Farmhouse 701

Chapter 701: A Fortuitous Encounter with Xu Guiren

Lady Sheng raised her eyebrows and said, "Ah, it's you. I've heard of you, you've achieved great success in Lingnan, and the Emperor has awarded you the title of Divine Doctor. I heard that you also treated the Empress Dowager's leg, is that true?"

Gu Youyou couldn't help but want to facepalm; Lady Sheng's way of talking was truly tiring. Did she really not know, or was she pretending not to know? And she had heard?

Everyone in the Imperial Palace knew about her treating the Empress Dowager's leg ailment; she had visited the Imperial Palace several times and often encountered other concubines paying respects to the Empress Dowager. The only one she had never seen was Lady Sheng.

At the Empress's birthday feast, the other concubines were also there, but just like Madam Ru, Lady Sheng claimed to be ill and did not attend.

Gu Youyou, with downcast eyes, responded, "It was indeed I who treated her."

Lady Sheng broke into a smile and said, "It's really not easy for a young girl like you to possess such superb medical skills."

Laughter came from a distance, and Lady Sheng frowned. She saw a group of colorfully dressed women approaching. She said lightly, "I won't disturb your enjoyment of the lotus pond anymore. Long Yi, let's return to the palace."

"We respectfully see off Lady Sheng..."

Watching Lady Sheng walk away, the three by the lotus pond sighed with relief. Cui Yingying said, "Princess, Master, let's go back. It's good that we ran into Lady Sheng who is easy to talk to. If we had encountered the Empress, and she knew the Princess was out in the Imperial Garden at this hour, there would be trouble."

Gu Youyou knew that this was the time when the Princess should be studying. She just thought that life in a feudal society was indeed tough and exhausting.

"Alright, let's go."

They wanted to leave, but it didn't mean others would let them go.

From a distance, a sharp-eyed concubine spotted Gu Youyou and called out loudly, "Hey, you there, stop!"

With no other choice, Gu Youyou had to stop with the two little girls in tow.

As fate would have it, the person who called out to her was none other than Noble Lady Xu, with whom Gu Youyou had a bit of a quarrel.

"It's you?" Noble Lady Xu exclaimed in surprise.

"This commoner has seen Noble Lady Xu," Gu Youyou said dutifully, leading the two little girls in a greeting.

Noble Lady Xu hummed in acknowledgement and allowed them to stand. Her eyes lit up at the sight of Gu Youyou's dress, and she hurriedly asked, "Where did you buy that dress?"

Gu Youyou honestly replied, "This was given to me by Miss Du from Manxiu Building to repay me for saving her life. If Noble Lady likes it, you can have someone go to Manxiu Building and order a set."

"Really?" Noble Lady Xu, forgetting the past grudge against Gu Youyou and that she should have been making trouble for her, said, "Of course I have to make a set. I like green; make me a set in green, just like this style."

She immediately gave orders to a Palace Maiden, "You all go out of the palace tomorrow and have them make a set of clothes like this at Manxiu Building."

"Yes!"

Gu Youyou didn’t want to get entangled with Noble Lady Xu and thus led the two young ladies, saying, "If Noble Lady has no further business, this commoner will take Ninth Princess and Miss Cui back to Liuying Hall; the Princess has not yet completed her studies for the day."

Noble Lady Xu was in a good mood that day and did not trouble Gu Youyou. She said, "Go ahead!"

...

They left the palace without having seen the Fire Lotus, much to Gu Youyou’s regret.

Personally seeing the habitat of that rare lotus would have undoubtedly been a great help in her research for an antidote.

The poison within Jin Zijin was different from their cold poison. As long as the poison from the Fire Lotus was neutralized, even if the beads remained in his body, there should be no issue.

However, she had no idea how, so many years ago, Jin Zijin ended up poisoned in such a peculiar way.

"Cousin, hurry up!"

From a distance, she could see that Lin Qianqing was already waiting at the palace gate. This girl.

Chapter 702: Are There Any Unfulfilled Wishes Left?

Gu Youyou approached her and walked with her toward where the carriage was waiting.

"You certainly ran fast. Have you been waiting for me a long time?"

Lin Qianqing smiled and said, "Not really, just for an hour or so."

An hour is two hours, girl—that’s not a long time?

"The Empress actually let you go?" She was a bit curious.

Lin Qianqing smiled and said, "It’s because the eldest Prince and the second Prince almost got into a fight at the racetrack; they had a verbal spat and nearly came to blows, so she didn’t have time to bother with me."

So that’s how it was.

"Since the Empress is so fond of you, she must already regard you as her daughter-in-law. With the selection coming in two months, I heard that the major selection will be set a month before the imperial examination, meaning you can still frolic for a month. Do you have any unfulfilled wishes?"

Lin Qianqing glared at Gu Youyou and said, "Cousin, are you delighting in my misfortune or what?"

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "Of course not. I’m sincerely asking you, is there anything you want to do before entering the Imperial Palace?"

Do what?

Lin Qianqing thought for a moment, then said, looking down, "I don’t know what to do."

This girl seemed quite down. Gu Youyou got into the carriage with her, and once they were far from the Imperial Palace, she lowered her voice and said to her, "I told you before that I’d take you to see the countryside fields. Mmm, and also the ancestral offerings. The ancestral offerings are too far, and your mother keeps a tight watch, so that’s probably impossible. But if you still want to see the countryside fields, I could risk getting beaten to take you there!"

"Really?" Lin Qianqing lifted her head, her eyes lighting up.

Gu Youyou said, "Do you dare?"

"What do you mean?" Lin Qianqing blinked.

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "We'll sneak out, of course. But if the two of us run away, your mother will definitely be furious. Do you dare to anger her?"

Lin Qianqing figured she was going to be kept in captivity for the rest of her life—what did she have to fear?

She patted her chest and said boldly, "I dare!"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "That's the spirit! I've more or less figured out your mother's methods. I don't know how she treats Uncle's other women, but for the two of us... it's nothing more than confinement, copying books, and cutting down on necessities. Oh, and for me, there's an additional one: to quickly find someone to marry me off to. Other than these, she can't really do much to us."

Lin Qianqing thought for a while and nodded, saying, "Well said. Since the selection is starting soon anyway, I'm going all out. But... if it causes you, cousin, to marry some undeserving guy, that would be too bad. Are you really willing to be so loyal?"

Gu Youyou took a deep breath and smiled quietly without answering.

She had promised her, and if she said she would do something, she would absolutely do it.

She just wanted to go out and take a look. If such a small wish couldn't be fulfilled, it truly wouldn't be worth it.

...

Taking Lin Qianqing to the countryside farms outside Beijing was no small feat.

If nothing went wrong, at worst she'd only incur her Aunt's wrath. But if something unexpected happened, that's another story.

Considering the incident from the last trip to Jinxiu City, Gu Youyou still decided it would be best to talk it over with Jin Zijin to hear his opinion and figure out how to go about it more safely.

"You want to take your cousin to see how the villagers grow crops?" Jin Zijin responded to her idea with a puzzled look.

Gu Youyou said, "It's not necessarily to watch the villagers grow crops. It's just that my elder cousin hasn't been out before. You see, the big selection is next month, and she just wants to go out and have some fun."

Jin Zijin looked thoughtful, fell silent for a while, then tilted his head and looked at her, asking, "Just wants to go out and have fun?"

Chapter 703: Whose Person is Noble Consort Sheng?

"Yes!" Gu Youyou rolled her eyes at him and said, "You must think I would run away from home with her, don't you? Don't worry, I'm not that naive."

In those times, the risks were immense for two young ladies who ran away from home. Setting aside the danger of being caught and brought back, just the risks of fleeing, such as being watchful of Xuanzong's men, bandits, and the uncertainties of being without shelter, lack of medical care, and so forth, were substantial. Unless one was truly at their wit's end, running away from home would be the most idiotic thing to do.

"It's good that you don't think so," Jin Zijin said. "Give me a few days to think it over properly."

"Hmm, I am going to Jinxiu City tomorrow. Do you want to come with me? Or maybe I should take Yue Rujing."

"To do what?" Jin Zijin's expression darkened.

What did she mean by taking Yue Rujing to Jinxiu City?

Gu Youyou said, "To discuss business, of course. There's a big profitable deal coming up. I am sure Yue Rujing will be happy to invest."

"You mean with that clothing business of yours?" Jin Zijin had already figured out her intent.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Yes, that very clothing line. I wore one of those outfits to the Imperial Palace today. The Empress Dowager complimented me on how beautiful it was, later I ran into Consort Sheng, and she thought it looked good too, and also Lady Xu... Ah, right, do you know anything about Consort Sheng?"

"Consort Sheng, Sheng Qiaoyue..." Jin Zijin murmured softly, then chuckled after a moment and asked Gu Youyou, "Why are you suddenly asking about her? Just because you happened to meet her today? But she wasn't the only one you met by chance today, so what's the point? Youyou, what do you want to ask?"

Gu Youyou gave him a look that said how boring it was and said, "Today was the first time I met Consort Sheng. I had heard from my cousin before that she is extremely favored, so much so that the Emperor dotes on her without even considering the Empress. That day of the Empress's birthday, she claimed to be sick and didn't attend; even when it comes to paying respects to the Empress Dowager, she comes and goes as she pleases. The Emperor never reprimands her, nor does the Empress Dowager. I thought she would be arrogant because of her favor, but when I met her today, the Princess mentioned she was an easy person to talk to, and I also felt that she may not be that kind of person."

Jin Zijin's eyes darkened, and he pressed his lips together without speaking.

After giving him a brief look, Gu Youyou cautiously said, "I heard that Consort Sheng used to be the Crown Princess Consort, and your mother Xiao Qinqin's personal maid. By that account, she could also be considered to have come from the Xiao Family."

Seeing that Jin Zijin still showed no reaction, Gu Youyou continued her careful inquiry, "I've also heard that at court there's a division between the factions supporting the first Prince and the second Prince. And the main force behind the second Prince's faction is the Xiao Family. Zijin, since Consort Sheng was your mother's maid and is openly supported by the Xiao family, is it that they're keeping her in the dark, or does she actually know everything and has always been working for the Xiao Family?"

This was a very important point for Gu Youyou as she would frequently visit the Imperial Palace and have many chances to encounter Consort Sheng.

Jin Zijin looked carefully at her face, gently smoothed out her slightly furrowed brows, and said in a low voice, "People's hearts can change, that matter happened more than twenty years ago. Maybe she was trustworthy back then, but now that she has her own son, it's hard to say if she is still reliable.

Sheng Qiaoyue is an anomaly; even my uncle isn't sure whose side she's on. She still maintains her position despite the suppression from the Empress's faction, which has very little to do with my uncle's family. Either she's a deeply cunning person, or she has powerful people backing her up. When you encounter her... it's best to stay away."

Chapter 704: Someone in the Jie Family is Courting Death Again

"So you're saying that the Xiao Family doesn't actually trust her. They are openly part of the Second Prince's faction, but they've kept her in the dark,"

"Yes!" Jin Zijin answered crisply.

Gu Youyou nodded and said, "I see."

Sound asleep, Gu Youyou was jolted awake by a series of urgent knocks.

She rubbed her eyes irritably, and before they could even open, she yelled out, "Who is it? Doesn't anyone want to sleep in the middle of the night?"

She hated being woken up in the middle of the night. In her previous life in modern times, critically ill patients often needed her urgently, and every time she was summoned from her bed, she would fly into a temper and scold the person at the door.

But although she might have vented her spleen, she still did her job beautifully; it didn't affect her work.

Jin Zijin also sat up, looking towards the door with a stern face.

Xiang Chun knocked from outside, saying, "Miss Gu, a messenger from Lord Jie’s residence has come. They are asking for you to go over and save a life!"

Gu Youyou was startled. The residence of Lord Jie again?

It seemed she had become their personal physician, on call at all times!

Gu Youyou, to the stern-faced Jin Zijin, "It’s always something with them; I have to go. Just yesterday, I reattached Young Master Jie’s severed finger. If there’s an issue with that finger and it doesn’t take, he’ll need immediate surgery, or else his life could be in danger."

Jin Zijin, with a scowl, said, "Then why did you reattach his finger? If it’s off, let it be off."

Gu Youyou: "..." She found herself at a loss for words.

But could she, as a doctor with professional ethics, really do such a thing? Could she ignore that severed finger?

No matter who it was, she would always strive to save lives with her utmost effort; she could accept it if, in the end, she couldn’t.

Seeing Gu Youyou swiftly lighting a candle and getting dressed, Jin Zijin murmured, "Don’t rush; given how much trouble they have, it might not be Young Master Jie’s finger having issues. It wouldn’t tarnish your reputation."

Gu Youyou thought that made sense. With the Jie Family’s myriad troubles, anything might have happened.

But with them, there were only a few masters worthy of her efforts— if not Young Master Jie, then Lord Jie or Qinyun?

"Who is dying?" Gu Youyou pondered as she dressed and asked Xiang Chun outside the door.

Xiang Chun replied, "This servant doesn't know. The messenger only said that you need to come quickly to save a life at Lord Jie's residence. They didn't specify who."

How annoying!

Having dressed, Gu Youyou turned to find Jin Zijin also ready.

She jumped with surprise, whispering, "You're going too? Just like this?"

"You go first; I'll follow you up," he said.

Gu Youyou: "..."

Carrying her emergency medical kit, Gu Youyou went to the Jie residence. On the way, she found out which member of their family was courting death.

It was said that Concubine Du adamantly refused to leave the Jie Family. She proclaimed that she belonged to the Jie Family and would rather die there.

Everyone thought she was babbling like a madwoman, so they ignored her. However, who would have imagined that she would actually dare to commit suicide? And here she was, not sleeping in the deep of the night, but setting her quarters ablaze.

She not only burned herself but also injured several maids and old women from the kitchen. If it weren't for the proximity to the lotus pond, who knows what kind of fire disaster could have occurred.

Gu Youyou glanced at the sky; the east was already beginning to lighten. By modern standards, it would be around five in the morning.

She really knew how to cause a scene. Choosing such a time around four to five in the morning, her actions had roused half the street.

For a moment, it was even more lively than the daytime market.

Chapter 705: Die Outside

"Is she still breathing?" Gu Youyou asked the maid from the Jie Residence.

The maid must have been terrified, shivering continuously.

"There's... there's a little breath. But her entire body has been burned beyond recognition; I'm afraid... she's not going to make it."

"Hm, if she's not going to make it, why did you call for me?"

This dangerous person should have been controlled a long time ago, letting her harm others is simply insane, and one wonders what was going through Lord Jie's head. It wasn't long ago that the second son of the Jie Family was nearly stabbed to death by her, and now, she has caused a fire.

"It was the Second Young Master who asked this servant to invite Doctor Gu," the maid said with a mournful face.

Gu Youyou sneered, "Still lingering feelings or what?"

By the time she spoke, they had already arrived at the Jie Residence.

Gu Youyou followed the leading maid into the inner courtyard at a brisk pace. It was still dark outside, and the servants were holding torches. When they reached the woodshed where Concubine Du was being held, Gu Youyou saw that the fire had already been put out.

The woodshed was gone, and several nearby servants' quarters had also been burned. Now the area was in ruins.

Lord Jie, the Second Young Master, and Xie Qinyun were all at the scene.

Xie Qinyun was cursing nonstop, while the Second Young Master stood by, looking stupefied.

Lord Jie seemed to have aged several years overnight, continuously sighing.

Only when he saw Gu Youyou did he muster some energy to approach her.

"Doctor Gu, it's always a bother to have you come over to the residence, I am truly ashamed."

Although Gu Youyou wasn't happy about being called upon, she still showed respect to Lord Jie and replied, "Lord Jie speaks too seriously, saving lives and healing the sick is the healer's duty. Let's have a look at the injured first."

"Please, Doctor Gu!"

In a room for servants, five people were lying on a large bed, all with varying degrees of burn injuries. Gu Youyou inspected each one and found that the two most severely burned had already died.

The other two were also close to death; the only one who might be saved was likely to live a life worse than death.

The time Concubine Du had her deathwish, everyone was asleep, and it was during the deepest part of sleep. Coupled with the remoteness of the woodshed, by the time everyone discovered the fire and came to rescue, it was already too late.

She ordered the people to carry out the two who had stopped breathing and then turned her attention to the remaining three.

All three were disfigured beyond recognition. She asked, "Which one of these is Concubine Du?"

Xie Qinyun, still cursing, pointed at the woman with the least severe injuries and said, "Her, this bitch, she burned others to death while she can still breathe."

Gu Youyou: "..." thought to herself how fortunate her life was.

Is it the saying ’Good people do not live long, but scoundrels live a thousand years’?

She looked at Lord Jie and said, "These two are beyond help, it is just a matter of time before they stop breathing. I think Concubine Du is rather lucky, perhaps she could survive. However, she has been burned beyond recognition, and even if she survives, life might be worse than death for her. Lord Jie, do you still want me to save her?"

Before Lord Jie could respond, the dazed Second Young Master took over.

"Save her, of course, save her." He said through clenched teeth, his eyes shot with malice, his whole body trembling with excitement.

"Please, Doctor Gu, make sure you save her!"

She wants to die here, but they cannot let her have her way. She thinks to live as a person of the Jie Family, die as a ghost of the Jie Family, right? He insists on her living only to be discarded.

Seeing the gloom on the Second Young Master’s face, Gu Youyou realized that his feelings for Concubine Du were not of lingering affection, but of utter hatred. Even if she wanted to die, he would not let her die at the Jie Residence.

One must admit, the man was ruthless.

Chapter 706: Can’t Kill Her

When Miss Du was at the Jie Family’s residence, because she wasn’t loved, he hated her enough to wish her dead, Miss Du had said, during those years, Jie Er Gongzi wished nothing more than for her to die.

Now that he no longer loves Concubine Du, he doesn’t even allow her to die in his own house.

After all, she was the woman who shared his bed for many years, how ruthless.

As a teenage girl, Xie Qinyun thought less deeply than Gu Youyou, failing to see through the situation, she simply assumed her second brother still held affection for this wretch. In front of Jie Da Ren, she berated Jie Er Gongzi loudly, "Why save this wretch? Don't allow it to be saved. Jie Zhonglin, do you really intend to save this wretch? What exactly is wrong with your brain, how have you been bewitched by this wretch? Open your eyes wide and look at her, neither human nor ghost in appearance, what do you want with her, aren't you afraid?"

"Brother Zhonglin said that your feelings for this wretch are true love, now I see it clear as day, you really do love her truly, no matter what she becomes, you'll stick by her, won't you? You're willing to be ruined with her for the rest of your life."

"Ayun!" Jie Da Ren stopped her, saying, "This doesn't concern you, go back now."

Jie Da Ren could see clearly, but he was too exhausted to bother explaining to a child. Plus, he also felt that his second son deserved the scolding.

"I won't go back, Father, you can't let Second Brother act recklessly like this." Xie Qinyun said indignantly.

Jie Da Ren, impatiently motioning to a few women, said, "Take the Third Miss back!"

Following orders, the women took Xie Qinyun by the arms and started to lead her away.

Xie Qinyun continued to curse and resist, but was powerless against the combined strength of the women.

After Xie Qinyun left, the room finally fell quiet.

Jie Er Gongzi said to Gu Youyou, "Please, doctor, treat her."

Gu Youyou nodded slightly and began to treat Concubine Du.

You pay the bill, I treat the patient, Gu Youyou wasn't troubled by whether the patient should be saved or not.

The burns covered a large area, mostly on the upper body, primarily the face.

Cleaning the wounds was a laborious and exhausting task.

Gu Youyou had two maids assist in the room, while she sent everyone else out.

The day had unknowingly brightened, and with her hands covered in blood, Gu Youyou was tired and hungry, but finally all the wounds on Concubine Du's body were treated.

She washed her hands in clean water before stepping out of the room.

The sun was already high in the sky; it was already midday.

Seeing her come out from a distance, Xie Qinyun ran toward her and asked, "Did you save that wretch's life?"

Gu Youyou replied, "She won't die for now, but if she isn't taken good care of, infection is highly likely, and death can easily follow."

"It would be better if she died," she said sourly.

"Conveniently, Miss Du has arrived, saying she wants to take her away. Do you think she's in a state to be moved now?"

Gu Youyou was slightly surprised, glanced at the unconscious Concubine Du inside the room, and said, "If she has to be moved, it’s possible. Find a flat board, and ensure minimal jostling on the way."

Peeking her head through the doorway, Xie Qinyun looked inside at the person wrapped in white cloth on a plank bed, her eyes darting around, she said, "I’m going to take a look inside, you go to the flower hall first, Miss Du is in the flower hall."

Gu Youyou knew full well what this young girl was thinking. She thought her quite bold, but she couldn’t just let her have her way.

After sending the maids away, Gu Youyou lowered her voice and said to Xie Qinyun, "You can’t kill her now, not only would it ruin my reputation, but it would also spoil your second brother’s plans."

"What about my second brother?"

Being called out by Gu Youyou on the spot, Xie Qinyun seemed a bit uncomfortable.

Gu Youyou said, "Your second brother isn’t clinging to lingering feelings for her, but he cannot allow her to die in the Jie family’s house."

Chapter 707: Carry Her Away

"Why?" The little girl was very puzzled.

Gu Youyou had to explain to her, "Your second brother originally intended to drive her out of your house, but if she were to die now in the Jie Family, she would still be a Jie Family woman, of the Jie people. Your second brother’s intention is that if she is to die, she must die outside, so as not to tarnish the Jie Family’s reputation."

Xie Qinyun suddenly realized and said, "That’s right, that makes sense. We shouldn’t let this wretched woman die in our house. If she must die, she should die on the main street."

In the midst of the conversation, they saw Miss Du from the Du Family arrive with several servants, and the second son of the Jie Family by her side.

"Thank you, Doctor Gu," said Miss Du to Gu Youyou with gratitude.

Gu Youyou noticed that she was holding a deed in her hand.

Miss Du explained, "This is the deed from the Jie Family expelling Du Wanqing from their household. With this deed, from today onwards, Du Wanqing will no longer be of the Jie Family. She returns to her maternal family and becomes a member of the Du Family."

A concubine driven out of her husband's family doesn't even have the right to take a divorce deed. Originally, no such proof was needed, but to give Miss Du an explanation, the second son of the Jie Family wrote this deed especially for her.

Gu Youyou nodded and said, "Then have someone carry her away."

Xie Qinyun loudly said beside them, "Just as well, take that plank from the large communal bed too; otherwise, it can only be burned."

Miss Du nodded, then instructed her people to carry away Concubine Du.

Gu Youyou and Miss Du stepped aside, and she briefed Miss Du on the condition of Concubine Du.

"For dressing the wound and regular check-ups, any ordinary doctor will do. There are many doctors in Jinxiu City; it shouldn't be a problem. However, even if she survives, she will often be in agony, barely able to live with the pain. Her injuries are not easily healed, and her right arm is useless now."

Miss Du indifferently said, "For her, it truly is a fate worse than death."

"Is this what you would call retribution?" Gu Youyou said with a smile.

"You believe in retribution, too?" asked Miss Du, surprised.

Gu Youyou twisted her mouth slightly and changed the topic, "By the way, I was planning to look for you in Jinxiu City today; I didn’t expect such an incident to occur."

Miss Du guessed the reason Gu Youyou had for seeing her and said, "Is it about those clothes?"

"Yes!" Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Yesterday I wore that outfit into the palace. Your Jinxiu Building might be expecting some distinguished guests soon."

Miss Du was stunned, and after a moment she said with a wry smile, "You really are... Doing business with the noble ladies brings in money, but it’s not easy at all..."

Gu Youyou appeared somewhat unconcerned and laughed, lowering her voice, "Business that brings in money is never easy, or else everyone would be making money. Miss Du, the brave may fall but never yield, and the timid starve without trial. Manxiu Building’s embroidery is precious; if we do it, we do it high-end. I’ll provide five to ten design drafts each season, and you’ll be responsible for making them. We’ll hang the sign of Manxiu Building."

Miss Du silently said, "We only do embroidery and don’t make clothes."

Gu Youyou nodded and said, "I understand you don’t make finished garments, but it’s not wise to always stick to old ways. You could try making the clothes as well. Hang the sign of Manxiu Building, I’ll handle the tailoring, and you be the boss of the storefront. We’ll split the profits fifty-fifty, how about it?"

Miss Du enlightened, asked, "So Doctor Gu does business as well? Is it for the sake of making money?" She asked in surprise, "Doesn’t Jisheng Hall make enough?"

Gu Youyou curled her lip and said, "Who would find silver too abundant? Naturally, the more the better. You’ve seen my situation; although I live in the Lin Residence, at best I’m only considered a relative of the Lins. If I don’t gather more silver, how will I live out the rest of my life?"

Chapter 708: Feeling Sad

Miss Du scoffed, covering her mouth as she spoke, "Doctor Gu does have a point, but this is a major issue; this is not the place for such a discussion, and it cannot be clarified in a moment. How about I return to Jinxiu City first, and whenever Doctor Gu is available, we can talk in detail?"

Gu Youyou bowed and said, "That was exactly my intention."

...

The Jie Residence became the laughingstock once again, and the tale of Concubine Du furiously burning the woodshed would probably entertain Beijing’s gossipmongers for quite some time.

Miss Du arrived, took Concubine Du away, and all the while, the younger Mr. Jie followed them. She did not spare him a second glance.

He deliberately held his injured hand to his chest, but she acted as if she didn’t see it, which saddened him greatly.

At dusk, the distressingly melancholic younger Mr. Jie pulled out some liquor, preparing to drown his sorrows all night. No sooner had he taken a sip than his father smashed the liquor jar.

"You still drink with your hand like that, do you not care about your hand anymore?"

Lowering his head to look at his little finger, the younger Mr. Jie thought of how losing this finger couldn’t even draw an extra glance from Du Xintong, and his sorrow deepened. He gave a bitter smile and reached for another jar of liquor.

"Father, I’m just having a drink," he murmured.

His father snatched the liquor from his hand and smashed it against the outside steps with a crash, shouting angrily, "If you don’t care about that hand, why bother having Doctor Gu reattach it? Wouldn’t it be better to just throw it to the dogs?"

The younger Mr. Jie ignored him and grabbed for the third jar.

He intended to get utterly drunk, so he had people bring over a lot of liquor.

His father turned a furious shade of livid blue and, without hesitation, seized it and smashed it against the doorway.

The servants outside were so frightened they didn't dare make a sound, standing far away but obedient.

His father pointed at the younger Mr. Jie and shouted furiously, "Look at yourself, what have you become? I wanted you to marry Xintong, and you made a fuss with me, insisting on marrying Du Wanqing. Even after Du Wanqing became part of your household, you continued to make a scene. You finally pushed Xintong away, still making a scene. Tell me, what in heaven's name do you want?"

"What do I want?" The younger Mr. Jie's hand, raised mid-air, stopped, and his heart clenched with pain—in pain that made his whole body tremble.

Since the year his mother passed away, when he cried, he had never wept again.

Yet at that moment, the younger Mr. Jie began to cry.

"Father, is there any regret medicine for sale at Doctor Gu's?"

"You..." His father stared blankly at the son who resembled him the most, unable to speak for a long while.

"Father, if there's no regret medicine, then just give me a packet of medicine that can make me forget all the things I want to forget," he said before looking at the liquors and muttering to himself, "No, there is no such medicine, but liquor can do it. I've heard that getting drunk can make you forget everything you want to forget. Liquor, give me liquor, do not stop me..."

His father sighed deeply but still took the liquor away from his grasp.

He squatted down, looking directly at the younger Mr. Jie sitting on the ground, and whispered with a sigh, "You realize your regret? You have finally woken up."

"Father! My heart aches."

His father nodded and said, "Your father knows your heart aches, but the idea that you can forget what you want to by getting drunk is deceptive. You are avoiding the issue! Zhonglin, a moment of folly is not a concern, but to live in folly forever is what one should fear. You, my son, suffer from an excess of devotion, fixating on one person and giving your all, to the point of obscuring all reason, effectively shutting everyone else out.

I know how devoted you were to Du Wanqing in the past, and now it is the same with Du Xintong. It seems your life will be inseparably entwined with these two daughters of the Du Family. Xintong is a good girl; you have a whole lifetime ahead, and there is still a chance for redemption. Instead of drowning in liquor here, it's better to pick yourself up and strive to win back Xintong."

Chapter 709: Found a Match for Youyou

"But I..." Jie's second son looked at himself with utter disgust and said, "In my current state, how am I worthy of her? I dare not see her, nor do I have the face to!"

Master Jie snorted, his tone anything but pleased, "At a time like this, you still care about your face? If you really cared about your dignity, could you have let the family end up in such a state? Go out and ask around; does the second son of the Jie Family have any face left?"

The heartbroken Jie's second son was left speechless by his own father's rebuke.

...

The Jie Family had been troubling the Lin Residence with constant issues recently, seeking help time and again. Madam Lin, who always valued propriety, was quite furious, complaining to Xingyi, "What on earth is going on with the Jie Family? Every day it's either someone getting hurt or attempting suicide. It's bad enough during the day, but now they come to our place before dawn to drag someone away. Oh, so it seems Youyou is their servant, always at their beck and call? Youyou is your only niece, and even I have never ordered her around like this. What exactly does the Jie Family mean by this?"

Lin Xingyi replied helplessly, "Youyou is a doctor; can you prevent a doctor from making house calls?"

"There has to be a limit, though. I say nothing of the day, but she is an unmarried girl, visiting other households before dawn—how is that proper? Xingyi, I've recently been matching Youyou with suitable families. If word of this gets out, would anyone agree to it? Tell me, who would want their daughter-in-law running off to another's house at night?"

"What? You're looking for a match for Youyou?" Lin Xingyi was so surprised that he nearly fell off his chair.

Others might not know, but he was very clear. Youyou had already been married to Jin Zijin back in Lotus Village. Sooner or later, Jin Zijin would come to the Lin Residence to take her away. Why fret over something so needless?

Madam Lin found Xingyi's shocked expression strange, but without delving deeper, she simply said, "At Youyou's age, she won't be able to marry off if we wait any longer. You, Master Lin, may be too busy to be concerned about your niece's marriage, but I, her aunt, cannot neglect it. I surely can't let others mock her for being parentless — if I don't arrange her marriage, who will?"

This argument seemed reasonable, but...

Lin Xingyi was caught off guard, unable to speak as Jin Zijin's matter certainly couldn't be known by others.

"Ahem, ahem..." He coughed twice, clutching his fist, and said, "Youyou is not in good health; you know that. Stop looking for her, it's uncertain how many years she has left."

"What are you saying, Lin Xingyi?" Madam Lin became upset and protested, "She's living just fine right now. Is that how you should speak? As a young woman, what can she do if not marry? This has nothing to do with her illness. When I find a family for her, I make everything clear beforehand. With my reputation, could I possibly deceive someone? It has to be a mutually agreeable arrangement."

"So, have you found someone?" asked Lin Xingyi, not sure what else to say.

Madam Lin replied, "Yes, there are a few prospects. The most suitable is a son from the Hu official's family, close in age to Youyou. He passed the imperial examination as a successful candidate two years

ago and is said to be exceptionally learned—a truly talented and scholarly young man. I think he is quite a match for Youyou. What do you think?"

"Which son? First-born or a child by a concubine?"

Being a minor official, Lin Xingyi, naturally, was unaware of the Hu family's personal matters.

Madam Lin stated, "He's a child by a concubine, but Youyou isn't a proper young miss of our family either; she's a cousin. It could be considered a match of equal social standing. Anyway, don't underestimate this son; he's the most talented of his generation in the Hu Family. He'll also take the imperial exams next spring; if he attains high honors, then Youyou would be marrying up. I'm setting her up with a young man who has a promising future."

Chapter 710: Someone Is Getting Impatient

Lin Xingyi did not deny her statement, but the problem was not at all where she claimed it to be.

Struggling with the issue internally and unsure of what to do, after some thought, he simply said, "I think we still need to take a second look at that illegitimate son from the Hu Family. Right now, there are plenty of prodigals pretending to be scholars, and passing the imperial examination to become a Juren is not such a big deal. Let's wait and see."

Madam Lin disagreed, "I know you don't think much of a Juren, but do you think everyone is like you? Wait and see, wait and see, by the time others participate in the imperial examination and rank as a Top Scholar, they will no longer consider Youyou. Isn't this precisely to ensure Youyou's well-being that I have timed this discussion of marriage? If they care about their son's future, they will certainly agree to this marriage."

Having been immersed in the bureaucratic lifestyle for many years, Lin Xingyi instantly understood Madam Lin's intention.

He stared at her for a moment, his gaze ambiguous and his expression somewhat cold.

Perhaps his disdain was because Lin Xingyi, a man who came from humble beginnings and genuinely became the Top Scholar, and rose to high office, had always disliked those in power who schemed their way to success.

Madam Lin, well-connected among officials' wives and very familiar with these tactics, was someone he was also well aware of.

Using Youyou to elevate the Hu Family's illegitimate son was likely related to her natal family.

Of course, this did not mean she did not care for Youyou. By all accounts, this was indeed a good match, but Lin Xingyi disdained such way of officiating, and Gu Youyou would not marry into the Hu Family.

"I will think it over further, and I hope you will do the same, Madam. Our Lin Family's foundation is unstable, and our relatives are poor." Lin Xingyi did not make his refusal absolute, for if this was indeed his father-in-law's intention, the implications would be significant.

This exhortation for Madam Lin to think it over meant to remind her that, although she was a daughter of the Ducal Residence, she was now a wife in the Lin Family and should consider the Lin Family's interests.

It's best not to wade into muddy waters one should avoid.

Madam Lin, a smart woman adept at reading the room, understood that her usually mild-mannered husband was seldom this stern unless slightly angered.

She knew when to advance or retreat.

"Alright, then... we'll wait and see?"

"Yes, this is a serious matter," Lin Xingyi said gravely.

"Alright, then. You rest early too. I will leave first," Madam Lin also became solemn.

The setting sun cast its rays into the study, stretching Lin Xingyi's shadow long.

He stood with his hands behind his back, his posture upright.

The Emperor was still in robust health, yet the Ducal Residence had already begun grooming a new generation of courtiers close to the throne.

Knowing that the Emperor favored young people of clear family background and without factional affiliations, they reached out to the Hu Family.

Minister Hu was the head of a department in the Ministry of Rites, a sixth-ranking official, with both an Assistant Minister of Rites and Minister of Rites above him, leaving him with little real power. His family had a son of astonishing talent, but he was an illegitimate child.

This was the type of person they naturally wished to draw in.

The daughters of the Ducal Residence, even if born from a concubine, were highly esteemed and would never possibly marry into such small households. If they waited to marry after the young man achieved Top Scholar status, it wouldn't be as commendable as during his less fortunate times, so they thought of Youyou.

"Hmph, they've miscalculated," Lin Xingyi said coldly.

...

Three days later, Jin Zijin had arranged all the travel plans, aiming for a villa owned by Miss Du.

Miss Du, having been in the Jie Family for several years without managing her property, found that the people on the villa had not let it go to waste; they kept it well-organized.

Gu Youyou spoke of this to Lin Qianqing, telling her to find an excuse to leave home, and if she couldn't, to obediently climb over the wall and go.

It was easy for Gu Youyou to leave; she went to Madam Lin’s courtyard and said, "Aunt, my medicine is almost finished; I need to go to Jisheng Hall to get some."