Farmhouse 691

Chapter 691: Life or Integrity?

That was the box where Gu Youyou kept her Western medical supplies, all of them crafted by artisans in Lingnan and after she arrived in Beijing; they were unique in this world.

Since it was a knife wound, they would presumably be needed.

She quickly went inside to fetch her commonly used medicine box and hastened out.

The doorkeeper had already prepared a carriage for her, but Gu Youyou, with a stern face, said lightly, "Saving lives is a race against time. How long will it take by carriage? I'll ride a horse instead."

With those words, she seized the horse that the Jie Residence's house servant had ridden to bring the news, mounted it, and galloped away, leaving everyone staring in amazement.

"Your family's young Miss can ride a horse?"

"I... I had no idea?"

"Since she has ridden off, just send the carriage back."

"Wait, I'll need it," Lin Qianqing rushed out in a flurry, the young Miss from the Du Family with her.

Lin Qianqing said, "I know you're worried, let's go together."

The young Miss from the Du Family nodded.

Although the Jie Family had no relation to her now, if Concubine Du were driven out of the Jie Residence, in the end, she was still of the Du Family, and she had to give her deceased parents an explanation.

Gu Youyou reached the Jie Residence with utmost speed, where a crowd of servants were already waiting at the door, expecting her to save a life.

Gu Youyou frowned and asked, "What are you all blocking the doorway for? Is your Second Young Master dead or not?"

Her words left the crowd blocking the door dumbfounded.

Doctor Gu was indeed fierce!

They quickly led Gu Youyou inside while spouting, "The Second Young Master is still alive, but his injury is serious, there's blood everywhere, and a finger was brutally severed."

"Oh? A finger was severed?" Gu Youyou was somewhat surprised.

In the course of the conversation, they had arrived at Second Young Master Jie's room.

The room was in disarray, blood everywhere; it truly looked like a recent battlefield.

"Doctor Gu, you're here?" Xie Qinyun greeted her with delight and urgently said, "Please check on my second brother quickly."

Gu Youyou nodded at her, put down the medicine box, and busied herself with examining Second Young Master Jie's wounds.

He had multiple stab wounds all over his body, his appearance disheveled. It seemed the wound was so painful and the blood loss so extensive that his face had turned pale from the agony, covered in sweat.

Seeing this worthless man in such a state, Gu Youyou felt an inexplicable urge to applaud and felt quite relieved.

Of course, as a doctor with professional ethics, these were merely fleeting thoughts, and her demeanor remained very serious and attentive.

She glanced at the severed finger on the table, then at the base of Second Young Master Jie’s finger that he was pressing down on, and let out a light sigh of relief.

The cut was clean, and the angle and pressure used to stem the bleeding were precise. As the finger had only been separated a short while ago, the chances of reattachment were still very high.

"First, take off your clothes, so I can treat the wounds on your body," she said.

Although the wounds on his body weren’t particularly deep, there were many, and there had been no proper effort to stop the bleeding. If they were not treated soon, he would likely faint from excessive blood loss.

"You are a female doctor, is that alright?" Even in severe pain, Second Young Master Jie’s mind was still lucid.

Gu Youyou replied impatiently, "Choose between your life and your modesty. It’s your call!"

Second Young Master Jie: "..."

Xie Qinyun interrupted, "Good grief, what time do you think it is to still be concerned about shame? Even Miss Gu, a young lady, hasn’t complained, so why your reluctance to undress? Shall I help?"

These shameless words of Xie Qinyun gave Second Young Master Jie quite a shock, "As an unmarried lady, how can you speak so improperly?"

Xie Qinyun shot back directly: "I had no mother to teach me, so this is how I am."

Chapter 692: Return to the Old Place

Having said that, he went straight to undress him.

Master Jie felt both anger and regret, his father had entrusted his sister to his care, yet he had spent all these years focused on Concubine Du. It was all because he had been too foolish to devote more care to his sister, which led to her becoming what she was now.

If only he had married a wife capable of managing a household, his sister would not have turned out to be so ill-mannered.

No, that wasn't right, he did have a good wife, he just blamed himself for being blind and not cherishing her properly.

The medicine box Gu Youyou brought had hemostatic emergency medicine, sterilized gauze, and everything else needed.

By the time Lin Qianqing and Miss Du arrived with their toolkit, she had already dressed all of Jie Zhonglin's wounds, except for his hand.

The water and clean room that had just been ordered to be prepared by the servants were ready.

Gu Youyou, carrying Master Jie's severed finger, led him into a room that had been prepared separately.

This room was a small chamber for storing silks and satins, always kept very clean. Once the door was closed, the glazed tiles on the ceiling let through a bright light, shining right on the operating table she had had prepared.

Master Jie truly lived up to his status as a Grade-One Minister of the Imperial Court, to have been awarded pieces of glazed tile.

The room was lit with the brightest candles, making it exceptionally well-lit.

Gu Youyou sat across from Master Jie's son and said, "The meridians in your finger are very fine, reattaching it will be very difficult, and it might take a long time. During the process, you must not move! If you need to relieve yourself, do so quickly. If there are no issues, then we can begin."

Master Jie looked at her with surprise and asked, "Can a severed finger really be reattached?"

Gu Youyou replied, "I can't guarantee it, I can only tell you that, barring accidents, there's a good chance of survival. I'm the only one in this world daring to reattach a finger under these conditions, so whether you want to proceed is up to you."

Master Jie paused for a moment, then clenched his teeth and said, "Reattach it, thank you Doctor Gu."

Gu Youyou nodded and said, "Place your hand properly, we're starting now."

She indeed was not one hundred percent certain, she could only first attach it and see, watching closely at all times.

There were many things that were lacking here, so she had to rely on her own skills to do this.

The bone-setting process was long and would be very painful. She had initially planned to have anesthetic, but Gu Youyou decided not to use it, preferring to let this scum man feel the full pain.

The man across from her furrowed his brows tightly, beads of sweat on his forehead falling in large drops, but he didn't make a sound.

After waiting outside for a while and seeing that Gu Youyou and the others had not come out, Miss Du said to Xie Qinyun, "I want to go see Du Wanqing."

Xie Qinyun's cold eyebrows hardened, and she said unhappily, "Why would you want to see her? She dared to try to kill Brother, let father deal with her when he comes back."

However, Miss Du said, "She was driven out of the Jie Family, which makes her a person of the Du Family. Even if she's dead, I need to tell it to my parents' graves."

Xie Qinyun rolled her eyes in speechlessness, saying, "Fine, go see her if you want. Seeing her in her miserable state might make you feel better."

Having said that, she called an old maid to lead Miss Du to the woodshed to see Concubine Du.

Less than two months after leaving the Jie Household, Miss Du revisited familiar ground but felt a strange sense of alienation.

She had lived in the Jie Family's inner courtyards for seven years, having been Zhonglin's wife for five, yet she had rarely paid serious attention to this courtyard.

To her, the seven years had been like a dream within a bubble.

A dream filled with endless bitterness.

Had it not been for the old maid leading the way, she might not have been able to find the woodshed at all.

Chapter 693: She's Going Crazy

From afar, Miss Du could hear the piercing cries of Concubine Du, helpless and despairing.

She thought she would be softened by them, yet to her surprise, she was proven right by that girl Xie Qinyun.

Hearing such sounds, she actually felt a sense of pleasure.

"So you too can cry in utter despair?" Miss Du stood outside the window of the firewood shed, looking in at the concubine inside.

The concubine stopped her wailing and pounding on the door, stunned for a moment, before turning to look at the window.

"Do you say I should take you back?" Miss Du added.

This time Concubine Du heard clearly; she scrambled up and stumbled toward the window.

Hands covered in blood grabbed onto the dusty wooden window, glaring at the person standing outside.

"You... you've returned?"

Concubine Du's gaze was vacant, and she shook her head fearfully as if seeing a demon, screaming wildly, "No, you've already left, you can't come back. I am the lawful wife, I am the mistress of the Jie Family, you cannot return, go away, go away..."

Miss Du said indifferently, "They say you've gone mad, and looking at you now, if you're not mad, you're certainly not far from it. You can't even bear this bit of suffering, how can you compare to me?"

"Me... why should I compare with you?" Concubine Du yelled frenziedly: "What right do you have to compare to me? What if you are the legitimate daughter of the Du Family? When father was alive, you were the daughter, but upon his death, you became just like me, nothing but an orphan without parents. Hahaha... But I am different from you, I am the person my husband loved most, I have my husband's love, what do you have? You have nothing. How can you compare to me? Hahaha... you are just a pitiful worm..."

The concubine's crazed laughter spread beyond the firewood shed, reaching the servants busy at work in the distance, sending shivers down their spines. They hastened their tasks, eager to finish their work and leave this ominous place as soon as possible.

Miss Du remained calm, "I admit, he used to love you. However... that was merely because you deceived him, he had yet to see your true face."

"What do you mean he hadn't seen my true face? This is just who I am," Concubine Du asserted loudly: "You don't know yet, do you? My husband said that if I erred, it was his error as well. We are one as husband and wife, we err together, we bear the consequences together. You remember what I did to you before, don't you? See, every time it was he who took the blame with me."

"Is that so?" Miss Du scoffed coldly, "Then why did you kill him today?"

"I killed him?" The concubine looked stupefied for a moment, her eyes wide with shock.

"I killed him, I have to kill my husband..." she mumbled dumbly, then suddenly looked up again and yelled at Miss Du outside the window: "What do you mean I killed him? It was a punishment we both shared. He had said long ago that no matter what I did, he would share the consequences with me, so if I cannot live, neither can he. I didn't kill him; it was suicide! He chose to die with me. Aren't you upset? Hahaha..."

Miss Du, looking at the crazed Concubine Du in that filthy firewood shed, shook her head and spoke softly,"It seems you really are losing your mind."

Thinking of her deceased parents, Miss Du sighed again and muttered to herself, "Even if you are mad, I still have to bring you to father's grave to kneel and apologize, to see how many years it's been since you've visited him. Father said before he died that only the two of us sisters were left in the Du Family, that we must depend on each other, support each other, never imagining it would come to this. Magistrate Jie should soon be returning; you had better watch yourself."

Chapter 694: Reattaching a Severed Finger

Miss Du finished speaking and without looking at the crazed Concubine Du again, turned and left.

Concubine Du stopped her wild laughter and began frantically beating on the window, shouting loudly, "Don't go, you're not allowed to go, let me out..."

A moment later, she shook her head violently and shouted something else.

"No, go away, you must not come to the Jie Family again, you are the one who was driven out of the Jie Family as a rejected wife, just go away..."

The watching servants shook their heads and whispered among themselves, "Concubine Du must truly be insane."

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Gu Youyou was busy until nightfall before she finished the finger reattachment surgery, and she herself was almost overwhelmed by exhaustion. In contrast, the second son of the Jie Family, throughout the entire process, was drenched in sweat from the pain yet clenched his teeth and did not utter a sound.

This couldn’t help but remind her of the legend of Guan Yu’s bone scraping.

This scum of a man still had some willpower, after all.

After putting away her things, Gu Youyou stood up and said to the second son of the Jie Family, "That should do for now. Keep an eye on the color of the severed finger. If it turns black, notify me immediately, otherwise your life could be in danger.

"If everything goes normally, I should be able to remove your stitches in about ten days. However, the steel pin used for stabilization cannot be moved, to be safe, it needs to stay in place for nearly two months. During this time, be extra careful not to injure it again."

The second son of the Jie Family took a breath and gently hummed in acknowledgment.

Seeing he was also on the verge of not being able to hold up, Gu Youyou didn’t say anything more and went outside.

Xie Qinyun hurried over and asked anxiously, "How is it, my second brother is alright, isn’t he?"

Gu Youyou replied, "The finger has been reattached, whether it will survive, I do not know. Observe it closely these next few days."

"A severed finger can be reattached?" They clearly thought Gu Youyou was just there to treat the wound on the second young master’s finger, and they had never imagined she was there to reattach his severed finger.

At that moment, the second son of the Jie Family came out as well, and wasn’t it his severed little finger that Gu Youyou had just reattached?

Xie Qinyun, looking at his hand and secretly marveling, said, "Doctor Gu, you're truly remarkable, you really did reattach it, didn't you?"

Gu Youyou, her heart blooming with joy and secretly smug, replied indifferently, showing off nonetheless, "What's so surprising about that? If the conditions are right, not to mention a lost finger, whether it's a severed hand or foot, or even a heart or liver transplant, it's not a problem."

"Cousin, you're so amazing!" Lin Qianqing said with an admiring face.

Gu Youyou chuckled, and seeing that it was getting late, she said after coming out, "Where is Miss Du? Cousin, didn't she come with you?"

Lin Qianqing glanced at the second son of the Jie Family and said, "Miss Du went to see Concubine Du after she arrived and then left, saying she would wait for you at our residence."

The second son of the Jie Family turned even paler and thought to himself, 'She didn't even glance at me, I thought she came to see me, but it turns out she was here to see her sister.'

"Since that's the case, let's not delay any longer and head back quickly," Gu Youyou told Lin Qianqing.

Xie Qinyun looked worriedly at her own second brother before turning to escort Gu Youyou and the others out.

"Has your father come back, and did he say how Concubine Du would be dealt with?"

As they passed by the flower hall, Gu Youyou asked.

Xie Qinyun replied, "I heard Concubine Du has gone insane. With a madwoman like that, it's truly hard to decide what to do. Keeping her in this state, if we were to toss her onto the streets, it would affect my father's reputation."

Given Lord Jie’s disposition, it seemed unlikely that he would throw a madwoman out onto the streets to be ridiculed by others.

Besides, no matter what she had done, Concubine Du was, after all, Lord Du’s daughter.

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Chapter 695: The Hidden Jade Pendant

Gu Youyou returned when the sky was already dark, and Miss Du had long since returned to Jinxiu City, leaving behind only a set of clothes.

"Miss Du saw that you hadn’t come back for a long time and left first," Xiang Chun said. "When she left, she said the clothes were a gift for you, and she also said that what needed to be discussed, could be talked about next time."

Gu Youyou nodded lightly and said, "I understand, you can go back to rest now. It’s hot nowadays, and there is no need for someone to keep watch at night."

After Xiang Chun left, Gu Youyou closed the door and opened up the clothes to take a look.

These were the very clothes she had sent in her designs last time.

She started to smile, deciding to try on the clothes first.

Miss Du’s visit today was probably to discuss a collaboration on the clothes, undoubtedly smelling the business opportunity. That hateful concubine, why did she have to make her move against that scoundrel now and not earlier? It wasn’t easy for Miss Du, a busy person, to make a visit, and it was all delayed because of that broken finger.

After changing into the clothes, Gu Youyou missed having a large full-length mirror. In this era, it seemed the only way to see a clear full-body reflection was to wait for daylight and go to the lake.

It was also only the lake at this time that could reflect a clear image.

Looking at herself in the bronze mirror on the dressing table, the fuzzy half-body effect wasn't too bad.

She would wear these clothes to the Imperial Palace tomorrow to start advertising from there.

She reached for her waist and quickly took the clothes she had just changed off from the hanger.

Inside the clothes was a small pouch she had sewn in by herself, and inside it lay a small Jade Pendant.

This was the Jade Pendant that Jin Zijin had treasured all along. She had always wanted to find a suitable opportunity, or rather, a suitable reason to return the pendant to him, but never had the chance.

In modern times, Gu Youyou had seen many such treasures. Looking at the quality of this jade, it was even better than the jade she had seen before, which was of national treasure level. He had given such an important item to the boatman as fare, she wondered what he was thinking.

Probably, the story of this jade in his heart had surpassed the value of the jade itself.

Gu Youyou had redeemed this Jade Pendant for him and since then had kept it on her person; maybe he would need it again in the future?

Gu Youyou fetched needle and thread, needing to embroider a hidden pouch on the set of clothes she had on to store the jade.

The style of the clothes didn't affect her ability to sew while wearing them, so she didn't bother taking them off.

The needlework was quick in Gu Youyou's hands. She was always precise and steady with the needle, and it didn't take long to finish.

Secured on the inner side of the waistband, it didn't affect the clothes' appearance and wasn't easy for others to discover.

There was an odd whistling of the wind coming from behind the wall in the room. Gu Youyou recognized this sound; Jin Zijin had arrived.

She hurriedly pushed the Jade Pendant inside and quickly sewed up the opening, biting off the thread.

Jin Zijin entered silently, standing in the dark for a moment before asking, "Why are you still sewing at this late hour?"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Some stitches came loose."

Jin Zijin walked up to her and looked her up and down, his eyebrows raised as he asked, "Is this a new dress?"

Gu Youyou stood up and twirled around, laughing, "Yes, this dress was a gift from Miss Du today; it's the same design I drew before. What do you think, does it look good?"

"It looks quite nice," Jin Zijin said, nodding with a smile.

Gu Youyou knew he wasn't one to express more flattering words easily and didn't trouble him further, instead she said, "The Empress Dowager can stand up and walk a few steps now. I must visit the palace tomorrow, and I should also take care of my two apprentices."

Jin Zijin didn't say much, just nodded lightly.

Chapter 696: Too Stiff, Easily Broken

He wrapped his arm around her from behind and rested his chin on top of her head, pressing down in a way that made her quite uncomfortable.

Having no choice, she could only shift her body.

He seemed to be deep in thought and didn't pay attention to her movement. After a while, he said, "Go to sleep, I came late tonight."

Gu Youyou pondered for a moment before replying, "It’s all right. I also got back late today, and Aunt dragged me away for a lecture. Fortunately, my visit to the Jie Residence was to save someone, so she didn’t say anything too unpleasant."

"Hmm! I heard there was another incident at the Jie Residence, that concubine almost killed Jie Zhonglin?"

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "Exactly, whether she succeeded or not, she cut off one of his fingers. I managed to reattach it for him, but I’m not sure if it will survive. Second Young Master Jie seems effeminate, but he has a robust constitution. As long as he’s well cared for, he should be able to make it."

"Reattaching a finger?" Jin Zijin mused and then laughed, saying, "With this story spreading, your reputation is going to grow even more."

Gu Youyou said, "I already have a big reputation, what about the matters in Lingnan, hmm?"

"Yes, you’re capable!" Jin Zijin said with a huff, "A tall tree catches the wind, you need to learn to be more reserved."

Gu Youyou disagreed, retorting, "Wasn’t it you who said that the greater my reputation, the more important I become, making it harder for Yu Jizi to lay a finger on me?"

Jin Zijin replied, "Although that’s true, there is a saying that the overly rigid are easily broken."

"Great, you’ve said all there is, good and bad," she retorted.

The two of them cuddled up in bed under a thin blanket. Gu Youyou felt that the temperature was just right, incredibly comfortable.

Jin Zijin, on the other hand, felt it was a bit too warm, especially in the searing summer heat when both of them were wearing thin undershirts, hugging each other was like wearing nothing at all, which was quite tantalizing.

Half of the heat was due to the flame toxin in his body, and the other half was roused by her.

Jin Zijin got up, reached for the medicine bottle inside his outer garment, poured out a pill, put it in his mouth, and swallowed it before he could continue to sleep.

Otherwise, the heat was simply unbearable.

His condition was different from Gu Youyou and those who had been nourished with medicinal concoctions for years. The flame toxin in his body was activated by the Fire Lotus in the Flame Pool and the heat emanating from the Zhuzhao Pearl. Compared to the likes of Gu Youyou, it was more manageable. According to her modern medical theory, it wouldn’t affect the central nervous system. As long as the body temperature didn’t continue to rise, it would be fine.

Her medicine was somewhat harmful to the body, but this harm was negligible compared to the effects of a continuously rising body temperature.

Still, he heeded her advice to avoid taking the medicine unless he felt his body temperature rising.

Gu Youyou turned over, touched his forehead, and asked, "Is it very uncomfortable?"

Jin Zijin hummed in response, saying, "It’s bearable."

Gu Youyou touched his cheek and said, "Don’t pretend. If it weren’t unbearable, you wouldn’t take the medicine. You’re always so tolerant."

Jin Zijin laughed and admitted, "Alright, it’s unbearable. I think I might feel better if you stayed a bit further away from me. Let’s sleep now, it’s late."

Gu Youyou countered, "Nonsense, I’m so cool to the touch, you should hold me tighter to feel better. A natural, reusable physical cooling ice pack."

"What nonsense are you talking now? Go to sleep!" Jin Zijin was truly drowsy now, his words slurring.

Gu Youyou sighed, unable to resist smoothing out his furrowed brow with her hand.

If only they had the equipment, she thought, she could give him a CT scan to see exactly where that thing was in his body. Perhaps a simple surgical procedure could remove it, sparing him this agony.

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Chapter 697: Becoming a Walking Advertisement

After entering the Imperial Palace, Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing parted ways. According to the previous Empress’s words, when Gu Youyou entered the Imperial Palace, Lin Qianqing had to follow; she was to serve the Empress, while Gu Youyou was to serve the Empress Dowager.

In the sweltering heat of the Imperial Palace, the palaces of the masters had excellently made cooling devices, and it was indeed very cool.

Gu Youyou took the Empress Dowager’s pulse and examined her leg carefully before daring to stand up and reply.

"Empress Dowager, your leg has recovered better than I expected," she said. "Continue with the acupuncture and massage, and after some time, you should be able to stroll around the Imperial Garden with the help of a walking stick."

The Empress Dowager was delighted to hear this.

Although she was old, she did not want to become an invalid. Being able to stand up again was something she had not even dared to dream of in the past, but now it had become a reality, and she could even stroll around the Imperial Garden by herself.

Out of joy, she bestowed upon Gu Youyou a case full of gold and silver jewels, saying, "Doctor Gu, you have made a great contribution by healing my leg, and a great reward is in order. Gold and silver may be mundane, but I am a mundane person, and besides these common goods, I cannot think of a better reward."

Gu Youyou thanked her profusely, saying, "As a commoner born to a farming family, I am only too happy to receive the Empress Dowager's gold and silver rewards. Thank you, Empress Dowager, for your generosity."

"Ha ha, that's good, that's good."

The Empress Dowager's gaze fell upon Gu Youyou, and the more she looked, the more pleased she became, especially with the outfit Gu Youyou was wearing. It was a lotus-pink color, made of top-quality silk brocade, and the embroidery was the Jie Family's exclusive Manxiu style.

In recent years, since the Jie Family had no one, Manxiu embroidery had become hard to find. The Empress Dowager's eyes lit up at the sight of it, and she asked in astonishment, "Doctor Gu, is the embroidery on this gown the Manxiu style from the Jie Family?"

The hem of Gu Youyou's gown, her entire waistband, and the collar were all adorned with the exquisite Manxiu embroidery.

She replied, "Your Highness, this gown was gifted to me by Miss Du of the Manxiu Building; it is indeed the Jie Family's Manxiu style."

"Miss Du?" The Empress Dowager had spent many years in the palace and was not a woman who meddled in power; naturally, she did not inquire about every matter and therefore was unaware of Miss Du's troubles with the Jie Family.

Gu Youyou explained, "Miss Du's mother is the daughter of the Jie Family. Miss Du is now the only craftsman skilled in Manxiu embroidery. She has recently reopened the Manxiu Building. She was ill before, and I had the fortune of saving her life. So she made this gown as a way to repay the kindness."

So that was it!

The Empress Dowager exclaimed, "It’s truly beautiful; this craftsmanship is even better than that of the palace’s Bureau of Tailoring."

A palace maiden, attentive and caring, asked, "Empress Dowager, if you like it, why not have Miss Du make one for you as well?"

The Empress Dowager laughed heartily but waved her hand, "No, no, at my age, comfort is all that matters when it comes to clothes, and whether they look good or not is of no consequence."

She looked Gu Youyou up and down and said with a smile, "However, I am certain this gown will cause quite a stir among the other ladies of the court."

When time was almost up after chatting casually with the Empress Dowager, Gu Youyou performed acupuncture on her once more, then it was time for her to leave.

The Empress Dowager sighed, wishing she could find a good match for Gu Youyou, if only her health were better.

Such a fine young lady might pass away at any time; it truly was a pity.

She asked, "Doctor Gu, has your health improved lately?"

Gu Youyou paused for a moment before hurriedly answering, "Your Highness, my ailment is more troublesome in the winter but easier in the summer. Now that it is the middle of the hot season, my health is as good as anyone else’s."

No wonder her complexion had improved considerably.

The Empress Dowager said with concern, "So there’s still no way to cure it completely?"

Chapter 698: Two Disciples

"I have always been trying to save myself," replied Gu Youyou.

The Empress Dowager heaved a long sigh and said, "There is a saying that healers cannot heal themselves. It must be tough for you. Do you want me to summon a few Imperial Physicians to have a look at you?"

Of course her illness could not be treated by Imperial Physicians. Gu Youyou quickly said, "Thank you, Empress Dowager, but there's no need to trouble the Imperial Physicians. It is already a miracle that Youyou has lived to this age. I am well aware of my own condition."

The Empress Dowager did not insist and said, "All right then. I've heard that you have been sick from a young age, which must have been very hard for you. You may leave now, go and find the Princess."

"Yes, I shall take my leave."

The Empress Dowager's palace maiden led Gu Youyou to Princess Jiu's Liuying Hall.

Cui Yingying, the young healer from the Cui Family, was Princess Jiu's study companion, and the two often read together. When Gu Youyou arrived, their female teacher was instructing them in the "neixun" (inner training).

The palace maiden was about to move forward to announce her arrival but was stopped by Gu Youyou.

"Thank you, Auntie Li, for leading the way. Please first return to Renshou Palace and report to the Empress Dowager, I will wait here for a while."

Complying, the palace maiden then returned to Renshou Palace.

Gu Youyou stood outside the window listening to the two young ladies reciting the inner training, and couldn't help but lament the sorrows of women in the feudal society from deep within her heart.

To want to read and to learn, one must first master the 'Four Books for Women.'

"The Women’s Precepts," the "neixun," the "Women’s Analects," and the "The Records of the Ladies of Distinguished Service."

To her, what was there to read in these books? They did nothing but indoctrinate women into the Three Obediences and Four Virtues, mere accessories to men who were revered as greater than the heavens.

Yet the women born in this era had no choice.

Of course, women like them were still somewhat better off, being able to learn at least a little. If they were daughters from a poor family, no one would say a thing even if they were educated through the rod.

Therefore, in peasant families, mothers with a bit of foresight would teach their daughters to be more assertive to avoid being wronged or suffering.

Perhaps the female teacher glimpsed Gu Youyou standing by the window, for she sped up the pace and ended the lesson early.

"Princess Jiu, Miss Cui, have you memorized everything your teacher taught you today?"

Cui Yingying obediently said she had remembered, while Princess Jiu remained motionless.

The female teacher did not say much, simply offered a faint smile, performed a curtsy, and then left.

Only after the female teacher had left did Gu Youyou, carrying her medicine box, enter the Princess’s study.

"Master, you’ve come!" The originally listless Princess Jiu brightened up immediately upon seeing Gu Youyou. She threw herself towards Gu Youyou, hugging her waist.

Gu Youyou smiled and patted her head, saying, "Yes, have you missed your master?"

"Yes, Liuying has been waiting for the master to come," said Princess Jiu with a joyful smile.

Cui Yingying was much more courteous than the Princess, conducting herself properly before calling her master.

Teaching children was considered shocking and scandalous to the palace maidens, so the astute Princess Jiu sent her palace maidens and eunuchs away as soon as Gu Youyou arrived, and closed the door.

"Have you read the books I showed you last time?"

Cui Yingying took out a book of acupoints and said, "I remembered the pages master told me to read."

Princess Jiu, on the other hand, brought out a book of paintings and asked, "Master, look, are my drawings good?"

Gu Youyou collected both children's homework and reviewed each, nodding her satisfaction.

"Both done well. This time, we won't do any schoolwork, let's go outside and play."

"Play outside?" Princess Jiu cocked her head and said, "If the Empress learns that I'm not studying diligently, she will scold me again."

Gu Youyou chuckled and said, "You are still so young, and it will be many years before you need to study seriously. Learning that little bit of stuff is so boring. When it's time to play, you should play properly. But when it's time to study, you should also study hard. The method your master teaches you, to learn while playing, is naturally more effective than being cooped up inside studying all day."

Chapter 699: Noble Consort Sheng

Women didn't need to learn as much as men, and not all books were deemed suitable for them. Having mastered the Four Books for Women, they might read some of the Book of Songs, but that was commonly the extent of their learning. They were typically taught needlework, embroidery, and arts like playing the zither, chess, calligraphy, and painting.

Without the heavy workload of modern education, girls would often complete their schooling at a women's academy in two or three years.

Lin Qianqing and Xie Qinyun had met at a women's academy, where they studied the Four Books for Women and the Book of Songs from the age of ten to thirteen.

To say that they went out to play meant, for the Princess, nothing more than strolling through the Imperial Garden.

In the summer, the lotus flowers in the ponds blossomed with vibrant beauty. Many early-bloomers had already formed seed pods; this was likely the last round of blooming.

"Ninth Princess, you love painting. Do you like to paint these lotuses in the pond?"

Since Gu Youyou had interacted with the Ninth Princess and Cui Yingying, she had discovered that Cui Yingying was seriously studying medical skills, comprehending even complex medical principles. The Princess wanted to learn medicine, perhaps out of hope and concern from seeing her mother ill during her childhood. But what she truly loved was painting, which was why Gu Youyou decided to cater to her interests, teaching them separately and focusing on instructing the Princess in painting.

The Ninth Princess leaned on the railing by the lotus pond, scrutinizing the beauty before her. After a moment, she turned back to Gu Youyou and said, "These aren't the most beautiful lotuses in the Imperial Palace. I've seen a kind that's as red as fire. In that pond, they bloom like sparks, incredibly stunning. If I were to paint lotuses, I'd paint those."

Hearing this, Gu Youyou was delighted. She guessed that the Ninth Princess was referring to the Fire Lotuses in the Flame Pool.

It was said that this was a treasure of the Imperial Palace. Once tended by the Zhuzhao Pearl, the flowers hadn't been as red since its disappearance.

"Is there such a lotus? How come I've only seen white and pink lotuses?" inquired Cui Yingying on the side.

The Ninth Princess patted her chest confidently, "Of course, I've seen them. If you don't believe me, I can take you there to see!"

This was indeed a delightful prospect for Gu Youyou.

However, at that moment, a concubine approached them from afar. Judging by her attire, her rank seemed quite high.

Many of the concubines had already been seen by Gu Youyou, but this one, appearing to be in her mid-thirties to forties, and of only average beauty among the concubines—a simply graceful woman—was someone Gu Youyou was seeing for the first time.

Upon seeing her, the Ninth Princess and Cui Yingying quickly paid their respects: "We greet the Noble Consort."

She was actually the Noble Consort?

Gu Youyou remembered what Lin Qianqing had told her: in the palace, aside from the Empress, there was only one Noble Consort bold enough to rival her status—the mother of the Second Prince, Noble Consort Sheng.

This woman had started as a personal maid to the former Crown Princess Consort. After the Crown Princess Consort's death, the then Crown Prince, who later became Emperor, upgraded her first to a room concubine and then to a secondary consort, eventually granting her the highly esteemed title of Noble Consort, just one rank below the Empress.

She was plain-looking, with no influential family backing her; it could be said she came from no significant background. It was widely rumored that the Emperor favored her largely because of the Empress Dowager.

Upon reflection, Noble Consort Sheng's situation was rather similar to the Empress Dowager's in the past, wasn't it? Loyally protecting her mistress's child after her demise. The Eldest Princess had been spoiled in her care.

But her luck was better than that of the Empress Dowager at the time. She had safeguarded her former mistress's Princess, yet bore a son herself, and the Emperor truly doted on her; she had never suffered in the presence of the Empress.

Chapter 700: There Are Capable People by Noble Consort Sheng's Side

The Empress Dowager had endured many hardships to achieve her current status.

Gu Youyou was lost in thought when Princess Jiu tugged at the hem of her clothing, awakening her from her reverie, and she hurriedly followed suit in paying respects.

"Commoner Gu Youyou pays her respects to the Noble Consort."

She bowed her head, unable to see Noble Consort Sheng's expression, but she could feel the burning gaze fixed upon her.

It took a while before she heard her voice.

"Rise."

Noble Consort Sheng examined Gu Youyou and said indifferently, "That outfit is rather lovely, did you make it yourself?"

Gu Youyou wore this outfit today precisely for the purpose of advertising Manxiu Building. She immediately responded, "Replying to the Noble Consort, this dress was a gift from Miss Du of Manxiu Building, personally made by her and the clothing masters of Manxiu Building."

"Manxiu Building?" Noble Consort Sheng repeated softly, then inquired, "Is it the recently reopened Manxiu Building? They also make clothes?"

Her palace maiden replied, "Your Highness, it must be the Manxiu Building that Princess Zhang mentioned the last time she returned to the palace. The owner is surnamed Du, the eldest daughter of the former Prime Minister Du. She is the wife of the second son of Zuo Zongzheng Jie, although they are already divorced."

Noble Consort Sheng raised her eyebrows and asked, "The one who caused quite a stir with her divorce from her husband?"

"Precisely!" the palace maiden answered.

Gu Youyou thought to herself: No wonder Noble Consort Sheng has thrived well for many years without any notable background—all because she has capable people by her side, as evident by her palace maiden.

Noble Consort Sheng chuckled and then asked Gu Youyou, "Manxiu Building makes clothes too?"

Before Gu Youyou had the chance to reply, having been interjected by the palace maiden,

She said, "Responding to the Noble Consort, I am not aware. Miss Du gifted me this dress as a token of gratitude for saving her life."

"Unaware?" Noble Consort Sheng spoke to her palace maiden behind her, "Then arrange for someone to inquire at Jinxiu Building. If they do make them, order a set for me as well, just like Miss Gu's dress."

Gu Youyou was overjoyed within, as the first Imperial family business deal had been established. It seemed she would have to meet with Miss Du early and get the business of a complete clothing store up and running as soon as possible.

The palace maiden acknowledged the order, and Noble Consort Sheng's gaze fell back onto Gu Youyou, giving her a glance and then smiling at Princess Jiu.

"Jiujiu, how come you have time to visit the lotus pond today?"

Gu Youyou felt a chill in her heart, thinking: This clever child must be astute, and must not reveal that it was I who brought them out for modern education.

She had forgotten to coordinate their stories before coming out.

Princess Jiu glanced at Gu Youyou before turning to reply to Noble Consort Sheng, "The teacher has been to the Imperial Palace many times but has never seen the Imperial Garden, so I decided to take the teacher to have a look."

"Oh? Teacher?" Noble Consort Sheng turned to Gu Youyou with a smile, "What has Miss Gu taught Princess Jiu?"

Gu Youyou did not dare to lie and honestly replied, "I was originally Miss Cui's teacher, instructing her in medical skills. When the Princess learned of this, she also wished to become my apprentice, and the Empress Dowager allowed me to take her under my wing. However, after spending time with her, I found that the Princess has a greater talent for painting, so I have been teaching Princess Jiu to paint."

"Is that so?" Noble Consort Sheng asked Princess Jiu.

Princess Jiu nodded and said, "What the teacher said is true, Jiujiu enjoys painting lotus flowers." She looked towards the lotus pond.

Gu Youyou breathed a sigh of relief, thinking: Princess Jiu is indeed quite astute.

Once again, Noble Consort Sheng's palace maiden reminded her, saying, "Your Highness, this Miss Gu is presumably the same person from our Zhuzhao Country who is quite renowned as the doctor from Jisheng Hall. The Emperor himself wrote the words 'Divine Doctor' for the signboard bestowed to this doctor."