Farmhouse 1711

Chapter 1711: Discovering a Little Secret

"Dad, Mom!" Jin Luoyin stood at the doorway and called out softly.

Gu Youyou turned her face and said softly, "You're back? Just in time for Second Aunt's funeral!"

In the coming days, Mom and Dad will be staying in Lotus Village to help out, until the deceased is buried up in the mountains.

Jin Luoyin wanted to talk to them about the Tianhai Mountain Villa matter, but hadn't found the opportunity yet, unexpectedly receiving a letter from Zhu Yiping.

Zhu Yiping's handwriting wasn't particularly pretty, even seemed a bit childish. But it was evident that he had a solid foundation when he first learned, though for some reason later he became lax in practicing.

Jin Luoyin guessed, it was probably because he was eager to practice martial arts.

She had heard Zhu Yiping talk endlessly about how, when he was young, he secretly ran out of the villa and was captured by a human trafficker. After that, his father wanted him to train in martial arts.

It was out of fear that something might happen again, leaving him unable to protect himself.

Probably because he practiced martial arts, he set aside the literary arts.

Jin Luoyin smiled, sitting in the candlelight grinding ink, writing a reply for him.

The door was pushed open, and she quickly crumpled the half-written letter into a ball, hiding it behind her back.

"Dad?" Jin Luoyin looked at Jin Zijin who came in and asked, "Dad, why are you here so late? And not even knocking!"

Jin Zijin calmly looked at her hand hidden behind her back, and said, "Seeing the light still on in your room, I thought you hadn't slept yet, so I came to check!"

"Oh, Dad, I'll sleep soon. By the way, where's Mom?"

Jin Zijin said, "Tomorrow we have to send your Second Aunt up the mountain. Tonight, your mom is keeping watch with Dabao and the others!"

Jin Luoyin nodded lightly, sighing as she said, "Mom has to keep watch too?"

Jin Zijin was momentarily shocked and nodded, saying, "If she can keep watch, then let her be, the last elder we have!"

"Hmm!" Jin Luoyin lowered her head, feeling unsure with her hand still hidden behind her.

Jin Zijin sighed helplessly, daughters grow up and have their little secrets.

Seeing her appearance, it was clear she hadn't planned to share it, so he could only leave.

"Then I'll go, you get some rest early!"

"Okay, Dad!" Jin Luoyin breathed a sigh of relief, so obvious, yet it made Jin Zijin amused and hopeless!

She was trying so hard to hide!

She didn't intend to speak, so he didn't ask, when children grow up, they'd always have their small secrets!

After Jin Zijin left, Jin Luoyin took out the crumpled paper behind her, looked closely, and sighed.

The half-written letter, the ink smeared into a ball, the words were indistinguishable.

She sighed softly; she had to rewrite it.

...

In the last couple of days, she hadn't told Dad and Mom about the Tianhai Mountain Villa matter, waiting until after Second Aunt's funeral was over to find them.

"Dad, Mom, I didn't go far on this trip, just went to Yangguan City, then to Tianhai Mountain Villa."

Gu Youyou put down her book and smiled gently, "I thought you weren't going to tell us your whereabouts, why did you go to Tianhai Mountain Villa?"

"Coincidentally, Tianhai Mountain Villa's Young Master's coming-of-age ceremony was happening. It occurred to me that my brother should also be coming-of-age this year, so I was curious and went to have a look!"

Already coming-of-age?

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin fell silent, in their impressions, Jin Xuyao was still a little child; upon reflection, he really was coming-of-age!

Gu Youyou glanced at Jin Zijin, then said to Jin Luoyin, "I also heard about it, and asked Boss Zhang to send a gift on my behalf. We have quite a few business dealings with Tianhai Mountain Villa!"

Chapter 1712: Time to Rest

Mother's business is quite extensive, so Jin Luoyin wasn't too surprised and simply said, "I also saw Jie Yi, but he didn't recognize me, and I didn't get to speak with him!"

Jin Zijin was momentarily stunned, and after a while, he slowly said, "Jie Yi and Xuyao are the same age, both reaching adulthood this year. In the blink of an eye, this group of kids has all grown up. I wonder if Xuyao still…"

Halfway through speaking, his voice suddenly stopped.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "So many years have passed in the blink of an eye, Zijin, I've always wanted to tell you something!"

Jin Zijin seemed to know what she wanted to say, sitting there with his brows tightly furrowed, making anyone who saw him feel a deep pity.

He never spoke when he was sad, and it was hard for others to see his sadness. He's been like this his whole life.

Gu Youyou gave a bitter smile and said, "What I want to say is, we really can't search endlessly like this. But I can't demand that you stop searching either. How about five more years? If we still can't find him, don't go again. At least, don't leave me to search alone anymore.

As we grow old, I hope to have a companion by my side. If you insist on searching, then I will search with you. Wherever you go, I will go too. When we can't walk anymore, we will search with walking sticks, until even those can't be held steadily…"

Gu Youyou knew that Jin Zijin always blamed himself for the child's disappearance. Over these years, he had been enduring various torments, including guilt over losing the child and neglecting his wife and daughter…

Jin Luoyin, seeing it all, felt helpless as well.

She let out a light sigh and said, “Of course, Brother must be found too, and what Mother said is right. Father, you are not young anymore and cannot run around like before. You see, I’ve grown up as well, and I can look for Brother! Although I didn’t find Brother during this trip, I did discover some interesting things!”

Gu Youyou tried to divert Jin Zijin’s attention. Even if she wasn’t in the mood to hear about Jin Luoyin’s interesting discoveries, she pretended to be very interested and asked, “So, Luoyin, tell us what interesting things you encountered?”

Jin Luoyin said, “The owner of Tianhai Mountain Villa, the Young Master, and the owner’s adopted son Jian Shiqing; I don’t know how they are outside, but inside, they are very peculiar.”

Jin Luoyin had no secrets in front of her parents, and to her, there was nothing unspeakable. Especially with Gu Youyou, who was very open-minded, she could get along with such a mother like a close friend with no secrets.

Gu Youyou knew a bit about the owner of Tianhai Mountain Villa’s family and said, “Tianhai Mountain Villa has been outside Yangguan City for over two hundred years. After several generations’ efforts, it has experienced wealth and decline. At its wealthiest, it was the richest in Yangguan City and even the whole southwest, with extensive business throughout Zhuzhao Country.

But during its decline, it was just the previous generation. It’s said that their successor was frail since childhood and couldn’t support the family. So the Family Head, focusing on treating his only son’s illness, had no heart for business, causing the situation to plummet compared to the generation before.

Only in the last twenty years, after the only son’s illness was cured, did the family begin to prosper again!”

Jin Luoyin’s expression turned solemn as she urgently asked, “Is the sickly only son the current owner of Tianhai Mountain Villa?”

“Yes, it is indeed the current owner of Tianhai Mountain Villa, Zhu Haisheng!”

“Why is it another only son?” Jin Luoyin muttered quietly.

Chapter 1713: Tianhai Mountain Villa Has Only One Son

Jin Zijin took over the conversation, saying, “This is the ancestral instruction of Tianhai Mountain Villa, fearing that having too many sons would lead them to compete against each other and ruin the family, so each generation has only one heir. The advantage of this is to prevent sibling rivalry, but the disadvantage is, as with the current owner, if he accidentally dies of an illness, they would have no heir!”

Jin Luoyin understood and nodded lightly, saying, “No wonder, Zhu Yiping said that when he was young, he secretly ran down the mountain to play, met human traffickers, and was almost sold by them, scaring his father into being sick for half a month.”

Gu Youyou laughed and said, “Zhu Haisheng is extremely fond of his only son, always cautiously protecting him, probably related to his own difficult upbringing. But Luoyin, listening to what you said, you seem to be quite familiar with the Young Master of Tianhai Mountain Villa?”

Jin Luoyin laughed, nodded, and said, “Yes, he doesn’t have many friends. His father is afraid he might have an accident, so he never lets him leave the mountain villa. I got to know him when I sneaked up into the mountains this time, we’re sort of friends!”

Jin Zijin raised an eyebrow and said, “The letter you hid the night before yesterday, was it written by Zhu Yiping?”

Jin Luoyin’s face instantly changed dramatically, angrily saying, “Dad, how did you secretly read my letter?”

“I didn’t secretly read it, I guessed randomly. From your reaction, I think it’s indeed a letter written by Zhu Yiping!”

Jin Luoyin: “…”

She was extremely embarrassed, both angry and ashamed.

Seeing her mother's meaningful smile, she hurriedly explained, "Afraid of you having the wrong idea, I will clarify first, I just think he's quite pitiful and consider him a friend!"

"Mm, a friend!" Gu Youyou smiled without speaking, saying, "Then you tell us, why is Tianhai Mountain Villa so strange?"

Seeing that she clearly didn't believe it, she was so anxious that her tongue twisted, hastily saying, "He really is very pitiful. When he… when he is bored alone, he sits in the yard watching ants move house, or sits in the greenhouse counting leaves, saying he's afraid the gardener might steal them. His father is afraid he might have an accident, so he always keeps him locked in the villa, not letting him have any friends. Do you think he's pitiful?"

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin secretly clicked their tongues.

How to put this?

They haven't seen the person either, and don't know if this counts as pitiful. All in all, being bored to such a degree at twenty years old, they thought maybe this person might have some mental issues.

The Young Master of Tianhai Mountain Villa, who is to inherit the owner's position in the future, should be very busy at the age of twenty. Where would he find time to count leaves or watch ants?

Unless he has mental issues, and Zhu Haisheng is afraid such matters would spread, thus locking up his foolish son.

Gu Youyou's mouth twitched, asking her foolish daughter.

"Are you sure he's a normal person?" She pointed to her own head!

Jin Luoyin nodded heavily twice, saying, "I'm sure, he has no issues!"

Ha…

“Then Zhu Haisheng must have issues!”

Jin Zijin looked serious and asked, “Then how did you sneak in there, and get acquainted with Zhu Yiping and become friends with him?”

“I…” This matter was somewhat dishonorable, for a moment Jin Luoyin didn’t know how to begin.

“Well, I just sneaked in with Zhang Boss’s assistant!”

“Be more specific!” Jin Zijin said in a deep voice.

Jin Luoyin then stomped her foot and said, “Dad, why do you need to know so clearly? You know the result, anyway I feel the owner of Tianhai is overly cautious with Zhu Yiping. Being afraid of his accident isn’t much, you can just sort out more manpower around him, but why not let him have a single friend? After he secretly ran out once, the owner killed all the servants in his courtyard!”

Chapter 1714: Offended Me

Gu Youyou values human rights greatly. To others, killing a few disobedient servants might not be a big deal, but under Gu Youyou’s influence, Jin Luoyin also sees the lives of servants as lives. That owner is truly terrifying.

Gu Youyou looked at Jin Zijin, who said, "It might have been a bit overly cautious, but it’s a family matter after all. Luoyin, if you want to visit Tianhai Mountain Villa, just find a proper reason and bring an official invitation. You must not sneak in like this time."

Jin Luoyin stuck out her tongue and said, "Got it, there won’t be a next time!"

Going to Tianhai Mountain Villa as a porter this time was quite suffocating for her, and she even suffered at the hands of Jian Shiqing.

Thinking of Jian Shiqing, she was filled with anger and said, "Father, there’s something else about Zhu Haisheng’s adopted son Jian Shiqing. How well do you know him?"

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "Could it be you also became friends with that Jian Shiqing?"

"Of course not, that person is not as simple as he appears. His kung fu is quite impressive, yet he always pretends to be a frail scholar to deceive others. I don't know if Zhu Haisheng is aware of his martial skills, but Zhu Yiping certainly isn't."

"Oh?" Jin Zijin said with some surprise, "Then there will be excitement at Tianhai Mountain Villa!"

"The adopted son harbors ill intentions?" Gu Youyou was surprised as well and suddenly thought of something. She said, "Now that Luoyin mentions it, I'm starting to sense something amiss too."

"What?"

"I used to think their Young Master was always very mysterious, and as Luoyin mentioned, Zhu Haisheng is protective of his only son. But over the years, Zhu Haisheng has been handing over outside business dealings to that adopted son. The silk business with Manxiu Building has always been handled by Jian Shiqing!

Zijin, why do I feel like Zhu Haisheng is intentionally sidelining Zhu Yiping's authority, transferring the entire Tianhai Mountain Villa into the hands of the adopted son? This isn't normal!"

Jin Luoyin immediately said, "Exactly? No wonder that adoptive son is so arrogant, he doesn't regard Zhu Yiping at all. Fortunately, Zhu Yiping isn't stupid, he also dislikes him and beats him up whenever he can!"

Jin Zijin gave Jin Luoyin a glance and said, "Didn't you just say that maybe Zhu Yiping truly has issues, that's why there's a need for the adopted son to handle these matters!"

Jin Luoyin immediately protested, "Zhu Yiping doesn't have mental issues. I actually think it's Zhu Haisheng who's out of his mind, and there's something off with Jian Shiqing too. He just wants to take over Tianhai Mountain Villa, like a cuckoo laying eggs in another's nest!"

Gu Youyou increasingly felt something was wrong with her daughter, she said, "Fine if you want to speak up for Zhu Yiping, but why constantly belittle Jian Shiqing? I've heard Jian Shiqing is quite good, a real talent in business. Did he offend you while at Tianhai Mountain Villa?"

"I... well, yes, right, he did offend me!" Jin Luoyin said fiercely.

Gu Youyou: "..."

Jin Zijin: "..."

"He also threatened me, saying he'd reveal my disguise. Fortunately, I know his secret too. If he dares to speak out, I'll expose his martial arts skills."

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin didn't speak, thinking that this adopted son truly isn't simple.

Considering Zhu Haisheng entrusted him with the business, it shows the level of trust he has, yet he harbors ulterior motives. His intentions are indeed impure!

Let's not end up with a rivalry between the legitimate son and the adopted son, instead of competition among blood sons!

Chapter 1715: Who Is Your Son?

"But…" Jin Luoyin immediately pulled a long face again, saying, "Zhu Yiping is quite strange; he saw through my fake mask and said mine was poorly made, then helped me create a new one. I personally watched him craft the mask, and his skill surpasses Lun Yu and Yi Yan."

Having said that, Jin Luoyin brought out the fake mask Zhu Yiping made for her, showing it to Zijin and Gu Youyou.

Upon seeing it, they were also extremely surprised. Although they didn't understand craftsmanship, the delicate feeling of the mask, as if it were real skin, shocked them immensely.

It's said that craftsmen become more proficient as they age, unless someone is exceptionally talented in the field.

Zijin frowned, and said slowly, "Let's show this to Lun Yu and the others later; perhaps as insiders, they can see something more."

Gu Youyou then said, "The Tianhai Mountain Villa is indeed not simple! Zijin, shall we investigate?"

"Yes, we definitely should investigate!" Zijin agreed.

…

After showing the fake mask made by Zhu Yiping to Lun Yu and his wife, Lun Yu immediately commented, "This craftsmanship comes from the same lineage as ours, but indeed it's more exquisite than what we make. If my guess is correct, this craftsman must be under my mother's senior brother."

"Your mother has a senior brother?" Zijin asked with surprise.

Lun Yu explained, "My mother's master, Master Xuanji, took on two disciples in total—my mother, and another disciple much older than her, who is her senior brother. However, nobody knows who that person is, beyond Master Xuanji, and no one has seen his true face. If I'm not mistaken, my mother's senior brother is related to the maker of this mask. Prince, who is this craftsman?"

Zijin and Gu Youyou both took a deep breath and glanced at Jin Luoyin, who then said, "It was personally made by the Young Master Zhu Yiping of Tianhai Mountain Villa. I watched him make it!"

"Tianhai Mountain Villa?" Lun Yu mused, puzzled, "Could my mother's senior brother be connected to Tianhai Mountain Villa? If so, this place is indeed not simple!"

Gu Youyou commented, "The Tianhai Mountain Villa's enduring presence over hundreds of years is backed by deep-rooted heritage."

The group nodded in agreement, then Lun Yu suddenly asked, “Why did you show me this mask? Are you suspecting a connection between Tianhai Mountain Villa and the Young Prince?”

With Lun Yu’s words, they suddenly recalled that the Young Master of Tianhai Mountain Villa and Jian Shiqing were coincidentally the same age as Jin Xuyao.

Gu Youyou opened her mouth slightly and looked at Zijin, asking, “Do you think it’s possible?”

Zijin pressed his lips together, uncertain of what to say.

These years, becoming obsessed with finding his son, they thoroughly investigated every child around Jin Xuyao’s age, in regards to Tianhai Mountain Villa…

Nervously, Jin Luoyin added, “There is something odd about it. Jian Shiqing told me he and Zhu Yiping were born on the same day, and the day Zhu Yiping reached adulthood was also Jian Shiqing’s coming-of-age. But Zhu Yiping said Jian Shiqing is a few months younger. I even suspected the child brought home by the owner of Tianhai Mountain Villa might be my brother, but Zhu Yiping claims Jian Shiqing is the son of his father’s old friend, not someone randomly picked up, not my brother!”

Zijin was slightly shocked, and said, “You asked Zhu Yiping to help find your brother?”

Jin Luoyin nodded, “Yes, he removed my fake mask, so I told him why I went to Tianhai Mountain Villa, and he said he could help me find him.”

“If Jian Shiqing isn’t, could it be Zhu Yiping instead?” Lun Yu suggested.

Chapter 1716: Recovered from Illness

Jin Luoyin immediately said, "Impossible, Zhu Yiping and Zhu Haisheng obviously look like parent and child, and Zhu Haisheng is indeed quite doting on Zhu Yiping. If he’s not his biological son, then who is his real son?"

Lun Yu laughed and said, "What’s strange about looking alike? The mask you just gave me looks just like the real thing. If Zhu Yiping is an expert, making a mask wouldn’t be difficult! Perhaps Zhu Haisheng doesn’t even have a son, and his so-called son is actually your brother?"

Jin Zijin shook his head and said, "No, he does indeed have a son, about the same age as Xuyao!"

Jin Zijin never speaks without certainty; since he says no, then he must have investigated.

Everyone fell silent.

This matter was indeed somewhat perplexing to them.

They had investigated men about the same age as Jin Xuyao, as well as Tianhai Mountain Villa.

The son was raised by his side since childhood; it was no secret.

Jin Zijin said, "The villa owner Zhu Haisheng came to Plum Blossom Valley the day Luoyin was one month old, which was the same day Xuyao went missing. He came with his only son. After Xuyao disappeared, I thoroughly checked the guests from that day, Zhu Haisheng included, and found no issues!"

Jin Luoyin understood; no wonder he heard Zhu Yiping say he seemed to have been to the plum blossom mountains when he was young. It turned out he came with the villa owner to Plum Blossom Valley and even attended his own full moon celebration.

Could this be considered a kind of fate?

"Alas! Searching for so many years, this isn't right, nor is that. Where exactly did Fu Jian hide your son?" Lun Yu reclined on the chair in frustration.

Yi Yan responded, "Among the people of the same age as the Young Prince, there are countless! Over the years, how many similar cases have we found, such as this one at Tianhai Mountain Villa? Let's think of it more openly. Don't be obsessed with finding people who have sons the same age as the Young Prince!"

Gu Youyou said, "Although that's true, his adopted son indeed has issues! Zijin, have we investigated whose child this old acquaintance is?"

"Of course, I have investigated. Jian Family from Ruyang City, their status declined, leaving a son, and that is Jian Shiqing!"

Upon hearing this, the group deflated like a punctured ball!

Every time they heard of someone with an adopted son about Jin Xuyao's age, they would get excited, but after investigation, it always ended in disappointment.

"Alas! It's been so many years, and we've not found him. Prince and princess, let me say something unpleasant. Either the Young Prince is no longer alive, or Fu Jian took him to the Barbarian Lands. Fu Jian lived in Beiping for years, has adapted to the northern harsh climate, is familiar with the terrain there, and if pressured by us, may very well no longer be in Zhuzhao Country at all!"

Both Jin Zijin and Gu Youyou had naturally thought of these possibilities, but they always held onto a strong obsession. Even if they knew their son was no longer there, they couldn't make themselves stop searching.

...

Zhu Yiping maintained constant correspondence with Jin Luoyin, and today he was gleefully sitting on a tree branch reading a reply from Jin Luoyin, when he caught sight of someone he disliked.

Jian Shiqing, after lying in his own courtyard for over a month, had finally risen and was politely standing at Zhu Yiping's courtyard gate, asking the guarding servant, "Is the Young Master in the courtyard?"

The two gatekeeping servants were about to speak when Zhu Yiping jumped down from the tree and started walking towards Jian Shiqing with a sneer, "Your health seems fine. You look fully recovered!"

"Young Master!" Jian Shiqing bowed to him, but his eyes remained cold.

Chapter 1717: Go Ask Her Directly

"Hmm, speak, what is it?" Zhu Yiping blocked the doorway but showed no intention of inviting him in.

Jian Shiqing felt extremely awkward but had no choice.

He had to muster his courage and say, "Young Master, when will the Young Master return Shiqing's maid to Shiqing?"

"Yours?" Hearing Jian Shiqing still referred to Jin Luoyin as his maid, Zhu Yiping was filled with anger.

"Who said she was your maid?"

Jian Shiqing's gaze deepened as he coldly said, "Many people in the manor saw the Young Master injure Shiqing and took advantage of the situation to take Mingzhu away. Is the Young Master trying to deny it?"

"Ha, deny it?" Zhu Yiping looked at Jian Shiqing's increasingly ashen face and suddenly felt quite satisfied. He looked at him disdainfully and sneered, "Do you think you are worthy? Look at yourself in the mirror, do you think you're worthy of Mingzhu?"

Jian Shiqing mocked Zhu Yiping, coldly snorting, "From what the Young Master says, does it mean the Young Master is worthy of Mingzhu?"

"Jian Shiqing!" Zhu Yiping was furious. He grabbed Shiqing's collar and pressed him against the courtyard wall, coldly saying, "Listen carefully, Mingzhu is not someone you are worthy of. Do you know her true identity?"

The push from Zhu Yiping earlier pressed Shiqing's back against the wall, causing intense pain. He clenched his teeth, bearing it, and glared at him angrily.

Feeling increasingly satisfied, Zhu Yiping sneered, "Haha, have you heard of the Ningwang Residence in Plum Blossom Valley?"

"Ningwang Residence?"

"Yes, Ningwang Residence! There is only one Mingzhu in the world, Princess Mingyue, the only daughter of the Ningwang. Tell me, why do you think someone like you is worthy of her?"

Jian Shiqing was shocked, feeling a chill straight to his core!

"I don’t believe it!" Jian Shiqing clenched his fists, almost unable to resist revealing his martial arts secret.

Zhu Yiping laughed and said, "Don’t believe it? It’s simple, just ask and you’ll know. You’re an insignificant nobody; I think Princess Mingyue wouldn’t bother to deceive you!"

...

After returning, Jian Shiqing couldn’t sleep at all. He naturally knew that Jin Luoyin had long gone and secretly thought to himself that Zhu Yiping was smart this time for not leaving her to be killed by Zhu Haisheng.

But after she ran away, he was sleepless at night until he figured the wound should be healed enough to go ask Zhu Yiping for her.

But now, knowing she is the Commandery Princess of Ningwang Residence is even harder to accept than learning she has fled to the ends of the earth.

If she had fled to the ends of the earth, he could still capture her back. But if she is the Commandery Princess of Ningwang Residence, how could he capture her back?

Tossing and turning, he donned his nightwear and left the manor.

It wasn’t far to Plum Blossom Valley, the road was easy to travel, and on horseback, it was only a day’s journey.

Riding through the night until dawn, the horse was exhausted, and he was drenched in sweat.

After sweating profusely and being blown by the cold wind, Jian Shiqing felt much clearer.

What was he doing? He looked down at his hands, reddened by the reins.

Could he, by just rushing over, see Princess Mingyue?

He didn't even have the qualifications to submit a letter to Ningwang Residence.

Was he capable of sneaking into Ningwang Residence with his skills?

Ningwang Residence was impregnable, probably even more so than the Imperial Palace.

Jian Shiqing slowly rode his horse towards Plum Blossom Valley, becoming more and more confused as he went.

In the past, Qingshui Town, under Yangguan City's jurisdiction, was merely a small quiet town. But since Ningwang Residence moved to Lotus Village in Qingshui Town, it has become a popular little town, now a vast city, second only to Yangguan City.

Chapter 1718: Opportunity

The merchants came and went incessantly, and Jian Shiqing led his horse, walking through Qingshui Town.

Though he wasn't sure how to find Jin Luoyin, he still rode his swift horse here.

"Hey, Brother Jian, Brother Jian?" Amidst the bustling crowd, he couldn't tell who was calling him.

Jian Shiqing turned around and saw Jie Yi.

“Young Master Jie?” Jian Shiqing was quite surprised, he hadn’t expected to meet Jie Yi here.

Jie Yi smiled and said, “What a coincidence to run into you here. Brother Jian, are you here in Qingshui Town for business negotiations?”

Jie Yi was gradually taking over the business left by his mother, Miss Du; he chose the path of commerce. Meanwhile, his two younger brothers pursued official careers.

Compared to Gu Youyou, Miss Du was truly a winner in life, experiencing sweetness after the hardship. Over the years, she and Jie Zhonglin had several children together: three sons and two daughters.

Jian Shiqing nodded and said, “Yes, just came to see the business around here!”

Luckily, Jie Yi provided him a way out, allowing him to take a stroll around his own business venues in Qingshui Town, which was better than having a wasted trip on horseback.

“Oh, is that so? Then I won’t disturb you, it’s getting late, I still have to head to the Ningwang Residence to meet Yue Qiulin as we agreed!”

“Yue Qiulin? The Princely Heir of the Lingnan Marquis Residence?”

Jie Yi laughed, “Indeed? Who else with the surname Yue could visit the Ningwang Residence except Yue Qiulin?”

In truth, Jian Shiqing’s main interest wasn’t in the Princely Heir of the Lingnan Marquis Residence, Yue Qiulin, but rather in envy of them being able to go to Ningwang Residence.

Yet with his status, what excuse could he use to visit Ningwang Residence?

Jian Shiqing pondered for a moment and suddenly said, “I’ve long heard of the distinguished reputation of Princely Heir Yue Qiulin, and I greatly wish to meet him. However, Ningwang Residence isn’t a place that commoners like me can visit. It’s quite unfortunate! I wonder if Young Master Jie knows when Princely Heir might be leaving Ningwang Residence, so I could wait for him in Qingshui Town for a few days without any problem!”

Jie Yi wasn’t aware of Yue Qiulin’s fame but was amused by the admiration of the slightly proud Jian Shiqing.

Without much thought, he simply laughed and said, “Why wait for Yue Qiulin in Qingshui Town? You can come with me to Ningwang Residence as a guest.”

“How could I? I’m just a commoner…”

Jie Yi patted his shoulder and said, “Don’t worry, the Princess is easygoing. She herself is involved in commerce and won’t trouble you!”

Jian Shiqing was overjoyed inside, but showed no signs of it. Suppressing his excitement, he led his horse and followed Jie Yi to Ningwang Residence.

…

This was, in fact, his second time visiting Ningwang Residence. He was too young the first time and had forgotten it.

Watching the plum blossoms gradually wither, he thought to himself that another spring was arriving. Soon, the villagers of Lotus Village would commence farming.

Soon he would meet Jin Luoyin again, and he felt a bit anxious.

With his current status, how should he act when he meets her again?

“Young Master Yi, please come inside. Princely Heir Yue has been waiting for a long time!”

The person who received them wasn’t from Ningwang Residence but someone Yue Qiulin had brought along, waiting by the gate for Jie Yi.

Jian Shiqing followed Jie Yi, led by the maid, through a quiet corridor, walking a long way. After winding paths, he finally saw a courtyard illuminated by lanterns.

The sounds of men and women laughing and joking could be heard from inside, and Jian Shiqing suddenly stiffened.

“Qiulin, you idiot, you still can’t beat me.”

“What’s to be proud of? The next time I’m here, I’ll fight you for three hundred rounds.”

Chapter 1719: Change

“You said the same thing the last time you left, yet you still lost this time?”

“Yinyin, be honest, have you been only studying chess these past two years?”

“Uh…?”

“Otherwise, how did you improve so much? But you haven’t improved in other areas, I’m sure that’s it!”

“Nonsense, you’re the one who hasn’t improved, Yue Qiulin, are you looking for a fight?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, I dare not, I can’t compete with you on Princess Mingyue’s territory, if you’re so capable, go to Lingnan and see who fears who…”

Watching the silhouettes chasing and playing under the light inside the glass window, Jie Yi smiled helplessly and said, “That’s Yue Qiulin, Princely Heir Yue, I wonder if it’s the one Jian bro had in mind?”

Jian Shiqing’s mind was completely on Jin Luoyin at this moment. Seeing her so happily messing with another man, his face turned pale, and he felt like fleeing.

Only when he heard Jie Yi’s voice did he realize that he didn’t come for Jin Luoyin, but for Yue Qiulin.

Yue Qiulin?

He smiled bitterly; he had only heard of Yue Qiulin, this was his first time meeting him, what impression could he possibly have?

Jie Yi, unaware of the twists and turns in his mind, only thought the idol in reality was too cruel for him to accept for a moment.

Jie Yi awkwardly explained, “Princely Heir Yue is actually quite… reliable usually, but in front of Princess Mingyue, he acts a bit childish. Princess Mingyue and Princely Heir Yue are about the same age. The relationship between Marquess Yue and Prince Ning, I think Jian bro has heard about it. Such relationships between their families make it normal for the younger ones to be close.”

Jian Shiqing lightly nodded and followed Jie Yi towards the brightly lit house.

“Princely Heir Yue, Princess Mingyue!” Jie Yi greeted them like a gentleman, making the two in the middle of play stop.

“Jie Yi, it’s so late, you’re just arriving, making me wait!” Though it sounded like a complaint, the smile between his eyebrows was clear.

Jie Yi smiled and said, “There were some delays on the way, but thankfully I didn’t miss the date!”

Jin Luoyin was about to greet Jie Yi with a smile but unexpectedly saw someone standing behind Jie Yi, and her smile froze on her face.

Jie Yi thought Jin Luoyin's sudden change was because of him, so he quickly touched his face and said, "What's the matter? Do I have something on my face? Why the expression, Princess Mingyue?"

Jin Luoyin shuddered and quickly said, "No, it's just that after not seeing you for a few years, I didn't expect you've changed so much, you've grown so much."

Everyone: "…"

Jie Yi awkwardly touched his face and smiled, "It's been a few years, but I don't think I've changed much, compared to how much Princely Heir Yue and Princess Mingyue have changed!"

He then quickly introduced them, "Oh right, this is Jian Shiqing from Tianhai Mountain Villa, Store Manager Jian, he…" He looked at Yue Qiulin, unsure how to proceed with the introduction, so he laughed awkwardly and said, "He came with me, we were originally discussing business in Qingshui Town, but I thought since Princely Heir Yue was waiting for me at the Prince Residence, I didn't want to leave Jian bro alone, so I decided to bring him along."

Yue Qiulin laughed and said, "So it's Jian Shiqing from Tianhai Mountain Villa, Store Manager Jian, I've heard of you. Our big business in Ruyang's Jisheng Hall was all thanks to Store Manager Jian, right?"

Jian Shiqing raised his hand in respect and said, "Princely Heir Yue, Princess Mingyue!"

Jin Luoyin only nodded slightly, then turned to Yue Qiulin and said, "Qiulin, it's getting late now, I'll leave first, I'll come back to see you tomorrow!"

Chapter 1720: Midnight

"Mm, you go back first, be careful on the way!"

Jin Luoyin smiled sweetly, "This is my home, could it be that I'll trip while walking?"

"That’s not certain, Xiaocui, brighten up the lantern!"

Jian Shiqing watched as Jin Luoyin passed by without even glancing at him, the coldness in her eyes made his heart palpitate.

If it weren’t for those words, if she had run to the ends of the earth, he could find a way to bring her back and punish her thoroughly.

But now, the distance between her and him seemed as vast as between heaven and earth; she was high above, he was just mud on the ground, how could he retrieve her?

Sitting next to Jie Yi, Jian Shiqing only occasionally responded to the conversation, not catching a word of what Jie Yi and Yue Qiulin were discussing and laughing about till midnight.

Meanwhile, after returning from Yue Qiulin’s place, Jin Luoyin picked up a pen and wrote a letter to Zhu Yiping, informing him that Jian Shiqing had come, feeling immensely satisfied at seeing the strange expressions Jian Shiqing directed at her.

She was in a great mood tonight, feeling vindicated!

...

Another restless night, Jian Shiqing couldn’t understand what was wrong with him.

Was he angry that she deceived him, yet revealed her true appearance and identity to Zhu Yiping? Was it not because of her departure without a word, while he had to pretend to be immobile due to injury? He couldn’t tell.

In short, he had told her that no matter if she fled to the ends of the earth, he would bring her back.

Maybe it was because of this promise that, even knowing she was the Commandery Princess of Ningwang Residence, he still came.

If he couldn’t capture her, he needed to reclaim some dignity for himself.

"No!" Jian Shiqing suddenly sat up, muttering to himself, "I must go ask her, why she’d rather trust Zhu Yiping and not me?"

Jian Shiqing got out of bed, put on his clothes, and quickly disappeared into the night.

Jin Luoyin, at fifteen, was at the age of heavy sleepers, living carefreely by her parents’ side, sleeping soundly!

Jian Shiqing had been there for quite a while, yet she remained sound asleep!

All the anger Jian Shiqing had along the way diminished greatly upon seeing Jin Luoyin sleeping peacefully.

She was just a girl who liked to play. Perhaps his ruckus at Tianhai Mountain Villa was just her mischievous behavior.

If thinking this way, then why secretly come to ask her anything?

He reached out to try to wake Jin Luoyin, but halfway, he pulled back his hand.

Why wake her? How to explain sneaking into her room in the middle of the night?

But having evaded so many hidden guards to get to her room, he couldn’t just leave.

This time he was lucky, meeting Jie Yi to enter Ningwang Residence, but next time?

Who knew when such an opportunity would come again.

Thinking of this, he couldn’t move his legs.

This choice was harder than picking a wife.

"Mm, who?"

As he was hesitating with his hand raised, Jin Luoyin, intending to get up in the night, woke and saw him.

"You, is it you?"

Seeing the familiar figure, Jin Luoyin was extremely surprised.

He was too bold to dare sneak into her boudoir at midnight, did he think this was the backyard of Young Master Jian of Tianhai Mountain Villa?

"Bold, if I shout, do you believe your head will roll tonight?"

"I believe!" Jian Shiqing said with a hoarse voice.

Then he approached her, whispering, "I just came to ask you, why did you lie to me?"