Farmhouse 711

Chapter 711: The Woman Who Changes Her Appearance

Madam Lin looked at her and said calmly, "For such a small matter, Xiang Chun could fetch it for you; why must you go in person?"

Gu Youyou replied, "My medicine is delicate and cannot afford the slightest mistake. Last time, there must have been a mistake in the preparation, and Youyou almost didn't recover. If it weren't for Brother Yue Rujing, things could have been dire. I dare not entrust this task to another, and besides, the process is quite troublesome; the tools in the residence are not as good as those in Jisheng Hall."

Concerned about life-and-death matters, Madam Lin did not insist and relented, "Then fine, let Xiang Chun accompany you. Go early and return early. Your uncle has said that the remnants of Prince Three have been stirring again of late. It's best if you don't go out unless necessary; it would be troublesome if those murderers came looking for you again."

"Understood, Aunt!"

Youyou secretly rejoiced in her heart, obediently agreeing before smoothly leaving the residence.

But why were the remnants of Prince Three stirring again? A sense of panic flickered in her heart. Could it be that Jin Ziyuan was coming to Beijing once more?

When the carriage arrived at Jisheng Hall, Yue Rujing and Jin Zijin were already waiting in the back yard.

They had both applied disguises, and had she not been very familiar with them, she might have failed to recognize them at first glance.

Gu Youyou chuckled and said, "With such disguises, you do resemble the attendants from my Jisheng Hall."

Yue Rujing smiled and said, "Our disguise is indeed that of Jisheng Hall's attendants, those who travel to the countryside to collect medicinal herbs."

Their reason was well thought out.

Looking at Jin Zijin, Gu Youyou asked with some concern, "Are you going as well, is everything all right?"

I heard their deranged master has come again.

Jin Zijin replied indifferently, "It’s fine, Yixi is also coming to serve. These past two days, Master has mistaken Yixi for me."

Gu Youyou: "..."

She was now somewhat curious; what on earth did this old man look like?

He was probably somewhat senile.

It’s not easy to live to a hundred years old, yet this centenarian is still able to travel between Qi Mountain and Beijing, a journey that takes four or five days by carriage.

Gu Youyou looked around and did not see Lin Qianqing, so she inquired, "Where is my cousin? Hasn’t she arrived yet?"

Yue Rujing pointed with her lips toward a room, saying, "She’s in the room changing clothes and applying makeup; you should change too."

By the time Lin Qianqing emerged, she was dressed in an attendant’s attire and had seemingly applied something to her face; her delicate white skin looked a lot rougher. At a quick glance, she truly resembled a thin and small labor hand.

Gu Youyou burst into laughter and said, "Who did this for you? I almost didn’t recognize you; the makeup is quite good." She had transformed a naturally charming young lady into the likeness of a laboring lad.

Lin Qianqing shook her head and said, "I don’t know; it was someone the Princely Heir brought." She smiled and added, "Quite a transformation, isn’t it? I almost didn’t dare recognize myself."

Gu Youyou nodded and gave a thumbs up.

She also entered the room, first changing into a set of ordinary attendant’s clothes, before going to another room for makeup.

The makeup artist was a young man who seemed unremarkable. He nodded slightly toward Gu Youyou and began his work without saying much to her.

Gu Youyou said, "As long as I don’t look like myself, it will be fine. Just don’t make it too ugly." Their makeup was too ugly.

The person replied, "Don’t worry, I won’t make you look too ugly."

The voice that came out was actually that of a woman, and it was a tender and pleasant one, at that. Gu Youyou was taken aback and suddenly turned around, exclaiming, "You’re a woman?"

The soft-voiced girl said, "Yes, Miss Gu, can you tell that I am a woman?"

Chapter 712: Leaving the City

Gu Youyou shook her head like a bobblehead doll, "I can’t tell, impressive."

All four of them had put on disguises, and each had undergone a big change in appearance.

Yue Rujing joked, "Yi Yan’s skills in disguise have become increasingly refined."

Yi Yan replied with a smile, "Princely Heir Yue, you flatter me." Then, turning to Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing, she said, "Ladies, if you find the makeup on your face uncomfortable after a while, you can simply wash it off with water."

"Will it be uncomfortable?" Lin Qianqing asked, blinking her eyes.

Yi Yan said, "This is the first time the ladies have used these disguise materials, so it may become uncomfortable after a long time. Once we get to the outskirts of Beijing and it's safe, keeping or removing the makeup won't matter."

That made sense. As long as they were safe leaving the city, what did it matter if they were discovered upon returning? After all, they would be back by then.

Having chemical substances on one's face for too long isn't good.

That girl's makeup wasn't ugly, just done in a way that made her look like an ordinary person, the kind no one would take a second glance at in a crowd.

Plainly put, it made the face very unrecognizable.

The plain looks were starkly different from their previous appearances, and among the four imperfect faces, Gu Youyou was considered to have more pleasing features.

The four of them walked out of the city grandly, and once they reached the suburbs, some people brought them horses and also a cart – the kind used by farmers to haul grain, drawn by an ox.

Gu Youyou broke into a sweat.

Yue Rujing said, "It would be too strange for four grown men to ride in a carriage. We should either ride horses or take the cart."

Gu Youyou chose to ride a horse. If she wasn't wrong, the cart was for transporting medicinal herbs; otherwise, were they pretending to be cohorts going to the countryside to collect herbs?

She looked at Lin Qianqing and asked, "Do you know how to ride a horse?"

They were northerners; the Lin Family and the Jie Residence both had quite a few horses, and many house servants knew how to ride. It was just uncertain whether the ladies knew how as well.

To her disappointment, Lin Qianqing shook her head and said, "No, I don't. The only time I rode one was when I was little, and my older cousin secretly took me for a ride at my grandparents' house."

"So you can sit on a horse?" Gu Youyou asked.

"Sit?" Lin Qianqing was a bit confused.

Gu Youyou said with a smile, "Come on, I'll help you."

So Gu Youyou mounted the horse first and then helped Lin Qianqing get up. Lin Qianqing sat behind her, and they shared one horse.

It was quite frightening to be up high on the horse for the first time, and Lin Qianqing quickly clung to Gu Youyou's waist.

Gu Youyou laughed, "Hold on tight, we're taking off!"

Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing each took a horse of their own, and no one bothered with the cart; it would be delivered to them in the countryside later.

On the road, the wind was strong as the horses galloped, blowing their hair into disarray.

Lin Qianqing was very excited, shouting, "Cousin, faster, I want to fly!"

Fly, indeed.

Gu Youyou replied annoyedly, "Hold on tight, I'm afraid you'll fall off."

Lin Qianqing immediately wrapped her arms tightly around Gu Youyou’s waist.

Gu Youyou started to laugh, using the riding crop to urge the horse forward.

"Giddy up..."

Yue Rujing, watching the pair ahead, also laughed, "They seem to be having fun now, but I wonder how Madam Lin will react when she finds out that one climbed over the wall and the other lied to her to go out and have fun."

Jin Zijin sighed, "With any action comes gains and losses. As long as they think it’s worth it, that’s good."

"Brother, you really are..." Yue Rujing shook his head incessantly, "You’re hopeless. You always listen to her. She should be staying quietly at the Lin Residence now. It’s the best for her. Jin Yi, that guy, I heard he’s come back to Beijing recently. This time, he’s not here for Madam Ru; guess what he’s up to?"

Chapter 713: What’s He Here For?

Jin Zijin hastened his pace, a faint voice drifting over, "What do you think?"

Yue Rujing sped up his horse to catch up, loudly saying, "He’s trying to incite internal strife within the Dao Family, or perhaps within the imperial court. I heard he’s also looking for the remaining ’medicinal people’, but I’ll keep a close eye on him and won’t let him succeed."

"Knowing that is enough." Glancing at the people ahead, Jin Zijin’s lips curved up slightly.

The two of them sped up, sticking close behind Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing.

As the road ahead came into view, Yue Rujing increased his speed.

"Miss Gu, take the left path."

Gu Youyou pulled on the reins, and her horse neighed, coming to a stop at the crossroads ahead.

"How much farther?" Gu Youyou called to the person catching up behind her.

Yue Rujing pointed to the lake in front of them and said, "Not far now, just on the other side of that lake. We should go around the left side, or else we'll need to take a boat." He paused for a moment before adding, "Taking a boat isn't as fast as riding, and I didn't prepare one in advance."

Oh, then we can only ride.

Gu Youyou tugged on the reins and continued to the left.

Lin Qianqing glanced back at the two men following them and curiously asked Gu Youyou, "Cousin, I can understand why the Princely Heir Yue is following us, but why is Tianzong's eldest senior brother with us? Do you also have a relationship with him?"

Gu Youyou said, "Of course, I do have a relationship with him!"

"What kind of relationship?" Lin Qianqing's heart skipped a beat, what kind of relationship could have enticed him to act as a guard?

Gu Youyou started laughing, not intending to deceive Lin Qianqing, so she simply said with a smile, "I can't tell you about this matter yet, we'll talk about it later. In any case, he won't harm us."

Lin Qianqing replied awkwardly, "Everything about you is mysterious, I really don't know how you spent your days before coming to the Lin Family. You've got a connection with the Princely Heir Yue and also a profound relationship with Tianzong's eldest senior brother."

Far behind them, Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing followed at a distance, Yue Rujing asking with a laugh, "I heard that Madam Lin has found a good marriage prospect for Miss Gu?"

Jin Zijin was in a good mood initially, but his expression darkened when Yue Rujing brought up the matter, saying, "A bast*rd son of the Hu family steward, is he even worthy?"

Seeing his senior brother looking jealous for once, Yue Rujing burst into laughter, "Exactly, no one but you is worthy. But that's only what you think. I heard that Madam Lin thinks they're quite well-matched and she's probably going to send for a matchmaker soon. Miss Gu might not know about this yet. Senior brother, what do you plan to do?"

Jin Zijin gave Yue Rujing a meaningful glance and said, "Isn't this sort of thing your forte? Do you really need to ask me?"

"Me to handle it?" Yue Rujing was dumbfounded, "My tricks are for dealing with women, but... the Hu family steward is a government official, it wouldn't be proper, would it?"

Jin Zijin shirked the responsibility, stating, "This, I won't handle. I have to take care of the old man lately, I won't have time for the Hu family or the Li family. In short, you sort it out, or come back and take care of the old man yourself. Choose one."

Yue Rujing's mouth twitched, an old man who wasn't confused was already difficult to serve, a confused one even more so, how annoying his senior brother was!

"I choose to deal with the Hu family."

Before long, they indeed saw a manor.

Near the lakeside, amid a grove of green willow trees and further in, crisscrossing paths divided fields of waving golden wheat in the wind. It was a rare rural beauty.

They'd picked a good time, what a treat for the eyes.

Upon reaching the ridge, they dismounted. Gu Youyou led Lin Qianqing to the lakeside first to wash the dirt from their faces. The sun was intense at this hour, and upon exposure, their faces truly felt a bit of stinging sensation.

Chapter 714: Wheat Field

First, clean up Lin Qianqing. After Gu Youyou had finished cleaning herself, she found that Lin Qianqing had already cheerfully run off.

Gu Youyou led the horse, passing through the willow forest and onto the ridges amid the waves of wheat.

The path was quite narrow, making it somewhat difficult to walk while leading a horse.

She saw a broader road on the opposite side that looked like the main entrance to the village. She had taken the wrong path.

"Cousin, take the road on the right, it’s wider," she shouted at the top of her lungs.

"Hey, cousin, come quickly, what is this grass? It’s so pretty..."

Lin Qianqing plucked a handful of wheat.

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "This is not just grass; the scallion pancakes you ate this morning were made from the flour of this plant."

"Really? This is it?" Lin Qianqing said, surprised.

Gu Youyou thought to herself: Her maternal grandmother, who loved to garden, was not doing a competent job. She should plant some crops as well, so Lin Qianqing wouldn’t be unfamiliar even with wheat.

They had set out early, and although it was just past the hour of Chen (7-9 AM), the sun was already quite strong, and its rays were scorching, burning the skin.

Gu Youyou anxiously looked back at Jin Zijin, who was following far behind, wondering if the harsh sunlight could trigger his inflammation.

It seemed they needed to hurry along.

Gu Youyou turned back and urged Lin Qianqing, "Let's walk faster, the sun is strong, and it's making my head spin."

Lin Qianqing, remembering that her cousin was frail, didn't dare delay and hurriedly quickened her pace towards the houses at the end of the wheat field.

From afar, they could see at the end of the crisscrossing fields, beneath a few clusters of willows, a lady holding a paper umbrella, expectantly looking out. It was Miss Du, who had been waiting inside the village.

Oh? The person standing beside her wasn't Cuiya, but Xie Qinyun.

When did Miss Xie arrive? Gu Youyou looked at Lin Qianqing.

With her head lowered and an embarrassed smile, Lin Qianqing said, "I mentioned our visit to the village to Qinyun a couple of days ago. She, like me, will be in the grand selection next month."

Oh, the pair of troubled sisters were indeed pitiable.

"I'm just worried this might leak out," said Gu Youyou, pausing before lowering her voice. "Do you remember what happened last time we went to Jinxiu City? With the grand selection approaching, do you know how many young ladies will be competing with you for the role of the primary wife?"

Lin Qianqing's face turned pale with shock, then darkened, "You mean our encounter with the attackers last time was..."

Gu Youyou quickly added, "As long as you are aware, anything is possible. Your aunt must have told you about the fearsome nature of the women in the Imperial Family's harem. Often, their families start fighting on their behalf even before they are married into the same residence."

Lin Qianqing’s complexion paled further, but she nodded firmly.

Gu Youyou breathed a sigh of relief.

Of course, saying that their previous attack was orchestrated by her competitors was just a guess from Gu Youyou, but the reminder was genuine.

No matter what the future holds, being alive is what’s important.

Since it was destined that she would marry into the Crown Prince Residence, it was good to be more cautious and to prepare her for the reality ahead of time.

Xie Qinyun was still unaware of which residence she would enter. If by chance it was also the Crown Prince Residence... based on these past days’ understanding of Xie Qinyun, she was a fierce woman capable of ruthless actions. If she and Lin Qianqing were not in the same residence, all would be well. But if they unfortunately ended up together, it would be hard to say whether she would take their past affection into account.

When they approached, several servants came forward to take their horses.

"You’ve arrived, please come in," Miss Du, along with Xie Qinyun, came out to greet them and gave each of them an extra umbrella.

Lin Qianqing said with a smile, "The sun is so strong, we appreciate you personally coming to meet us, Miss Du. You could have just sent a servant."

Chapter 715: In the Depths of the Lotus Flowers

Miss Du laughed, "You are my honored guests, how could I let the servants handle that? Hurry back to the villa, I’ve cooked lotus seed and mung bean soup, both are perfect for cooling off."

Xie Qinyun chuckled as she pulled Lin Qianqing along and whispered, "I’ve been here for two days now, staying at this villa. They have a stone mill in their yard, and the bean juice it produces is so delicious—much better than what my family makes for me."

"Really? My grandmother’s yard also has a stone mill; I wonder if it’s the same."

The path through the rice paddies was narrow, accommodating only one person at a time. Gu Youyou and her three companions walked in single file, with her at the rear, holding an umbrella, but her gaze was turned back towards the person behind her.

After a moment’s hesitation, Gu Youyou turned back, handed the umbrella to Jin Zijin, and said, "I don’t mind the heat. You use it."

Jin Zijin didn’t refuse and took the umbrella.

He was indeed suffering from the heat. Accepting it also spared Youyou the worry.

"I’m hot too!" Yue Rujing dragged out her voice, smiling in a way that begged for a teasing response.

"Suffer through it!" Gu Youyou retorted, unamused.

The three girls ahead stopped when they heard the commotion behind them and turned to look.

Xie Qinyun asked Lin Qianqing curiously, "Who are those two? Gu Youyou actually gave her umbrella to that person?"

She had taken a casual glance at the two men, assuming they were just laborers dressed as attendants, brought by Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing as a ruse. But seeing Gu Youyou’s concerned gesture of offering the umbrella, she realized their identities must be out of the ordinary.

Therefore, when Xie Qinyun and Miss Du looked at the two men again, their gaze no longer resembled that of looking at servants.

Miss Du nodded slightly in greeting, "Xintong has been remiss. May I ask who the two of you are..."

She stopped mid-sentence as Yue Rujing raised a hand to signal Miss Du not to ask further.

Miss Du was smart and instantly understood, saying, "Please, gentlemen."

The willow sitting area had several well-arranged tile-roofed houses; the courtyard was sunning a variety of half-dried vegetables, and by the side of the house, a chicken coop housed several chickens.

A simply dressed middle-aged woman came out to greet them, holding a basket that was half-filled with picked vegetables.

A yellow dog lazily slept under the eaves of the house. It glanced at the newcomers half-heartedly before closing its eyes and dozing off again.

This scene was very much in the spirit of a rural homestay.

The middle-aged woman bowed to Miss Du, saying, "Miss, are these the guests you were expecting?"

"That’s right, just these few," Miss Du replied. "Chen’s mother, please prepare a few of your specialty dishes."

"Of course, of course, I’ll go right away," said Chen’s mother with a busy smile.

Xie Qinyun, with Lin Qianqing in tow, went off to where the tofu was being freshly ground, while Jin Zijin gave Gu Youyou a meaningful look, prompting her to eagerly follow him out of the courtyard.

"Where to?" An opportunity to meet Jin Zijin during the day was a rare treat. Gu Youyou glanced at the expanse of lotus flowers in front of her, an idea striking her, and said, "To the river?"

Jin Zijin smiled, leading her to the riverbank.

Approaching, they saw a small boat under the willow trees, Jin Zijin untied the rope securing it to the trees, tossing it into the boat before turning to extend a hand to her, "Come, be careful."

Just what was needed at the moment.

Carefully, Gu Youyou stepped onto the boat and asked, "How did you know there was a boat here?"

"I saw it when we arrived earlier."

The waves shimmered, and the small boat quickly reached deep into the lotus bloom. The low houses of the villa receded further away, and on the river, other boats were out of sight. Only the lotus leaves could be seen swaying lightly in the wind, some flutters growing a bit more intense.

Chapter 716:

In the midst of the swaying, vast patch of lotus plants, there was a small, low boat.

The sun blazed intensely and, having not brought an umbrella, Gu Youyou plucked a large lotus leaf to hold up as a makeshift one, which effectively shielded her from the sun.

Gu Youyou studied Jin Zijin’s face and said with a low chuckle, "When the time comes, with a beard stuck onto this face, you’ll look almost the same as when you were pretending to be a hunter. Yi Yan said that wearing disguise materials on your face for too long can be uncomfortable. How did you manage to endure it for so many years?"

Jin Zijin plucked a lotus pod and placed it back on the boat, murmuring, "It was very uncomfortable at first, so I didn’t look like that when I initially arrived at Lotus Village. But after a while, I got used to it."

Thinking about how difficult those years must have been for him living alone in the mountains, Gu Youyou pondered for a moment before saying, "When I first met you, I often acted foolishly, thinking maybe you were after my dowry."

As Jin Zijin diligently picked more lotus pods, hearing Gu Youyou say that, he paused for a moment, then sat down in the boat, motioning her to come closer to him.

He gazed into her eyes, which shimmered like clear springs, rippling like the water beneath the boat.

He found his voice growing hoarse as he spoke softly, "It’s quite normal for you to think like that. If I had truly been a poor hunter and wanted to quickly earn money to marry a wife to bear children, the easiest and fastest way would have been to marry you, wait for you to die, and then sell off your belongings."

Gu Youyou was not a shy girl prone to blushing. She responded with a loving gaze, her breath sweet as orchids, "You weren’t really a hunter, but you’ve still made a profit. Not only am I alive and well, I can make silver, and... whenever you want to have children, you can, right?"

She gave him a look that made Jin Zijin feel as if half of his body had turned to mush. The other half was stiff with confusion.

"Youyou!" he reached out to stroke her face.

His voice lowered, "Indeed, we’re not young anymore. Most women your age already have two or three children."

Gu Youyou: "..." The tender atmosphere was abruptly tainted by his words.

She brushed off the hot hand from her face in irritation, cursing, "Pick the lotus pods, just keep picking the lotus pods. They’re needed for the pot!"

Jin Zijin sheepishly straightened up.

"You’re angry again, you really are capricious."

"That’s because you’re annoying!" Gu Youyou retorted, "It’s not us who are not young, it’s you. In a year or two, you’ll be reaching the age of adulthood, right? Most men at your stage already have a brood of children."

She couldn’t hold back her need to retort, could she?

Jin Zijin: "..."

Yue Rujing often said she was quick-witted and sharp-tongued, and he wasn’t wrong.

Chapter 717: He Found a New Body for Himself

As memories of the past arose, Gu Youyou thought back to the ancient tomb on the hill behind Lotus Village.

Back then, she had found many remains in the ear chamber of that tomb and had said that if she had the chance to leave, she would rebury those remains properly. There were also some strange occurrences in the tomb, but afterwards, the tomb chamber collapsed, and since she was in the midst of a conflict with Jin Zijin, mistrusting each other, she had no one to confide in, so she ended up forgetting those events.

Now that she thought about it, she realized that the tomb chamber was indeed no ordinary place. It was a refuge for the third prince and his son, which could hardly be just an ordinary tomb.

She asked, "That tomb behind Lotus Village, the one where Jin Ziyuan was hiding, what kind of tomb is it exactly? I saw many murals of ascensions in broad daylight in there, and even the mechanism on the door is the Innate Eight Trigrams. Is it related to your Dao Family?"

Jin Zijin nodded and said, "Indeed, that tomb is a several-hundred-year-old ancient tomb. The owner of the tomb was a high-level figure of that era’s Xuanzong, also the one closest to succeeding in a medicinal human sacrifice ritual."

Gu Youyou’s brow twitched, and she said, "Closest to succeeding, so that means not successful, right? If our ancestors failed, then why does Yu Jizi still believe in the superstition of ascending to heaven in broad daylight?"

Jin Zijin replied with a scornful laugh, "Some people just don’t believe in fate and are convinced they are the first to defy heaven and change destiny." He looked at Gu Youyou, his expression becoming more somber, his pupils constricted, his face more serious than ever.

Gu Youyou was startled and asked, "What’s wrong?"

Jin Zijin said, "I never used to believe their nonsense, even when there was plenty of convincing evidence right before my eyes, I didn't believe it. But Youyou, your case... it's very similar to the records."

Seeing his expression, Gu Youyou's face turned a shade paler, "What... what do you mean by that? Similar to what?"

"Soul Transfer!" Jin Zijin uttered coldly.

Soul Transfer?

Gu Youyou shuddered with fear, instantly understanding his meaning.

"You mean..." She could hardly believe it. Wasn't it about ascending to heaven in broad daylight? How did it become Soul Transfer?

"You're saying that what they truly meant by immortality isn't becoming a fairy and ascending to heaven, but rather... discarding one's aging body and transferring the soul to another person, using another person's body to continue living."

"Exactly," Jin Zijin said indifferently.

Gu Youyou chuckled dryly, her laugh more pained than crying, "How is that possible?"

But as soon as she spoke, she froze.

How is that possible? Why wouldn't it be possible?

Gu Youyou herself was a case in point. Modern-day Gu Youyou drowned at sea and transferred her soul into the body of Gu Youyou from Lotus Village, using her body. Now eight years younger, she continued living in this younger body.

Otherwise, she would be the same age as Jin Zijin.

Jin Zijin watched Gu Youyou intensely, his voice low, "That male body of pure yin was the new body he had chosen for himself."

"You mean Jin Ziyuan?" Gu Youyou's face filled with horror, "He intends to transfer his soul into Jin Ziyuan's body?"

Jin Zijin nodded slightly and said, "Exactly, which is why for all those years, he kept Jin Ziyuan in an idiotic state using drugs, not wanting him to retain too many memories that might interfere. He has been the State Preceptor for more than fifty years, getting old but delaying the selection of a new State Preceptor, likely paving the way for his new body."

Gu Youyou was stunned—what a vile old creep.

"Then why didn't you say anything before?"

Chapter 718: Blood Sacrifice

Jin Zijin sighed, "I don't know much about the Blood Sacrifice Soul Transfer Array, which I learned a few days ago when my master was in Beijing and lucid enough for me to get some information from him."

He had always been uneasy about Gu Youyou's state of existence. Hence, when he had the chance, he asked Tian Jizi but unexpectedly, the true purpose of the Blood Sacrifice Soul Transfer Array was indeed not any sort of ascension into the daylight, but... to plunder another's body.

Therefore, when Yu Jizi chose Jin Ziyuan to help the emperor conquer the world while keeping the Fifth Prince and the many forces of the Third and Fifth Princes from the past covertly intact, it probably wasn't as straightforward as it seemed on the surface.

"So what?" Gu Youyou had a bad premonition.

"So..." Jin Zijin really didn't want to frighten her, but he felt it was better to inform her in advance.

"So, the blood sacrifice of the medicine man should take place before the election of the State Preceptor."

Gu Youyou felt a chill in her heart. The evil old society and blood sacrifice—just these two words were terrifying enough. It couldn't be the kind that drains a person's blood completely, could it?

It was too cruel, especially since she was one of the sacrificial offerings.

"Roughly when?" Gu Youyou's teeth chattered as she managed to utter the question.

Jin Zijin pondered for a moment, sitting on the boat, staring at the gently rippling lake with a chill in his eyes.

He said in a low voice, "It should be because the medicine man is not ready yet, otherwise he would not ignore you guys."

'You guys' referred to Gu Youyou, who obediently stayed at the Lin Residence, Jin Ziyuan who was planning a rebellion, and the one they found in Jinxiu City.

Gu Youyou bit her lip and said fiercely, "My situation didn't come from a blood sacrifice; he can dream of succeeding. Even if it really comes to that day, I'd rather smash my head to death than let him have his way."

Jin Zijin held her tight and gently patted her back, saying, "You won't have such a day, since his medicine man isn't ready yet, then..."

Before he finished speaking, they heard the sound of oars moving through the water from the lotus patches ahead, and they stopped talking, focusing carefully instead.

Listening to the sound, they guessed that the boat on the opposite side was still quite a distance away. Gu Youyou whispered to Jin Zijin, "It wouldn't be good for them to see us like this, hard to explain. Let's quickly row back."

Jin Zijin nodded slightly, hmm’d in agreement, and began to lower the oar, rowing the boat in the direction opposite to where the sound came from.

Who knows who it is—really, even hiding in the middle of the lake doesn’t give one peace.

They hadn’t even managed to steal a quick kiss before being forced to flee.

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin were now rowing the boat as if they were fleeing for their lives.

On the other side, another boat seemed to be tracking them, determined to catch up and find out what was afoot. Judging by the sound of the oars, there were four oars and two people rowing.

Gu Youyou, watching Jin Zijin rowing the boat with all his might in the sweltering heat, felt distressed and wanted to help, but their small boat only had two oars.

So all she could do was use a lotus leaf to fan him, while quietly panting and encouraging him in a hushed voice.

"Come on, faster, give it your all... "

Jin Zijin: "..."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Why did these words sound inappropriate?

"Shut your mouth, and fan me quickly."

Jin Zijin swore, even when he got caught stealing chickens with Yue Rujing and got caught red-handed, it wasn’t this embarrassing.

Getting caught stealing and being caught in adultery were two different concepts.

Jin Zijin had tried his best, short of using Qinggong to escape with Gu Youyou. Unfortunately, his two arms couldn’t compete with four hands, and they were still caught up.

Gu Youyou was preparing her excuse when the boat behind got closer, only to find that the people on it weren’t familiar faces from the manor she had guessed, but two strangers.

Chapter 719: Huo Li Followed

They thought too much. There were many manors and farmhouses around the lake, not just Miss Du’s Green Willow Manor. Since they weren’t acquainted, there was simply no need for explanations.

Wait, the person standing at the bow didn’t seem unfamiliar, somewhat recognizable.

Gu Youyou thought for a moment but couldn’t remember who he was.

However, her memory was usually excellent, so she was certain she had seen this person before, without a doubt.

"Jin Zijin, what’s with this disguise?" The person standing at the bow asked with a smile, glancing at Gu Youyou before quickly looking away.

Jin Zijin pulled Gu Youyou behind him, using his tall stature to shield her thoroughly.

"Huo Li, your tracking skills have improved." Jin Zijin said coldly.

The man called Huo Li just laughed and said, "You’re mistaken, I just came here to pick some lotus seeds to honor my teacher who is fond of them from this place. It’s quite a coincidence to run into you here, haha..."

"Is that so?" Jin Zijin said icily, "What a coincidence indeed. My teacher also likes the lotus seeds from here. So, let’s each pick our own lotus pods, goodbye."

Having said that, Jin Zijin protected Gu Youyou and began paddling the oars once again.

Huo Li did not pursue further, just watched the boat gradually disappear, chuckling lowly, "No matter where you run, don’t think you can escape with her from the palm of our hands."

Gu Youyou’s heart pounded fiercely. She remembered.

That man was the one who was standing opposite Jin Zijin and receiving the incense on the day of the Dragon Head Festival in February.

At that time, she was completely focused on the chill in her body and on Jin Zijin himself, and had only glanced briefly at the person receiving the incense on the other side.

"What does it mean for them to be pursuing us here?"

A still shaken Gu Youyou said.

Jin Zijin said, "It’s nothing, just a coincidence."

A coincidence?

Gu Youyou was no fool.

"A coincidence that he has followed us for so long?"

Jin Zijin replied with an easy smile, "Probably just curious, following us to take a look."

Gu Youyou: "..." Keep making things up, but she didn’t believe it.

Upon returning to the manor, they were greeted by Lin Qianqing holding a bowl of hot soy milk.

She saw Gu Youyou and asked with a smile, "Where have you been, cousin? I was just about to drink this bowl of soy milk before coming to look for you."

Gu Youyou, holding the lotus pods in her hands, said, "Picked some lotus seeds." She struggled to muster a relaxed smile and said, "Let’s go, drink the soy milk you’ve made yourself."

Lin Qianqing started to smile and said, "We also made tofu."

"Great, the tofu beauty." Gu Youyou looped her arm through hers.

...

Jin Zijin looked solemn and gave Yue Rujing, who was plucking chicken feathers, a sign with his eyes. He immediately dropped the half-plucked chicken, brushed the feathers off his hands, and followed Jin Zijin.

Xie Qinyun wasn’t pleased and called out loudly, "Hey, at least finish the job before you go, who’s going to pluck this chicken now?"

Whoever wants to pluck it, let them! Not only did the Princely Heir agree to become a bodyguard, but he had to pluck chicken feathers too?

Yue Rujing scampered after Jin Zijin to the fields, laughing, "I thought you and Gu Youyou, deeply immersed in love among lotus flowers, would at least not return until lunchtime, but you came back so soon."

Jin Zijin looked serious, not in the mood for jokes, and simply said, "Huo Li came. We encountered him on the lake."

"What?" Yue Rujing stumbled, "Huo Li? That pest followed us here?"

"Hmm!" Jin Zijin nodded.

"This relentless tracker, with such a vast lotus field, still manages to find us," Yue Rujing said irritably, "We shouldn't have let him off so easily last time. At the very least, we should have beaten him so badly he couldn't leave the bed for three lunar cycles."

Chapter 720: Yu Jizi Rushes Over

Seeing his senior brother's somber expression, Yue Rujing also became serious, "What is he doing following us?"

Jin Zijin sighed, "He says it's a coincidence, here to pick lotus pods for Yu Jizi."

"Give me a break!" Yue Rujing cursed bitterly, "Such a lame excuse, he actually thought of it. Does he think we're fools?"

Jin Zijin said, "Exactly, so his real purpose must be to warn us, no matter how we disguise ourselves, no matter where we hide, he can find us."

"Look how capable he thinks he is," Yue Rujing said as he rolled up his sleeves, "I'll go beat him up so bad he won't be able to get out of bed for three months. Come on, even if he finds us, what's he going to do about it? I'd like to see if he dares take the boss away."

"Hey!" Jin Zijin stopped him, saying, "He's already gone, what are you going to do. Even if you catch up to him, can you beat him?"

The last sentence inflicted at least ten thousand points of damage to Yue Rujing, if someone else had berated him like this while he was feeling bold and mighty, he would've definitely given them a beating.

"Senior brother, can't you accumulate some verbal karma?"

"I’m stating the facts."

Yue Rujing: "..." His senior brother is not cute at all.

"I’m telling you something important, you’d better not stay in Beijing recently. Go to Xining. There’s news of a medicine man there."

Yue Rujing’s expression turned serious, and he asked, "Why so urgent? That Hu surname might be going to the Lin Family to propose marriage, that matter..."

Jin Zijin interrupted him, "Don’t worry about that for now, I will handle it. You go and find the medicine man in Xining and secretly send him to Lingnan."

Jin Zijin’s eyes were more solemn than ever, he felt that something big might happen soon, they should take action quickly.

"Set out tomorrow, we must get ahead of them before they make a move on Youyou."

"They’re going to make a move on Boss Gu?" Yue Rujing was shocked.

Jin Zijin said, "I reckon it’s coming soon."

...

In Sanqing Temple, Tian Jizi from Tianzong had arrived, and the news had already spread.

As the Sect Leader of Xuanzong, Yu Jizi naturally had to pay a visit.

Yu Jizi, in his thirties then, had competed with the over fifty-year-old Tian Jizi for the position of the State Preceptor. Tian Jizi, with many years of roots in the Dao Sect, had actually lost. This had caused much trepidation.

People thought to themselves how formidable Yu Jizi was at such a young age, not someone to be trifled with.

Ever since Yu Jizi became the State Preceptor, Tian Jizi retreated to the Dao Sect's stronghold on Qi Mountain with his followers, rarely coming down thereafter. Now, after more than fifty years, Yu Jizi had seen Tian Jizi only a handful of times. Today, hearing that Tian Jizi had come to Sanqing Temple, Yu Jizi naturally had to visit.

"Sect Uncle!" The young disciples guarding the door became anxious upon seeing Yu Jizi's arrival.

Yu Jizi looked at the two white-clad Daoist boys with a pleasant expression, "I heard my senior brother has come, and I'm here especially to visit him."

The two white-clad Daoist boys exchanged glances, clearly not daring to stop him, gestured for him to enter.

"Master is in Qianyuan Hall, Sect Uncle, please!"

Despite being over eighty years old, Yu Jizi's body was still very strong, and he walked swiftly, arriving at Qianyuan Hall shortly after to see Tian Jizi.

Having not seen his opponent for many years, he noticed Tian Jizi had aged a bit more.

He looked at his own white hair, and thought, indeed, he had aged as well.

"Senior brother, have you been well?" Yu Jizi greeted Tian Jizi with a bow, showing his respect.

In the Dao Family, Tian Jizi and Yu Jizi were contemporaries, both direct disciples of the previous Sect Leader. The only person who could call him senior brother was the much older Tian Jizi.