Farmhouse 671

Chapter 671: Can You Still Be My Sister-in-Law?

Qinyun, your mother passed away early, and you often play with Qianqing, so neither of you have the temperament of the other young ladies in Beijing. Your hearts are more free than theirs, yet your bodies are confined just like them.

One must learn to adapt to the environment, not expect the environment to adapt to them. Remember, being alive is more important than anything else.

The selection day is fast approaching, and they have already come of age. After the selection, they could be taken to the Prince Residence at any time. Even if I wanted to do something for them now, it's too late.

If in the future, if Jin Zijin wins and her heart remains like it is today, maybe I can strive for something on her behalf.

Xie Qinyun took a deep breath, patted Lin Qianqing's shoulder with a smile, and said, "I'm fine, I've come to terms with it. At worst, I'll just have to compete with a bunch of women, and perhaps it wouldn't be so bad to become a favored concubine, like Madam Lin or Concubine Du. Right now, the one who doesn't understand is Qianqing."

Having said that, she brushed off the melon seed shells from her sleeve and stood up to walk toward the window.

The streets of Jinxiu City are indeed different from Beijing; everywhere in Jinxiu City thrives with prosperity.

Gu Youyou also smiled at Lin Qianqing and said, "Drink freely today, worry tomorrow. Girl, it's not often you sneak out, come on, let's go enjoy the scenery."

They arrived early, and the guests of Miss Du were almost all present. According to local customs, the feast would start once the fireworks were set off.

Since the three of them were officials' daughters from Beijing, they wouldn't be dining downstairs with everyone else. Soon enough, a maid came to set up a separate table for them upstairs.

Miss Du came upstairs, held up her cup of wine for a toast, and apologized, "I've been busy all morning and neglected you, my apologies!"

Xie Qinyun replied, "Not at all, seeing you like this I can reassure my father. He's been worried you wouldn't be happy away from home."

"You've troubled Sir Xie," Miss Du said with her head lowered.

The few of them clinked cups and downed their drinks in one go.

Miss Du poured another one for Gu Youyou, "Great kindness requires no thanks, Doctor Gu, this one's for you alone."

Gu Youyou did not decline and drank a cup of tea in place of wine.

Xie Qinyun sighed, recalling her second brother who stood in a corner alone, desperately watching over Miss Du all morning and felt deeply anxious.

She ignored him, but how could she truly ignore him? Despite what he did to Miss Du, which was detestable, he was, after all, the brother who had raised her.

After some thought, she still asked the question she had in mind.

"Sister Du, my second brother knows he wronged you in the past and recently he's been very remorseful for what happened then. If, and I mean if, he realizes his mistake and apologizes to you, could you forgive him? Could you... become my sister-in-law again?"

This girl!

Everyone was stunned upon hearing her words.

Lin Qianqing seemed curious about Miss Du’s answer too, looking at her with the same anticipation as Xie Qinyun.

Gu Youyou gave a wry smile and continued to eat and drink leisurely.

Because she understood that Miss Du’s ability to stand here so calmly now meant that the man who had hurt her the most was already gone from her heart.

How could she possibly allow herself to fall for a man who no longer held a place in her heart?

"No," Miss Du said flatly, and poured herself another cup of wine.

"Do you... do you have to answer so bluntly? Couldn’t you... consider it for a moment?" Xie Qinyun asked, her eyes wide in shock.

Chapter 672: Why Can’t Turn Back

"Consider!" Miss Du gently pondered over these two words, set down the wine jug, slowly lifted her head, and then let out a bitter laugh before sighing, "It was after I had thought things through that I decided to leave the Jie Family."

"But you used to love the second brother so much..."

"Yes!" Miss Du bitter laughed again, downed the wine in one gulp, yet spoke in an incredibly calm manner.

"I loved him so much before, loved him in the most humble way, gave my all to love him, and what I got in return was his ruthless hurt, over and over again. Five years, more than eighteen hundred days and nights of pain, time and again, until I finally excised him from my heart. Five years of marriage didn’t earn me a shred of his pity, but only growing resentment. This shows that he and I were not fated, and even if we were, it was a tragic fate. Now, that tragic fate has also come to an end. I am doing very well on my own now, and have given them space as well; why would I go back to that? I’m not that bored."

Xie Qinyun felt it wasn't like that and hurriedly said, "But there's been a misunderstanding between you two. I heard about it, it was that bitch, Concubine Du, who took the tiger embroidery you made and deceived my second brother. If he had known earlier that it was your work, he certainly wouldn't have..."

Xie Qinyun wanted to say more but was interrupted by Miss Du.

"No, he would!"

"What?" Xie Qinyun looked at Miss Du in confusion.

Miss Du said, "Since you've brought up the matter of the little tiger, I might as well tell you about what happened back then."

Miss Du sat down, her thoughts drifting back to many years ago, to the year when Du Wanqing lost her concubine mother, and within less than a month, Jie Zhonglin's sister Xie Qinyun was born, and at the same time, he lost his own mother.

Madam Du took him into the Du Residence to look after him, and he kept himself shut away in his room all day, unwilling to come out. It was Miss Du's tiger sachet that gave him the courage to walk out of that room.

Likewise, having lost his mother, he saw Du Wanqing who also had a tiger sachet, and he thought that the little girl who had handed him the sachet that day was Du Wanqing.

They both had lost their mothers, so they played together in the Du Residence.

Miss Du said, "What you saw was because of the sachet, but what I saw was not so simple. They both lost their mothers in that year, and they were both grieving. His kindness to her was genuine, and the hurt he's caused me over the years was real, too. Whether his affection was for me who gave him the sachet, or for Wanqing who had also lost her mother like him, the life that the three of us have lived together all these years was real.

That’s why they belong together, and I was the one who was superfluous. So much painful memory, how could it be untangled by simply calling it a misunderstanding? So, Ayun, it’s better you don’t ask anymore. Right now... we’re all doing quite well."

Xie Qinyun realized that what Miss Du was saying made a lot of sense, but seeing her second brother’s hopeless, painful eyes, she still couldn’t bear it.

"Really... Don’t you think about it again?"

"Miss Xie, Miss Lin, Doctor Gu, please enjoy your meal and drink well. There are many guests today, and it’s not convenient for me to stay long. Please, go ahead."

Miss Du no longer wanted to continue the topic.

Lin Qianqing pulled Xie Qinyun to sit down and whispered, "Don’t speak anymore. She finally made it out. If your second brother is suffering, it’s his own doing. People always have to pay for their mistakes."

Gu Youyou said with a light smile, "It’s rare for our Qianqing to say something so philosophical."

Lin Qianqing replied, "Having been with cousin for a long time, I’m influenced by what I hear and see, and I’ve come to think about some things more clearly than before."

Chapter 673: A Chance Encounter with the Sneaky Yue Rujing

Xie Qinyun heaved a heavy sigh and said, "Oh well, it serves my second brother right, his fate... is so bitter!" With that, she covered her face with her handkerchief and started to cry melodramatically.

Lin Qianqing laughed heartily and said, "Do you have to be so dramatic, like you’re at a funeral or something?"

Discarding the handkerchief, Xie Qinyun grabbed Lin Qianqing’s sleeve and wiped it across her face, saying, "Right, just like a funeral, and now I’m crying into your sleeve, I’ll ruin your sleeve and see how you face people when you go out..."

After all, they were young girls, and soon enough, she had forgotten about her troubled second brother.

In the midst of their playful scuffle, they finished their meal.

After wiping her mouth and rinsing her mouth, Gu Youyou stood again by the window.

The location of Miss Du’s residence was really good, especially this window, which offered a wide view.

But... Gu Youyou thought she saw a familiar figure acting all sneaky.

"Huh? It’s Yue Rujing!" she muttered to herself softly.

"What? Cousin, what did you say?" Lin Qianqing, who was playing with Xie Qinyun, thought she heard Gu Youyou mumbling something but didn’t catch it clearly.

Turning her face with a smile, Gu Youyou said, "It’s nothing, it’s lively outside. You haven’t eaten your fill yet, keep eating, keep drinking, today there’s no mother watching over you, eat lying down, eat sleeping, all sorts of poses, just eat however you like."

With that, Gu Youyou walked from the window toward the door, adding, "I’m going to step out for a moment; you do as you please!"

In her relaxed state, Lin Qianqing was so happy she didn’t notice anything unusual about Gu Youyou.

...

Gu Youyou left the T-shaped room on the second floor and headed straight downstairs.

She crossed the street beside the Manxiu Building and saw Yue Rujing in front of a fabric store.

This rare time, he wasn’t wearing his usual White Moon Robe with the crane motif but a dark green outfit instead.

No matter what he wore, he couldn’t hide his charm, which attracted women like bees to honey; even buying fabric, he made the shop girl blush a deep red.

"Young Master, this is the finest fabric in our store, and I think this plain white color suits your temperament very well."

Yue Rujing smiled and said, "Your eye for detail isn’t bad, girl; how could you tell that this white fabric suits me?"

"Young Master, you..." The girl acted coyly, blushing and lowering her head shyly, said, "You glow with a brightness like the moon, young master. In a suit of white, you’d resemble the Moon Celestial even more. Moonlight pouring down, a ground full of silver frost, none shines as brightly as you."

Gu Youyou thought to herself: Someone needs to deal with Yue Rujing, this enchanting troublemaker; his mere presence is bewitching this shop girl, who will likely suffer from lovesickness for a long time.

She was about to step into the shop when she heard Yue Rujing’s voice again, causing her to reluctantly draw back her advancing foot.

"You sure have a way with words, girl; you’ve touched my heart. Your words have deeply moved me. However, lately there’s been an issue weighing on my mind, preventing me from peace, so I can’t stay and chat with you. Just wrap this fabric up for me."

"Oh, okay!" The girl paused, visibly hesitant and bashful. She slowly wrapped the fabric, her movements sluggish as if she was planning to wrap it the whole day.

"Young Master, could you share with Wanwan what’s troubling you?"

Yue Rujing sighed, effortlessly flicked open his folding fan and waved it twice, then said, "My mother has a cousin who vanished on her wedding night more than ten years ago. Her family searched everywhere

but couldn’t find her, and after two years, they gave up the search. But recently, my mother hasn’t been feeling well and suddenly remembered her cousin, whom she was quite close with, so she asked me to make some inquiries."

Chapter 674: Another Misfortune Befalls the Young Girl

Hey! It’s been over ten years now, I never found her before, and how could I find her now, right? I originally agreed to help her just to ease her mind, but unexpectedly, when I started searching, I actually found some clues.

I searched from Lingnan all the way to the vicinity of Beijing. Recently, I heard that my elder cousin’s mother is in Jinxiu City, but I’ve been in Jinxiu City for almost half a month now and I can’t find her again.

What a mess this has turned into. I’ve even had someone send a letter to my mother, saying her cousin has been found. My mother has been eagerly awaiting her cousin’s return, and now I can’t produce the person. What should I do now?"

Wanwan also frowned, looking even more anxious than Yue Rujing.

After hesitating for a long time, she asked, "Young Master, Wanwan is a local of Jinxiu City. Why don’t you tell me what your elder cousin’s mother looks like? How old is she, and does she have any distinguishing features? Maybe Wanwan can help you find her?"

"Really?" Yue Rujing excitedly grasped the young lady’s hand, and his sudden action scared her so much that she was almost suffocated.

Her heart pounding wildly, she looked at the hand now atop her own, excited enough that her heart nearly leaped out of her throat.

The young lady felt as if love blossoms were opening, and she was about to fall in love.

Gazing at Yue Rujing, she said, "Young Master, Wanwan will definitely find your elder cousin’s mother for you."

Oh, it’s not your elder cousin’s mother anymore, it’s "elder cousin’s mother."

Gu Youyou crossed her arms, watching Yue Rujing deceive the young lady, wondering what he was up to. Elder cousin's mother? She did not remember Yue Rujing losing any elder cousin's mother. And with Madam Yue ill, could Yue Rujing still be here flirting with the young lady?

Clearly, he was making it up.

But why was he so nervously running from Beijing to Jinxiu City to make things up?

Gu Youyou suddenly remembered what Jin Zijin had said the other night and hurriedly hid to one side.

That's right, they found a "medicine person" in Jinxiu City.

Yue Rujing's so-called elder cousin's mother was probably the "medicine person" mentioned by Jin Zijin in Jinxiu City.

Yue Rujing continued to beguile the young lady, locking eyes with her, his voice as soft as silk, "She should be in her thirties by now and is rumored to be unmarried. She lives a reclusive life, scarcely speaking with anyone. Wanwan, my elder cousin's mother is very low-profile; I'm afraid you might not recognize her."

But Wanwan was startled and muttered softly, "A woman in her thirties who is still unmarried and leads a reclusive life... I do know such a person, but I don't know if she's your elder cousin's mother."

"Wanwan knows?" Yue Rujing was overjoyed, gripping the young lady's hand even tighter.

Wanwan felt pain, but it was a pain filled with happiness, a pain she was willing to endure.

Seeing the man she loved so excited, what was a little pain?

"Yes, I know!" she nodded firmly.

"Can you take me to her right now?" Yue Rujing asked urgently.

Who could refuse those urgent, affectionate eyes? Her heart melted halfway, and hurriedly, she put down the fabric, locked up the shop, and took him to find the ’elder cousin’s mother’!

Gu Youyou quickly stepped aside to the front of a Bun Shop, pretending to buy buns.

After they had walked far away, she followed them along the street.

But unexpectedly, they moved so fast. After just turning down one street, Yue Rujing and the cloth-selling young lady had disappeared.

They ran off, but Gu Youyou didn’t mind too much and turned to walk back.

Just then, someone darted out quickly, grabbed Gu Youyou, and dragged her into the nearest alley.

Chapter 675: The Person on the Roof of the Car is Me

Yue Rujing pressed her against the corner and asked in a low voice, "Why did you come here?"

Gu Youyou exclaimed in astonishment, "You went to find a herbalist?"

Yue Rujing raised his eyebrows and asked, "How do you know?" He immediately added, "Did your senior fellow disciple tell you?"

Gu Youyou replied, "Zijin said you found a herbalist in Jinxiu City. What a coincidence, you are in Jinxiu City today, so I thought you were looking for a herbalist."

Yue Rujing nodded and said, "Indeed, I am looking for a herbalist, and you can’t follow me."

Gu Youyou: "..."

"You really are troublesome. Can’t you take care of yourself? Alright, alright, let’s go together."

"No!" Gu Youyou earnestly said, "No, I won’t go. I came to find you because I wanted to ask about what happened on the road this morning. Our carriage driver has changed, and there was an additional person on the roof. Who was it? Since you also happened to be in Jinxiu City today, you must know about this morning’s incident, right?"

Yue Rujing let out a sigh of relief, reverted to his carefree manner, and said with a laugh, "Yes, I know. The person on the roof was me."

Gu Youyou: "..."

"Why are you overthinking things? I, the Princely Heir, will ensure your safety."

Gu Youyou angrily said, "How can I not think about it? You scared... my cousin! What exactly happened?"

Yue Rujing’s expression darkened, and he said, "They were just a few insignificant scoundrels; it’s not worth mentioning. You better go back quickly. I must be on my way, too. I’ve finally deceived Wanwan into guiding me, and I cannot let it fall through because of you."

Gu Youyou looked down on him, scornfully saying, "Sooner or later, you will fall into a woman’s hands."

...

Miss Wanwan led Yue Rujing to a secluded courtyard in the city. The yard was squarely shaped, with two tile-roofed houses, a stone table, a vegetable plot, and a peach tree. In the middle of the courtyard, a middle-aged woman was bending over, drawing water from a well.

Although this courtyard seemed no different from the others in Jinxiu City, once inside, one would feel a chilly yin energy wafting through.

The orientation of this house, along with the willows and scholar trees planted in a circle around it, were deliberately arranged to create a yin-gathering formation, making the courtyard exceedingly chilly.

Just from the layout, Yue Rujing knew... this woman... must be the herbalist fostered here by Xuanzong.

"Young Master, do you think it’s her?" Wanwan asked.

Yue Rujing nodded happily, "Yes, it’s her. Miss Wanwan, I truly thank you. Your kindness will never be forgotten."

Wanwan bashfully lowered her head, looking towards the woman and said, "Sister Lu, Wanwan has come to see you."

The woman pulled up the bucket of water, looked woodenly towards Wanwan, then shifted her gaze to Yue Rujing. After a moment, she lowered her head again.

She poured most of the bucket into a large water jar beside her, before once again dropping the bucket into the well.

Wanwan turned to Yue Rujing with a smile, "Please don’t mind her, Sister Lu is always like this; but she is really a good person."

Yue Rujing nodded slightly and said, "My maternal aunt has been missing for over a decade; she must have endured countless hardships. It’s likely she has even forgotten her own family, otherwise, she wouldn’t be staying here alone, instead of returning home."

Wanwan seemed to have never considered these issues, but seeing Sister Lu’s dazed and dull demeanor, she fully agreed with Yue Rujing’s words, merely saying, "Your aunt is truly pitiable!"

Wanwan stepped forward to help Lu Chengjun pull up another bucket of water, pouring it into the water jar.

Once the water jar was full, she stopped drawing water, and with half a bucket, she began to water the vegetable plot in the courtyard.

Chapter 676: Yu Jizi

She busied herself with her own tasks, seemingly oblivious to the two new arrivals in the courtyard.

Wanwan followed her and snatched away her gourd ladle, saying, "Miss La, your family is here looking for you; look, that gentleman is your relative."

La Chengjun remained indifferent and snatched back the gourd ladle from Wanwan's hand to continue watering the plants.

Seeing no other option, Wanwan returned and sighed, helplessly saying, "Young Master, what shall we do now?"

Yue Rujing replied, "It seems that Auntie is not going to be easy to deal with right now. Let's go back for now, I will have to give this some thought."

Wanwan nodded and said with a sigh, "Alright then. It just means more worries for the Young Master."

"No matter, no matter, it's good that we've found her."

...

Inside the Sanqing Temple, the old Madam Lin of the Lin Family was seated on meditation cushions brought by the serving boys with her second daughter Lin Zixin and young master Lin Shenxing, listening to the ceremony.

Once the ceremony concluded, many people in the hall, unable to bear the discomfort of sitting on their knees for so long, began to stretch their bodies.

This was the Lin family's first time attending, and they felt the strain particularly acutely.

The old Madam Lin looked at the two youngsters with pity and said, "Go outside and move around a bit; we have another session coming up."

Lin Zixin and Lin Shenxing, as if pardoned, hurried outside with numb legs and feet.

They had already wanted to go outside but did not dare to.

Lusun saw the young lady and the young master come out and quickly made her way into the hall to the old lady's side. Seeing the old lady earnestly massaging her own legs, Lusun kneeled by her side, busily thumping her legs and rubbing her shoulders.

"Old Madam, why do you bother with this? You don't even understand the ceremony, and look how it has worn you out," Lusun lamented.

The old lady was easy-going, and she raised the maids around her to be quite bold, which was why Lusun dared to speak to her in such a manner.

The old lady was not angered but simply smiled and said, "While my old bones can still move, it's nice to come see the Sanqing Ceremony that guards our Zhuzhao Country with favorable weather. Next time I meet with the other old Madams, I'll be able to join in the conversation, won't I?"

Glancing around, she saw that there were still quite a few devotees attending the ceremony, most accompanied by their daughters-in-law and granddaughters.

"Ah, but you don't believe in any of this," Lusun sighed.

The old lady smacked her on the head with a swift crack and whispered sternly, "You girl, you've become too spoiled for your own good. Do you realize where you are and still dare to speak such nonsense?"

Lusun, holding her head, looked around and quickly shrank her neck, saying, "I understand, my loud mouth deserves to be punished." As she said this, she slapped herself on the mouth twice.

Pleased, the old lady laughed and then, without changing her expression, gently said to Lusun, "Go check on the young lady and the young master; don’t let them wander too far."

Lusun responded with a "Yes" and rose to walk outside.

Yu Jizi, stroking his long beard with a faint smile, approached the old Madam Lin and sat down on a cushion opposite her, saying softly, "It seems that this is the old Madam’s first time attending the ceremony; I see your face is unfamiliar."

Hearing the words "National Master," the old Madam Lin became cautious and hastily got up to pay respects, saying, "So it is the National Master, please forgive my ignorance for not recognizing you."

Yu Jizi laughed heartily and said, "The old Madam is too formal; I am just a serving boy under the statues of the Sanqing, unworthy of such respect. If you wish to pay respect, pay respect to the statues of the Sanqing."

Meanwhile, Lusun, looking from a distance at the person speaking with the old Madam in the great hall, felt very uneasy and tugged at a serving boy, asking, "Hey, little brother, who is that old man in black with white hair?"

Chapter 677: Jin Zijin Helps

The Daoist boy looked at Lusun with the eyes of someone watching a fool and said, "You come to Sanqing Temple to listen to sermons and you don’t recognize our master?"

"Your master?"

The Daoist boy nodded and said, "Yes, that is our master, the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country."

"Ah...?" Lusun was taken aback because the old lady she served didn’t believe in ghosts and spirits, never worshiped Sanqing nor listened to sermons, and as maids who served her closely, they didn’t believe either, so naturally, she wouldn’t recognize the State Preceptor Yu Jizi.

She thought to herself: The Old Madam of our house is really something, attending her first sermon and already chatting with the legendary State Preceptor.

She shook her head and hurriedly turned to look for the young master and young mistress.

The young master had just turned fourteen, and the second young mistress was only ten, both at the age where they loved to play. It would be troublesome if they got lost.

After searching for a while, Lusun found the ten-year-old second young mistress Lin Zixin, but had no idea where Lin Shenxing had gone.

She was greatly alarmed and said, "Second young mistress, where is the young master?"

The second young mistress was standing by a large pond and said, "Brother said he was going to find a boat to pick the biggest lotus pod in this pond for me, and told me to wait for him here."

Lusun rolled her eyes, knowing without her saying that the young master had used this excuse to leave the second young mistress here and had run off to play somewhere else.

Really now, the second young mistress is already ten years old, why can’t she be a bit more wary?

"Second young mistress, don’t wait here any longer. Why don’t you come and help me look for the young master?"

"Oh, okay!" said Lin Zixin happily.

After sending Lin Zixin off, Lin Shenxing ran off on his own.

He glanced at the wall over a person’s height and thought, if he could climb over this wall, he should be able to get out.

Madam Lin had confined him for several days, and he hadn’t had the chance to greet his colleagues. He had to take advantage of this rare opportunity today to visit Yinchun Tower.

But their family being of civil officials, other than his eldest sister, it seemed no one else was good at climbing walls.

Lin Shenxing tried several times and failed, which made him incredibly discouraged.

"I can’t even climb over it? Lin Qianqing can climb over a wall over a person high, and I can’t make it?" he huffed angrily with his hands on his hips.

But he was completely unaware that someone had appeared behind him.

"Do you need help?" the person behind him asked with a faint smile.

Lin Shenxing turned sharply and saw a man in white, pure as snow, standing behind him, looking at him with a smile that wasn’t quite a smile.

"You... you are?" Lin Shenxing startled, said, "You are Jin Zijin?"

"It is I," Jin Zijin said with a light smile, "The young master of the Lin Family has a good memory."

It seems he had only seen him once, on the day of the second day of the second month, when they offered sacrifices to the Dragon King and Dragon Mother.

Lin Shenxing glanced at the wall over one person’s height again and said, "You really want to help me get out?"

Jin Zijin said, "If you want to get out and are not afraid of your grandmother worrying, I will naturally help you."

"Why?" Lin Shenxing looked at him warily.

Jin Zijin said, "There’s no reason. Helping someone over this wall is but a trivial matter to me."

"Then..." After hearing Jin Zijin’s words, he still had some concerns and cautiously said, "Could you do me another favor and inform my grandmother?"

Jin Zijin shook his head calmly.

"You can’t?" Lin Shenxing asked in surprise.

Jin Zijin said, "Your grandmother is also here at the Sanqing Temple for the first time. She’s old and can’t handle a fright. You are the only male descendant of the Lin Family! Besides, it seems she is already in some trouble."

"My grandmother is in trouble?" Hearing this, Lin Shenxing became agitated.

Chapter 678: Is He Fully Aware of the Affairs of the Lin Family?

Jin Zijin spoke mildly, "Why don’t you go to the hall and see for yourself?"

Lin Shenxing clenched his fist, feeling somewhat reluctant as he made his way to the grand hall.

In the grand hall, the Lin Family’s old lady couldn’t understand how this esteemed Yu Jizi could grab her attention and talk incessantly.

"I’ve heard that the Lin Family’s old lady always teaches the younger generation in a way that stands out from the rest. Miss Lin is unbound by minor formalities and possesses a free-spirited nature, much like your esteemed self in your younger days."

"The National Master is joking. My eldest girl is taught by her mother, resembling her mother."

Yu Jizi did not argue, and instead, he laughed and brought up Lin Shenxing.

"Young Master Lin, at such a young age, is well-versed in the Four Books and Five Classics, full of poetic discourse. This year is his first time taking the imperial examination, right? The title of Jieyuan will surely fall into the Lin Family with him, for he truly has his father's talents."

"The National Master flatters him, Shenxing is far behind his father; his father had achieved Jieyuan at the age of twelve. But this child Shenxing, who spends all day in idle pursuits, would do well just to pass as a scholar, let alone hope for him to achieve Jieyuan."

Yu Jizi smiled and continued, "What is most astonishing is your family's young lady relative. Ever since she was a child, she's been weak and sickly, yet she managed to persevere. The people of Lotus Village all call her a once-in-a-millennium prodigy. Despite having been nursed for decades due to her frail health, she became a divine doctor within a year of coming out. If she had been born a boy, I'm afraid even Mr. Lin himself could not compare."

The Lin Family's old lady's face grew darker and darker, feeling certain that the State Preceptor was enticing her to do something and definitively had no good intentions.

She bent her knees slightly in a bow, "I am old and unwell today, I'm afraid I won't be able to stay for the rest of the ceremony. National Master, I take my leave."

Yu Jizi stroked his long white beard and with a light smile said, "Then I will not keep you, old madam."

He had said all he needed to hint at. This old lady was smarter than most, he thought, she must have taken it in.

When the Lin Family's old lady emerged from the hall, she happened to bump into Lin Shenxing who was hurrying into the hall, nearly knocking her to the ground.

"Ouch, who bumped into this old woman?"

Lin Shenxing quickly steadied her by the arm, saying, "Grandmother, it's me."

Seeing that she was unharmed, he hurriedly asked, "Are you alright?"

His question was odd, and the old lady of the Lin Family's face darkened as she answered, "I'm fine, let's go back to the residence and talk."

"Return to the residence?" Lin Shenxing looked at those settling down for the ceremony and inquired, "Isn't there another session?"

The Lin Family's old lady replied, "We won't be staying; I'm unwell and must get home quickly."

Hearing her mention feeling unwell, Lin Shenxing grew cautious.

Although he felt that something was off during today's visit to the Sanqing Temple, he did not question further and escorted the Lin Family's old lady outside.

Later, they bumped into Lusun and Lin Zixin heading towards the grand hall, and the family decided to descend the mountain together directly.

Throughout the journey, the Lin Family's old lady was restless and uneasy.

The State Preceptor's idle chatter with an old lady like her was bound to be no simple matter. His words, although seemingly mere praise for the Lin Family's younger members, every sentence carried a deeper meaning.

Upon closer thought, right, yet not right.

Not right...

She suddenly realized the inconsistency—why would a State Preceptor, known for his pure and simple desires, know so much about the Lin Residence?

If he hadn’t intentionally learned about the Lin Residence, how could he know so much?

The Lin Family’s old lady broke out in a cold sweat and gripped her handkerchief tightly.

The atmosphere inside the carriage was off, and Lin Shenxing noticed.

He glanced at Lin Zixin, who was gleefully enjoying the passing scenery from beside the window, then turned his head to look at the Lin Family’s old lady.

Chapter 679: Suspecting Gu Youyou

"Grandmother, has something happened?" he asked in a low voice.

The Lin Family matriarch looked at her eldest grandson, a fourteen-year-old boy. Although he was not quite comparable to her own son and daughter back in the day, he was much more composed than the average fourteen-year-old boy.

"Shenxing, are you confident about this year’s Imperial Examination?"

This matter, she had to discuss with her son, Lin Xingyi. Lin Shenxing was still too young, and with the importance of this year’s Imperial Examination, it was best not to burden him with worries, lest it affect his performance.

"Grandmother, why do you suddenly ask about the Imperial Examination?" Lin Shenxing could clearly see that something was amiss with his grandmother.

The old Madam Lin sighed, "I just encountered the Chen Family’s Old Madam at Sanqing Temple, who mentioned this year’s Imperial Examination. Her grandson is also participating in it this year. Shenxing, do you think you could become the Jieyuan (top scholar)?"

As Lin Xingyi’s only son, all eyes from within the court were on him, to see if the son could match his father’s feat of becoming Jieyuan on his first Imperial Examination.

Due to such immense pressure, Lin Shenxing was not allowed to participate in the previous Imperial Examinations. Only now at fourteen was he entering his first Imperial Examination.

Lin Shenxing bowed his head and said in a low voice, "Grandmother, Beijing is not like Qingshui Town. The Imperial Examination in Beijing is also not comparable to the local examinations." Therefore, he had no certainty.

The old Madam Lin intended to change the subject and was not truly worried about his examination, letting out just a light sigh before smiling again.

"Do your best, you must not feel too much pressure. If you don't become Jieyuan, becoming a successful candidate in the provincial examinations is also good enough."

Lin Shenxing breathed a sigh of relief and responded with a smile, acknowledging the statement.

...

The journey from Jinxiu City back to Beijing was peaceful.

Yue Rujing was right, as they left Manxiu Building they saw the Lin Family's coachman.

Lin Qianqing immediately bombarded him with questions, but it was as if the coachman had a piece missing from his mind; he knew nothing.

It was unclear whether he truly knew nothing or if he was pretending to be ignorant.

In any case, it was good that no one was harmed.

Gu Youyou admonished Lin Qianqing to not breathe a word about the danger they had encountered en route today, otherwise, she could look forward to being grounded until her wedding day.

Lin Qianqing nodded repeatedly in agreement.

Of course, seeing this, Xiang Chun, who had no say in the matter, dared not speak even more so. Not even to the old Madam.

Gu Youyou's carriage followed Jie Qinyun and Jie Zhonglin's carriages. When they reached the outskirts of Beijing, they saw the grandmother's carriage, who had returned from Sanqing Temple, already waiting for them.

She nudged Lin Qianqing and said, "There, quickly go to the carriage across the way; I'll enter the city first, you follow later."

Lin Qianqing replied and quickly donned her cloak before boarding the old Madam Lin's carriage.

Gu Youyou opened the window, waved to the other side, and then had her coachman drive into the city.

She needed to drop Abao off at Jisheng Hall first, wait for Yue Rujing to return to pick her up, and then head back to the Lin Residence.

The old Madam Lin's carriage was quite large, and even with four people inside, it did not feel cramped.

Seeing Lin Qianqing return, she asked, "Your cousin..." She originally wanted to inquire whether her cousin had exhibited anything unusual, but feeling that might not be appropriate, she swallowed the rest of her sentence and changed it to, "How is your cousin's health today?"

Lin Qianqing smiled and said, "The weather is not cold anymore, and cousin is doing very well."

"That's good to hear!" the old Madam Lin mused thoughtfully.

Gu Youyou had been at the Lin Residence for several months. She was personally brought back by Butler Qiu, and since she resembled her own daughter somewhat, the old Madam had never doubted her authenticity.

However, the words Yu Jizi reminded her of at the Sanqing Temple had planted a seed of doubt in her mind.

Chapter 680: Incident Exposed

Yu Jizi was right. According to her knowledge, Gu Youyou had contracted a strange illness as a child, after which she was confined at home for treatment. For a family like the Gu Family, it was already good enough that they fed her and didn't let her starve; how could they possibly afford to hire a tutor to teach her to read and practice medicine?

Her eyes darkened as she thought to herself, "Could it be that Xingyi hired a tutor behind his back?"

At the thought of this possibility, she breathed a sigh of relief.

She would wait until they were back home and ask Lin Xingyi to be sure.

If there was nothing out of the ordinary, then so be it. But if there was something off about Gu Youyou, she would not let her get away with it.

...

Gu Youyou returned to the Lin Family almost simultaneously with the carriage of the old Madam Lin.

Fortunately, she was the one who arrived later. Otherwise, she would have seen her aunt standing at the gate with a gloomy face.

Upon seeing Gu Youyou, the servant at the gate hurried forward and said, "Miss Gu, the Madam said that if you returned, please go quickly to the flower hall."

Gu Youyou hummed in acknowledgment, "Understood."

She had anticipated a scolding was inevitable.

Everyone was seated in the flower hall; her aunt, grandmother, eldest cousin, second cousin, and her cousin.

Indeed, she had gathered all the people who had left the house today except for her uncle.

No matter, the sky would not fall as long as the tall one stands firm, and with her grandmother as the mastermind, she would just sit and listen to the scolding.

"Grandmother, mother, cousin has also come back," Lin Qianqing said as she stood up and pulled Gu Youyou to sit next to her.

Madam Lin glanced coldly at Gu Youyou and said, "Good, now tell me honestly, what exactly happened today?"

Lin Qianqing and the others had just arrived and were somewhat baffled by Madam Lin’s question.

Madam Lin huffed, "The people I sent to Jinxiu City were all killed. I have to give their families an explanation. Are you still planning to keep quiet?"

Her gaze stayed fixed on Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing.

Her words clearly shocked everyone present.

Old Madam Lin looked at Lin Qianqing and Gu Youyou, asking, "Did something happen to you two on the road?"

Great, a confession without beating.

They had agreed that if Madam Lin asked whether Lin Qianqing visited Jinxiu City, they would deny it vehemently.

Of course, the situation now was obviously different from what they had expected, and there was no need to hide it any longer.

Slamming her fist on the table, Madam Lin shouted angrily, "Qianqing, did you really go to Jinxiu City?"

With her head lowered, Lin Qianqing nodded slightly.

"Mother, I was wrong."

"Wrong?" Madam Lin was evidently furious and stood up with trembling legs.

"You know you were wrong, do you realize how dangerous it was today? The group of ten people I sent all died on the road from Beijing to Jinxiu City. Tell me, what exactly happened on the road?"

Old Madam Lin's face grew stern with worry as she looked in their direction. Gu Youyou glanced over, realizing that even her grandmother would be of no use in this situation. It seemed that the incidents on the road could not be concealed and must be disclosed.

At that moment, someone was thrown into the flower hall with a thud, the swollen-cheeked Xiang Chun.

Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing were both greatly shocked.

Xiang Chun had returned with Gu Youyou; how could she have been beaten in such a short amount of time?

Madam Lin stared at Xiang Chun angrily and demanded, "You tell us, what happened on the road?"

Xiang Chun, already dazed from the beating, still looked towards Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing. She had no intention of speaking if they did not nod in agreement. Even under threat of death, she would not utter a word.

Gu Youyou nodded slightly at her, signaling that she could speak.

Kneeling on the ground, Xiang Chun recounted everything that had happened on the road in great detail.

Naturally, as something that had confused the parties involved, Old Madam Lin and Madam Lin also failed to comprehend the story.