Farmhouse 501

Chapter 501: On the Thickness of Face

"Can you still retrieve the sacred object after you've eaten it?" This was what Gu Youyou wanted to ask the most.

"Of course, it can be retrieved."

Gu Youyou let out a sigh of relief; it hadn't been digested yet.

These things couldn't be explained through physiology; otherwise, she'd have to conjure up performing open-chest surgery on him.

"However... it's going to be very troublesome, and we currently don't have the means to do that," Jin Zijin added.

Alright, Gu Youyou's face fell again, just as she expected.

"If you take it out, can your flame poison be cured? Ah, do you need the Youying Pearl?"

Jin Zijin shook his head and said, "No, the Youying Pearl is only for detoxification. The Zhuzhao Pearl has another use after being removed, like... curing your poison."

This was so convoluted that Gu Youyou was confused again.

"So what do we do now?"

Jin Zijin gently stroked her hair and said in a low voice, "You don't need to worry, just focus on getting Jisheng Hall up and running. Since we've come to Beijing, we must solve the problems at hand properly."

Indeed, as if she wasn't worried enough.

Having spent more time with Jin Zijin, she slowly realized that many things he didn't tell her weren't a matter of trust, but rather a problem with ancient men's way of thinking.

They were too chauvinistic, believing it was right for men to bleed and cry out in the world to protect the women at home, and he simply didn't want her to get involved in those dangerous matters.

"If you need anything, make sure to tell me. I'm not just any ordinary girl," Gu Youyou said seriously.

Jin Zijin cracked a smile and replied, "Okay, I know."

"You'd better remember that!" Gu Youyou felt he was brushing her off and pinched him hard on his body.

Caught off guard by her pinch, Jin Zijin winced in pain, a fierce flame igniting in his eyes as he said sternly, "You're getting bolder and bolder, aren't you afraid that I might really..."

"What's the matter?" Gu Youyou wasn't easily frightened and with an excited expression, she cheekily retorted, "If you dare, I'd be very pleased."

Jin Zijin instantly lost his temper and muttered quietly, "You really are not like ordinary women, thicker-skinned than a wall. You should be more reserved."

Gu Youyou continued unabashedly, "You're reserved enough, if I were any more reserved, how would we even have a chance? I've tried everything to seduce you, and you don't even react. I really want to try using a needle."

"Using a needle?" Jin Zijin raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, I'm very skilled at acupuncture. If you're willing, let me give you a full treatment."

Jin Zijin was so exasperated he glared with widened eyes, regretting ever bringing up the topic of modesty with her.

She simply had no limits.

"I’m not sick."

When it came to a man’s dignity, every man would get fired up.

"Let me check." She fearlessly moved her hand resting on his chest slowly downwards.

Her cool hand touching his sculpted waist made her ears redden without her realizing it.

"Alright, go ahead and check," Jin Zijin said generously, though his rapid breathing betrayed his outward calm.

Actually, Gu Youyou was a bit cowardly. But seeing Jin Zijin, so upright and stern, she couldn’t help but feel competitive again.

Chapter 502: Failed to Entice

Actually, from a physiological perspective, there’s no difference.

Gu Youyou said, "I suddenly remembered something and wanted to ask you about it."

"What?" What an inopportune time to ask.

She felt somewhat embarrassed recalling her question.

But for the sake of their future, she still asked, "You said that to become the State Preceptor one cannot marry, right?"

"Hmm," Jin Zijin didn’t know what she was getting at.

"Does this count as an affair?"

"Ah...?" Jin Zijin was a bit stunned, but after a moment, he earnestly told her, "Of course not, we are doing this to detoxify, otherwise we’d have to drink blood."

"You’re only fooling yourself with ’covering your ears to steal the bell’." Gu Youyou said irritably, "If others knew we sleep together every night and did nothing but detoxify, do you think they would believe that?"

"Of course they would," Jin Zijin confidently said, "Ajing knows, he’s aware that we’re detoxifying."

What an idiot.

As soon as Yue Rujing was mentioned, Gu Youyou remembered the Maidenhair Spike matter on her arm.

He believes, he believes crap. If he believed it, he wouldn’t have tricked her into getting the Maidenhair Spike to verify it.

"Are you really dumb or just pretending?" Gu Youyou’s voice rose as she beat her fists restlessly against his chest, "They even say monks can’t marry, yet there are still monks with illegitimate children. Who would know about us if you don’t tell and I don’t tell?"

Jin Zijin understood her point and blushed with excitement, pushing her away.

Gu Youyou was about to faint from frustration, her big warm furnace.

It was too cold; she hurried to move herself a few inches closer to him.

"What are you doing? I'm cold." She was somewhat angry, having abandoned her own sense of shame and propriety, yet he was still acting like this.

After all, she was still a chaste maiden, how embarrassing for her, and yet he stood on ceremony, even after she'd been so explicit. What more did he want?

She felt both embarrassed and wronged, having never thought that dealing with men could be so difficult.

"Youyou, you mustn't speak like this again in the future," Jin Zijin said to her seriously, "To have done it and yet say we didn't, that's truly deceiving oneself. How could I dare to deceive in the presence of Sanqing? It would be an affront to the gods, a gross impiety."

Gu Youyou was left dumbfounded by his words, never expecting him to be such a rigorously self-disciplined Taoist.

He'd rather mistreat her than deceive the spirits.

Alright, to hell with physiology, she understood now. In his heart, there really was a difference—it all came down to the restraints imposed by one's internal codes suppressing the nature of the believer.

To hell with Sanqing. Who were they, anyway? What did they have to do with her, Gu Youyou? She didn't even know them.

All she knew was that she had spent nearly thirty years as a virgin over two lifetimes, and she had finally found a man she liked. He held her every night but wouldn't let her have her way, causing her immense frustration.

Time flies swiftly, and he was already twenty-seven or twenty-eight. In this era, most men of this age who hadn't married were likely destined to remain bachelors.

His righteous scolding not only made her feel ashamed and wronged but also brought forth a sense of resentment.

Chapter 503: You Look Down On Me?

Gu Youyou turned over, her back to him, and in a voice brimming with vexation, she murmured, "You came early tonight, did you overhear what my maternal grandmother said?"

She tilted her head slightly, eager to hear his response.

"What did she say?" Jin Zijin asked.

Oh, he hadn't heard.

Gu Youyou let out a sigh, since he hadn't heard, she might as well spin her tale.

"My grandmother said I'm not young anymore and plans to look for a marriage prospect for me in Beijing. You know, a girl's marriage is not for her to decide. I have no parents; I came to rely on my uncle, and naturally, my uncle is the one to decide my marriage. And there's more, you saw it too that day at the teahouse, standing right next to that... Xiao Jinyan, Qianqing called him cousin-brother. It seems from what Qianqing implied, they intend to introduce me to him. What a coincidence, his surname is Jin too!"

"Nonsense!" Jin Zijin behind her grew angry, "The eldest son of the Ducal Residence? How could he possibly marry you?"

Gu Youyou was taken aback and then her anger surged.

She rolled over, dismissing the chilly air outside the blankets, and sat up straight.

With the light from the brazier, Gu Youyou glared fiercely at Jin Zijin, "What a fine man you are, Jin Zijin, looking down on me when I've never scorned you?"

She yelled furiously, "What right does a stinky Taoist like you have to look down on me? Would you believe I have a way to make him willingly marry me? I will marry into the Ducal Residence with pomp and splendor. That's still better than a self-deceiving, stinky Taoist like you."

Gu Youyou was a very proud person; she had always looked down on others, never having been looked down upon herself.

This vile feudal society had worn her to the brink, nearly bringing her to tears.

She had time-traveled from being a princess with a queue of men waiting to be chosen by her to inhabiting the body of a dying farm girl; that gap in experience alone was bitter and intense, and now she was being scorned, moreover by the man she cared about the most.

His tone just now made it clear he was looking down on her for her farmer girl background.

"Youyou, I didn’t look down on you," he said.

The sudden outburst from Gu Youyou clearly stunned Jin Zijin.

Reflecting on what he had just said and his attitude, he realized it indeed might have been too much.

But he was only provoked by her, wasn’t he? She clearly understood the nature of their relationship and his feelings, so why would she provoke him with an unworthy suitor?

In his eyes, those men trying to get involved with Youyou were just losers.

How could they be worthy of his Youyou? Aside from her background, she was no less than any noble lady.

He also sat up, pulled her into his arms, and consoled her softly, "What nonsense are you thinking? I’ve already told you to wait for me. How could I let you marry someone else?"

Gu Youyou, fueled by anger, no longer cared what should or shouldn’t be said, wanting only to express her frustration.

"I’m not imagining things. Your ’waiting’ is far from realistic. How long should I wait? Three years or five? Fine, let’s say you succeed in three years. How old will I be by then, have you counted? And how old will you be, have you thought about that? Over these three years, how am I supposed to fend off my grandmother’s attempts to marry me off? So many people in Beijing are watching the Lin Family; even if I’m just a relative, it’s enough for them to laugh at the Lin Family’s expense. You can say you don’t care about what others think, but there’s a saying that the opinions of others are to be feared. Your disregard doesn’t mean I don’t care, and my indifference doesn’t mean that the Lin Family doesn’t care. When the time comes, have you thought through how I’m going to handle all this?"

"But this was your idea," Jin Zijin said indifferently.

Chapter 504: Sanqing was enraged to death

This was your idea, just one sentence, yet it crushed all of Gu Youyou’s lengthy speeches and a pile of reasons back into her stomach.

Yes, these were the words she said before entering Beijing that day.

Huh, isn’t this like lifting a rock only to drop it on one’s own foot?

Gu Youyou gave a bitter smile, drawing herself back into the covers as the salty tears unknowingly slid down the corners of her eyes.

She clutched the blanket tightly, also covering her head with it.

It’s so hard, why is it so difficult.

Finally having a relationship, she had met a stubborn blockhead.

After sobbing under the covers for a while, Gu Youyou said in a low voice, "Don’t come over tomorrow night, I’ll drink more medicine."

"Youyou, don’t be like this, it’s distressing to watch," Jin Zijin was not good at comforting people, he hadn’t had many opportunities to interact with women as he grew up. Because of his background and

the burdens he carried, he had never bothered to study a woman’s mind. Now, seeing Gu Youyou like this, besides feeling distressed with her, he couldn’t do anything else.

"What’s wrong with me? I’m reaping what I sowed, am I not even allowed to feel sad for a while?"

A moment of secretive fun is exciting, but having to sneak around for years would be unbearable for anyone.

She had never experienced love either; it was her oversight to overestimate her own endurance.

It turns out that lovers separated for just a few days would find the longing unbearable.

She truly understood the saying "a day apart feels like three autumns."

"Well... alright, I understand, I won’t make you wait too long," Jin Zijin pulled her back into his embrace, warmth overflowing the room.

Just as he’d warmed her up again and arrogantly turned her body towards him, passionate kisses landed on her lips, mixed with his heavy, ragged breaths.

"What are you doing?" Gu Youyou was obviously confused.

But he asserted righteously, "Having a fight doesn’t mean you can skip out on my nightly benefits."

He kissed down her neck inch by inch, but the more he did so, the more uncomfortable he became, his body growing hotter and sweating profusely.

Feeling his nearly uncontrollable ragged breaths, Gu Youyou really lost all her anger.

If she was lifting a rock only to hit her own foot, then he was a duck that stiffens its neck to death, bringing trouble upon himself.

She was not okay, and indeed, he felt even worse.

She really wanted to perform a craniotomy on him, to knock open his head and see what the structure inside was like.

"Why don’t you go out for some cool air?" Gu Youyou suggested.

Jin Zijin crawled out of the blanket, while thoroughly wrapping her up inside.

"Alright, I’ll be back soon," he said.

He naturally didn’t go outside to cool off; Xiang Chun was sleeping soundly in the outer room, but he went to the small washing compartment behind the bedroom instead.

The sharp-eared Gu Youyou heard some strange noises, and she couldn’t help but get out of the blanket and sneak over to take a peek.

The scene she saw through the crack of the door made her jaw drop.

Who said he didn’t know how to relieve physical pain? He was quite adept at it.

A sanctimonious guy, Sanqing had almost angered you to death this morning.

The abstinent male god was dealing with his problem on his own, truly shocking her.

...

Chapter 505: Who was the young master Xiao that day?

Gu Youyou left the residence to handle serious business; she wanted to be self-reliant and open a medical clinic. Besides her aunt-in-law from the Jin Family who was completely against it, everyone else was very supportive.

Her older cousin Lin Qianqing secretly told her that her aunt-in-law was the eldest daughter of the Ducal Residence, raised to uphold propriety and decorum, and she thought that women appearing in public was a disgraceful affair, always opposing their leaving the residence.

Fortunately, their grandmother was in good health and had progressive ideas, and could still make decisions for the family, which allowed these young ladies to frequently go out under the pretext of buying things for their grandmother.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "So you used your grandmother's name today to go out shopping?"

Lin Qianqing also smiled and said, "Exactly, but grandmother knows what's going on, she told me to help you."

"What can you help me with? Just don't cause trouble," Gu Youyou said with a hint of irritation.

When they passed by that tea house from the other day, Gu Youyou suddenly remembered Xiao Jinyan and asked, "Who is that Master Xiao who was with your older cousin that day?"

"Him? He's the third young master from the Grand Master Residence. Despite his young age, he has been conferred the rank of a general of the third grade, and he is the most promising among our younger generation. It's just that he's quite arrogant. Of course, don't be intimidated by his rank as a general of the third grade; the way he got his position is an open secret, there's really nothing to boast about."

Gu Youyou didn't see it that way; she was taken aback and continued to ask, "If he's the general of the third grade from the Grand Master Residence, then why did he salute Yue Rujing? Yue Rujing seems to only have the empty title of Princely Heir without an official rank."

"That's different." Lin Qianqing looked at Gu Youyou in surprise and said, "How do you not know this? I thought you were quite familiar with Princely Heir Yue."

"Familiar!" Gu Youyou nodded.

Lin Qianqing rolled her eyes and said, "Then how do you not know?"

Uh... is that my fault? I just don’t know.

"Marquess Yue also has another title, the King of Lingnan. The King of Lingnan can rank just below the Emperor, and his status is even higher than that of the fifth prince. The legitimate son of their family naturally holds a much higher status than the usual Princely Heirs."

"What rank would that be?" Gu Youyou apologized, for she really didn’t understand the ranking system. She only knew that the greatest official position beneath the Emperor was the first rank, followed by secondary first rank, the first secondary rank, and so on. As for those without an official rank but still of high status, she truly had no idea.

"No official rank." Lin Qianqing directly explained: "The princes don’t have official ranks either, but their status is greater than that of primary rank officials."

Gu Youyou: "..." Fine then.

"Then tell me how Xiao Jinyan got his third-grade military official rank, seeing as how you look so disdainful of it."

Lin Qianqing expressed her disgust and said: "It’s true that warriors from the Grand Master Residence are not well-regarded in Beijing, where civil officials govern. But who could ignore his family when they produced an Empress. With the Grand Master Residence connected to the Empress’s family, their status is naturally different.

Alas, the Empress was unlucky; she didn’t become Empress while alive but was posthumously honored.
"

There were not a few instances in history where an Empress was posthumously honored, and Gu Youyou didn’t find it peculiar, only asking, "What virtues did the former Empress have that she wasn’t promoted while alive, but was honored posthumously?"

"Oh, it has nothing to do with whether she was promoted or not," Lin Qianqing said. "She just died young and didn’t live to see the Emperor’s ascension. She was the Emperor’s officially betrothed Crown Princess Consort before she passed too early. The Emperor cherished her for having shared his hardships in earlier years and for giving birth to the eldest princess. Therefore, after her death, he was extremely doting on the eldest princess and showed great affection for her maternal family, the Xiao Family of the Grand Master Residence."

Chapter 506: Xiao Family

The descendants of the Xiao Family are promoted early, what’s so special about Xiao Jinyan? He has an elder brother who is a second-rank general. Honestly, I think those brothers of his are all dandies, becoming generals without any merit, and who knows, they might just wet themselves out of fear when it comes time to lead troops into battle. Tsk, absolutely disgraceful. If it were me, I would never want an official position that wasn’t earned with my own accomplishments, even if it killed me."

Lin Qianqing’s face was full of disdain. Lin Xingyi came from humble beginnings and had achieved his status solely through his own talent, so it was only natural for Lin Qianqing to look down on those who relied on family connections or other backgrounds to forge their paths.

However, Gu Youyou disagreed with Lin Qianqing’s words.

Did she not know whether Xiao Jinyan had actual skills or not? After so long, Gu Youyou still remembered that stormy night.

And whether Xiao Jinyan had been secretly doing Jin Zijin’s bidding on his own volition or on behalf of the entire Xiao Family was still unknown.

Chief Imperial Teacher, one who commands troops, a first-rank Chief Imperial Teacher, is that a position one can simply secure through connections alone?

After all, Lin Qianqing was only fourteen years old, too young and inexperienced, and to be able to speak such words was already commendable.

In the blink of an eye, they arrived at a storefront currently being renovated.

It’s unknown how Yue Rujing managed to secure it, but in Beijing, where land is worth its weight in gold, he miraculously found a prime piece of real estate right on the main street.

The building had three floors: both the first and second floors could be used for living quarters or clinics, while the third floor was lower and could only be used as a small attic for storage.

It would be perfect for storing medicines, dry and well-ventilated.

Yue Rujing was personally directing the workers, bustling about. Since the layout of the house resembled that of Jisheng Hall in Lingnan, he couldn’t be bothered to design a new one and just decided to decorate it similarly.

"Hey, hurry up with that paint. Ah, be careful, don’t damage the signboard."

It seemed like he was quite capable of handling things.

"Yue Rujing, how many more days will it take?" While speaking, Gu Youyou walked in with Lin Qianqing.

"Yo, General Manager Gu has come to supervise the work!" He turned around with a smile: "And... Miss Lin?"

"Princely Heir!" Lin Qianqing gave a slight bow as a salute.

"It’s quite similar to our Jisheng Hall in Lingnan, isn’t it?" Youyou said, surprised.

"Yes, I think the layout of Lingnan’s Jisheng Hall is quite good—convenient, practical, and grand."

"Naturally, I designed it myself," Gu Youyou stated.

Yue Rujing: "..." Alright, she always knew how to toot her own horn.

Forget it, let her be proud. It’s better to indulge her than to argue and lose out, that’s what my senior brother used to say.

"Since you’re here today, why don’t you look around to see if there’s anything that needs to be changed? If nothing else, we can finish the decoration like this, and it’ll be ready to open in seven days."

After looking around, Gu Youyou said, "Add more compartments for storing the medicine jars. Our future use of medicines will likely consist primarily of powders."

Thinking of the production capacity of the drug factory in Lingnan, Yue Rujing nodded.

Not only did they plan to open a medical clinic of Jisheng Hall in Beijing, but they also intended to establish a medicinal powder factory. Oh, not in Beijing—this place is too dry and cold all year round, and there aren’t many types of medicinal herbs. It could be set up in Yangguan City.

Yangguan City is the crucial hub linking the north and the south, making it convenient for distribution.

"Also, fence off a small courtyard for me here, and build some... cabins as big as Abao’s house."

The page following Yue Rujing took notes, though he didn’t quite understand what a house as big as Abao’s meant.

"Young Master, this..."

Chapter 507: Jisheng Hall

This gentleman was brought from Lingnan by Yue Rujing, he actually is the shopkeeper Yue Rujing brought to work.

"Noted," Yue Rujing didn’t know why Gu Youyou made such arrangements, but he wouldn’t ask, as based on his past experiences, if he did, he would definitely be ridiculed by Gu Youyou.

If he didn’t understand, he would ask his senior brother another day, his senior brother would definitely understand.

After all the requested changes and additions were made, Lin Qianqing had been idling behind for a while and was becoming impatient.

"Cousin, is there anything I can help with?"

She had liked to follow her grandmother since she was young and had a temperament that wasn’t quite like that of ordinary daughters from official families.

Although she hadn’t neglected her music, chess, calligraphy, and painting, she herself wasn’t content with just knowing those things. She had always envied Shenxing for being a man, able to do something significant like their father, freely coming and going as he pleased, whereas as a woman, she wasn’t allowed by society to do so.

In the past, seeing her elder cousin being open-minded, she still had a glimmer of hope for her future life, but now, she might very likely be sent into the palace, and Youyou’s cousin’s sigh that entering the palace gates is as deep as the sea made her even more upset.

If she didn’t live freely while she still had her freedom, she would just end up as a bird in a cage for the rest of her life.

Gu Youyou looked over at Lin Qianqing. There was less innocence and more melancholy in the young girl’s eyes, but she didn’t say the words of refusal.

She smiled and said, "There’s nothing you can help with now, but after the opening, you can help me sort out the prescriptions. I’ll talk to my grandmother."

"Really?" Lin Qianqing’s face was filled with joy; she heard what must be the most wonderful sound in the world.

Grandmother always had a soft spot for her cousin, so if she went to talk, it would definitely work out, and she could leave the house every day, no longer being a bird waiting to be sold in a cage.

Gu Youyou said, "Of course it's true. If you don't come, I would have to find someone else. It seems that your lessons are well done, probably better than most people, and it won't cost me any silver."

Yue Rujing listened with a face full of disdain; this money-grubbing woman, even swindling her own family. For Lin Qianqing, the news was almost enough to make her jump for joy.

Being able to get out was good enough, she'd even pay for the privilege.

"Make way, be careful there."

A few craftsmen were carrying in a signboard.

This was the Jisheng Hall signboard made of pear wood, Yue Rujing's generous contribution.

Gu Youyou was about to lift the red cloth covering the signboard to check the craftsmanship but inadvertently caught sight of a person standing beside the osmanthus cake stall across the street, staring at Gu Youyou at the door of Jisheng Hall. Dressed in simple clothing, even these plain clothes couldn't conceal his translucent, glass-like elegance.

"Why has he also come?" Gu Youyou muttered under her breath.

On the other side, Yue Rujing and Lin Qianqing were admiring the newly arrived signboard and hadn't noticed anything unusual with Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou looked at him for a moment, then turned and whispered a few instructions to Lin Qianqing, "You wait here for me, I'll go across the street to buy some food; I didn't eat enough this morning."

Lin Qianqing, who was praising the calligraphy on the signboard, agreed vaguely.

"Who wrote these characters? They're even better than my dad's. So powerful and vigorous, it couldn't be Princely Heir Yue who wrote them, could it?"

Yue Rujing's face turned red with embarrassment, wishing he could claim the calligraphy as his own, but unfortunately, it was not.

"Not him?" Seeing his unusual expression, Lin Qianqing asked again.

"No," Yue Rujing said impatiently: "Your cousin wrote them."

"Ah? My cousin?" Lin Qianqing was visibly surprised, believing that Gu Youyou was only a few years older than her; although she herself wrote well, it was far from comparable to Gu Youyou.

She wondered if she could produce such handwriting if she grew a few years older.

But she soon shook her head, thinking that it was probably impossible to surpass her father's writing.

"My cousin is truly remarkable," Lin Qianqing praised. "Grandmother says everyone in our family is exceptional, and it really is true. My cousin has a rare talent."

Yue Rujing detested this pair of cousins who loved to sing each other's praises, snorted, and instructed the craftsmen to make some extra compartments for storing medicine bottles.

Meanwhile, Gu Youyou followed Jin Ziyuan to an inconspicuous and quiet alley across the street.

"How come you are in Beijing?" Gu Youyou asked in surprise once they were alone.

"I have something to ask you," Jin Ziyuan said.

Gu Youyou's expression became serious as she waited for him to ask.

"Last time, on the outskirts of Lingnan’s snow mountain... were you picking Snow Lotuses?"

It was obvious, Gu Youyou nodded.

"Did you also pick that half-bloomed pink Snow Lotus at the mountain top?"

"Hm??" Gu Youyou thought for a moment and then understood what he meant.

Jin Ziyuan said he was looking for something in Lingnan and had encountered them on that snow mountain; it must be the pink Snow Lotus from the mountaintop he was talking about.

Gu Youyou had not seen this pink Snow Lotus before, which must be a rare treasure of great use to him.

Gu Youyou shook her head and said, "No, your appearance caused an avalanche. We didn’t go to the mountaintop."

As she said this, Gu Youyou suddenly paused.

They had not gone to the mountaintop that day, but that didn’t mean Jin Zijin hadn’t gone alone afterward.

Jin Zijin had mentioned that the place full of Snow Lotuses was very secretive, discovered accidentally by him and Yue Rujing. Others wouldn’t know of it.

Gu Youyou herself had not gone again, and Jin Ziyuan hadn’t found it, so it seemed likely that the pink Snow Lotus had been taken by Jin Zijin.

"Is that item very important to you?" Gu Youyou asked.

If it was really important, perhaps she could inquire with Jin Zijin.

A treasure, after all, is only valuable when used properly.

"Very important." Jin Ziyuan also guessed that the millennia-old Heart-Cooling Snow Lotus might have fallen into Jin Zijin's hands. He said, "It's very important to both you and me, it might be the key for us to return to normal."

"That important?" Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow. Such an important item, yet Jin Zijin had not mentioned it to her.

She nodded slightly and said, "I'll ask him, but there's no guarantee that he really has it."

"Okay!" A hint of melancholy and disappointment flashed across Jin Ziyuan's face.

"Then I'll be leaving. I'll still be here in three days... waiting for you."

"All right, be careful!" Gu Youyou didn't say much else and turned to leave the alley.

At the mouth of the alley, she ran into a grand procession of carriages and horses.

Ordinary people all stepped aside to make way for the carriages. Jin Ziyuan, who came out of the alley, also stood beside Gu Youyou.

The carriage was unbelievably luxurious, much larger than those of ordinary households, drawn by three horses, with four well-dressed maids following closely before and behind, and knife-bearing guards protecting it. As it passed by, it left a trail of refined fragrance in its wake.

Gu Youyou murmured in a low voice as she gazed at the luxurious procession, "I wonder whose carriage that is. It's so impressive."

Gu Youyou was entirely focused on the grand carriages and horses, completely unaware of the tightly clenched fist and icy eyes of Jin Ziyuan at her side.

The common folk nearby whispered among themselves, "That must be the family of the fifth prince; don’t know which of his wives it is."

Someone else added, "With such grandeur, it has to be the princess consort."

"The princess consort wouldn’t have such grandeur; it must be Madam Ru."

Chapter 509: The Imperial Family’s Secrets

"Could that be Madam Gu, the former wife of the third Prince?"

"Shh, keep your voice down. It’s better for us common folk to speak less of such forbidden secrets within the palace."

"What’s there to fear, we’ll just whisper it."

The more timid one whispered, "Then you whisper to yourself. I better take my leave first."

"Hey, hey, you’re such a spoilsport. Fine, don’t talk about it, but wait for me."

Perhaps it was the chilly aura behind her that was too overwhelming, but Gu Youyou couldn’t help turning her head to look back.

The venomous glare in Jin Ziyuan’s eyes as it followed the departing horse startled Gu Youyou.

"What’s wrong with you?"

The cold aura bursting from his body was greatly harmful to him, and Gu Youyou reached out to feel his pulse.

Jin Ziyuan pushed away Gu Youyou as if she were a snake or scorpion, the venomous look in his eyes shifting onto her, sending a shiver through her.

How deep must the hatred in his eyes be?

But why did he hate that woman in the carriage so much? I heard people whispering earlier that she was the wife of the fifth Prince, not an official wife but perhaps a concubine of sorts. But what was she previously, the wife of the third Prince?

This messy web of relationships.

As Gu Youyou was lost in her thoughts, Jin Ziyuan had already returned to his usual self.

"I'm leaving. Remember to wait here for me in three days," he said.

After speaking, he vanished into the crowd in no time at all.

Gu Youyou sighed. She probably wouldn't be able to get that pink lotus, but she hadn't said that.

After glancing at the shops ahead, Gu Youyou went into a store selling osmanthus cakes and bought some before returning to Jisheng Hall.

In ancient times without snacks, osmanthus cakes were considered quite delicious as a leisure food, but Gu Youyou wasn't particularly fond of them.

She liked sweets, especially Western-style pastries.

It seemed she would have to try making some herself during her spare time to satisfy her cravings.

...

Upon returning home, Gu Youyou pulled Lin Qianqing aside to gossip about the woman in the carriage she saw earlier that day.

"I heard the wife of the fifth Prince is stationed at the Xining Border Defense. Today, I saw her on the street."

"Oh my, we must be careful when speaking of such matters—the Imperial Family has its taboos!" Lin Qianqing looked around at the doorway and then carefully closed the door.

She asked with a smile, "How did you know the person in the carriage on the street today was the wife of the fifth Prince?"

Gu Youyou replied, "I heard it from the people nearby. They also said she used to be the wife of the third Prince."

With an extremely interested look on her face, Gu Youyou found Lin Qianqing very accommodating.

Ladies sequestered in seclusion, like them, loved to hear gossip from different households, especially secrets of the Imperial Family. She had managed to gather quite a bit of information with great difficulty.

"I know about this matter. Let me tell you," she said excitedly.

"Years ago, when the current Emperor was not the Emperor but the Crown Prince, his position was unstable despite being the heir. You see, he was the legitimate son of the previous Empress, who had died. The old Emperor then elevated his favorite concubine to the Empress, and obviously, he doted on her son, the third Prince, immensely, even considering replacing the heir with the Prince.

In short, the Emperor ascended to the throne with bated breath, and as for the third Prince, the victor becomes king and the loser a bandit; he couldn’t accept having lost the throne, which was within his grasp. In those years when the Emperor’s position was unstable, he started gathering supporters to

rebel. It’s said that he even had a decree from the late Emperor—an edict that revoked the status of the Crown Prince and designated the third Prince as the new Emperor.

Of course, you should only listen to this and not take it as truth—it could just be rumors."

Listening closely, Gu Youyou said in a low voice, "So the third Prince plotted a rebellion but failed. The key lies with the wife of the third Prince, right?"

Chapter 510: Jin Ziyuan’s Resentment

"Ah, how did you know?" Lin Qianqing exclaimed in surprise.

Gu Youyou smiled and said nothing more.

If her guess was not wrong, the hermit uncle she and Jin Ziyuan met behind the mountains of Lotus Village was none other than the failed Prince No. 3.

She even remembered a sentence Jin Ziyuan had said at that time, "Are all women so heartless?" At that moment, his eyes were no different from the ones she had just seen.

So, it made sense why Jin Ziyuan harbored such towering hatred towards the consort of Prince No. 3, truly a tragedy of the human condition.

Lin Qianqing continued, "Yes, it’s said that Prince No. 3 was certain of victory, but at the critical moment, he was betrayed by his own consort. She produced evidence of Prince No. 3’s rebellion. When the Prince Residence was raided, everyone died except for her, and she emerged as a great hero.

Latter on, Prince No. 5 proposed to her. Logically, even as a second wife, she shouldn’t have been just a concubine, but she willingly accepted, and the Emperor approved."

If Prince No. 3 had succeeded, she would have been Empress. Giving up the position of an Empress to become the concubine of Prince No. 5, the reason behind it was beyond anyone’s understanding. Gu Youyou’s gaze deepened. Jin Ziyuan might know something about it.

They switched topics and chatted about other matters concerning the households of various officials in Beijing.

Lin Qianqing, a sheltered young lady, knew quite a lot; it was a waste that she wasn’t a know-all.

It was not until dusk that Lin Qianqing left.

At night, Jin Zijin came online punctually.

Poor Xiang Chun, being divested of her consciousness every night by Jin Zijin via acupoint tapping, Gu Youyou worried it might affect the girl’s health over time. Tonight, she administered a calming medicament to Xiang Chun, ensuring she would have a sound sleep without the need of being tapped.

After much contemplation, Gu Youyou finally came up with a suitable excuse to bring up the matter of the pink snow lotus to Jin Zijin.

"Zijin, do you know of a kind of... pink lotus?" Seeing Jin Zijin’s probing gaze turn to her, Gu Youyou felt uneasy inside.

She said, "That lotus could help with the cold poison in my body, so I just wanted to ask. If you haven’t seen it, never mind."

Jin Zijin stared at Gu Youyou for a long time before responding indifferently, "You saw him today?"

"Ah...?" Gu Youyou was stunned, not expecting to be figured out so quickly. It seemed she was truly no good at lying to him.

"How did you know?" Gu Youyou still couldn’t help but ask curiously.

"Because I’m the one who took the snow lotus," Jin Zijin said bluntly.

Gu Youyou was left speechless for a while; he really did dare to own his actions.

"Do you know that Jin Ziyuan needs that snow lotus?" She was sure he knew.

"Indeed, I am aware," Jin Zijin admitted straightforwardly.

This really is something.

"He needs that snow lotus for medicine, and you don't need it, yet you took it. You said you needed to join forces with him against the State Preceptor. With such pettiness, you can't be allies," Gu Youyou reproached.

"How do you know I have no use for it?" Jin Zijin didn't like Gu Youyou speaking for someone else, especially for Jin Ziyuan. His face darkened, visibly upset.

"You have a use for it?" Gu Youyou had never seen that plant and was unaware of its medicinal properties.

Jin Zijin hummed, "Do you know what he is using that thousand-year Heart-Cooling Snow Lotus for? Did he tell you?"

Seeing his expression, it seemed the situation was not as simple as she had thought.

Gu Youyou shook her head.

Jin Zijin said, "With that snow lotus, he might be able to find the Zhuzhao Pearl, but the Zhuzhao Pearl is inside my body. This is a secret, a matter not even Ajing is aware of. He only thinks I've been afflicted with the common Fire Lotus Flame Poison."

Gu Youyou blinked her eyes, not expecting such a complex turn of events.