Farmhouse 331

Chapter 331: She Can Still Ride a Horse

"Senior brother, why don’t you take over driving the carriage? I need to sleep a bit."

Before Jin Zijin could answer, Gu Youyou immediately interjected, "How can that be? Zijin has an injury on his arm."

Yue Rujing’s nose twisted with irritation as he said, "My senior brother is tough as old boots, what’s a little injury to him? Back in the day, we..." He stopped mid-sentence, and then muttered resentfully, "I think you two are just ganging up to bully me."

Gu Youyou yawned and said with a grin, "Or I could drive."

Yue Rujing was startled and asked, "You know how to drive a carriage?"

Jin Zijin looked at her with equal surprise.

But Gu Youyou said, "I can ride horses. I’ve never driven a carriage, but I figure it can’t be that hard, right? Just teach me and that’s it."

She couldn’t believe driving a carriage could be harder than getting a driver’s license.

Back when she incognito went to a small city for a driver’s license, the always proud Miss Gu questioned her own intelligence for the first time because of the driving test. After being scolded by the instructor, she even began to doubt her life choices.

She could still recall every word of that bizarre instructor’s scolding.

("See the person ahead?"

"I see them."

"Hit them."

"What? I can’t do that!"

"Then why didn’t you hit the brakes?"

"...")

Yue Rujing turned his head, gave her a strange look, collided gazes with Jin Zijin, then said with an inexplicable expression, "Since you can ride horses, you might as well not learn to drive a carriage. Let’s switch to riding horses at the next stop."

Gu Youyou certainly understood the hidden meaning behind his expression. With so many inexplicable things about her already, hiding them all would be too exhausting, wouldn’t it? Anyway, whether she could ride horses or not, they looked at her with the same skepticism. The idea that ’with enough fleas one stops itching’ must be her attitude. She smiled lightly and said, "Sure!"

Gu Youyou knew medical skills, she could write, she could ride horses, and she could do many other things too. She didn’t hide her abilities; she was just herself, open and forthright. When the time came, she’d naturally show what she could do.

"Wow, you ride pretty smoothly!" Yue Rujing mocked her.

This woman was a bundle of problems. She could ride horses? Even the daughters of wealthy families, the young ladies from official households, were nurtured sheltered from the world. And yet she could ride horses?

Did she think she was a general’s daughter?

Gu Youyou picked up the undercurrent of his backhanded compliments, but she didn’t care. The heir to the Gu Family was versatile, second to none, and when it came to horse riding, she was particularly skilled. She had even competed in the past, so how could she be anything but excellent?

"Not bad at riding," Jin Zijin commented, then quickly mounted his horse and followed her.

Soon they had left the relay station far behind, riding swiftly into the distance.

They had no idea that Lingnan was so far away. They'd been riding for three days and still hadn't arrived. Today was even worse, they ended up in the wilderness with not a single inn to stay in.

Although Gu Youyou had participated in many outdoor activities and was no delicate lady, that was with her other body. This body was even frailer than those sheltered misses, and she was utterly exhausted.

If Yue Rujing hadn't been constantly goading her with his snide comments, she would have given up long ago.

"If you're really tired, we can rest a while. We should reach Lu City by tomorrow," Jin Zijin suggested.

Gu Youyou glanced at Yue Rujing and then snorted, "Why would I be tired? Nonetheless, your wound hasn't fully healed; it would be wise to rest a while."

Jin Zijin subconsciously looked at his own arm, which had clearly healed

Chapter 332: Gu Youyou VS Yue Rujing

Gu Youyou spoke solemnly but nonsensically, "Some injuries are invisible, like yours. In fact, it has reached the bone, and it's not apparent now because you're young. When you grow older, you'll understand. The pain will come with every gust of wind and rain."

"Don't scare people with such nonsense here!" Yue Rujing said with disdain, "Don't forget that I am also versed in the Qihuang Technique. If you can't run anymore, just say so. Why drag my senior brother into this? Do you think I am easily frightened?"

Seeing that they were about to start arguing again and that it seemed it wouldn't end anytime soon, Jin Zijin consciously went off to start a fire.

"Qihuang Technique?" Gu Youyou repeated with a faint smile, her expression even more disdainful, "All you know is the Qihuang Technique, but do you not realize that the true medical skills cannot be encompassed just by 'looking, listening, questioning, and taking the pulse'? The theories of Yin and Yang, the Five Phases, Zangxiang, Meridians, Essence, Qi, Blood, and Body Fluids... the Five Phases and Six Qi Theory. Even if you can recite them fluently, how can you comprehend their forms and discern their natures?"

Yue Rujing, who had always taken great pride in his medical skills, was belittled for the first time by someone, and to make matters worse, by a woman. This made him so angry that he burst into laughter, "Then tell me, how do you understand their forms and discern their natures?"

Gu Youyou stared at him intently, and suddenly her face broke into a confident smile, slowly turning slightly eerie.

This ambiguous smile made Yue Rujing feel inexplicably uneasy.

This woman, she was about to take some shocking action again.

As Yue Rujing felt uneasy, Gu Youyou's voice, as clear as a silver bell and tinged with laughter, reached the ears of the three of them.

"Simple, dissection. If you don't know what a diseased liver looks like, you take one out and study it closely. If you don't know why the head aches, you open up the skull and look at it carefully with your eyes. As for the heart..."

"Stop right there!"

Yue Rujing cut Gu Youyou off before she could finish, holding back his urge to vomit.

Damn, what kind of person was this? He looked sympathetically at Jin Zijin, who was making a fire not too far away, thinking how could he stand being around such a person all day without feeling discomfort?

Was this a normal person? Of course not, she was just plain twisted.

"Are you a doctor or a coroner?"

In ancient times, the person who examined dead bodies was called a coroner, akin to a forensic scientist today. Forensic scientists, like doctors, were respected by people, but that refers to the modern era.

In ancient times, coroners were ill-regarded, standing worlds apart from doctors. The ancient people were superstitious, and ordinary folks would not touch a dead body; hence, coroners were usually from the lowest classes or slaves. Gu Youyou recalled this from a casual conversation she had with Qin Changlin.

Gu Youyou became angry. Good one, Yue Rujing, comparing her to the lowest classes and slaves.

She said indignantly, "How dare you call yourself a doctor when you don't even have the courage to pursue the real essence of medicine? No wonder your decayed thinking needs to evolve for thousands of years. Do you get what I'm saying, you idiot? Time will prove that I'm right."

"Oh, look at you being all high and mighty. Come on, before it gets dark, let's get the horse and go for another round," Yue Rujing challenged her.

Gu Youyou said, "I'd have to be utterly bored to bother taking you for another round."

"You just don't dare!"

"Fine, let's say I don't dare," Gu Youyou laughed heartily and happily ran over to where Jin Zijin was.

Yue Rujing said smugly, "At least you know what's good for you!" The words had barely left his mouth when he felt that something was off.

Huh, what did she just say?

I’d have to be utterly bored to bother taking you for another round?

Yue Rujing’s face suddenly darkened.

Gu Youyou vs. Yue Rujing, a complete victory!

...

Chapter 333: She Went to See Her Senior Brother Again

"Come, have some dry food and drink some water to moisten your throat," Jin Zijin said to Gu Youyou in a kind voice.

Gu Youyou took them with a smile, ate a bit of dry food, and took a sip of water. Suddenly, she felt the rumbling in her stomach lessen a bit and smiled contentedly.

"How many more days will it take to reach your home?" she asked.

Jin Zijin thought for a moment and said, "Judging by the rate we’re traveling, probably another five or six days."

With a ’pfft,’ Gu Youyou spat out the water she had just sipped.

Five or six more days even at a gallop? Hearing this made her feel as if her body had been hollowed out instantly.

"Ah, you might as well just kill me!" Gu Youyou, like a deflated ball, slumped to the ground, her upper body flopping onto Jin Zijin’s legs, limp as a lump of mud.

Jin Zijin raised his hand, feeling her soft body on his, and was somewhat at a loss.

Although they slept together each night, and he often held her to cool off, this was the first time she had taken the initiative to throw herself into his arms.

This feeling was different.

"Youyou," he called her name softly.

Gu Youyou raised a hand and waved it, saying, "Don’t call me; just let me perish on my own."

Jin Zijin: "..."

He chuckled and finally put his uncertain hands to use, gently patting her back with one and stroking her soft long hair with the other.

Meanwhile, Yue Rujing tethered the horses and turned around to witness this scene.

He rubbed his eyes, turned away, then back again, and rubbed his eyes once more.

No way, I’m not seeing things.

The setting sun was peaceful, and the young man and woman rested together quietly. The woman’s inelegant pose was momentarily overlooked, and his handsome senior brother’s face wore a gentle smile, softly comforting the woman’s back. Under the sunset’s glow, they both shone with a faint golden light, which was blinding to his eyes and infuriating to his lungs.

This shameless woman, seducing my senior brother again.

Yue Rujing’s expression darkened, and he strode toward them.

"Hey, Gu Youyou, you..."

"Ah, Jing!" Yue Rujing was cut off by Jin Zijin’s warning gaze before he could finish.

"She’s fallen asleep, keep it down."

"What? I..." Yue Rujing’s throat felt as if he’d swallowed a fly, disgusting and unable to spit it out.

He glared fiercely at Gu Youyou, sat down in frustration on the other side of the fire, and had no choice but to take on the task of adding firewood.

This was infuriating, not a hint of sleepiness after a tiring day.

Was his senior brother smitten?

With Gu Youyou? No way!

Of all people to be smitten with, why that bundle of problems, Gu Youyou?

Ah, there’s just no justice! His senior brother was so great, yet he had such peculiar tastes. A whole field of fine cabbages awaited him, yet he had to go and pick a crooked, split melon?

No, this won’t do. When they reached Lingnan, he’d have to get his mother to find a few well-bred young ladies worthy of his senior brother, ones who could outshine Gu Youyou in seconds.

...

Lu City was a small fortress a tad larger than Qingshui Town but several times smaller than Tongguan.

The bustling crowd, sparse shops, it seemed even less lively than Qingshui Town.

After entering the city, Jin Zijin said, "Let’s rest here for a day, replenish our dry food and water, and give the horses a chance to rest as well."

"Yes, yes!" Gu Youyou, having been tired for several days, was naturally very happy.

"It’s about time to rest; we’ve been running the horses for three days straight, which is just too cruel—animal abuse."

Chapter 334: Mid-Station

Yue Rujing looked resentfully at Gu Youyou, thinking to herself, "Senior Brother is too much, obviously wanting Gu Youyou to rest, but he said it’s for the horse to rest?"

How could the horse he personally picked be tired after only three days of running?

Jin Zijin smiled but didn’t say anything and went straight into the only inn in Lu City.

"Dear guests, are you here for a short break or to stay overnight?"

"To stay overnight."

"Just a stopover!"

Two different voices answered; to stay overnight was shouted by Gu Youyou, while just a stopover was shouted by Yue Rujing.

The shopkeeper looked at them oddly and said, "How should I handle this? Should I listen to the young lady, or to the young master?"

Jin Zijin placed a silver ingot down and said, "Whoever has silver gets to decide, we’re staying, two top-floor rooms."

Gu Youyou’s eyes immediately sparkled with delight, and she even did something very childish, sticking her tongue out at Yue Rujing.

Yue Rujing’s face turned green with anger, and she huffed, "Senior Brother, you’re biased."

Jin Zijin simply said, "You don’t have to stay."

"Ah...?" Yue Rujing was on the verge of crying, "Senior Brother, you’ve changed!"

"This way, please," said the shopkeeper with a smile after collecting the silver, not caring about who changed.

Jin Zijin nodded and followed the shopkeeper upstairs.

Gu Youyou, feeling triumphant, looped her arm through Jin Zijin’s arm, sticking her tongue out at the fuming Yue Rujing, "Ha, take that, you single dog. Ah, my husband, let’s stay in this room."

Suddenly feeling the joy of being wilful, Gu Youyou thought it was quite pleasant to have a husband who stood up for her.

Yue Rujing followed the shopkeeper into the room next door. The shopkeeper heaved a sigh and comforted him, "Young brother, why bother? Your senior brother and his madam are obviously newlyweds, and it’s very normal for a man to dote on his new wife. If you argue with her at this time, you’re just asking for trouble. Remember, ’brothers are like limbs, and women are like clothes’; once the novelty wears off, he’ll appreciate his brother again!"

The shopkeeper wore a knowing look, but Yue Rujing’s face turned cold as he angrily said, "What do you know, get lost!"

The well-meaning advice of the shopkeeper fell on deaf ears, leaving him with a fallen face, "You can’t appreciate a good heart? Serves you right for sleeping in a cold bed."

Damn it, what kind of people are these? Yue Rujing was so angry she almost kicked the knowing shopkeeper’s backside.

...

There were still several days' travel to reach Lingnan. Jin Zijin said, "The next city is two and a half days away, we have to take enough food with us, as the food in the inns along the way isn't very good."

Gu Youyou, jotting down notes, looked up and asked, "Should we add two more pounds of beef? The beef I had earlier downstairs tasted quite good."

Jin Zijin nodded and said, "Add it, the beef from Lu City is known far and wide, we won't find it anywhere else!"

Gu Youyou's eyes lit up, "Then let's add two more pounds of beef jerky."

There was a lot to prepare. According to Jin Zijin, they would be entering a sparsely populated area as they traveled further south, where it would be difficult to find tasty food, so she took some silver and went out to make purchases.

Lu City was an interesting little city; their staple food wasn't rice but flatbread. Instead of pork, they preferred beef. She bought plenty of flatbread for dry provisions and went to a shop recommended by the innkeeper, specializing in beef jerky. After trying a bite, she found it genuinely authentic.

The night was cool, so to avoid being too cold when camping outside, she also went to a clothing store and bought a thick, man's overcoat.

Chapter 335: Lingnan City

No choice, after all, men's clothing tends to be larger.

When she came out, Gu Youyou suddenly realized someone was spying on her.

She immediately turned around and saw a shady-looking person near the clay figurine stall not far from her, pretending to buy figurines but actually looking quite uncomfortable.

Gu Youyou took a glance and found his face somewhat familiar, and when she recalled who he was, she was slightly startled. Wasn’t this one of the men who had pursued her to the edge of the cliff, the one who had loudly proclaimed his intent to kill "Gu the Third"?

Dammit, these people really followed her here.

Gu Youyou didn’t linger and quickly packed up her things and returned to the inn.

"What’s the rush?" Jin Zijin asked.

As Gu Youyou packed, she said, "Aren’t you eager to return? Let’s leave now."

Jin Zijin’s gaze darkened slightly.

At that moment, Yue Rujing also rushed in anxiously.

Another person in a flurry of haste.

"Brother!" Yue Rujing didn’t say a word, but with one look, Jin Zijin understood what was going on.

He said, "Alright, let’s leave now."

On the way, they pressed on with great urgency, arriving at the next city half a day earlier than expected. They didn’t rest this time, just replenished briefly before continuing their journey, all the way to Lingnan.

Lingnan City was the largest city to the south of Zhuzhao Country, and further south was Nanzhao Country. Lingnan also served as a natural barrier separating Zhuzhao Country from Nanzhao Country, as well as being an important hub for interaction between the two nations. Therefore, even though Lingnan was just a border city of Zhuzhao Country, it was bustling with activity.

Being a border defensive city, Lingnan had a well-trained garrison and maintained stricter management over the residents entering the city. The city gates would open at a few set times each day to allow people to enter and leave the city for business. If the time was not right, everyone had to wait outside the gate, unless they were officers on important missions.

Seeing the ancient and sturdy city walls just ahead, Yue Rujing chatted away with a smile.

He and Gu Youyou had grown tired of each other over the past few days, but perhaps because they were nearly home, he became more talkative and even amiably began to introduce Gu Youyou to the local customs of Lingnan.

"The girls and boys here are much more forthright than those from the inner cities. Don't be scared." Then recalling Gu Youyou's shockingly unconventional temperament, his face stiffened, and he snorted, "Of course, you make them seem tame by comparison. You should still tone it down, so you don't frighten the townspeople."

...Gu Youyou was speechless. You're the one who sneaked a peek at a minor surgery, and instead of feeling shame for spying, you're treating me, a doctor who is legitimately treating patients, like I'm some kind of monster.

Where is the justice in that?

"Ajing!" Jin Zijin gave him a warning glare and then said to Gu Youyou, "The people in the city are simple folk. Whatever you did in Qingshui Town, do the same here. Don't listen to Ajing's nonsense."

"Sure, husband!" Gu Youyou replied with a smile, infuriating Yue Rujing enough to gnash his teeth.

Shameless woman.

Seeing Yue Rujing's displeasure, Gu Youyou felt extremely gratified.

It was not yet time to open the city gates. Yue Rujing, riding ahead, led the way, while the pace of Gu Youyou's and Jin Zijin's horses slowed.

He took out an identification plaque and showed it to the guards at the city gate.

"Kang Shouyi, open the gate quickly!"

Kang Shouyi was the commander in charge of Lingnan’s city defenses, and he recognized Yue Rujing. Hearing the voice, he quickly peeked out, and upon confirming that it was indeed the Princely Heir returning to the city, he immediately instructed his men to arrange for the gates to be opened and personally descended from the watchtower.

"Young Master, please wait a moment!"

Chapter 336: All That Glitters Is Not Gold

"The Princely Heir’s returning to the city, everyone make way swiftly."

The soldiers guarding the city gate straightened up instantly. Some opened the city gates, while many others moved nimbly to push the commoners waiting to enter or exit the city to either side. Opportunities to be seen by the Lingnan Marquis Residence’s Princely Heir were not frequent.

"Young Master is back in town, all unrelated persons must quickly clear the way!"

The crowd erupted with noisy chatter.

"The Young Master is back? Hasn’t it been three years since he last returned?"

"Hey, why are you pushing? I have legs, don’t I? Let me have a look, what’s the problem with that?"

"Exactly, what’s wrong with taking a look? The Young Master hasn’t even spoken, why are you gatekeepers putting on airs?"

A young woman lamented, "The first time I saw the Young Master, I was still an unmarried girl. Why did it take him so long to return!"

"Yo, Cuihua, you're still pining for the Young Master, huh? Your son can almost walk now."

Cuihua replied discontentedly, "So what? I miss whom I miss, what's that to you?"

"Heh, with the way you are, you're only fit to long for Second Dog Zhang, not even taking a good look at yourself."

Cuihua rolled up her sleeves, furious, "Wang Dajiao, are you asking for a fight? Just watch as I rip your mouth apart."

The soldiers, faced with such a scene, could only be at their wits' end. Someone shouted, "Take your fights home! If you startle the Young Master's horse, you'll all be thrown into the big prison."

By now, Yue Rujing and his companions had entered the city. Yue Rujing's horse was at the forefront, his face beaming with a victorious smile.

It was also Gu Youyou's first glimpse of an ancient grand spectacle, and she was a bit curious. However, she wasn't overwhelmed; she maintained a look of complacency.

She remembered that she used to put on a much bigger front than this when she went to inspect the various branch companies to upstage her uncle.

"Ms. Gu, were you startled to learn of Young Master's identity?"

"Heh heh..." Gu Youyou chuckled dryly.

She really hadn't considered the Lingnan Princely Heir before.

"Look, look how much the commoners adore me. This is me returning without any prior notice. If I had alerted them beforehand, you would see the scene of fruit filling up the carriage as a tribute."

Gu Youyou never missed an opportunity to take a jab at him, and replied disdainfully, "You really think you're Pan An, don't you? At best, you're like a rotten interior under a splendid exterior, a so-called gentleman only in decay. Those showering you with fruit are either middle-aged women with vision problems or vulgar flatterers relying on your status. There's nothing to be proud of."

Yue Rujing's face stiffened. What was she implying? That those who fancied him were either blind or only interested in clinging to power?

And she dared to call him a veneer over rotten straw, a gentleman in decay?

Gu Youyou's venomous tongue reached new heights.

"You you... still, you're better than a shameless woman like you," he retorted.

"How am I shameless, idiot."

As it looked like a quarrel was about to erupt on the street, Jin Zijin hurriedly squeezed his horse between the two.

"It's good the commoners are noisy; otherwise, if these words of yours were to spread, your father would have another go at you."

"Brother!" Yue Rujing felt incredibly wronged. Why did his brother always criticize him? He was the one being insulted, the victim here.

"Ah, it really is the Young Master returning to the city. I won't leave; if I can see the Young Master's grace, even a beating would be worth it."

"Ouch, don't push! You trying to kill me or what?"

"My shoe!"

"Who’s the bastard touching my butt?"

"..."

Peals of lofty voices emerged from the crowd, and the once triumphant Yue Rujing’s face gradually darkened.

Chapter 337: The Grand View Garden of Yue Residence

Gu Youyou laughed heartily, "Haha, are these supposed to be better than me? I must say, Young Master, you have a unique taste!"

Because she read Yue Rujing’s jokes, Gu Youyou became entirely energized, and the fatigue from days of continuous travel dissipated by half in an instant.

...

"Ajing is back!"

"Oh my, I heard Ajing is back, my son!"

The message brought by the city guard reached the Lingnan Marquis Residence, and the place immediately erupted into commotion.

Yue Rujing was sent to the Tianzong on Qi Mountain by the Marquess at the age of eight, returned home once at ten, again at thirteen, then at fourteen, and frequently from fifteen to twenty years old. Now Yue Rujing was twenty-three, and it had been another three years since he last came home. In the Marquis Residence, aside from the one male Marquess, all the women of the household had long been yearning for his return.

"Grandmother, big brother has come back."

"Maternal grandmother, cousin has come back."

"Where is he? Where is my eldest grandson?"

"Mother, Ajing will be here soon. Please take it easy."

"Oh, I heard Brother Zijin also came..."

Riding on horses, Yue Rujing and his two companions arrived at the Lingnan Marquis Residence. The residence’s main gate was already bustling with people, with a tall, imposing middle-aged man at the forefront and the rest all women.

Yue Rujing, accustomed to mingling among these women, was already used to such scenes. Dismounting his horse, he immediately strode towards them.

"Grandmother."

"Father, Mother!"

"Second Aunt, eldest aunt, youngest aunt!"

"Eldest sister, second sister, third sister... cousin!"

Standing beside Gu Youyou, Jin Zijin smiled faintly, seemingly unfazed, but Gu Youyou was already dumbstruck.

Don’t tell her this courtyard is the Grand View Garden from "Dream of the Red Chamber"!

The Marquis Residence was severely imbalanced, with far more females than males.

This scene was... truly astonishing.

"Oh Ajing, my eldest grandson, you've gotten thinner!"

"My son, you've suffered!"

What kind of scene is this?

"Big brother, we've missed you so much!"

"Shoo, shoo, shoo, don't cling to your big brother. You must be tired from the journey, go inside and rest first." The old lady used her walking stick to shoo away the delicate young girls, at last, making way for everyone.

Gu Youyou seemed to understand why Yue Rujing had grown up somewhat effeminate, just like Jia Baoyu.

The banquet to welcome and cleanse away the dust from travel had a rather odd atmosphere!

Men and women sat at separate tables, with only three people at the large table opposite: Jin Zijin, Yue Rujing, and the Marquess.

Their table seemed overly crowded, packed with Yue Rujing's aunts and a heap of sisters, plus her—filled to the brim.

Gu Youyou ate the delicacies on the table with an uneasy heart. It wasn't the overcrowding that bothered her, but ever since Jin Zijin introduced her as his wife, those young girls started treating her as an outsider.

Of course, to those young girls, she was indeed an outsider and she paid little mind to it. The point was, ever since Jin Zijin introduced her as his wife, the Marquess' eyes would occasionally and seemingly unintentionally flit towards her.

How should she describe that feeling? His surreptitious glances were hard to articulate; they held a kind of expectation akin to looking at one’s daughter-in-law, yet also guarded.

What was all that about?

If it were because of the relationship between Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing, and if it were time to examine a potential match for the younger generation, it would make sense for the old lady and the Marchioness to be the ones glancing, not you, a grown man looking at someone else’s young wife. What’s the meaning of that?

Being watched by such an important figure would definitely intimidate anyone else.

Lucky for Gu Youyou, having been accustomed to significant events, she managed to avoid any impropriety.

"Sister-in-law Youyou, where are you from?"

Chapter 338: Asking for the Source

Gu Youyou lifted her gaze and saw a petite young girl with a delicate, melon seed-shaped face. After a moment of thought, she recognized the girl as Yue Rujing’s younger sister, who seemed to be about thirteen or fourteen years old, and looked at Gu Youyou with a smile that was not quite a smile.

Gu Youyou unveiled a light smile, her voice as soft and clear as pearls falling onto a dish, and said, "I am from Qingshui Town, Yangguan City, a small place in the countryside, which Miss Yue may have never heard of."

She thought that her introduction was appropriate, but to her surprise, upon hearing it, Yue Ruxue immediately stopped smiling and showed a hint of disdain, sneering, "I haven’t heard of it, indeed. It is a small place from the countryside. But I wonder how a woman from such a small rural place managed to win Zijin brother’s favor and become his wife?"

Gu Youyou glanced at another table. The three men were chatting casually and seemed to be unaware of the awkwardness at their table.

Being new here, she honestly just wanted to be courteous and give face as a guest. But this second young lady's bare disdain for her was hard to ignore.

Then, another woman spoke up, "Second younger sister, the people from small places have their own ways, how would you know, having always lived in Lingnan City?"

Yue Ruxue scoffed, "I'm just curious. Zijin brother is such a good man; I thought only the daughters of officials from Beijing would catch his eye. I never expected he would marry a country girl."

The two sisters seemed to egg each other on, their words filled with insinuations that Gu Youyou was not worthy of Jin Zijin. Gu Youyou bit her lip and had no choice but to meet the gaze of the second Miss Yue, saying timidly and shyly, "Destiny is preordained by heaven, and isn't there an old saying, 'Fate brings people together from far and wide, and without it, they do not meet even when face to face'? These matters of marriage, how can one explain them clearly?"

The women at the table seemed startled by her words. The old Madam Yue squinted at Gu Youyou and scolded her granddaughters in a low voice, "Ashuang, Axue, do not be rude to our guest."

They were all familiar with Jin Zijin, the top disciple of Tianzong, who, even when in the Imperial City, would receive respect from the Emperor himself. His presence in their home, as a fellow disciple and brother of Yue Rujing, was naturally very welcome.

Years ago, Jin Zijin had lived in Lingnan with Yue Rujing for several years, and they had come to regard him as their own child.

Given his outstanding character, the Yue Family had always harbored the hope of marrying one of their daughters to him.

Now, after several years without seeing him, they didn't expect he would bring a wife with him. How could they not be curious?

Upon first seeing Gu Youyou, though she appeared slender and modestly dressed, her manner was graceful and polite, clearly the upbringing of a lady from a prominent family. The Yue Family could

accept losing out to a high official's daughter from Beijing, but Yue Ruxue just couldn't let it go and had to inquire about her background.

Upon hearing that she was from a small rural area, the others also became restless.

How could a woman from a small rural area be worthy of Jin Zijin?

This was why nobody stopped the exchange between Yue Ruxue, Yue Rushuang, and Gu Youyou.

However, the old Madam, a woman of more experience, could tell from Gu Youyou's demeanor and poise that she was not some village girl who had never seen the world.

Since they were strangers to each other, it was best not to offend anyone. Even out of respect for Jin Zijin, it would be inappropriate to overstep boundaries. Merely hinting was enough, which is why she intervened with her granddaughters.

Chapter 339: Is the Yue Family's Young Lady Alright?

"Grandmother!" Yue Ruxue, who was always fond of acting spoiled, felt somewhat indignant. Why shouldn't she speak? The girl was nothing but a country bumpkin.

"A visitor is a guest!" the old lady said, her tone light.

Although Gu Youyou felt somewhat uneasy because of the Marquess's strange gaze, she maintained her composure and finished her meal without acting subservient or arrogant. She chose to ignore the ostracism from the other young ladies of the Yue Family.

She was just a visitor, after all, and would slap her bottom and leave in a couple of days.

After dinner, the Marchioness ordered a maid to attend to them and led Jin Zijin and Gu Youyou to the guest room.

"Young Master Jin, Madam, my name is Xiaotao. Please don't hesitate to call on me if you need anything," she said.

Jin Zijin nodded politely and said, "Thank you, girl! We don’t need anything right now; you may go rest."

Gu Youyou started feeling somewhat uneasy about actually staying the night in the Marquis Residence. She tugged at Jin Zijin’s sleeve and asked, "You’re not going to tell me that your so-called home in Lingnan happens to be this place, are you?"

As soon as she spoke, Jin Zijin suddenly remembered the trick he had originally played on Gu Youyou.

He truly had no home, but if he had to name a place that had given him a sense of home over the years, it really was this Marquis Residence of Lingnan.

He thought for a moment and then said, "Of course not, our house hasn’t been lived in for years. I suspect it’s uninhabitable. I’ll go and take a look tomorrow, and if it’s damaged, I’ll find someone to fix it. We will move there after it’s repaired."

He had become capable of lying with a straight face and without a twinge of conscience. A year ago, he couldn’t have imagined lying just to coax a woman.

One lie requires more lies to cover it up; there seemed to be some truth to that saying.

Gu Youyou pondered about having to stay here for a few days, which gave her a headache just thinking about it.

She wasn’t foolish; the young ladies of the Yue Family made no effort to hide their hostile glances toward her, plainly provoking her.

Since when had Gu Youyou fought for a man? Men always flocked to her like birds to a lagoon.

Once she looked up and saw the complicated gaze in Jin Zijin’s eyes again, it really seemed like they thought she, a village girl, truly wasn’t worthy of him—not even to be his maid.

Well, luckily, she wasn't the village girl Gu Youyou, at least not in her mind.

A village girl lacked confidence, but she had it.

"Zijin, are the young ladies of the Yue Family nice?" she inquired.

Jin Zijin was briefly taken aback before his thoughts shifted, and he understood her implication. He took off his outer garment and said with a light smile, "The last time I saw them they were only a few years old, all little girls. Ajing's sister; I consider them as my sisters too."

...Damn, so many 'sisters.'

Gu Youyou watched him for a while and, seeing his expression was unchanged, she believed him.

The backyard of the Lingnan Marquis Residence was vast; even with just Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin as the guests, they still occupied an entire separate courtyard. What was even more surprising was the existence of a half-man-made, half-natural warm spring behind the bedroom. Soaking in the warm spring washed away the fatigue of many days' travel.

When she came out, Jin Zijin was reading under a lamp. It was getting late; Gu Youyou yawned and said, "Their house is really generous, huh? There's even a hot spring in the guest room."

Jin Zijin put down his book and replied, "There are many hot springs in Lingnan. Large households in the city all have hot springs channeled into their houses."

"Oh...?" Gu Youyou paused her movements for a moment, realizing this place was indeed blessed by heaven.

...

The next day, Gu Youyou slept until the sun was high in the sky. As a guest, she felt slightly embarrassed.

When she awoke, Jin Zijin was already gone. Honestly, he could have at least called her.

The sound of light footsteps came from outside, and before long, she saw Xiaotao, the maid from the day before.

Chapter 340: An Unexpected Encounter

Gu Youyou quickly donned her clothes, then heard Xiaotao’s crisp voice.

"Madam Jin, breakfast is ready. Would you like to eat now or wait for Young Master Jin to return?"

Gu Youyou glanced through the window at the sky, finding it a bit improper to be eating breakfast at this hour; it was almost time for lunch.

She smiled and asked, "Where is Zijin? Where did he go?"

Xiaotao replied, "Young Master Jin went out early this morning. He instructed that you eat some breakfast after you wake up, and he’d take you out for lunch at midday."

"Did he say when he’ll be back?"

Xiaotao shook her head and said, "No."

Gu Youyou pondered what Jin Zijin’s plans could imply. But she had no understanding of the ancient ways of hospitality, especially of great ancient clans, and thus even after much thought, she couldn’t figure it out.

Well, she might as well just do as he said. She had fled here to escape misfortune; what was there to fuss about?

Soon, Xiaotao brought her breakfast, still warm from the stove even though it was already late in the morning.

"Madam Jin, would you like to take a walk in the courtyard after breakfast? The young ladies are all there."

Gu Youyou looked up at the young maid, who appeared honest and straightforward at the age of fourteen or fifteen. If not for the fleeting look of evasion in her eyes when she met Gu Youyou's gaze, she would have seemed like a very innocent and trustworthy little maid.

Gu Youyou smiled and continued to eat her breakfast without showing much concern.

After all, this was someone else's territory. To have a maid serve you was unlikely to be of good intent.

She just hoped that Jin Zijin's house wasn't too dilapidated and could be made habitable with some minor fixing up.

As she put down her chopsticks and was wiping her mouth, Gu Youyou heard some rather unpleasant voices.

"What if she doesn't come out? Shall we go in?"

"But Great Grandmother said that visitors should be treated as guests and that we shouldn't go looking for trouble with her. If she comes out on her own, that's fine, but if we go in and stir up trouble, we'll be at fault no matter who is right or wrong."

Yue Ruxue raised her voice, discontent, "How could we be at fault? This is my home, I can go wherever I want."

"Cousin, but Great Grandmother has told us not to go in and provoke her."

"Why should I listen to that? This is my home, and she even took over Brother Zijin's affections."

"But Brother Zijin said she is his wife."

"I don’t care, I must go. I want to see what she is capable of, to see if she is better than us sisters."

"Ah, Second Sister..."

Listening to the voices, the second young lady seemed determined to barge in and find trouble with Gu Youyou, who arched an eyebrow and stood up to walk outside.

A few girls in their teens—she was not afraid of them.

In the courtyard, she met several young ladies, experiencing an unexpected encounter. Gu Youyou’s face showed a brief expression of surprise as she made a modest curtsy as a polite gesture.

"Young Ladies, where are you headed?"

Nobody would expect that Gu Youyou, with her sharp hearing, had come out after hearing their conversation; they all thought it was just a coincidental meeting.

Yue Ruxue curled her lips into a scornful smile and said, "Oh, we heard you just woke up. Have you had breakfast? It’s almost time for lunch; where are you off to?"

Gu Youyou also chuckled lightly and honestly answered, "I heard the young ladies wanted me to go out for a walk, so here I am."

Xiaotao, who had followed Gu Youyou out, looked stunned.

That’s not what she meant at all!

"May I know what the young ladies want with me?" Gu Youyou asked, her expression unchanged.

She caught Yue Ruxue glaring fiercely at Xiaotao behind her.