Farmhouse 511

Chapter 511: How to Get the Pearl

"Does your master know about the Zhuzhao Pearl inside you?" Gu Youyou remembered that he had said he didn't know when it had gotten into his body, so how did he know it was his mother who put it there? And Jin Zijin had been adopted by his master since he was young.

Jin Zijin paused for a moment, took a deep breath, and sighed lightly, "After I was poisoned, I asked him about the Zhuzhao Pearl, and he knew. I wasn't actually picked up by my master, but rather, my mother entrusted me to him, and he also knew the secret of the Zhuzhao Pearl. However, now he's... become senile."

"Hmm...?" What does senile mean in this context?

Jin Zijin gave a wry smile, "I'm not joking, he really has gone senile. When I went back to the mountain to see him the year before last, I noticed he would be lucid one moment and confused the next, and during his confused times, he didn't even know who I was."

Gu Youyou: "..."

"So the current situation is really bad." He gently stroked Gu Youyou's hair and said, "I understand what you mean, but his identity is sensitive. It's best not to get involved with him. Ah... I need some time to properly consider what to do. Plans never keep up with changes. Youyou, do you think I am useless?"

"How could that be?" Gu Youyou snorted with laughter, "There's a solution to every problem, and if the sky falls, there will be tall people to support it. Why worry all the time? If you can't figure it out today, think about it tomorrow. If one day isn't enough, take ten days; if ten days aren't enough, take a month. There will be a way around the mountain when you get to it, and a boat will find its way when it reaches the bridge. Haven't you said it yourself? Planning can't keep up with changes. Success is partially in our hands and partially in fate's. Just do your best and don't put too much pressure on yourself."

These words, these phrases, were what Gu Youyou frequently used to encourage herself in her previous life, and she knew them inside out. To be born was to suffer; without experiencing various hardships, how could one enjoy peaceful times?

Jin Zijin quietly watched Gu Youyou for a moment and suddenly chuckled lightly, "Yeah, you really do have a clear mind. Listening to you, indeed, makes me feel much better."

After chatting for a bit, Gu Youyou steered the conversation back to the snow lotus.

That's right, Jin Ziyuan had said that the snow lotus was very important, related to the poison in both him and herself.

If it could be used to find the Zhuzhao Pearl, then it was definitely related to the cold poison in their bodies, wasn't it?

But without this single snow lotus, could there possibly be another way?

As she thought about these things, she began to laugh again, "You two really are something. What he's looking for, the Zhuzhao Pearl, is with you, and what you're looking for, the Youying Pearl, is with him. Can't you both just be generous and lend them to each other to use for a while? By the way, what methods do you guys have for taking out the pearls?"

Jin Zijin narrowed his eyes and heaved a long sigh, "Xuanzong has a type of insect that, once swallowed, will carry the pearl out."

Gu Youyou paused for an instant, feeling a chill. Not to mention whether the insect would be obedient, the mere act of swallowing a live thing and then letting it crawl out was disgusting enough—far too disgusting.

"The method of Tianzong involves placing a person in a cauldron and using a secret ritual to simmer for seven days. After seven days, the pearl that cannot melt will be removed."

Ugh...

Gu Youyou felt like she wanted to lean over the bed and vomit, realizing that without comparison, there's no harm done. Boiling for seven days would dissolve the flesh off the bones, naturally leaving behind the indestructible pearl. And what secret ritual? It's like adding firewood with the same effect.

"Youyou, what’s the matter?" Jin Zijin saw that she was genuinely startled.

"It’s nothing, I just think... the Xuanzong’s insect is quite nice." Practically adorable.

"Yeah, I think so too."

Chapter 512: Someone is Eavesdropping by the Corner of the Wall

No wonder Jin Ziyuan wanted to flee. She had previously called him a fool for valuing the pearl over his life. It turns out that whoever catches it ends up not just dead but dies so unsightly.

A moment later, Gu Youyou asked softly, "Do they have any other way to find the Zhuzhao Pearl?"

"Of course, there are other ways, but those as difficult as ascending to heaven need not worry you. Anyway, the Heart-Cooling Snow Lotus is gone."

"Oh, I see," Gu Youyou nodded lightly. "I’ll just tell him you’ve already eaten it."

"Mmm, that’s right, I did eat it," Jin Zijin said.

Gu Youyou’s eyes widened.

Jin Zijin smiled and said, "Who would have thought that such a thing could be found in the snow-capped mountains outside Lingnan? It’s indeed very beneficial for the flame poison in my body. With such a treasure, why wouldn’t I eat it, right?"

Hehe... "Yes, yes," Gu Youyou hurriedly said.

It wasn’t on purpose; it’s fine as long as it wasn’t wasted.

"Let me prescribe you a formula to slowly detoxify. Be it cold poison or flame poison, it’s all just poison. If it’s a poison, there’s a way to cure it; it’s just that I haven’t found a permanent solution yet."

"Mmm, okay!" Jin Zijin said softly to Gu Youyou.

Strange noises came from the roof, as if someone was eavesdropping.

Jin Zijin listened intently; Gu Youyou also suddenly fell silent.

Jin Zijin looked at Gu Youyou in surprise. Had she heard it?

He took a deep breath and whispered, "Go to sleep."

...

Three days later, Gu Youyou arrived as promised in the alley across from Jisheng Hall. Jin Ziyuan was already there waiting.

She removed her hood and took a packet of pills from her cloak, saying, "Jin Zijin did indeed pick that snow lotus, but don’t bother about it—he’s eaten it. Here, this is for you. The weather is cold now, and it’s difficult to suppress the cold poison. Take one pill every day, in the morning when you wake up, and you will feel much better."

Jin Ziyuan’s gaze darkened, perhaps knowing he could not obtain the lotus, so he wasn’t too disappointed.

The agreement to meet Gu Youyou here in three days was probably just an excuse to see her.

He reached out and thanked her as he took the medicine she handed over.

Touching Jin Ziyuan’s hand felt as cold as ice, startling Gu Youyou.

"Why is it so cold?" Since Gu Youyou’s body was colder than the average person, touching others always felt warm to her. Coming across someone even colder than herself was rare, and it immediately touched her sensitive nerve.

"You should take two pills now; it seems one won’t be enough, and the dosage needs to be increased. From now on, take two at a time. Remember to refill your prescription with the medicine I gave you last time after you finish these—you can’t stop with the severity of your condition."

Gu Youyou rambled on without concern, lamenting, "Why did you even come to the north if you didn’t need to? Alright, alright, there’s nothing you’re looking for here, hurry off to the south—it’s warmer there. If you really have to come to the north, wait until the weather is warmer. You don’t know medical skills, and it will inevitably lead to trouble sooner or later."

Watching Gu Youyou’s non-stop chattering, Jin Ziyuan slowly revealed a smile.

It had been a long time since anyone had cared or nagged at him like this.

"Thank you for the medicine." Jin Ziyuan immediately took two pills.

No sooner had the medicine entered his mouth than he felt a long-lost warmth slide down his throat.

"And thank you for your concern," he said. "But I have important matters to attend to in Beijing and won’t be leaving for now."

Important matters? Gu Youyou’s mind instantly went to the wife of the fifth prince.

"Is it about the third prince’s wife from yesterday?" Instead of mentioning the fifth prince’s wife, Gu Youyou used ’the third prince’s wife,’ aiming to provoke Jin Ziyuan.

Chapter 513: Blind Date

As he had expected, Jin Ziyuan’s expression changed instantly when he heard the three words "third prince’s consort."

"That is the fifth prince’s concubine, from whom did you hear ’third prince’s consort’?" he said coldly.

The look in his eyes was as if it could freeze someone solid.

Gu Youyou spoke directly, "It’s said this matter is an Imperial Family secret, but no matter how secret, things always leak out; you can’t wrap fire with paper. If I’m not mistaken, your father is the third prince, and she is your mother?"

"No, she does not deserve to be a mother; she is nothing more than a lowly concubine, a plaything for men."

Jin Ziyuan was furious, veins on his forehead bulging as he clenched his fists, seemingly struggling mightily to contain something.

Gu Youyou, seeing his demeanor, felt a little intimidated and took a step back, but softly urged.

"Since that’s the case, why care so much? You survived, you should live well. Your identity is sensitive right now; if people discover you’re still alive, it will be dangerous. The third prince took you to hide in those deep mountains, I think his original intention was also for you to survive well."

"What do you know? Someone who should not have survived yet continues to live, that taste of a life worse than death..." Jin Ziyuan took a deep breath, unable to continue, and instead looked up at the sky.

This sorrowful story, even as an outsider Gu Youyou only had a rough idea yet felt indignant; what more for Jin Ziyuan himself.

No matter the woman’s difficulties, whether clinging to life out of fear or bearing humiliation and heavy burdens, with her husband and son ending up like that, yet she lives extravagantly — that’s abnormal.

"So, what do you want to do? Kill her? Patricide doesn't sound good, and it's not worth it for you to exchange your life for hers; think about what your father did for you." Perhaps coming to Beijing to ask about the false snow lotus was a pretense, but to follow the madam might be the real reason.

Jin Ziyuan looked at Gu Youyou and sneered, saying, "Of course, I'm not foolish enough to trade life for life. I still have so many important things to do; you think too much."

"What important things?" Gu Youyou had a bad premonition.

"You're asking too many questions," Jin Ziyuan said.

He snorted coldly, walked past Gu Youyou, and quickly disappeared into the crowd outside the alley.

This man really is, Gu Youyou mused: does he still want to achieve what his father failed to do back then?

So many years have passed, if one could say that the Emperor's throne was unstable back then, giving the third prince an opportunity, now it's quite different.

Wouldn't trying to shake the Emperor's throne be an impossible fantasy, like striking stone with an egg?

Gu Youyou shook her head and left the alley.

...

The weather was getting warmer, and Jisheng Hall was about to open in Beijing.

The once-a-year Plum Blossom Festival had arrived, and Gu Youyou did not want to go, but unable to resist Lin Qianqing's persistent persuasion, she agreed to accompany her.

The grandmother kept instructing, "Daya, your cousin is not in good health, make sure not to stay out too long."

"We know, Grandmother."

"Xiang Chun, take enough charcoal and thick blankets, and if anything happens, let Dachunzi come back immediately to inform us."

"Yes, Madam."

"Youyou, you're a doctor yourself, remember not to overexert yourself, don't end up like last time; it frightened everyone."

"Maybe I shouldn't go, Grandmother."

"That won't do," the old lady said: "You're already twenty, look around and see how many girls of twenty are still unmarried? It was excusable when you were sick, but now that you are well, you need to get your lifelong matters settled quickly.

It's not just the ladies who'll appreciate the plum blossoms; the young masters from various houses will be there too. If there's someone you like, come tell me, and I'll have your uncle arrange it."

Chapter 514: Accidental Encounter

Gu Youyou was speechless, wondering why the old lady, knowing full well her health wasn't good, still arranged for her to go admire the plum blossoms so enthusiastically. It turned out this was her idea.

Huh, she didn't ask Jin Zijin last night if he was going, did she?

Alas! He probably wouldn't go, he's a "pure and desireless" Taoist, after all. How could he go to such a place?

In the carriage, Lin Qianqing chuckled, "Grandmother is getting more and more long-winded as she ages."

"If the grandmother hears you, watch out for your hide."

"Hehe, it’s because she can’t hear that I said it."

Outside the city was a plum grove, vibrant with a cacophony of colors.

To describe this plum grove as ’a cacophony of gorgeous colors’ was spot on because the plum blossoms here were not the common shades of pink and white, but rather came in a variety of colors.

Gu Youyou stood still, her face lit with wonder.

She liked plum blossoms, particularly the strange and rare breeds.

Palace Pink Plum, red plum, Jade Butterfly, Long E... Gu Youyou could name over thirty varieties, but that was less than half of what this grove held.

Clearly, many of the plum blossoms here did not exist in modern times.

Nature’s gifts had gradually diminished with human advancement, in both flora and fauna. Being able to see so many extinct varieties of plum blossoms could be considered some form of compensation for a person who had traveled through time.

"Naturally plump and delicate to the salt touch, leaning against the east wind, their light makeup is faintly applied."

"But the spring cold is still piercingly raw, and the morning window tests the green Luo costume."

In front of them, near a cluster of Long E, stood several young men, reciting poetry with abandon in front of a tree adorned with green and white plum blossoms.

Upon seeing this, Lin Qianqing commented to Gu Youyou, "That's the second son of the Great Scholar from Wenhua Hall. He does have talent, but he's infamous for his debauchery, always visiting the brothels of Yanliu Land seeking girls. His wife at home died in childbirth due to his actions, tarnishing his good reputation. No matter how talented he is, it's worthless, and now finding another wife has become difficult. Look at him, still aiming for a romantic encounter here, hmph..."

For men at that time, debauchery was considered artistic interest, but too much of it was unacceptable.

Gu Youyou, hearing this, nodded and followed her to the other side.

"Let's head over there. Oh, that's Xie Qinyun from the Left Principal Minister's Residence, we used to get along well during our school days."

Gu Youyou was pulled by her to a verdant plum tree, different from the Long E. It was so green, it seemed almost wet, and sheenthal and sparkling. Gu Youyou had never seen or heard of it before, suggesting it was a species long extinct.

"I most adore this Cui Ji, look at its petals, like the freshly sprouted tender buds," said the girl in green, smiling tenderly at the plum.

"Qinyun, what a coincidence that you also came out to admire the plum blossoms," Lin Qianqing approached to greet her.

The girl in green was indeed Xie Qinyun from the Left Principal Minister's Residence that Lin Qianqing mentioned.

"Yes, you're here too, Qianqing. Oh, who is this sister?"

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and greeted her, "Miss Xie."

"This is my cousin, the Gu Family's cousin," Lin Qianqing introduced. "The Divine Doctor from Lingnan who resolved the typhoid issues, the owner of Jisheng Hall."

"Ah, so you're Doctor Gu," exclaimed one of the girls beside Xie Qinyun excitedly. "I know you, the doctor from Lingnan who advocated for the use of herbal concoctions. Last year, when I went to Yangguan, my elder brother was ill, and it was your medicine we used. I've always been afraid of bitter medicine; the brewed kind is too hard to drink, but the powdered medicine was so much better."

Her excitement was loud, quickly attracting several young ladies nearby who were admiring the flowers.

A flurry of conversations started among them.

"The female doctor from Jisheng Hall, the one that's opening the day after tomorrow, right? So she's Miss Lin's cousin."

Chapter 515: Discussing the Rebellion of the Three Kings

"Doctor Gu, oh, I've also heard about it. I heard that last year there was an epidemic of typhoid in the Lingnan Barracks, and it was you who cured it, right? His Majesty even personally rewarded you with the plaque of 'Divine Doctor'."

"Now that you're in Beijing, that's great. From now on, when we get sick, we don't have to see that old man anymore; it's quite embarrassing, really. We can just come to you, Doctor Gu."

"Yes, from now on, I too will go to Doctor Gu."

Lin Qianqing said happily over there, "No problem! My cousin is a Divine Doctor. Her remedies work wonders. If you guys fall ill, just come to Jisheng Hall to support the business."

In the blink of an eye, the nature of the plum-viewing gathering changed. The romantic encounter my grandmother was hoping for didn't happen, and there was Lin Qianqing, pulling in a bunch of potential patients for her.

"Alright, it's the day after tomorrow that you open, right?"

"Yes, yes, the day after tomorrow."

"Alright. The day after tomorrow, I'll send a big gift over. Doctor Gu, you better not look down on it."

"It's great to have a female doctor, you have no idea. Ten years ago, when I got sick, I needed acupuncture, and that involves undressing. My mother had Imperial Physician Xue give me the acupuncture. I was embarrassed, and I'd rather have died than comply, so I ended up drinking medicine for over two months before I got better. If it had been Doctor Gu, I wouldn't have had to go through that ordeal."

"Oh, that really must have been tough!"

The ladies went on talking, one after another, and Gu Youyou could hardly get a word in edgewise.

Behind several layers of flowering trees, Yue Rujing was making faces at her, wrapped up tight. A pang of anxiousness struck Gu Youyou's heart. With Yue Rujing here, could it be that Jin Zijin has come as well?

Seeking a love affair?

That thought popped into Gu Youyou's head, making her shiver with alarm.

Gu Youyou lowered her head and said to Lin Qianqing, "Wait here for me a moment, I'll be right back."

Lin Qianqing saw a glimpse of white clothing flash past the bushes and understood. She replied softly, "Okay."

Gu Youyou followed Yue Rujing, winding her way like a maze into the heart of the flowers, and indeed, Jin Zijin was there.

He was sitting beside a pond, steaming with vapor. Hearing footsteps, he slowly turned his head.

Yue Rujing said grumpily, "There, I brought her to you!"

Having said that, Yue Rujing turned and walked away, huffing at Gu Youyou, "Fickle as water!"

Gu Youyou: "..." She was just admiring some flowers. Who had she provoked?

"How come you're here too?" Gu Youyou asked.

"I guessed you would come, so naturally, I had to come," Jin Zijin responded.

Gu Youyou chuckled, sat down beside him, and said, "It wasn't my own idea to come, you know. It was my grandmother's. Well, she says I'm not getting any younger, if you get my meaning."

Jin Zijin's gaze was as dark as deep ink, yet he nodded and said, "Although daughters of wealthy families are not strictly bound to marrying after their 'hairpinning' ceremony, it is indeed rare for someone like you to still be unwed at twenty."

"Oh, you know that too. How about... you give me an analysis of the current situation?"

"Current situation?" Jin Zijin laughed. "Which aspect would you like to hear about?"

"For example..." Gu Youyou pondered seriously before saying, "I heard that more than a decade ago, the third prince rebelled and his house was raided. I wonder if it was cleared out thoroughly? Do they still have an opportunity to make a comeback?"

Jin Zijin replied indifferently, "You mean to ask if Jin Ziyuan would rebel, right?"

Gu Youyou paused for a moment, then slowly said, "You... you really are... You pretend to be confused when you ought to be smart, yet you expose what shouldn't be mentioned when you should play the fool, too boring."

He smiled faintly, lifting the corner of his mouth, "Alright then, let's talk about that third prince's rebellion."

Back then, when the former emperor was still the Crown Prince, he had lost his mother's protection at an early age. The then-Empress had died when he was merely ten years old.

Chapter 516: How to Fail?

The favored concubine ascended to power, and her two sons were deeply loved by the late Emperor. The Crown Prince's position was precarious, but thankfully, he managed to remain vigilant until the Emperor's passing and then ascended the throne smoothly.

However, even after his enthronement, his position didn't seem to be secure. At that time in Beijing, four-tenths of the military force was under the control of Prince Three, who could be said to have power equal to the Emperor's. The only thing Prince Three lost to the Emperor was the sequence of their ages.

The Emperor was well aware of this and constantly sought to weaken Prince Three's power, whether his rebellion stemmed from an unwillingness to accept his earlier loss of the throne, or from being forced by the Emperor to save himself, or perhaps both, only they themselves might know.

Prince Three and Prince Five were full brothers, and while the late Emperor was alive, they looked down on the powerless Crown Prince and would not bother to compete with him. They believed that the Crown Prince's downfall was only a matter of time, and the late Emperor on multiple occasions had the intention to depose the Crown Prince, choosing to establish one of these brothers as the Crown Prince instead.

So, on the surface, they presented a united front, but in reality, the two brothers were in constant covert conflict.

They competed for the affection of the Emperor and Empress and for the support of their external family, among other things...

No one expected, however, that the Emperor would pass away so suddenly, dying abruptly.

The Crown Prince, who had always been looked down upon for only indulging in pleasure and having no real power, still occupied the legitimate position of the Crown Prince.

The sudden death of the late Emperor and the succession of the Crown Prince were as natural as the Heavenly Scripture mandates!

The underground struggles between Prince Three and Prince Five gradually surfaced. It was rumored within the court that although Prince Three and Prince Five were full brothers, their discord had reached a point where either you die or I die. So, Prince Three's failure in the rebellion was, to a large extent, due to Prince Five.

Prince Three and Prince Five's uncle had a cousin who often visited the palace since she was a child, and grew up with the two princes. They both took a great liking to her, but she chose Prince Three, becoming his wife.

For this, Prince Five harbored a grudge, leading to another rumor that he betrayed his own older brother because of this woman.

This woman later became Prince Five's favored concubine, which seemed to corroborate that rumor.

All in all, Prince Three's failure was complete, and it was inseparable from that woman and Prince Five.

However, Jin Zijin held a different view regarding the word 'complete.'

He said, "When the late Emperor was alive, it's true that Prince Three and Prince Five were engaged in an open and covert struggle, but after the late Emperor's death and the new Emperor's ascension, to say that they were still fighting, I wouldn't believe it."

Gu Youyou thought for a moment and nodded lightly in agreement.

Unless the two princes were fools, but considering that Prince Five was still living well and commanded a large military force, obviously, he was not.

"I believe that the Emperor's outward display of weakness doesn't mean he lacks means. If he had no means, he wouldn't be able to still sit steadily on the throne so his failure isn't as the rumors say because of his discord with Prince Five, nor was it due to the betrayal and accusation by his wife.

On the contrary, Prince Three and Prince Five being full brothers, their odds of succeeding would be much greater if they joined forces."

Gu Youyou was slightly startled and said, "So Prince Three has been definitively labeled as a traitor, and Prince Five..."

Jin Zijin understood her implication, nodded slightly, and said, "They underestimated the Emperor and were doomed not to succeed. The Emperor was silent, simply waiting for Prince Three and Prince Five to fall into the trap. Regrettably, they realized their error too late; by then, the arrow was on the bowstring and they had no choice but to release it, having to protect one at the expense of the other."

Chapter 517: On the Current Situation

Jin Zijin’s meaning had become quite clear, and Gu Youyou nodded lightly.

"According to the strategy of sacrificing the chariot to save the chess piece, the Fifth Prince holds great military power; their strength remains. They have merely lost the Third Prince!"

"Exactly!" Jin Zijin said, "Perhaps things are far from being so simple. The rebellion of the Third Prince over a decade ago involved many, aside from the Fifth Prince and the wife of the Third Prince, who acted out of moral righteousness. The other royal relatives involved in the rebellion all died, including three of the Emperor’s own brothers."

Every magnificent imperial throne is founded on a pile of stark white bones, and the blood that flows most is often that of the Imperial Family.

Jin Zijin stood up, walked under a plum tree to pick up a few withered branches, then slowly returned.

Gu Youyou said, "The Emperor is deep and calculating. He must have wanted to use that opportunity to weed out dissidents, yet the Fifth Prince managed to stay unscathed, which is no simple feat."

"Yes," nodded Jin Zijin, "The Fifth Prince’s act of righteousness in exterminating his kin severed any intent the Emperor might have had to kill him."

"But given that outsiders can see that the Fifth Prince is employing the tactic of sacrificing the chariot to save the chess piece, wouldn't the Emperor, with his wisdom, know as well?"

Jin Zijin broke the twigs he had gathered and slowly started piling something on the ground.

Seeing this, Gu Youyou stopped out of curiosity.

From a distance, they looked just like two children with untainted hearts.

"Being a prince, the Emperor would need a just cause to act against him, and he's undoubtedly aware of that; it's just that there hasn't been an appropriate opportunity," said Jin Zijin with a sneer, "An old round of succession struggles has ended, and a new one slowly begins. As long as imperial power exists, the struggle for it will be endless. He keeps the Fifth Prince not only because he hasn't found the chance to eliminate him but also to contain other powers."

As he spoke, Jin Zijin finished piling up his creation and said, "The current court is just like this tower constructed of sticks!"

Looking at the pile of sticks, Gu Youyou's lips twitched.

Well, let's just pretend it's a tower.

"Steady if not moved," he said, suddenly pulling out a small stick, and then said, "Collapse if disturbed."

He pulled out that stick, and the tower he had taken a while to build collapsed into a heap.

"Outsmarting oneself, years of effort to maintain the balance of the court, yet it is so fragile that pulling one hair affects the whole body."

Gu Youyou stared blankly at Jin Zijin's contemptuous expression.

He was scorning the current Emperor, no less, which was... quite outspoken. She wondered if it was because he was a member of the Dao Family that he could be so bold, or if it was just his own disdain for the current Emperor.

Gu Youyou had been there for quite a while; glancing at the sky, she stood up and said with a light chuckle, "It's getting late; I should head back now. See you tonight."

"Mhm, see you tonight!" Jin Zijin responded with a smile.

A meeting tonight? Why did that feel a little odd?

Lin Qianqing, who had been waiting impatiently for Gu Youyou for quite some time, finally saw her return and practically jumped with excitement.

"Cousin, where have you been? Finally, you're back."

The day was getting late, and people were returning to the city in groups of threes and fives.

Gu Youyou, apologetically, said, "I bumped into a friend and talked for a while; I'm sorry for making you wait."

Gu Youyou's polite words made Lin Qianqing feel slightly uneasy.

"We're family; why so formal?" She grinned, sidling up to Gu Youyou and said, "I saw who you were with, you and the Princely Heir..."

"Stop right there!" She couldn't let her imagination run wild, "Seeing isn't always believing; it wasn't him."

"Then who was it...?"

"I can’t tell you for now. As for what to say to Grandmother, you should understand, right?"

Chapter 518: Tian Jizi Delivers Tea

"Oh..." Lin Qianqing smiled with a profound meaning, "Understood, I’ve got this covered. You can rest assured."

On the way back, Gu Youyou kept pondering on the brief conversation she had with Jin Zijin that day.

Having thought about it all the way, she suddenly realized she seemed to have deviated from the main topic.

She intended to inquire about the power struggle within the Dao Family for the position of State Preceptor, yet why had he talked to her about the situation at the Imperial Court?

Was it related to them?

...

Sanqing Temple was divided into Yin and Yang Taiji, one half inhabited by Xuanzong disciples, the other half by Tianzong disciples.

Yue Rujing pushed the door open in a hurry, and Jin Zijin was in the midst of burning something in the fireplace inside the room.

He paused for a moment, but paid it no mind, closed the door, and went straight to the point, "Senior brother, I..."

He had just uttered the word "I" when there came a knock on the door.

Jin Zijin raised his head and looked towards the main door.

Yue Rujing also turned to look at the door, asking, "Who is it?"

A young man’s voice came from outside, "Senior brother Yue, it’s me, Yixi."

"Yixi?" Yue Rujing frowned, muttering under his breath, "Isn’t he supposed to be serving our master? What’s he doing in Beijing? Could there be something the matter with our master?"

Jin Zijin called out to the person outside, "Come in."

A seventeen or eighteen-year-old young man pushed the door open and entered, dressed in the same white attire as everyone else, a handsome lad with rosy lips and white teeth.

After entering, he respectfully presented a box, "Senior brother Jin, this is the freshly grown tender tea from that old tea tree on the back mountain this year. Master said you’re especially fond of it, so he personally roasted the tea and asked me to bring it to you."

With the opening of the box, the refreshing aroma of tea filled the room.

"Ah, it’s from that old tea tree!" Yue Rujing exclaimed excitedly.

He took hold of the tea, then suddenly felt something was amiss.

"Eh, that’s odd, I remember you don’t have a fondness for tea, senior brother. This tea is clearly my favorite."

Jin Zijin nodded, speaking calmly, "Indeed, it seems our master must have remembered wrong."

Yue Rujing’s mouth twitched, and Yixi laughed awkwardly, pointing to his head, "Our master is over a hundred years old now, he often gets confused lately. I guessed since Senior brother Yue was also in Beijing, I didn’t correct it."

This was really...

Yue Rujing sighed, lamenting that time passes so fast, yet people’s hearts remain the same.

The master was so old, yet he still remembered to send him tea, even though he got the person wrong.

Jin Zijin asked, "How has our master been doing lately?"

Yixi replied, "Master has always been healthy, but he’s increasingly behaving like a child, often forgetting things. If we call him out on it, he gets angry, so the brothers usually just let him be."

Yue Rujing snorted with laughter, "That’s good. He’s always been an enlightened old man, worrying over his disciples all his life. Now that he’s old, it’s time for his disciples to worry about him."

Yixi gave Yue Rujing a disdainful look, thinking: Why don’t you go worry about the old man yourself? It’s easy for you to say without lifting a finger.

After delivering the tea, Yixi left, saying he was going to seize the opportunity to visit his family, then quickly return to the mountain.

The master was accustomed to his care and was worried that the other brothers wouldn’t take care of him well.

Yue Rujing also advised him that in a year’s time, Yixi should leave the mountain to gain experience too. It was necessary to leave some opportunities for the younger disciples and to get the master used to the care of others within the remaining year.

After closing the door again, they continued the conversation that had yet to begin.

"Senior brother, don’t be hasty to make a decision. Let me analyze the current situation for you."

Chapter 519: Tian Jizi’s Intentions

Upon hearing Jin Zijin’s decision, Yue Rujing did not sleep well all night.

"If you reveal your identity now, you won't be able to participate in the struggle for the position of State Preceptor. By then, you'll have no hand in the matters of the Dao Sect, yet you'll still be mired in the struggle for succession. You must think this through; you might end up in a dilemma," Yue Rujing warned.

Jin Zijin replied indifferently, "It is precisely because I have thought it through that I am discussing it with you."

Yue Rujing naturally knew Jin Zijin's temperament, which was why she was so anxious.

"You will become the target of all, your emergence will stir up dormant forces from all sides. And you know what's going on with the Dao Family; if our master is becoming senile and you don't fight for our cause, our generation will have lost," she said gravely.

Jin Zijin looked up at Yue Rujing and asked in a deep voice, "Do you know what our master's intentions are?"

"Master?" Yue Rujing was confused by the abrupt question.

"What do you mean by our master's intentions?" she queried.

Jin Zijin explained, "The Dao heart is no longer pure. Our master's greatest wish in this life is for the Dao Sect to distance itself from worldly power and return it to the Imperial Court. To cultivate purity, one must refine their character, not fight over power and possessions to the death."

"Tianzong and Xuanzong have been fighting for many years now, and it's not just over the Youying Pearl or for the Dao Sect's supreme power. They've caused harm, not just to members of our sect, but by dragging ordinary people, and even the imperial power, into the mire.

"They have strayed from the original intention of joining the Dao. Thus, our master intends to completely extract the Dao Sect from the quagmire of imperial power, to truly abstain from governance.

"Ajing, this is an opportunity," he concluded.

Yue Rujing nodded, then shook her head.

She understood everything up to that point, but not the last statement.

"What opportunity?" she asked.

Jin Zijin smiled cryptically, "You will find out in time."

"Alright then!" Yue Rujing sighed, conceding, "Whatever you say, brother. Since you've thought it through, let's keep our distance from the affairs of the court."

Yue Rujing and Jin Zijin went to the back hall and spread out a lifelike blueprint.

The blueprint, when unfurled, was as large as half a wall.

"Brother," Yue Rujing pointed at a spot and said, "If you take your rightful place, the Xiao Family will definitely stand with you. They command a force of one hundred thousand, and with the twenty percent of the forces I can bring from Lingnan, we will command a force of three hundred thousand.

"The one hundred and fifty thousand troops belonging to the fifth prince are remnants of the third prince's faction; any intelligent person would not give them the chance to rise again. We'll set them aside for the moment, out of consideration.

"Additionally, the fifteen thousand from the Empress's natal Ducal Residence are definitely our enemies, and we won't consider the Emperor's two hundred thousand. The fifteen thousand troops guarded by the General of the East Sea... The general used not to be involved in the court's succession struggles, but earlier this year, his son married the legitimate eldest granddaughter of a minor branch of the Ducal Residence!"

Jin Zijin, with his hands behind his back, slowly walked in front of the blueprint, his sharp eyes never leaving the paper. After a moment, he chuckled, "So, you mean to say that the general is supporting the Empress? Three hundred thousand troops, exactly matching our own."

"Exactly," Yue Rujing nodded and said, "Who wins or loses will ultimately depend on the Emperor. Our Zhuzhao Country boasts of one million soldiers, but I've done the math and can only account for nine hundred and fifty thousand. The remaining fifty thousand, I once heard my father mention inadvertently, are also in the Emperor's hand, and they are all valiant warriors who only take orders from the Emperor himself. No one knows exactly where these fifty thousand are hidden."

Jin Zijin raised an eyebrow but then said with a smile, "So it seems he's not as useless as he appears on the surface, eh?"

Chapter 520: Cannot Acknowledge Kinship

The words "useless" dropping into Yue Rujing's ears scared him into a stumble.

He steadied his forehead and slurred, "Senior brother, we should only whisper such matters behind closed doors. You mustn't talk recklessly in public. No matter what, the Emperor is your birth father, and his attitude will largely determine whether you can succeed in the end.

"Ah, even if you dislike him, you must keep it to yourself. At most, curse him in secret with a few talismans, but never criticize him to his face."

"Hmm, I still have to ingratiate myself with him?" Jin Zijin said emotionlessly.

"Isn't that the way?" Yue Rujing sighed, "I know full well how stubborn you are, and I fear you cannot yield to compromise, which is why I originally advised you to take the path of the State Preceptor."

"Compromise?" Jin Zijin smiled faintly, "Ajing, you worry too much. All beings suffer; it's not that I cannot bear compromise."

"Mm, that's good." Yue Rujing wiped away the cold sweat.

"When do you plan to acknowledge your ancestors and return to your clan?"

"I haven’t decided yet."

Yue Rujing: "..."

"The time hasn’t come yet!" Jin Zijin added.

Yue Rujing was impatient, saying, "What are you waiting for? Just show that jade to the Emperor, and everything will be settled. I’ve seen how well he treats that substitute of yours; with you, the real deal, he will treat you even better. Maybe he’ll be so pleased that he’ll make you the Crown Prince right away, saving a lot of trouble."

"I’ve lost the Jade Pendant," Jin Zijin stated indifferently.

"What...?" Yue Rujing, tongue-tied in shock, stammered, "You... you’ve lost the Jade Pendant? The one left to you by Empress Xiao? The one that proves your identity?"

"Indeed." Compared to Yue Rujing’s unrest, Jin Zijin seemed utterly composed.

Yue Rujing felt tortured; it’s like the saying ’the Emperor isn’t in a hurry, but the eunuch is dying of anxiety’, and he felt like he was that anxious eunuch.

"You’ve lost it, you lost something so crucial... Senior brother, how could you not have lost yourself too?"

At Jin Zijin’s icy glare, Yue Rujing shut his mouth.

"When did you lose it? Where did you lose it? I’ll have someone search for it right away."

"No need," Jin Zijin said. "If he wishes to acknowledge me, no jade is needed. If he doesn’t wish to, what use is the jade?"

...Yue Rujing was completely baffled and only partially understanding.

Senior brother’s words seemed reasonable, but they made no sense when it came to acting on them.

Without the Jade Pendant to prove your identity, if you suddenly ran up to the Emperor claiming ’I am Xiao Qinqin’s true son, and the daughter they brought back is a fake,’ who would believe you?

You’d be chased out as a lunatic, and that would only be out of respect for the Dao Sect.

"So what’s your plan now? Without the jade, the Xiao Family won’t acknowledge you, and we’re short a hundred thousand troops."

"The Xiao Family has always known I am the true descendant," Jin Zijin revealed.

"The Xiao Family knows?" Yue Rujing found unexpected joy, but a moment later he furrowed his brows, somewhat displeased, "Senior brother, you’re treating me like an outsider, not telling me such an important matter."

In Yue Rujing’s view, he and his senior brother were as close as brothers, sharing everything without secrets.

But Jin Zijin replied, "I feared you couldn’t keep your mouth shut. Before the political situation becomes clear, I cannot reveal my identity."

"Well, that’s true." Once explained, Yue Rujing understood; whatever his senior brother said or did must be right.

"Since the Xiao Family acknowledges you, let’s have General Xiao escort you to the palace to recognize your relations with the Emperor?"

Jin Zijin looked at Yue Rujing and sighed, "I’ve said it’s not yet the time."