Farmhouse 471

Chapter 471: Meeting Maternal Grandmother

Before they arrived in Beijing, Lin Xingyi had received a letter inferring that the marriage arrangement between Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin had been annulled, and he believed that he understood the reasons behind it.

Therefore, the current members of the Lin Family assumed that Gu Youyou had never been married.

Following Madam Lin into the Lin Family's grand courtyard, Lin Xingyi cast a deep glance at Jin Zijin who was not far away, and respectfully performed a gesture of gratitude.

...

After entering the Lin residence, Gu Youyou first went to see Old Madam Lin Chenshi.

She was originally an ordinary farm wife from the countryside who was living a life of wealth today only because her son had made something of himself.

But having toiled for half her life, her thriftiness and frugality were habits she could not shake off.

Upon entering Old Madam Lin's courtyard, the decoration inside appeared much more modest compared to the outside. There were fewer flowers and plants in the courtyard, mostly giving way to a vegetable garden, and there was even a chicken coop.

Surrounded by her aunt and cousins, Gu Youyou went to Old Madam Lin's room and heard her voice from a distance; unable to restrain herself, the bedridden old lady attempted to sit up.

"Youyou has come, hasn't she? It must be my granddaughter Youyou who has arrived!"

The two maids by her side hurried to help her up.

"Mother, how could you get up? Youyou has arrived," her aunt said as she entered the threshold, hearing Old Madam Lin's words. She quickly stepped in and busied herself with making sure the old lady was comfortably seated.

Gu Youyou paid a visit, loudly calling out to her grandmother, and then the two of them wept together.

She was not the real Gu Youyou, but thinking of the scene of a family reunion, she knew how to play the part.

Moreover, she was alone and without support in Beijing, so she had to cling firmly to the leg of her grandmother, who was honored with the title of Imperial Commandery Madam.

"Youyou, they told me you were sick, sick for over a decade. I only saw you when you were very little. After more than ten years, I thought I would never see you again. My poor elder daughter, she just wouldn't listen to my advice. If she hadn't insisted on marrying into the Gu Family against all opposition, she wouldn't have passed away so early..."

Madam Lin interjected from the side, "Mother, the Imperial Physician said your health cannot withstand great sorrow or joy. Didn't we agree that you wouldn't cry when Youyou comes? Why do you still weep?"

"I..." Old Madam Lin hastily wiped her tears and asserted with conviction, "I wasn't crying; I'm just happy."

Gu Youyou smiled and took the handkerchief passed by the maid, wiping the tears from Old Madam Lin's eyes.

"Quickly tell your grandmother about how you've been these past years! That Xiaoqiu is so useless, always saying the Gu Family wouldn't let him see you, and we've had no clue how you fared."

Gu Youyou said, "Grandmother, haven't you seen me now? Look at me, how do I appear to you?"

"Now?" Old Madam Lin finally looked Gu Youyou over carefully, and after a while, she raised her thumb, declaring, "Good, you're truly the daughter of my dear child; you are no less than your uncle's two little girls."

Hearing this, the two younger cousins playfully protested to their grandmother.

Old Madam Lin, delighted, laughed and said, "Alright, alright, you're both good."

Then she turned to Madam Lin and said, "Daughter-in-law, take her two sisters out first; I have some private words to discuss with Youyou."

"Ai, Youyou, stay here and talk to your grandmother for a moment," she said.

Madam Lin smiled and led the two cousins away.

In the room, with only the two of them left, Old Madam Lin's face grew stern, and she asked Gu Youyou seriously, "Tell your grandmother, were you truly harmed by someone? And your parents, did they..."

Gu Youyou was slightly startled before she responded with a light smile, "Grandmother, everything is in the past now, and my parents' grievances have been avenged. Why bring that up again? Besides, I'm doing just fine."

Chapter 472: First Entry into Lin Residence

The old lady saw Gu Youyou's difficulty and only sighed deeply, not pressing her for more answers.

Her daughter had been gone for so many years, indeed, there was no use talking about it anymore.

"From now on, you stay by my side, I want to see who dares to snatch someone from this old woman."

Gu Youyou was mildly surprised again.

Because from her tone, it seemed that she knew quite a bit about the matter.

"Grandmother, let me take your pulse, you need to be in good health so Youyou can have someone to rely on."

The old lady then said with sudden realization, "Right, right, Youyou is the Divine Doctor, I've heard about this."

Having spoken, she stretched out an arm.

With the Divine Doctor's Signboard bestowed upon her, Gu Youyou had perfectly controlled an epidemic, and her reputation had spread far and wide.

The Lin Family in Beijing naturally knew about it.

The old lady's illness was not as serious as Butler Qu had said, and Gu Youyou prescribed her a medicinal formula, combined with acupuncture, and she would soon recover.

"Ah, right, how come I heard that the young Divine Doctor has already married?"

Gu Youyou: "..." How could she have forgotten about that? With her fame so great in Lingnan, it was normal for there to be rumors about her marriage.

"It must be a mix-up, that's my senior brother."

"Senior brother?" The old lady looked at Gu Youyou intently.

Gu Youyou, looking natural, explained, "Yes, that's my senior brother. Not just a senior brother, I also have a junior brother. We opened Jisheng Hall together. My junior brother is the Princely Heir of the Lingnan Marquis Residence, have you heard about this from someone?"

Upon hearing this, the old lady nodded gently and said, "I have heard people mention it, saying that the Divine Doctor comes from no ordinary background, her master is a highly reclusive expert, and she is in the same sect as the Lingnan Princely Heir."

But she had never heard about a senior brother!

...

The old lady of the Lin Residence, Gu Youyou's grandmother, liked to plant some vegetables and raise chickens and ducks because she used to be a farm woman. To avoid affecting other people in the Lin Residence, she lived somewhat apart, which she herself quite enjoyed.

At first, Madam Lin arranged a room for Gu Youyou near where her older cousin stayed, but Gu Youyou declined.

She said she needed to treat her grandmother's illness and being too far would be inconvenient; moreover, as a village girl herself, she liked the kind of courtyard her grandmother had.

Thus, under the odd gazes of everyone, Madam Lin showed understanding and allocated to her the most secluded courtyard.

Of course, that was the very courtyard she had taken a liking to at first glance.

The maids whispered behind the scenes, now that the Miss from the countryside had come, it seemed their residence would gain a few more vegetable plots.

Hearing this, Gu Youyou couldn't help but smile.

As for her personal maids, Madam Lin arranged two to attend her closely, four to do heavy chores, one old nurse, and two servant boys to run errands.

Her status was on par with the second young miss, only having two fewer maids and one less old nurse than the legitimate daughters of the Lin Family.

Seeing this, the old lady assigned one of her own head maids to Gu Youyou. Although she didn’t say anything explicitly, everyone understood that the old lady didn’t trust Madam Lin, and with the transfer of her head maid, it was a sign of leadership.

This made Madam Lin both embarrassed and angry.

Gu Youyou was somewhat speechless. She knew her grandmother loved her, but this move could easily offend her aunt, the moment she had just arrived.

And at a time when she knew nothing about the Lin Residence.

Gu Youyou had been at the Lin Residence for three days and two nights, this being her third night.

After two nights of insomnia, she still didn’t feel sleepy.

Used to being with him, the bed that was supposed to be warm from the fire felt cold and she couldn’t fall asleep at all.

Chapter 473: Climbing Over the Wall

She rose to fetch an extra blanket from the chest.

"Ah..." Gu Youyou felt someone embrace her from behind and cover her mouth, startling her into a cry.

"Don’t yell, it’s me."

A moment later, Jin Zijin’s familiar voice came from behind her.

Having been thinking about him, and then he appeared, Gu Youyou was ecstatic.

"I’m freezing to death, let’s get under the covers first and talk there."

Since her arrival in this era, she had never spent a winter night alone, and now she realized how difficult it was.

When Gu Youyou had first arrived, it was summer, and she would cover herself with a thick blanket every day, so she hadn’t felt cold.

But half a year later, when the weather turned cooler, she moved into Jin Zijin’s thatch-roofed house, and every night she had him to warm the bed, she almost forgot how severe her cold toxin was.

The maids and old women outside had all fallen asleep, and those who hadn’t were made to sleep by Jin Zijin.

The two clung together under the blankets, intimately exchanging their affections.

Gu Youyou, panting, poked her head out from the covers and asked, "The Lin Residence is supposed to be well-guarded, especially this part where my grandmother stays. It looks secluded, but the guards are actually the most numerous. How did you manage to get in?"

Jin Zijin simply said, "Are you looking down on me?"

"...I’m just worried about you. It would be awful if you were caught." How embarrassing, right?

"Don’t worry, I won’t get caught." He said, "Your uncle has made arrangements. From now on, I’ll come every night."

"What...?" This revelation from him shocked Gu Youyou, leaving her stunned for a long moment.

What kind of uncle was this? He agreed to his unmarried niece’s nightly rendezvous with a man?

And even deliberately let him in?

Yet he nonchalantly captured her delicate chin, kissed it, and teased her with a smirk, "It has a certain charm, doesn’t it?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

A wife is not as good as a concubine, and a concubine is not as good as a stolen encounter, or so they say?

Moreover, he had to maintain his celibacy, so in reality, it was an unfulfilled theft.

Gu Youyou’s expression darkened, and she bit him, demanding, "Tell me, what agreement have you reached with my uncle?"

Jin Zijin only said, "What agreement do we need? He wants to protect you, so he’s on the same side as us. Besides..." Jin Zijin’s expression turned grave, "As an emperor, who would want someone out of his control? The Art of Sovereignty is about absolute dominance. Both overtly and covertly, he is the one most eager to root out the Dao Family, and your uncle, being his favorite minister, naturally aligns with him."

Gu Youyou understood that the ’he’ he referred to was the Emperor, but his words carried a strange tone.

After a moment of thought, Gu Youyou asked, "So you’re saying, as the Dao Family’s head disciple, you’re also a target the Emperor wants to uproot."

Jin Zijin paused for a moment before giving a bitter smile, "Yes, I too am a target to be uprooted."

"Zijin!" Seeing him like this, Gu Youyou felt a vague unease.

He laughed, "What's there to fear? If the sky were to fall, there would be tall men to hold it up. The former State Preceptor hasn't been toppled yet, so why would he bother with me? In The Art of Sovereignty, the most important thing is to know how to balance and utilize resources, and in that, he is exceptionally skilled."

Gu Youyou took a deep breath and began to imagine all sorts of maneuvers for power.

It seemed her future life would be very interesting indeed!

...

Her great warmer had returned, and she slept incredibly soundly that night.

Xiang Chun heard some noise and hurried into the room to serve her.

"Miss, did you sleep well last night?"

Gu Youyou, getting dressed, replied with a smile on her lips, "Quite well."

Chapter 474: Preparing to Go Out for a Stroll

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The young lady from the capital had been here for a few days and hadn't been sleeping well, but today her complexion and mood both seemed to be quite good, and Xiang Chun finally felt relieved.

In a while, she would go to report to the old Madam that the young lady had adapted to the large bed of the Lin Residence and now could have a good night's sleep.

The old Madam's mood had improved, and with Gu Youyou's miraculous rejuvenation, her health was much better now. After cleaning up, Gu Youyou went to pay respects to the old Madam of the Lin family and joined them for breakfast as a matter of course.

"No dark circles today!" The old Madam said with a smile as she eyed Gu Youyou.

Madam Lin glanced at the old Madam and then smiled at Gu Youyou, "Youyou just arrived a few days ago and probably wasn't used to the bed. Now that she's had a good night's sleep, she should be able to sleep well every night."

Only Gu Youyou pursed her lips, cautiously offering a smile, her heart filled with awkwardness.

They didn't know how she had managed to sleep so well.

Lin Qianqing was sitting beside Gu Youyou, nudged her, and whispered, "How about I take my cousin out to play later?"

Gu Youyou had heard that most young ladies in Beijing were raised in sheltered environments, making it no easy feat to go out. She looked at her older cousin in surprise, seemingly asking: Can you really take me out?

Lin Qianqing just giggled and lowered her voice even more, "I know what you want to say, but I have my ways."

"Hmm...?" Why did she have a bad feeling about this?

Madam Lin saw everything and likewise had a bad feeling upon seeing her daughter's mischievous expression. She put down her chopsticks and frowned, "What are you whispering to Youyou about? Your cousin has just come to Beijing and is unfamiliar with the place; don't lead her astray."

Lin Qianqing replied with feigned annoyance, "What are you implying, Mother? How could I possibly lead my cousin astray?"

The old Madam gave Madam Lin a sideways look and scolded, "Daya is finally getting close to her cousin. It's just a heartfelt conversation. Why are you so anxious?"

"Mother!" Madam Lin's face showed her grievance, and although she wanted to say something, she ended up holding back.

The old Madam snorted and, ignoring her, turned to Lin Qianqing and Gu Youyou, "Daya, since your cousin is new and unfamiliar here, you should take her out today and help her get to know the place."

Lin Qianqing could hardly believe her ears and stood up excitedly, "Really? Can I take my cousin out today, visibly and properly?"

"How could that be alright? It might have been fine before, but Daya is almost fifteen now. If she's too conspicuous now, how will she marry in the future, Mother? That's not permissible!"

The old Madam paid no attention to her, acting as if she hadn't heard, and just said to Lin Qianqing, "Even if I don't allow you to go openly, you would still think of all sorts of devious ways."

"Thank you, Grandmother!" Lin Qianqing replied, filled with excitement.

"However, remember to bring two maids with you. Let Xiang Chun and Long Luo follow." After saying this, she turned to her own head maid, "Lusun, fetch some silver. It's Youyou's first visit, so let her buy whatever she likes. You're my own granddaughter, so be sure not to see yourself as an outsider."

Gu Youyou received the silver the head maid Lusun handed over with a submissive and approving look and thanked the old Madam.

At the same time, she was quietly contemplating the interesting names her grandmother had chosen for her maids - Xiang Chun, Lusun?

Gu Youyou had also observed the relationship between her grandmother and her aunt and pretty much understood it.

The old lady was not quite satisfied with her daughter-in-law, no wonder.

Later, she reflected that her aunt was a daughter of a deeply-rooted aristocratic family from Beijing, a proper lady of a great household, while her uncle, despite having true talent and learning, was nothing but a nouveau riche in the eyes of those entrenched families.

Chapter 475: Her Purpose

Especially Auntie, Gu Youyou's maternal grandmother, she was truly a woman from a farming family, a country bumpkin. If her son becomes successful, one could say that a golden phoenix has flown out of a chicken coop—remarkable abilities indeed—but the old lady's status is elevated entirely through her son's prestige. Even if she becomes the wife of a first-ranked imperial officer, what of it? She's still a country bumpkin.

With such a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law pair, it would be truly strange if they managed to get along peacefully.

Having just arrived at the Lin Family's residence, Gu Youyou was unfamiliar with everything. Anyway, playing dumb was never wrong—she simply followed wherever her big cousin took her.

Because she herself was also a country bumpkin from a farming family, and moreover, in the Lin Family, no one dared to look down on country bumpkins—Madam Lin would be the first to get upset.

Gu Youyou followed Lin Qianqing out of the residence, and true to Beijing's reputation, even with the weather so cold that it made people shake, the streets were still crowded with many people.

The streets were bustling, and the big cousin dragged her all over the place. They bought some trinkets suitable for girls and all sorts of... strange things, tasking two maids with carrying their purchases home.

Xiang Chun and Long Luo looked around with troubled expressions on their faces.

Lin Qianqing said unapologetically, "If you're not going back, then just carry these things and follow us."

Gu Youyou looked at the steamer basket full of buns. Long Luo was about to cry holding it—if she had to carry the steamer with them all the way, both her arms would probably be good for nothing.

Gu Youyou said, "Why don’t you go back first? We have to put down the steamer basket, right?"

Xiang Chun, however, understood what Lin Qianqing meant. She tugged at Long Luo’s arm and said, "Let’s go back first. If we run quickly, we can catch up."

With no other choice, Long Luo had to leave.

As soon as the two maids left, Lin Qianqing made a beeline for a restaurant.

While observing the cultural atmosphere of Beijing, Gu Youyou noticed something. It seemed that her big cousin wasn’t particularly interested in looking around or buying things—it was as if she was casually covering something up, and the real destination was this restaurant.

No wonder she sent the two maids away, but it was unclear what she had in mind.

The shopkeeper greeted Lin Qianqing with great enthusiasm, his face full of smiles, "Yo, Miss Lin, the usual place?"

Lin Qianqing asked in return, "Are they in the usual place?"

The shopkeeper replied with a smile, "Of course, and I’ve specially reserved your usual spot."

"Ha, good. Let me introduce you, this is my cousin," said Lin Qianqing.

Cousin: "..." What on earth was this girl up to?

This restaurant was considered quite high-end in Beijing. In the private tea room on the third floor, Gu Youyou saw a piece of glassware used as decoration, a bottle.

Oh no, at this time, it should be called liuli, which was somewhat different from modern glass.

Gu Youyou curiously picked it up for a closer look. It was crudely made, but beautiful.

Lin Qianqing glanced over and smiled, "Cousin, you haven't seen a bottle like this before, have you? This is called liuli; it's very beautiful and also quite precious. There are only three of these in the entire restaurant. There's one here with us, and the other two are in the rooms opposite ours."

After saying this, she no longer paid attention to Gu Youyou, instead, she sat by the table and turned her gaze towards the rooms across from theirs.

Lowering her head, Gu Youyou took a glance at Qianqing, put the liuli bottle back, and looked in the direction she was gazing.

Through the gauze curtains of the room opposite, the faint outlines of two people chuckling softly were visible, and by the sound of it, they were young men.

The soundproofing of the room was good; with Gu Youyou's hearing, she could only make out some voices but couldn't discern what they were saying.

Gu Youyou looked at Lin Qianqing in surprise and exclaimed, "You know them?"

Chapter 476: Cousin Meets Elder Cousin

Actually, she was curious what a fourteen or fifteen-year-old girl was doing staring at a young man. She really was, it couldn't be that she was dragged out to accompany her meeting a lover.

Lin Qianqing only sighed grievously, "Yes, of course I know him, but now that's all I can do—know him!"

"...What do you mean by that, cousin?" Gu Youyou felt that the expression of a wronged woman seemed particularly strange on the face of her young fourteen or fifteen-year-old cousin.

But she whispered, "The Emperor is selecting consorts for his two sons, all daughters of officials of the third rank and above, aged fourteen to eighteen, must participate in the selection, and I am among them."

Uh...

"So?"

"My mother told me before that she intended to marry me to my eldest cousin from my maternal side and that had already been decided, but now... my father says I can forget about my eldest cousin. Given my identity as the legitimate daughter of the Lin Family, becoming part of the Imperial Family as a wife is almost certain."

Gu Youyou: "...So, cousin, do you actually fancy your eldest cousin?"

"Fancy?" Lin Qianqing blinked and sighed again, "For all these years, I've always regarded him as my future husband, but once the Imperial Edict arrived at our home, I could only consider him as my eldest cousin. Is it a matter of fancying him, or is it just not being used to it?"

Gu Youyou glanced across and then said with a laugh, "If you didn't fancy him, why would you come here? Don't tell me this is how you guys usually meet?"

"Of course not. I used to go directly to my maternal grandfather's place, but now my father won't allow me."

This child, such a small thing, probably can't understand feelings at all.

"Then why did you drag me into this?" Gu Youyou asked again.

"For you, of course!"

What Lin Qianqing said next nearly scared Gu Youyou to death.

"My eldest cousin is so great, the direct eldest son of the Ducal Residence's third household, a truly distinguished gentleman. The saying goes, 'Why let the family's water irrigate someone else's field?' Since I no longer have a chance to marry him, you can! That's why I'm here today—to introduce you to him."

Gu Youyou held her forehead and hurriedly said, "No need, no need, this... Ai, isn't there Lin Zixin, your younger cousin? Just introduce your eldest cousin to her."

"Her?" Lin Qianqing scoffed disdainfully, "She's just a child born from a concubine, how can she be a match for my cousin? Aye, cousin, didn't I say, my cousin is the direct eldest son of the Ducal Residence, how could he possibly marry a daughter born from a concubine, she's not the Princess."

Gu Youyou: "..." The ancient people's peculiar views on family hierarchy, where the legitimate often looked down on the illegitimate, were normal.

But..."I am a country girl."

Lin Qianqing didn't see it as an issue, "What's the big deal about that? Our grandmother was also a country girl, and now isn't our grandmother still a first rank noble lady with an imperial decree? Who dares to look down upon her?"

"That is true!"

Ah no, that's not the point here.

"Ah, he's coming out!"

Just as Gu Youyou was about to say something, she saw Lin Qianqing's eyes light up as she dashed out.

Gu Youyou held her forehead and called out loudly, "...Hey, hey, eldest cousin, don't... "

"Eldest cousin, what a coincidence, you're here too!"

Gu Youyou hurriedly chased after her, and there her eldest cousin was, having already bumped into the cousin.

"Cousin, you came out again? Did your aunt say anything?" Her eldest cousin seemed surprised.

Lin Qianqing giggled and replied, "My grandmother allowed it, took my cousin out for a walk. Oh, you haven't met my cousin yet, let me introduce you."

The innocent Gu Youyou was dragged over forcibly.

Chapter 477: The man in the rain that night

"This is my cousin, the one I've mentioned to you, my aunt's only daughter, Gu Youyou. You see, my cousin is quite pretty, isn't she?"

Gu Youyou couldn't help but roll her eyes. So much for the demure attitude that ancient young ladies were supposed to have at a first meeting.

Being new to the place, she couldn't overdo her act, so she had to keep her head low and play the part of a young maiden.

"Miss Gu?" The other party, this older male cousin, seemed quite surprised, then looked at Gu Youyou with curiosity.

"Hehe, elder cousin!" Gu Youyou forced a laugh and focused on the tips of her own shoes.

Seeing the young maiden's coy demeanor, the older cousin's expression turned somewhat strange. He straightened up and hurriedly said, "Miss Gu, since you are my cousin Qianqing's elder cousin, it is appropriate for you to call me elder cousin as well. My name is Jin Wei, but you can also call me Young Master Jin."

Upon hearing this, Gu Youyou looked up, her expression darkening slightly. She simply couldn’t keep up the act of a young maiden anymore.

The other party had excellent composure, wearing an expression of humble amicability. Amidst his warm words, his meaning couldn’t have been clearer.

Gu Youyou curled her lips slightly and said softly, "Yes, Young Master Jin!"

As the cousin of the Lin Family, she was not really a miss of the Lin Family. In the eyes of those people, she was just a country girl.

It seemed that her cousin hadn’t noticed the undercurrent flowing beneath the fine weather. She was fretting about whether she regretted having to give up the affections of the elder cousin to her own elder cousin. Was she regretting or not?

All three were lost in thought, but their silent contemplation was interrupted by a young man emerging from the house behind them.

"Qianqing is here, and who is this young lady?"

The newcomer was a young man with sharp brows and starry eyes, a high-bridged nose, and thin lips lightly pursed. His piercing gaze shot towards Gu Youyou like a sharp sword thrusting into her heart.

This person...

Gu Youyou’s eyes widened.

She had met him only once before, during a night of thunderous rain and lightning. She saw his face beneath the black cloak—just a single glance was enough to make his sword-like eyes unforgettable.

Was it him?

How could it be him?

After she and Jin Zijin had opened up to each other, he had never mentioned him, nor had she ever brought up the mysterious man who had wanted to take her life that rainy night.

She remembered his words clearly, "She’s discovered us. She must be killed."

To anyone other than Jin Zijin, this man was an existence that couldn’t be exposed. She knew things she wasn’t supposed to know. So, what was to be done—kill her or not?

To avoid putting him in a difficult position and not wanting to touch upon certain dangers, she chose to feign ignorance.

"Young Master Xiao, this is my elder cousin," said Lin Qianqing shyly.

Xiao Jinyan eyed Gu Youyou without seemingly noticing the tempest in her eyes. He smiled gently at Lin Qianqing and said, "I recognize both the elder young ladies of Young Master Jin’s family. Which family’s elder cousin are you?"

Although his face wore an unfazed smile, the irony in his tone was unmistakable.

Gu Youyou just huffed softly. This outing had exposed her to the true nature of the so-called noble sons of Beijing.

They were hardly better than Yue Rujing, who was all glitter on the outside and rottenness within—a veritable scholarly scoundrel.

Indeed, without comparison, there would be no hurt, and this saying couldn’t be more true.

Of course, with the reputation of her uncle, Lin Xingyi, it was probably no secret among the officials of Beijing what his background was and who his relatives were.

So, if Lin Qianqing’s elder cousin wasn’t one of those from the Ducal Residence, then that left only the country relatives.

Well, it was normal for people to look down on someone from the countryside.

Chapter 478: What a Coincidence

Lin Qianqing was caught awkwardly in the middle; she couldn’t claim she hadn’t heard her older cousin belittling Gu Youyou just now, and she had clearly heard this Mr. Xiao’s sarcastic comment as well.

What kind of cousin?

"Mr. Xiao, this is indeed Qianqing’s cousin. She is my..."

"Qianqing!" Gu Youyou stopped her, preventing her from continuing, and simply glanced at the two men, whispering, "Although I don’t recognize who this Mr. Xiao might be, seeing Mr. Xiao’s impressive demeanor, I presume he’s no ordinary person. Perhaps there’s no need for introductions."

"Ah?" Lin Qianqing looked somewhat sheepish and said, "Cousin, are you angry?"

Gu Youyou said, "Why would I be? I don’t even know this... Mr. Xiao!"

Not knowing him, how could she be angry?

Xiao Jinyan snorted coldly and said, "What a bold cousin."

Gu Youyou rolled her eyes in embarrassment.

Lin Qianqing was still playing the peacemaker without realizing that Gu Youyou and this Xiao Jinyan had long since become enemies. He had once tried to kill her; had it not been for Jin Zijin’s intervention, their enmity would have been a matter of life and death.

"Don’t be angry, Mr. Xiao. My cousin has just arrived in Beijing. This is her first time going out."

Hehe, of course, he wouldn’t bother arguing with a country girl.

"Qianqing, we’ve been out for quite a long time. Let’s return, lest grandmother worries," Gu Youyou said as if she hadn’t heard anything.

Lin Qianqing looked at Jin Wei with difficulty and said, "Then what do you think about my older cousin..."

Gu Youyou touched her forehead in frustration. Couldn’t this child see that both men were looking down on her? Yet she still wanted to play matchmaker.

Fat hopes of channeling water only to one’s own field, huh...

"Your older cousin is quite well, but we really must be going," she said dismissively.

Having said that, she turned and went straight downstairs.

"Good to know you’re sensible!" Xiao Jinyan stared at Gu Youyou’s eyes, filled with intense hostility, as cold as ice.

"Cousin, wait for me." Lin Qianqing gave her older cousin a resentful glance, then glared hard at Xiao Jinyan, stamped her foot, and chased after Gu Youyou.

Jin Wei looked meaningfully at Xiao Jinyan and said flatly, "Do you know Miss Gu?"

Xiao Jinyan’s expression darkened. He snorted with a laugh and said, "Do you think I would know such a person?" Glancing in Gu Youyou’s direction, he continued, "I just think Miss Lin is being ridiculous. Even if she’s not destined for you, she shouldn’t introduce you to a woman like that. She’s just a relative depending on the Lin Family, still a rustic at heart. Heh, haven’t you noticed her temperament is even more arrogant than the young ladies of Beijing? Utterly oblivious of her place."

Gu Youyou had been walking down despondently but perked up upon hearing Xiao Jinyan’s words right at the top of the stairs. Her temper flared instantly.

This was the first time she found her own ears to be a headache.

How nice it would be if they weren’t so sensitive; what the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve over, what the ear doesn’t hear, the mind doesn’t torment over.

At this moment, the door diagonally opposite of the stairs opened, and Gu Youyou, without meaning to, looked up only to see the person inside the room. Both were slightly taken aback.

"Oh, what a coincidence!" Yue Rujing said as she stood in the doorway.

Gu Youyou’s gaze drifted past Yue Rujing’s side to the person inside the room. Jin Zijin?

He was sitting by the window, calmly drinking tea.

Feeling Gu Youyou’s gaze on him, he slowly turned his face, his indifferent eyes showing neither joy nor sorrow, betraying no emotion.

Gu Youyou shifted her gaze away, gave Yue Rujing a faint smile, and asked, "Indeed, what a coincidence. When did you arrive?"

Yue Rujing answered, "I arrived today."

Chapter 479: A Conversation in the House

Gu Youyou glanced at Jin Zijin inside the room, no wonder she hadn’t heard Jin Zijin talk about Yue Rujing’s arrival in Beijing last night.

Lin Qianqing wore a face of surprise, this being the first time she had met Yue Rujing, whose remarkable beauty certainly drew attention; a young girl in the budding stage of her life would likely feel ripples in her heart upon seeing such a breathtakingly handsome young man, her cheeks flushing red.

Lin Qianqing timidly stood behind Gu Youyou, tugging at her sleeve.

Gu Youyou took her hand, smiled, and said, "Oh yes, let me introduce her, this is my cousin, surnamed Lin."

Yue Rujing raised an eyebrow and gave a slight bow, with a light smile, he said, "The daughter of the Great Scholar Lin?"

Feeling shy, Lin Qianqing nodded slightly and said, "I am my father’s legitimate eldest daughter." Then she asked, "Does this gentleman know my father?"

Gu Youyou turned her head to look at Lin Qianqing, who mentioned that she was the legitimate eldest daughter of the Lin Family; though she was a bit shy, her chin was held high with pride.

Indeed, her status as the legitimate eldest daughter was something to be proud of, but this girl seemed unaware of the need to be reserved, especially since it was their first meeting with a stranger.

Yue Rujing looked at Lin Qianqing with mild surprise and smiled lightly, "I am Yue Rujing, the Princely Heir of the Marquis Residence of Lingnan. Years ago, I accompanied my father on a visit to Beijing and had the fortune to meet the Great Scholar Lin once."

Alright, the comparison of status had begun.

Lin Qianqing’s face showed astonishment, and she hurriedly bowed, saying, "So you are the Princely Heir of the Marquis Residence of Lingnan!"

Jin Wei and Xiao Jinyan, separated by a long corridor, upon witnessing this exchange, both wore faces of surprise and quickly walked over.

Having heard Yue Rujing’s confident self-introduction, both of them bowed respectfully to him.

"We’ve seen Princely Heir Yue."

Gu Youyou wasn’t familiar with the intricacies of Zhuzhao Country’s hierarchical differences, but she had common sense. Typically, officials from outside the capital did not hold higher status than those from within it, yet here were the sons and daughters of three capital officials who had to pay their respects to Yue Rujing.

The Marquis Residence of Lingnan was indeed an outside official residence.

Yue Rujing carried himself with poise, only nodding slightly to Jin Wei and Xiao Jinyan, before turning his attention back to Gu Youyou.

His smile was one of pure innocence as he said, "Senior sister, I happen to have something to discuss with you, may I talk with you inside?"

Jin Wei and Xiao Jinyan looked at Gu Youyou in surprise, then awkwardly stood in place.

They probably hadn’t expected Yue Rujing to call Gu Youyou senior sister, and he completely disregarded them, just staring expectantly at her.

This is just a village girl, isn’t it? What’s going on?

Jin Wei looked doubtfully at Lin Qianqing.

And Xiao Jinyan, seeing the relaxed individual drinking tea inside the room behind Yue Rujing, furrowed his brow in a few quick steps.

And Gu Youyou had been observing all of this.

She turned her gaze back to Yue Rujing’s face, pulling a smile on her lips, and spoke lightly, "Sure!"

Yue Rujing stepped aside with a smile, and Gu Youyou brushed past him, entering the room.

Lin Qianqing wanted to follow, but Yue Rujing blocked her at the door.

"Miss Lin, I have important matters to discuss with my senior sister. When we are finished, I will personally escort her back to the Lin Residence."

Since Lin Qianqing was stopped, there was no need to mention the other two; they could only stand awkwardly outside the door, watching as Yue Rujing closed it with a bang.

People who were unexpectedly snubbed returned to their own reserved private room, calling Lin Qianqing with them.

She dared not go back alone; was she going to lose her cousin on their first outing and expect there to be a next time?

"Qianqing, who exactly is this Miss Gu? Isn’t she the cousin you mentioned before?"

Chapter 480: Shattered Dream

"Who is it?" Lin Qianqing looked at Jin Wei, suddenly feeling a strange sensation, so her tone was unpleasant.

She felt that today’s cousin didn’t seem as dashing and compelling as usual, which always made her heart flutter like a little deer.

In his eyes, she saw something disdainful.

Although Lin Qianqing’s mother was the legitimate daughter of the Jin Family, a proper lady of high society, her father came from a grassroots background, and so did her grandmother. Influenced by them, she also felt a sense of being of grassroots origin.

She couldn’t stand those who looked down on ordinary people and seemed to think they were above everyone else. Before today, she had thought her cousin shared her sentiments.

Xiao Jinyan watched Lin Qianqing, silently giving a sneer and then went back to drinking tea by the window.

From this angle, looking out the window, one could see a vast beautiful vista of Beijing.

Jin Wei seemed not to have noticed Lin Qianqing’s odd behavior and continued, "The same one we were talking about earlier, the daughter of the sister my uncle left in the village, the peasant girl."

Seeing the look in Jin Wei’s eyes, Lin Qianqing felt even more uneasy. She blinked, then slightly lowered her eyes and said, "Of course, it’s her. My father has only one sister, my aunt has only one daughter, so naturally, I only have that one cousin."

Jin Wei found it strange and pressed on, "But I heard that your aunt married a rural man. How did her daughter become the Princely Heir’s senior sister?"

"How would I know that?" Lin Qianqing’s response was genuine. She paused, then added, "However, I’ve heard that last year, His Majesty bestowed a plaque of ’Divine Doctor’ and had it delivered to Lingnan to commend the doctor who cured the epidemic at the Lingnan Barracks. The recipient of that plaque is indeed my cousin."

"What? Her?" Jin Wei was stunned and couldn’t speak for a moment, his mouth agape.

Although he didn’t hold an official post in the royal court, he was quite aware of the epidemic at the Lingnan Barracks. The medicines were in short supply, and the Emperor issued an edict for Prefecture Governments to work with Lingnan’s physicians in dispensing medicines. The portion from Beijing was managed by his father, and he himself had lent a great deal of help.

It was said that the ’Divine Doctor’ was a woman, which surprised everyone in court; they never imagined that this woman would turn out to be Gu Youyou, whom his cousin Lin Qianqing had always spoken highly of to him.

The very same woman from just before.

Meanwhile, Xiao Jinyan, with an enigmatic smile, sipped his tea.

Naturally, he knew who Gu Youyou was. But so what? Therefore, if one were to observe him closely, they would notice the hint of disdain he concealed.

Jin Wei managed a stiff twitch of his mouth, smiling in a way that looked more painful than crying, "No... it can't be, how could it be her? She's just a village girl and seems so young..."

If it really was her, then he had unwittingly offended a 'Divine Doctor'—one conferred by the Emperor himself.

Lin Qianqing had been watching every move Jin Wei made, and seeing the changes in his expression from before until now, her heart turned cold.

How could her elder cousin be such a person? When talking about her cousin as a village girl, that look of contempt was unmistakable. When it came to her being a 'Divine Doctor' conferred by the Emperor, his incredulity was obvious.

Couldn't he know that the Lin Family started from a rural background?

The Ducal Residence's title was hereditary and unchangeable, so they were born with high status. That's why Lin Qianqing disliked the other cousins from the Jin Family, as they always referred to the Lin Family as bumpkins, and in her childhood, they had even insultingly called her a bumpkin.

But this elder cousin of hers had always stepped up to protect her whenever he heard such talk. He never criticized the Lin Residence's vegetable gardens, so she had thought he was different.