## Farmhouse 371

Chapter 371: Celebrating New Year at the Marquis Residence

"Hey, do we really have to go to the Marquis Residence for the New Year celebration? Don’t you know that group of women there, including your favorite disciple, all dislike me?"

As they approached the entrance to the Marquis Residence, the woman dressed in a pale green jacket kept tugging at the sleeve of the tall man walking in front of her.

She did not want to!

Meanwhile, Abao seemed quite pleased. The path to the Marquis Residence was familiar territory for it, leading the way and occasionally turning back, tilting its head and looking curiously at its awkward master trailing behind.

Jin Zijin said, "Marquess Yue has been kind to me. He invited us, and it wouldn’t be polite to refuse."

"This is a case of ’suffering for the sake of face,’ and I’m the one who suffers," Gu Youyou asserted righteously.

"Don’t you trust me? Or are you scared?"

Screw you!

"I believe you can handle them, they’re just a bunch of no-hopers."

"..."

That annoying goading tactic.

Gu Youyou was actually susceptible to such provocation. They were just a few maidens, a bunch of no-hopers; what did she have to fear?

"Fine, fine, fine, I wasn’t even scared staying at his place for a few days, why would I be scared of having a New Year’s Eve dinner?"

This was challenging her to show her true strength.

Outside the Marquis Residence hung the biggest and brightest red lanterns in all of Lingnan City, casting the entire vermillion-painted gate in a radiant glow.

Speaking of which, Marquess Yue really did give Jin Zijin a lot of face, bringing his only son, Yue Rujing, to welcome them personally at the gate, his face always adorned with a kindly smile.

Cold flakes of snow flew outside the gates; it was quite chilly, a rare occurrence indeed.

Huh! She thought the weather in Lingnan was warm and would not bring snow. Unexpectedly, come winter, the snow flew thick and heavy, no less than the snow in Qingshui Town.

"Ayan, you’re here. Come inside quickly and get warm!"

Ayan? Gu Youyou was taken aback. That must be Jin Zijin’s nickname, huh? Their relationship was indeed extraordinary.

"Marquess, please!"

Yue Rujing instructed a guard to take Abao inside.

"Take Lord Abao to the back yard, pamper him with good food and drink, alright?"

The guard replied affirmatively, and Abao abandoned its master, scampering off with the other man.

Gu Youyou rolled her eyes; now she understood why Abao had been so happy—it had become a favored 'Lord' in this Marquis Residence.

Jin Zijin entered with Marquess Yue arm in arm, while Yue Rujing stood there with ill intentions, waiting for Gu Youyou to enter first.

Gu Youyou gave him a sideways glance and quickly followed in Jin Zijin's footsteps.

Alright, she would just act as if she was shamelessly freeloading a meal.

However, it seemed Yue Rujing did not intend to let her off so easily. Back in Qingshui Town, he had endured much humiliation and suffered under Gu Youyou's bullying.

Getting up earlier than the chickens and working harder than an ox, and then having his wages docked or threatened with dismissal at the drop of a hat.

With a smile that was not quite a smile, he said to Gu Youyou, "Manager Gu, where did you buy this outfit? It's quite lovely, makes you look just like a sprout of green beans."

Gu Youyou's lips curved into a wicked smile, thinking to herself: When it comes to wit, I, Gu Youyou, have never been afraid of you, Yue Rujing.

She appraised Yue Rujing from head to toe and said, "Isn't that white robe the one you said was bitten by a dog? You mean to say they couldn't even spare you a new outfit for the New Year's celebration?"

The malevolent smile on Yue Rujing's face momentarily stiffened, and he instinctively looked down at the sleeve that Abao had bitten.

He had removed and remade that whole sleeve, so who would be able to tell it had been bitten by a dog?

"This is the Crane Immortal White Moon Robe, the one and only exquisite rarity in the world!"

Gu Youyou nodded and said, "Yeah, a robe bitten by a dog and still worn for the New Year’s celebration is indeed the one and only."

Yue Rujing: "..."

Chapter 372: New Year’s Eve

"Good, good, good..." He sneered, repeating the word ’good’ three times and lowered his voice to Gu Youyou, "Let’s see how you deal with tonight with that sharp tongue of yours. Hey, if you know what’s good for you, submit to me now, and I’ll help you later."

"You?" Gu Youyou had a face full of disdain, "Deal with your senior brother first."

"Haha!" Yue Rujing laughed and said, "Don’t think that senior brother will help you; it’s not proper for a grown man to interfere in women’s quarrels."

"Oh..." Gu Youyou responded meaningfully, "So you’re saying it’s not proper for your senior brother, a grown man, to get involved, but you, who are neither man nor woman, can just meddle as you please?"

Yue Rujing was furious, "Who are you calling neither man nor woman?"

Humph, that’s what you get for living among women, Gu Youyou gave him a look that said ’you’re one to talk,’ and then left with flair.

This damn Jin Zijin had already taken off, no sign of him.

So much for trusting you, huh?

Yue Rujing muttered in frustration, "Tomboy, you’re not even like a woman." With that, he quickly followed her.

"Hey, hey, where are you going? The main hall is this way!"

In this pitch darkness, who could tell?

...

Similarly, at the table next door, where the men sat, three people were enough, but the women's table was almost too small to fit everyone.

Gu Youyou thought the New Year's Eve dinner would be very unpleasant, which had kept her on edge, preventing her from enjoying some really good food. But surprisingly, not a soul blew up at her by the end of the meal.

The old Madam and the Marchioness seemed to be quite courteous towards her the whole time, only discussing Jisheng Hall merrily and even praising her at length.

Talking about how she was a 'woman of valor,' and how she sought blessings for all the women in the city, and so on.

Gu Youyou had mustered all her energy for a battle, only to have her opponent throw her a ball of cotton candy, or so it felt.

After the meal, the servants cleared everything away, and in no time, the main hall was transformed, giving Gu Youyou the illusion of a theatrical stage.

She quietly asked a nearby maid, "Are we going to see a play?"

Ancient people seemed to enjoy watching dramas, but it would be a bummer if that was the case. With all the strident singing, she wouldn't understand a thing. A play would last so long, she'd go numb from sitting still before it ended.

Luckily, the little maid replied, "It's not a play; it's to assess the ladies' talents. It's the New Year; everyone has gone home for the New Year's vigil. Who would come out to perform in a play?"

Gu Youyou patted her chest in relief; thank goodness it wasn't a play. It was a perfect opportunity to see what skills the so-called ladies of high-standing in ancient times were supposed to master.

Come to think of it, she was also a lady of high-standing with multiple skills. She wondered how she compared to these young ladies?

There were quite a few young ladies in the Yue Family. Besides Yue Rujing, the eldest sister born to their father, the second and third sisters were born to an uncle and aunt.

Her uncle was said to have died early in battle, leaving behind just two daughters, one six years old, about the same age as Sanya, and another eight years old, a little girl, along with a cousin, totaling five young ladies.

"According to tradition, you five come forward and draw lots. Whoever gets number one goes first, starting with the guqin," they were told.

"Yes, Grandmother!" all five girls said in unison as they bowed to the old lady.

The lead maid by the old Madam's side smiled and immediately carried a tray to the young ladies for the draw. Yue Ruxue, being the legitimate daughter, always took the lead in everything, and accordingly, she was the first to reach out her hand.

But halfway through, she stopped, turned her head to Gu Youyou, gave her a meaningful look, and addressed the old madam seated in a place of honor, "Grandmother, why not add one more person this year?"

"Add one more person?" The old Madam frowned and asked.

Chapter 373: Who Will Lose Face?

And Gu Youyou, by now, had already grasped what she intended to do.

She responded with a meaningful smile in return.

No wonder she was quiet during the meal, it turns out she was waiting for her here.

Indeed, it was as if their minds were in sync. Just now, she was pondering how she compared to these young girls, and now one of them was pulling her into their game.

Their inquiries had concluded that Gu Youyou was indeed a country bumpkin, but she happened to be a Divine Doctor with exceptional talent, hence her medical skills. In all other aspects, she was just as unsophisticated. If not now, when else would be the perfect time to deal with her?

She was determined to seize this opportunity to show Jin Zijin the difference between this country girl and ladies of their standing, as well as to make this clueless Gu Youyou recognize her own status.

Lest in the future when she's made to be inferior, she still remains defiant.

Yue Ruxue was cooing to the elder madam, her smile sweet as she said, "I notice Youyou sister-in-law looks about our age. Why not let her join in this year too, to play along with us?"

From afar, Yue Tingfang glanced over with a frown, muttering lowly, "Axue, according to the rules, this is to test the skills of the young ladies. Why involve Doctor Gu in this?"

However, Yue Ruxue replied, "It's simply to make the New Year's Eve observance less boring. With two or three hours to go, it would be too dull just among us sisters. Since Youyou sister-in-law seems about our age, let her play with us.

Besides, it's not just for fun. The one who wins will get the biggest red envelope from Grandmother as a reward!"

Hearing this, Gu Youyou's eyes lit up. The most authoritative elder in the Lingnan Marquis Residence must have quite the generous red envelope, and she just so happened to be planning to buy the courtyard of the bakery next door, only lacking silver.

"Grandmother, what do you say? Please?" Yue Ruxue continued to wheedle the elder madam.

Yue Rujing looked on at Gu Youyou as if relishing in her misfortune.

Jin Zijin's expression was unreadable as he watched Gu Youyou, who smiled confidently, so he remained seated, not stepping in to help her out of the predicament.

The other young ladies, as well as the other women, watched the elder madam with anticipation.

They were eager to see for themselves just how capable the legendary female doctor was.

The elder madam, dizzy from Yue Ruxue's cajoling, gently grasped her hand and said with a laugh, "Alright, stop pestering this old woman. Doctor Gu is not a member of the Yue Family, so it's not for me to decide. We should ask what Doctor Gu thinks."

After saying this, she turned to Gu Youyou and said, "Doctor Gu, what do you think? If you don't wish to participate, we won't force you."

Gu Youyou stood up, curtsied slightly, and said with a faint smile, "New Year's Eve is all about having a lively time. As long as the elder madam doesn't mind this country girl, who isn't fit for high society, sullying your eyes, I'm happy to join in."

Although her words might not have been very pleasant to hear, she had successfully fallen into their trap.

The elder madam laughed heartily, "Then it's settled. Xia He, go add one more lot, let Doctor Gu have some fun too."

"Yes, elder madam!"

In the blink of an eye, a maidservant named Xia He brought out a lot, which was apparently ready beforehand, just waiting for her to walk into the trap.

On the other side, Yue Rujing said with a smile, "Senior brother, let’s go see too. Who knows if this prodigiously talented Doctor Gu can also handle music, chess, calligraphy, and painting!"

"Hmm," Jin Zijin nodded.

Yue Ruxue was the first to pick a lot. With a glimpse of her number, she secretly rejoiced, holding up the slip and declared, "I’m the first again this year!"

The elder madam said with a laugh, "Good, I hope your musical performance will also be number one. Decide on what you want to perform and have them bring it to you."

Chapter 374: Battle Joy

"Grandmother, my favorite instrument is naturally the guqin." Turning to the servant in charge of the instruments, she said, "Go fetch my ’Hao Zhong.’"

’Hao Zhong?’

Gu Youyou was slightly startled.

She had the fortune to hear the legends about the famous zither Hao Zhong. In Zhuzhao Country, which did not exist in any historical records, she wondered if this Hao Zhong was the same as the one in the legends.

If it was, then she would indeed be feasting her eyes.

It wouldn’t be a wasted journey after all.

Before long, someone brought out an ancient qin of peach wood color. Just from its appearance, the craftsmanship was refined, with gold wrapping around both ends and silver threads, inlaid with green gemstones.

Yue Ruxue took it, her eyes gently sweeping over everyone in the room, and finally settling on Jin Zijin. She smiled brightly with confidence.

The sound of the Hao Zhong did not flow like other soft guqins, but resonated like the sound of bells and the prolonged call of horns.

If the qin were to be played for the ordinary scholar-gentleman, it would not be as pleasing as the gentle music of other qins. However, Brother Zijin was different; he was meant to be a man of the battlefield, just like his father and brothers. Therefore, she was certain Brother Zijin would prefer this kind of robust and spirited music that stirred the blood.

For this reason, she specifically chose a battle melody meant to boost the morale of the troops.

As the piece began, Gu Youyou listened with a quiet heart.

This tune was not like the delicate sentiments of love favored by young ladies. From the start, it was an impassioned and moving sound of profound sadness and excitement, which made Gu Youyou reevaluate the imperious Yue Ruxue.

She actually played such a tune—had she misjudged her?

They say that qin music can best reflect one's innermost feelings. It wasn't that she played exceedingly well, but the music seemed to paint a scene of thousands of soldiers battling fiercely. Gu Youyou saw another Yue Ruxue, a heroic figure on horseback.

When the piece ended, the Marquess seated on high was the first to clap and praise the performance, and the house servants and guards standing at the far edge were also stirred, making Gu Youyou instantly understand why she chose not to play romantic melodies, but rather warlike ones.

It turns out she was pandering to their tastes.

The women might not appreciate it, but most of the men in the Marquis Residence had seen the battlefield, and they enjoyed it.

Despite the Yue Residence being predominantly female, with few men, the status of those few men was unmatched.

One must admit this girl was not as foolish as she had thought, which was rather interesting.

The elderly Madam also smiled in satisfaction, saying, "Axue's qin skills have improved considerably this year. When it comes time to fight enemies on the battlefield, Axue will be able to assist with her qin music."

Hearing this, Gu Youyou was again surprised. Could the young ladies of the Marquis Residence also go to the battlefield?

Yue Ruxue shyly thanked her, "Thanks for the praise, Grandmother, Axue will not be outdone by her father and brothers."

Ah, such bold words. It was as if calling her fat would make her pant.

The Marquess laughed heartily with joy, "Ha ha, each of my children is commendable. Axue, despite her young age, does not pale next to men in service to Zhuzhao."

The Marchioness was also very pleased by the compliment.

Next, Yue Rushuang, the eldest daughter, went to draw lots. Although she was the eldest, her status was far inferior to Yue Ruxue's because her mother was a concubine.

She drew an upper lot, which was third in order. After showing it to the elderly Madam, she stood aside properly to wait.

The two younger daughters from the second house timidly picked one each.

The six-year-old little girl drew the second lot and blinked her big eyes at her mother, seeking guidance.

Her mother smiled and said, "Xiaosi just started learning instruments this year, and her fingers are tender; she fears pain. So I didn't let her learn various string instruments, but instead, she learned the bianzhong. She finds the chiming, ringing sounds amusing. Let's choose the bianzhong then, just hope the child's play won't cause too much noise for Madam."

Chapter 375: Look at with New Eyes

The old lady laughed heartily as she ruffled her little granddaughter's head and said, "It's not noisy at all, the racket is what makes it lively! Alright, bring over the chime bells, and let our little girl clink and clank away to her heart's content, just like setting off firecrackers."

As brave as a calf that doesn't fear tigers, the fourth young miss clasped a hammer-like object in each plump little hand. As soon as the chime bells were set up, she excitedly started to bang on them. But the sound... actually proved the old lady right, it really was like a barrage of firecrackers.

She was young and cute, so no one became upset over the unpleasant noise; instead, the whole family laughed and enjoyed themselves thoroughly.

Next was the eldest sister, who chose a set of drums to play.

Witnessing the delicate young woman wielding large mallets to strike the drums genuinely startled Gu Youyou.

She wasn't playing an ordinary musical drum, it was a war drum.

Wow, the taste of the young misses of the Yue family is truly... extraordinary.

As the drumming ceased, and with Marquess Yue's applause and cheers, Gu Youyou understood that in this house, while it was important to appease the old lady overtly, it was also key to win favor with Marquess Yue.

If Marquess Yue was pleased, then so was the old lady, and when she was happy, the whole family followed suit.

"Very good, very good, Ashuang's drumming isn't bad either, complements Axue's zither just perfectly," the old lady commented.

Drums and zither pairing up?

Seeing the eldest miss receive praise too, the Marchioness's expression turned sour.

Then it was the turn of the cousin and Gu Youyou to pick up the last two lots.

Gu Youyou took a look and saw that she had drawn number six, the very last one.

The order didn't matter; last is just last.

The cousin and the third sister each chose a pipa and a flute; it was quite remarkable that none of the young ladies chose the same instrument, showcasing the diverse talents of the Marquis Residence's ladies.

Soon, it was Gu Youyou's turn. Yue Ruxue lifted her chin and walked up to her, taking pleasure in Youyou's predicament, "It's your turn, what instrument will you choose? Just a reminder, the rules say you can't pick an instrument that's been played by us. Oh dear, your options are pretty limited now."

Cannot repeat, huh?

Only then did Gu Youyou realize why each miss had chosen a different instrument.

She stood up, bypassed Yue Ruxue, and respectfully bowed to the old lady on the high platform, inquiring, "Old lady, may I ask what instruments are available in the residence?"

The old lady gestured to the house servant in charge of music and said, "This is Doctor Gu's first time participating in such an event, and she's unfamiliar with our family's collection of instruments. Take her to the instrument room to choose."

"Yes, old lady," responded the house servant, then said to Gu Youyou, "Doctor Gu, please follow me!"

Gu Youyou followed the house servant through a Shuixie, around the long corridor, and quickly arrived at the instrument hall.

Though the Yue Residence was a warrior's home, it had a rather complete collection of musical instruments.

The house servant in charge of the music was very responsible, introducing each instrument in detail.

"Doctor Gu, apart from the zither, drums, pipa, flute, and chime bells that the young ladies have already used, you may pick any other instrument."

Gu Youyou examined each item on the racks.

Ocarina? That thing is exhausting, and she couldn't play it.

Konghou? Her hands were too short, and she hadn't learned it.

Horn? Forget about it; she was even less experienced with it.

The dulcimer and the Yueqin might be an option, but given the soul-stilling sound of Yue Ruxue's guqin earlier and her own less than proficient skills, opting for these two instruments would mean defeat.

Suddenly, Gu Youyou's gaze swept over a large object in the corner covered by a black cloth, which stirred a faint sense of familiarity. The object was quite big, and though hidden, it piqued her curiosity.

"What's this?" Gu Youyou inquired of the house servant in charge of the music.

Chapter 376: Stunning Everyone

The head of the household musicians glanced over and said with a chuckle, "Our old Marquess used to love all sorts of musical instruments and collected quite a few at home. But that thing... none of us can

name it. It’s said that the Marquess brought it back from a seafaring voyage before his death. It has a quite pleasant sound; it’s just that no one knows how to play it."

He then drew back the black cloth that covered the object, and an ancient and simple piano appeared before Gu Youyou’s eyes.

She walked up excitedly and gently touched it.

It indeed was a piano, the most ancient kind.

Gu Youyou had suspected that the history of Zhuzhao Country possibly corresponded to the Ming Dynasty period. Seeing this piano only strengthened her speculation.

Although there were some discrepancies in time, the difference was not substantial.

Besides, in a world of void history, anything was possible.

"I’ll choose this one," Gu Youyou said.

The head of the musicians looked at her in surprise and said, "Doctor Gu, if you really don’t know how to play it then..."

Gu Youyou interrupted, "Who says I can’t? Just have someone move it over."

Well, okay then, the head of the musicians didn’t say anything more.

He thought to himself: Doctor Gu is really clever. Since no one knows how to play this thing, even if she plays it poorly, no one could say anything about it, right?

Thinking this way, it indeed was far less embarrassing than performing poorly on any other instrument.

When the piano was moved in, it shocked everyone present.

"Why did you choose this? Can you play it?" Yue Ruxue asked in astonishment.

The old Madam was also smiling, thinking that Gu Youyou was about to make a fool of herself, but then her smile stiffened as she had a sudden thought.

This girl was truly... audacious, knowingly facing embarrassment yet deliberately choosing an instrument that no one else could play.

Yue Rujing's mouth hung open for a long while, immediately filled with regret.

Had she known this girl was accustomed to deceit and trickery, she should have had the instrument hidden away earlier.

After the initial surprise, the Marquess's face was filled with admiration.

Such a clever girl, no wonder Ayan took a liking to her.

Jin Zijin, however, looked at Gu Youyou with some expectation. He didn't share everyone else's assumption that Gu Youyou couldn't play and thus chose an instrument that no one else could to avoid embarrassment.

He knew that Gu Youyou harbored many secrets unknown to others. Since she had picked this item, she surely could play it.

Such a dream.

Gu Youyou sat down, her fingers lightly placed on the piano keys. She looked around at the people gathered and said with a light laugh, "This instrument is called a piano, a hit-string style ancient piano. Its melodies are lyrical and heartwarming, most suitable for a family indoor performance like tonight's."

No sooner had she spoken than she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and the fluid, soothing sounds of the piano began to flow from her fingertips.

The piece was a Moonlight Piano Sonata, not some masterpiece by a famous composer but one written by a piano-loving friend of Gu Youyou's.

She felt that the melody of this piano sonata was particularly fitting for the tranquil and mild atmosphere following the tumult of battle, an excellent choice to conclude the evening's performance.

After the soaring piano, drums, and bell chimes... enthusiasm among the audience had already been spent.

Once the battle drums ceased, the soldiers would always grow quiet, reminiscing about the tenderness of their families.

The Moonlight Piano Sonata brought silence to the entire Marquis Residence. The guards who couldn't go home because of their duties were especially moved, their hearts softening, almost to the point of tears.

With her eyes closed, Gu Youyou didn't look at the keys. She just let her heart dance to the rhythm of her fingertips and infused all her gentleness into the warm and soothing melody.

After the piece ended, silence lingered in the quiet Marquis Residence for a long time before the first round of applause erupted.

Then came the second, the third.

Gu Youyou opened her eyes and smiled gently.

It turns out that people here also enjoy clapping.

Chapter 377: Divine Assistance

Who would dare say such music was a desperate attempt to not disgrace herself?

Her melody overshadowed all the sounds of war, encapsulating the true meaning behind a man’s duty to protect his home and country.

They go to battle and kill the enemy, but isn’t it all for the peace of home and country, to be able to stop and listen to this melodious tune? To savor that warmth.

Yue Tingfang stood up, looking directly at Gu Youyou, then after a moment, smiled and said, "I truly didn’t expect to be fortunate enough to hear the sound of this qin again after my father’s passing. Doctor Gu wasn’t wrong, it indeed deserves to be called a qin."

Reminded of the past, the old Madam couldn’t help but shed tears. She took Yue Tingfang’s hand and said, "Tingfang, your father passed away too suddenly, and this musical instrument was not passed down. I thought it would rot away untouched, but who could have imagined I’d live to hear it again in my lifetime!"

The Marquess comforted his mother for a few moments, then turned to Gu Youyou and asked, "Doctor Gu, may I ask what the piece you just performed is called?"

Gu Youyou answered, "Moonlit Piano Piece."

"Moonlit Piano Piece!" the Marquess murmured, "For the first round of the musical instrument competition, Doctor Gu prevails."

The Marquess had made his decision, and the only one who could dispute him, the old lady, was lost in sorrowful memories. Thus, no one dared to object.

Looking at the ladies and Madams, each had a more unpleasant expression than the last, especially Yue Ruxue, who seemed about to bite her silver teeth to pieces.

"You’re just lucky."

Surprised, Yue Rujing poked Jin Zijin beside her and asked, "How does she even know that one?"

Jin Zijin was brimming with pride and chuckled, "Youyou is extraordinarily talented."

Yue Rujing: "..." Some sneaky spy, who's going to believe she's naturally gifted?

The second round, chess!

Gu Youyou furrowed her brow slightly upon hearing the announcement from the old Madam's lead maid.

To her knowledge, when ancient people spoke of 'chess,' they usually meant Go, and she did not know how to play.

Her family's business had a heritage stretching back hundreds of years, and in some respects, her grandfather was quite conservative. So, besides learning modern things, she also had to learn the piano, chess, calligraphy, and painting that daughters of ancient households would. Apart from achieving some success in literature and Xiangqi, she was merely familiar with the rest, but not proficient.

As for this 'chess'...

Back when she was young, it coincided with her uncle and aunt being around when her grandfather wanted her to learn Go. Her uncle wore a black suit, her aunt a white dress, and upon glancing down at the black and white Go stones, she immediately felt a strong repulsion.

Her uncle and aunt together resembled those black and white stones.

So, she outright told her grandfather she wouldn't learn Go, and he didn't force her, letting her learn Xiangqi instead.

This was a problem. She would have to find a way to get them to bring out the Xiangqi board to stand a chance.

"What’s the matter, Doctor Gu? Are you afraid?"

Seeing Gu Youyou frowning, Yue Ruxue couldn’t resist adding fuel to the fire.

Gu Youyou looked up, about to say that the Yue Family, being warriors, would not befit the literary elegance of Go, only Xiangqi would... but then she caught sight of a few guards bringing over a huge table. From a distance, wasn’t that a Xiangqi board?

Oh my, fortune favors me, the back yard of the pancake shop was secured.

Gu Youyou rejoiced inwardly.

Then she heard the old Madam say, "Our Yue Family has honored martial prowess for generations and doesn’t indulge in the literary pursuits of chess. For generations, our children have held a unique fondness for Xiangqi. Doctor Gu, if you are unfamiliar with this game, you can withdraw. This match will not count as win or loss for you."

How could this be?

Gu Youyou bowed and spoke slowly, "Old Madam, having already agreed to join the young ladies for games tonight, how could I possibly withdraw midway? Even if I lose, I still wish to give it a try."

Heh... such confidence.

Chapter 378: Unconventional Moves

Yue Ruxue stepped forward and said loudly, "Since that is the case, let the first game be where Miss here seeks guidance from Doctor Gu!"

Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow, thinking to herself: A direct challenge? We’re not drawing lots?

Fine, it’s your rules anyway.

"Second Miss, please!"

Gu Youyou’s petite frame was nevertheless imposing. At the moment when she walked toward the chessboard with a confident smile, one could seemingly see a commander who led armies, a true master of the life-and-death game of chess.

Jin Zijin sat quietly, not taking his eyes off her for a moment.

Seeing Gu Youyou’s posture, Yue Rujing became restless.

She poked Jin Zijin again, saying, "Brother, it seems she even knows how to play Chinese chess, this spy placement is indeed a grand gesture."

Jin Zijin glanced briefly and stood up, walking to the side of the chessboard.

The large-sized pieces were not for them to play with, but for the spectators to see.

Two guards stood by the side, and beneath the pieces, there was a smaller chess set made of ivory—that was the one for their use.

As Gu Youyou and Yue Ruxue moved the pieces in the smaller set, the two guards would replicate their moves on the larger set, making it easier for those behind to follow the game.

The opening moves were just a few old routines. Yue Ruxue, who was accustomed to being first in everything, didn’t ask Gu Youyou and simply took the first step.

Moving the cannon to the central file is a common move, but from this single step, one could tell that she was used to taking the initiative in everything, which also fit Yue Ruxue’s personality perfectly.

Gu Youyou quietly advanced a rook one step forward.

This was an unconventional move; the normal move would be to jump a horse. But Gu Youyou thought, to handle an impatient young lady like her, unconventional tactics would be required so that she couldn't see through her strategy.

Seeing the opening two moves, a smile curled up at the corners of the mouth of the old Madam on the high platform.

The others laughed as well, thinking to themselves: indeed, she doesn't know how to play. Moving the cannon to the central file and not quickly advancing the horse, moving a stunted chariot instead? Is she giving up the central pawn to her opponent?

And it's not just the pawn she's giving away, but also an excellent line of attack.

Even those among them who weren't proficient in chess would not use such a tactic; this was really something.

Yue Ruxue lifted the corners of her mouth in a smug smile, unceremoniously capturing Gu Youyou's central pawn.

Why not eat what's freely given? Why would anyone refuse such a free offer?

The subsequent moves also went as they anticipated.

Yue Ruxue adopted an attacking stance using dual cannons to control the central file, pressing down on Gu Youyou's guards and elephants so they couldn't move. With just the use of two cannons, it seemed as though she had already taken control of the whole game, as if the outcome was immediately clear.

She looked at Gu Youyou, her face brimming with a triumphant expression she couldn't suppress.

Humph, does she honestly think this chess game, akin to a battlefield struggle, is but a child's game?

Jin Zijin glanced at Gu Youyou from the side and saw that she remained composed and carefree, without any hint of the anxiety of someone about to lose at chess. Instead, in her eyes, he saw the confidence of someone with everything under control.

He lowered his head and could also see that although it seemed Yue Ruxue had gained the upper hand in the chess game, upon a closer look, her dual cannon tactic was threatening in demeanor only and posed no real threat to the overall game.

Gu Youyou chuckled softly, her slender fingers slowly picked up a chess piece, placed it down gently, and in a tranquil manner, gained control of the opponent's half of the board.

The distant spectators could no longer laugh; their smiles froze on their faces.

The one unchanged was Marquess Yue, seated high above.

Chapter 379: Not a Single Piece Left

From the moment Gu Youyou made her first move, he didn't have a mocking smile, nor did he look down on her in the slightest. Even now, his expression wasn't unpleasant, just like a truly qualified spectator of the game.

He was only responsible for watching, whether someone won or lost had nothing to do with him.

Yue Ruxue's expression stiffened, and she immediately mounted another horse on the opposite side. With her next move, she planned to bring out her chariot, also aiming to control half of her opponent's territory with a single piece.

But where in the world was such a good thing possible? Gu Youyou had long placed a cannon across the board, just waiting for her horse to deliver itself as a cannon platform. With this move, her horse couldn't budge, and the chariot dared not advance. If the chariot moved, her king would be forced out of the palace.

In this way, the other half of the territory was also controlled.

On New Year's Eve, even a room with a heated kang could be bitterly cold, yet sweat beaded on Yue Ruxue's face.

Zijin was standing right beside her. Losing to this country girl in front of him, how could she ever face him again?

"You, your despicable way of playing, how about you have a real fight with me?" Yue Ruxue said angrily.

Gu Youyou laughed lightly, and gave her four words, "All's fair in war!"

If you don't even understand that all's fair in war, do you still dare to call yourself a warrior's descendant, do you still dare to go into battle?

You might as well stay at home and embroider.

Yue Ruxue was so angry, she launched her chariot without a care. Once the chariot was in play, it could form a fierce offensive with the double cannons. So what if the other pieces didn't move, they were all yours to take.

Gu Youyou naturally didn't hold back and went straight to capture a minister. Only then did Yue Ruxue realize that the situation was not as simple as forcing the king out of the palace. There was another chariot waiting on the other side, and her king couldn't get out at all. Reluctantly, she had to move a guard.

But as she moved it around, she found that her chariot was still unable to get out, because Gu Youyou never gave her a chance to move her chariot. She was so busy defending with her horses, cannons, and chariots that she was overwhelmed until she ran out of pieces.

...Lose so utterly?

By the end, not a single one of her own pieces remained on the board? All were Gu Youyou's.

This wasn’t just winning a game, it was clear humiliation.

Yue Ruxue, who had been eager to humiliate Gu Youyou, suddenly cried. She had never lost so miserably before in her life.

Even if her elder brother wanted to win her game, he certainly wouldn’t dare to make her lose so miserably, not leaving a single piece behind.

Who in this world dared to beat her without leaving a single piece behind?

The people in the room fell silent; a young girl helped the crying Yue Ruxue to one side, and the old Madam sternly said to her, "Axue, victory and defeat are common in military affairs. It’s just a game of chess, why cry?"

She herself was naturally displeased, not only by the loss but also by the complete consumption of all the opponent’s pieces, which was quite unsightly.

Jin Zijin found it amusing, thinking to himself: She really is unforgiving by nature.

Marquess laughed heartily, his laughter immediately breaking the awkwardness in the room.

"Axue is spoiled; indeed, she needed someone to temper her edge. Otherwise, she would forever remain a frog in a well, never knowing the principle that there are skies beyond skies and people beyond people."

Looking at Gu Youyou again, with an expression full of admiration, he said, "Doctor Gu moves in the game are intricate and profound, evidently a remarkable player. Another day, I would like to seek some advice from Doctor Gu."

Gu Youyou, sincerely apprehensive, bowed repeatedly, saying, "It is Youyou’s fortune to receive guidance from the Marquess, how can I possibly deserve the word ’advice’?"

Marquess laughed out loud again, then turned his head to look at the other young ladies, saying, "Ashuang, none of you are a match for Doctor Gu. I think we should stop the game here. Someone, bring the writing materials."

Chapter 380: The Child Plays with Ink

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Uh... a calligraphy competition?

She was sure to win this round, mastering calligraphy wasn't something achieved overnight. Given the ages of these little maids, she felt as if she were bullying them.

Alright then, out of the five young ladies, the two younger ones wouldn't compete, leaving the three older ones plus Gu Youyou, making it four contestants in total.

They would each write one character, piecing together "annual abundance".

Gu Youyou: "..."

She was allotted the last character, "abundance".

This was a proper large character, the paper big as a sieve.

Gu Youyou couldn't help but notice Yue Rujing's sly smirk and immediately understood it was his idea.

Among these people, he had seen Gu Youyou's handwriting the most. After all, he was the clerk back at Jisheng Hall in Qingshui Town, wasn't he?

As he put it, Gu Youyou had one characteristic when writing–she couldn't use big brushes, only specially made fine-tip pens, creating small, nimble characters. He conjectured that Gu Youyou must be incapable of writing large or, if too large, it wouldn't look good.

How wronged Gu Youyou was! She wrote in small script to save paper and also because it was more pleasing to the eye.

Who accustomed to modern small regular script would find those giant brush characters easy to read? She wasn't near-sighted.

The board for such a large character, accompanied by a brush resembling a feather duster, required more than a small inkstone–the maid brought up an entire bucket of ink.

This time the second young lady, Yue Ruxue, didn't rush forward. She had just cried, her eyes still somewhat red, yet she looked fierce as ever, as if she was ready to devour Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou pretended not to see. With the mindset of someone in her late twenties, was she really going to fuss over a little girl?

The eldest sister dashed off a "year" character with one stroke, and the grandmother behind her loudly exclaimed her approval, with the maids and old women joining in the praise.

She bowed to the Madam and stepped aside.

The second lady, with a sullen face, also stepped up. With the same sweeping motion of that feather duster-like big brush, she completed the "year" character in one go, her handwriting no less skillful than the eldest sister's, and added a bit more force.

No wonder this second lady was favored at home; not only was she born legitimate, but she also had some real talent.

The cousin, slightly younger, did a somewhat inferior "abundance" character, but it still looked not too shabby.

For a teenage girl, it was very impressive.

Finally, it was Gu Youyou's turn, and everyone held their breath as they watched her slowly pick up the brush.

If they had mocked her earlier for her piano and chess performance, no one dared to laugh at her during this calligraphy competition.

On the contrary, they felt her silent composure hinted at a ’wolf in sheep’s clothing’.

Observing her leisurely demeanor, even the servants couldn’t help but subconsciously believe that Doctor Gu was about to amaze everyone once again.

Gu Youyou certainly didn’t disappoint them, and when the final "abundance" character danced upon the paper like a dragon and phoenix in flight, anyone who knew a little about calligraphy loudly applauded.

Yue Rujing joined in the praise. He usually only noticed the beauty of her small regular script, unaware that her large characters were also splendid.

Four servants each held up one character, standing in a row. Upon comparison, the final "abundance" character stood out starkly, making the other three characters seem paltry by contrast.

In their minds, only four words came to mind: "Child’s play with ink."

Compared to Gu Youyou’s character, the previous three misses looked like mere children playing with ink–right characters, indeed, but utterly lacking in beauty.

Yue Ruxue was so furious her face turned ashen, nearly breaking into tears again.

After being defeated by Gu Youyou in three out of four rounds, what would winning the last one even mean? Gu Youyou still emerged victorious.

But winning one round was better than losing all four, wasn’t it? Her gaze shifted toward the elder sister, who was the best at painting among the siblings.