Farmhouse 721

Chapter 721: What Happened to Tian Jizi?

Originally, Tian Jizi's opponent was not Yu Jizi, but another person—a senior brother of Xuanzong who was several years his senior.

Alas, his life was cut short, and he passed away before their rivalry could ignite.

Out of necessity, the Sect Leader of Xuanzong had to promote another young disciple to the position of elder brother of Xuanzong, and that person was Yu Jizi.

Everyone thought that this newly raised elder brother would surely be defeated by Tian Jizi, but to everyone's surprise, he won and even forced Tian Jizi to retreat back to the old lair of the Dao Sect.

Now, seeing these two elderly men with their hair white with age, everyone couldn't help but sigh.

Tian Jizi waved his hand, signaling everyone to leave Qianyuan Hall.

Then, he half-closed his eyes and looked at Yu Jizi for a long time without uttering a word.

Yu Jizi stood awkwardly in the middle of his bow, and eventually, feeling embarrassed, he let down his raised arm and straightened up.

"Elder brother, you haven't left the mountain for many years. Why have you come to Sanqing Temple now?"

Tian Jizi sized up Yu Jizi from head to toe but still did not say a word.

Yu Jizi grew increasingly embarrassed, unable to grasp what Tian Jizi meant.

Tian Jizi had fortified Qi Mountain to be as impregnable as a wall of bronze and iron. Despite his fifty years of effort, he was unable to penetrate it in the slightest.

Qi Mountain was also the only place under the heavens not under his control.

Therefore, he had no idea what Tian Jizi had been up to all these years and why he now appeared in such a strange state.

"Elder brother, long time no see. You seem as healthy as you were in your youth. Shall we sit down and have a cup of tea first?" Yu Jizi felt more and more awkward, not knowing what he was saying anymore.

Tian Jizi stared at Yu Jizi as if deep in thought and didn't bother to respond to him.

Yu Jizi couldn't bear the awkwardness any longer. He had seen Tian Jizi a few times fifty years ago, both openly and covertly, and they had clashed many times. He knew Tian Jizi's disposition thoroughly, but at this moment, he found it somewhat impenetrable.

What is this old fellow up to?

The staring made one's skin crawl.

Yu Jizi shook out his sleeves and respectfully bowed to Tian Jizi, then sat down first.

Tian Jizi finally had enough of staring and curiously asked, "Who are you? Why is it that others have white clothing and black hair, yet you have white hair and black clothing?"

"Pfft..." Yu Jizi spat out the tea he had just sipped.

He stared at Tian Jizi in disbelief, just as Tian Jizi had stared at him moments before.

How could Tian Jizi, who was always so stern and proper, act like this?

How could such words come out of his mouth?

At that moment, there was a knock at the door, and a white-clothed Dao boy holding freshly brewed tea stood at the entrance.

After knocking, the boy paused for a moment at the door. Seeing that Tian Jizi showed no sign of acknowledging him and without waiting for his permission, the boy brought in the tea himself.

Placing the tea on the table, Yixi bowed to Tian Jizi and Yu Jizi and respectfully said, "Master, Uncle Master, please enjoy your tea."

Tian Jizi sat down opposite Yu Jizi and said to Yixi, "Zijin, sit down too, and keep your master company for a chat."

Yixi: "..." Alright then, he had gotten used to it over the past few days, but in front of Yu Jizi... He still had to explain.

"Master, I'm not the elder brother. I'm Yixi!"

"Nonsense," Tian Jizi shook his head and said, "Yixi is still on Qi Mountain. I didn't bring him here."

"But I did come, Yixi came too," Yixi explained.

"I didn't bring Yixi here. How could Yixi possibly come? Zijin, there are guests present. Don't be silly."

Yixi: "..." Well, he was at a loss for words.

Chapter 722: I know who he is now

"You say it's whoever you say it is."

Yu Jizi realized something was off with Tian Jizi.

He turned his head to Yixi and asked, "What's wrong with your master? Why can't he tell people apart?"

Yixi replied, "My master is over a hundred years old. He's naturally become senile." At the same time, he shook his head in lament, "Only people like my master and grandmaster can live so long and still be so spirited. It's just that although his body is energetic, his mind... inevitably has aged."

Yu Jizi felt a deep sense of empathy as he looked at Tian Jizi, who couldn't even recognize who he was anymore, and he found himself unable to say another word.

What this little Taoist boy, Yixi, said made sense. They lived longer than ordinary people. Even at his age, his body wasn't worse than that of a young person, but that didn't mean that all his organs stayed young.

If one day he also became confused, even if that thing was accomplished, it would be meaningless.

He stood up, gave a fist and palm salute to Tian Jizi, and said, "Senior brother, when I heard you had come to Sanqing Temple, I made a special trip to see you. Now that I see you're still in good health after all these years, I can leave at ease."

Since he was senile, there wasn't much to say.

Yixi rose to see Yu Jizi out of Qianyuan Hall, then turned back and asked Tian Jizi, "Master, do you recognize who he was now?"

Tian Jizi, with a confused expression, said, "How would I know who he is? And what's it to me who he is?"

Yixi helplessly said, "Oh dear, Master, you've become so muddled that you didn't even recognize him?"

"Who is he?" Tian Jizi raised an eyebrow, refusing to admit that he was confused, and coldly snorted, "I know who he is, I just don't want to say."

"...You know?"

Tian Jizi, as if he were onto something, patted his chest and said, "How many people in this world would wear a black Eight Trigrams robe and have a head of white hair? There's only one person who dares to dress like that."

That's right...

Yixi's eyes widened.

Although the master didn't recognize the face, being the master, he guessed the person just by their clothes.

"Hmph, he's none other than the Emperor of Zhuzhao Country, Jin Moning."

Yixi put a hand to his forehead, wanting to take back his previous thought.

"Zijin, even if it's a dragon robe, only he dares to dress like that in this entire world. Hey, I'm telling you, if you become emperor one day, you must dress like that too. Becoming an emperor means you have to."

Yixi smiled bitterly out of helplessness, "Master, the big senior brother is the one who will wear clothes like that in the future, but our Tianzong's State Preceptor robe is a white Eight Trigrams robe."

"Nonsense, all dragon robes look the same."

"Master, the big senior brother is going to be the State Preceptor, not the Emperor. That's a Daoist robe, not a dragon robe!"

"Aren't you the one who said you didn't want to be the State Preceptor anymore, that you wanted to be the Emperor? Zijin, you better explain to me clearly what you really want to be."

Yixi was already dizzy from the conversation, feeling that his master was becoming increasingly muddled.

The big senior brother is the greatest among the Dao Family's Tianzong, clearly destined to be the State Preceptor, so how could he possibly become the Emperor?

Even though he also bears the surname Jin, what does he have to do with Emperor Jin Moning? Did he think that the Emperor, like the State Preceptor, is chosen by election?

Really, it seems that Master and Yu Jizi also share the surname Jin.

...

Gu Youyou sat in the courtyard discussing with Miss Du about starting a ready-to-wear clothing store.

The designs would be drawn by Gu Youyou, as she wanted to create a unique style of her own to sell exclusively to wealthy ladies.

When it came to starting a ready-to-wear clothing store and hiring skilled embroiderers, Miss Du was somewhat shy about her finances and blushed ever so slightly.

Chapter 723: Open a shop, get rich

She said, somewhat embarrassedly, "In the past few years, I've been living a life of confusion, not managing the shops and estates left by my parents properly, basically teetering between profit and loss. This time, after leaving the Jie Family, although Lord Jie gave me quite a bit of silver, I've almost used it all up in reopening Manxiu Building. If I were to expand the business further, I'm afraid I'd have to sell the shops and even the estate, which would require some time."

Gu Youyou said, "You can sell some of the estate, but you can't sell the shops. The future chain of ready-made garment stores will rely on your family's shops! Some well-located shops can't just be bought with money."

Miss Du said with difficulty, "That may be true, but the estates aren't worth much, only a few well-located shops left by my parents are worth some silver."

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "You don't have to worry about the silver, we agreed on a fifty-fifty split. I can't just contribute designs and not care about anything else, right? Don't worry, you just need to lead the embroiderers in their work, I'll take care of the garments."

"You'll take care of them?" Miss Du asked in surprise.

"Right!" Gu Youyou smiled and nodded, saying, "There's a rather large courtyard behind Jisheng Hall's pharmacy in Jinxiu City; I had it converted into a factory, originally intended for packaging medicines. Now that we're going to partner up and open a ready-made garment store, I'll repurpose that factory to be a garment manufacturing facility. Miss Du, you're familiar with Jinxiu City, won't it be no problem for you to find some skilled female garment workers?"

Miss Du was stunned and nodded, taking some time to grasp the strange new terms brought up by Gu Youyou.

A garment manufacturing facility, female garment workers – she must be talking about setting aside a courtyard to hire women who can tailor clothes. Then, sending the finished garments to Manxiu Building for embroidery decoration before selling them through Manxiu Building.

"I've arranged everything; it's just that your embroidery... when we start getting orders, you alone won't be able to keep up. To produce more and not overburden you, why don't you bring out a few apprentices?" Gu Youyou looked on eagerly, unaware of what the unbreakable rules of the Manxiu craft passed down in Miss Du's family meant to her.

For Gu Youyou, as long as it was profitable, these things didn't matter; however, Miss Du didn't feel the same way.

Miss Du's face suddenly changed, torn and resistant. Yet, facing the sincerely earnest Gu Youyou, she didn't know what to do.

"Manxiu is a heritage craft of the Yu Family, following the tradition that only the legitimate heirs and daughters-in-law, not the concubines or daughters, may be taught. There were no more men in the Yu Family in my mother's generation. To continue the legacy, we had no choice but to break the tradition of not passing it to daughters. Now that this craft has been passed down to me, how can I pass it on to outsiders?"

Their stubbornly conservative mindset wouldn't be easily shifted, Gu Youyou knew well.

She could only patiently persuade, "But right now, you have no son or daughter, and since you've divorced Second Son Jie, to remarry and bear children who would grow up to inherit your craft, that would take so many years. You can wait, but Manxiu Building can't. By the time you've spent all the property left by your parents, by the time everyone has forgotten the once exquisite Manxiu craft, reviving it will be difficult."

Hearing these words from Gu Youyou, Miss Du struggled intensely within.

Not to mention the future, even now... though she has managed to reopen Manxiu Building, and there are some patrons who still cherish Manxiu embroidery, when compared to the heyday of the Manxiu Building, the difference is like heaven and earth – not even remotely comparable.

Chapter 724: The Decision

Collaborating with Gu Youyou, her theoretical proposal was undoubtedly the best opportunity to push the art of Manchu embroidery to another climactic peak.

At the same time, she was also very aware that if Gu Youyou wanted to start this ready-to-wear clothing store, she could use other embroidery to replace her Manchu embroidery. The reason she was sought out was merely due to their acquaintance.

This opportunity... could be described as once this chance is gone, there won't be another shop.

But at what cost... to make Manchu embroidery a common craft that everyone could master?

Gu Youyou calmed her spirit and carefully observed Miss Du, who was in a quandary, guessing the latter's thoughts to a great extent.

Had it been a normal business partner, Gu Youyou need not have employed persuasion with emotion and reason. She could have exerted both favor and authority and secured Miss Du's cooperation effortlessly.

But then again, who else could be as loyal and down-to-earth as Miss Du?

Based on the favor she owed the Jie Family and because helping her reignite the greatness of Manchu embroidery, Miss Du would be the most trustworthy business partner.

In this world, unlike modern times, Gu Youyou did not have the luxury of time to ponder over an opponent or a partner. Finding one worth trusting was to secure lasting peace of mind, which is why she made every effort to persuade Miss Du and win her over.

"You're unwilling? But have you considered that without heirs and without a disciple to pass on your skills, Manchu embroidery will ultimately be lost? Since your ancestors broke tradition to ensure its continuous transmission from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, why must you adhere to convention and let this skill lose its legacy?"

"I understand you fear that Manchu embroidery will lose its value once everyone can do it, but you needn't worry. Go to the human trafficker's, spend more silver to buy maids with good talent. With the Servitude Contract in your hands, they are yours, just like Cuiya, and controlling a maid is far easier than managing an Embroiderer, isn't it? If all else fails, ask Miss Xie to help you find a fierce matron to take charge."

Although such a practice was very inhumane, it must be said that Yue Rujing's method was highly effective.

For those maids who were sold, it was also beneficial.

Being an Embroiderer was certainly better than being confined to serving and dealing with the intrigues of women in a large household.

At least they wouldn’t be beaten on a whim, wouldn’t have to take the blame for their masters, wouldn’t be sexually harassed by male masters with ulterior motives, and they wouldn’t have to kneel and kowtow to everyone. They would at least live with dignity, like human beings.

Anyone not born lacking common sense would choose to be a loyal Embroiderer with rights rather than a maid.

Miss Du had been struggling with this decision, her head bowed in thought. This was a significant matter for her, and Gu Youyou did not rush her, waiting for her to make a decision.

By the stone table under the willow tree outside the courtyard, Xie Qinyun was playing with Yue Rujing.

Gu Youyou glanced over in slight surprise, never expecting these two to frolic together.

"Are you an employee of Jisheng Hall?"

"No."

"Are you a guard of Jisheng Hall? Oh, no, that’s not right. Why would Jisheng Hall have guards? Are you a relative of the Lin Family?"

"No, I have nothing to do with the Lin Family."

Xie Qinyun thought about it and realized it made sense; after all, the relatives of the Lin Family were essentially from the Ducal Residence.

She ran out of patience after guessing back and forth, and asked loudly, "Who exactly are you?"

"You guess?" Yue Rujing plucked a willow twig and playfully scraped it over Xie Qinyun’s head.

Xie Qinyun snatched it and threw it on the ground, and looking at Lin Qianqing talking to another employee by the lotus pond in the distance, she said, "Calling you a servant doesn’t seem right. Qianqing is so respectful towards you! And that person who came with you, she’s respectful to him, too. Who on earth are you two?"

Chapter 725: Interrogation

Yue Rujing chuckled, "If you can’t guess, let it be; I won’t tell you anyway."

Having said that, he saw several farmers in the field harvesting rice and started to walk toward them, swaying and singing a strange tune.

Gu Youyou mentioned wanting to make a new type of pastry, the main ingredient being wheat flour, and he remembered that.

Those farmers were from Miss Du’s estate, and they were collecting fresh ears of wheat.

"Hey, I’m asking you because I can’t guess. Wait for me..."

Xie Qinyun chased after him.

On the other side, Lin Qianqing was also curiously questioning Jin Zijin.

"You are the eldest senior brother of Tianzong, and I hear you’re to run for the next State Preceptor, so why with my cousin... Don’t hurry to deny it, I’ve seen it. Your relationship with my cousin isn’t simply because the Princely Heir Yu introduced you. Your relationship with her is... it’s better than hers with the Princely Heir Yu."

Lin Qianqing said with certainty.

Jin Zijin replied indifferently, "So what if it is?"

Lin Qianqing gasped, looking at Jin Zijin, whose appearance was ordinary under his disguise, and couldn’t help but recall his true visage.

Raiment white as snow, warm sun of March.

If it were indeed as she thought, she would admit that her cousin had good taste. Yet this man was the eldest senior brother of Tianzong, not her cousin's rightful husband.

Her cousin was of age and yet unmarried; if she were to be delayed by this man for a lifetime, it would be an unfortunate bargain.

Considering, she added, "I remember that a State Preceptor cannot take a wife. Even if one doesn't become the State Preceptor, as the heir of the Tianzong sect leader, one also cannot marry. Please don't bring harm upon my cousin; my mother is currently seeking a good match for her."

Jin Zijin found Gu Youyou's cousin somewhat amusing, no wonder Youyou liked her.

He raised an eyebrow and asked, "Are you referring to that illegitimate child of the Hu family?"

Lin Qianqing's heart skipped a beat, and she exclaimed, "How... how do you know that?"

Jin Zijin said, "There is nothing about your family I am not aware of." With that, he also turned and walked toward the wheat field.

Lin Qianqing stood there stunned, pondering over Jin Zijin's recent words.

'There is nothing about your family I am not aware of.'

What was he planning? Why should he know anything about the Lin family's affairs?

On Gu Youyou's side, Miss Du finally had a change of heart.

Sitting under a tall willow tree, feeling the light breeze in the courtyard, the scorching weather turned somewhat cooler.

Miss Du lifted her eyes to Gu Youyou; her voice was as soft as the wind, as cool as water.

"Miss Gu, you're right. Compared to the imminent loss of the embroidery inheritance, what's the harm in breaking tradition and passing it to an outsider? In this lifetime, it's unlikely for me to marry again, how can I pass on this skill? It seems that taking on a disciple is the only way."

Although Miss Du had come around, Gu Youyou did not rejoice but instead sighed lightly.

Miss Du was merely twenty-one or twenty-two, at the prime of her life, yet due to society's unfairness to women, she might indeed never marry.

Of course, an ordinary man willing to take a widow as his wife is far from worthy of Miss Du.

In the midst of their conversation, those who had gone to collect the wheat ears had returned.

They carried baskets and sickles for reaping wheat, returning fully laden.

Gu Youyou smiled, stood up, and took the basket from Lin Qianqing's hand, "Take this to have the flour milled."

Miss Du smiled and said, "Miss Gu, you might not know, but freshly picked wheat ears cannot be directly ground into wheat kernels."

"Oh? So how is it done?" Gu Youyou asked curiously.

She knew much about the processing of natural medicinal materials but knew little about grains.

Miss Du laughed and said, "Just bring it to me, please wait here for a moment, lunch will be ready soon."

The sun was directly overhead; it was the height of noon.

Several young ladies sat at one table, while Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing joined the farmers from the manor at another table to drink wine and eat meat.

Compared to the dishes on that table, the girls' was much more delicate with no large pieces of meat, but rather finely chopped varieties of stir-fries.

There was wine, homemade fruit wine.

Plum wine, mulberry wine, apricot blossom brew... surprisingly bountiful.

Miss Du laughed and said, "All the grain from this manor is used for brewing wine. Old Chen and his son and daughter-in-law are best at making wine."

That explains it!

Gu Youyou picked up a cup full of plum wine and took a light sip; the fragrance of the wine filled the air.

In her last life, she had overindulged in happiness, drinking wine that led to mishaps. In this life, she had always been wary of wine and never touched it.

After being here so long, this was the first time she had picked up a wine cup.

Sharing a small cup with the other ladies, she felt that something within her heart had been let go.

Like wine, for instance...

She had abstained from wine, never touching it. Now, she realized what she had really abstained from was not the wine itself, but the day her friends and relatives got her drunk, which gave others the opportunity to take advantage of her.

It was her own lack of vigilance; how could it be the fault of the wine?

"What's the matter? You're both smiling and sighing," observed Miss Du, sitting nearby and noticing Gu Youyou's odd behavior.

Gu Youyou lifted her eyelids, holding the now empty wine cup, and laughed, "I was reminded of the last time I drank, and felt a bit melancholic about the wine."

Miss Du said lightly, "What causes melancholy is never the wine, but people!"

Gu Youyou couldn't help but give a bitter smile and said, "Yes, it's me who is full of melancholy."

Lin Qianqing and Xie Qinyun, these two misses, had completely forgotten their status; a few cups in, they didn't even remember their own names. The two of them even started to play rock-paper-scissors; who knows where they learned that.

Seeing them both somewhat drunk, Miss Du started to stand up to stop them.

Gu Youyou pulled her back and said, "Let them drink. They came out today to be happy, after all."

Drink however they want, let them indulge.

"After today, we might not have a chance to drink together again," Lin Qianqing said as she held her wine cup, looking melancholic.

Xie Qinyun downed a large cup in one gulp and laughed, "Of course, we will have the chance, but surely the feelings won't be the same as now. If we end up in the same family, we'll be enemies. If not, while the men fight it out, we could still collaborate in private, share our tactics."

This lass...

Miss Du gave a wry smile, then turned her gaze back to Gu Youyou and said, "You have to go back to the city in the afternoon; aren't you afraid your aunt will hold you to account?"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "If I were afraid, I wouldn't have come! I will write a prescription, and you can have someone prepare the medicine; it will ensure she's well by the time she returns."

"You, you came prepared," Miss Du took the prescription and handed it to a servant to prepare the antidote.

After a few more rounds of drinks, it seemed they were indulging in one final act of recklessness for their fading youth; the two young misses had started drinking heartily.

At first, it was wine cups, then bowls, and now, they were directly lifting the wine jars to drink.

The fruit wine wasn't very intoxicating, but even so, it couldn't stand up to this kind of drinking.

And they were just fifteen-year-old girls, with a shallow capacity for wine...

Lin Qianqing was mumbling something in a daze, incoherent to others; Gu Youyou listened and couldn't help but twitch the corners of her mouth.

Chapter 727: Making Western-Style Pastries

"After drinking this cup of wine, I dare to shout even in front of the old lady..."

Actually, she was quite a good baby who listened to her mother; otherwise, she would have accepted her fate strangely.

...

After getting drunk and falling into a deep sleep, Gu Youyou kneaded the dough in the kitchen.

She didn’t know what tools Miss Du used, but the flour was finely ground and clean.

Eggs, milk, all the things needed to make a cake were ready, only needing to be cooked.

Gu Youyou used to love making desserts with her pastry chef; she loved to eat them. If she hadn’t been afraid of getting fat, she could eat them every day.

Although her skills were not as good as those of a professional pastry chef, they were still presentable.

Once the cake was done, she spread cream over it, creating a beautiful pattern, and a playful, cute and delicious little dessert was made.

She put it aside and made another one on a plate. After about an hour or so, she had made over a dozen different styles of small cakes.

Over at Miss Du’s, the remedy soup had also been prepared. Noticing it was getting late, she had someone give it to the two young ladies who were drunk.

When they faintly woke up, what they saw was a table full of fragrant and adorable desserts.

Having never seen such desserts, they were immediately attracted and looked expectantly at Gu Youyou.

"Cousin, is this the dessert you said you’d make for us?"

Gu Youyou nodded and smiled, "Come, pick your favorite one."

The treats were indeed tempting; upon Gu Youyou’s invitation, they stopped being polite. The girls hastily picked out their favorite pastries, letting go of their restraint.

"They’re really pretty; I almost don’t want to eat them."

Once they had a bite, they immediately wanted a second.

"It’s so delicious, I’ve never tasted such a flavor of pastry, sweet but not greasy!"

It must be this kind of amazement for anyone having cream cake for the first time.

Gu Youyou smiled, took a plate in each hand, and went out to give one to Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing. They owed getting out successfully this time to their help.

The two sitting at the stone table under the willow tree in the courtyard were utterly surprised by the strange pastries Gu Youyou brought out.

One of the pastries was shaped like a little rabbit, while the other was a simple round piece, but the dotted flowers on it were lifelike.

"Did you make these desserts?" Yue Rujing asked in amazement.

Gu Youyou said, "Yes, eating is also an art, so I made them look so good."

Yue Rujing took the cake with the beautiful flowers and said with a shy smile, "Then let me see if your dessert is as good on the inside as it looks on the outside."

"I guarantee you’ll be satisfied!" Gu Youyou laughed, and gave the one shaped like a rabbit to Jin Zijin.

"You try it too; this is the first time I’ve made a dessert for you. After you eat it, I’m sure you won’t find my cooking skills lacking anymore."

Suddenly, she recalled when Gu Youyou had cooked in the house and accidentally burned down Jin Zijin's only thatched cottage, leaving them homeless and having to spend a night together in a cave.

And after that, although she didn't burn down the house again, her cooking skills were always hit or miss—some dishes tasted good, while others, not so much. When they lived together, she usually tended the fire while he did the cooking.

"Alright, I'll try it!" Jin Zijin brought himself back from the memories and took the dessert with a soft smile.

On the other hand, Yue Rujing, who had just tasted the strange pastry, let out a sound of amazement.

"Hmm, this... Gu Youyou, did you really make this?"

"Hm? What's wrong? No one else could make it?"

His sudden exclamation and the wide eyes that followed made Jin Zijin hesitant to take a bite.

Chapter 728: Early Countermeasures

"How does it taste?" Jin Zijin asked.

"It's delicious, Senior Brother!" Yue Rujing still wore a praising expression.

"Is it really made from those wheat grains?"

Gu Youyou nodded lightly.

Seeing Yue Rujing wasn't acting, Jin Zijin picked up a spoon and took a bite.

His movements were elegant, unlike Yue Rujing's unrestrained gobbling.

As soon as it entered his mouth, it was just as Yue Rujing said, delicious.

And the sweetness brought a sense of joy to one’s heart.

He turned to Gu Youyou, who was looking at him expectantly, and said, "It truly is delicious. I didn’t know Youyou had such skill."

Gu Youyou let out a sigh of relief and smiled, "I haven’t had the time to make it, but if you like it, I can make it for you often."

Yue Rujing, who had wolfed down one already, spoke with his mouth full, "Remember to call me next time you make it."

"Dream on. If you want more, go inside and take them. This is enough for now."

Hearing this, Yue Rujing didn’t hesitate to go inside, and before long, he came out with two more.

He laughed, "Every time you make it, it’s different; both pretty and tasty. Madam Gu, you like silver, don’t you? With your craftsmanship, are you afraid you can’t earn silver? People in the capital all love something rare and unusual."

Gu Youyou said lightly, "Biting off more than one can chew is never good. I’m currently running the clinic and have just agreed on a business deal with Miss Du regarding the garment shop. The cake shop... I’ll hold off for now. Maybe I’ll really open it up if I have more free time."

"That makes sense," Yue Rujing said, somewhat embarrassed.

...

Filled with trepidation upon her return to the Lin Family, she saw her aunt’s face, already as dark as the bottom of a pot.

Of course, this was anticipated, and they had already thought of a strategy to handle it.

Lin Qianqing, with reddened eyes, went up to hug her legs and cried out, "Mother, the great selection is approaching soon, and I've been thinking about these past ten years. I haven't done anything for you and father, so I had to resort to this desperate measure."

Madam Lin gritted her teeth and said, "What desperate measure?" She practically squeezed out the words through gritted teeth.

Those two thoughtless things—she heard that the eldest miss had climbed the wall to escape again, and she knew they had run off together.

She had gone to Jisheng Hall to look for them, but there was no trace of them to be found. Nobody knew where they had gone.

Without a word, she mobilized all the people she could from the household to search for them, yet unexpectedly, they returned on their own.

Heaven knows how worried she was. She was always afraid that Gu Youyou would take her daughter and run away recklessly.

"It's just that..." Lin Qianqing looked up, meeting Madam Lin's gaze, biting her lip and said, "I'll be joining the great selection next month, and there isn't much time left to stay by my parents' side. In all these years, I have never done anything for you, so I begged my cousin to take me to the manor outside the city to make some pastries for you."

After speaking, Gu Youyou hurriedly presented the meticulously prepared pastries in front of Madam Lin, saying, "This is the pastry that my cousin made for aunt. It's also my cousin's expression of filial piety. Making these pastries is quite laborious, from selecting ingredients to production, it took a whole day. Please try it, aunt."

Madam Lin's anger was hard to dissipate, but she ultimately couldn't resist her only daughter's filial piety, just as her daughter had just said. As she grew up, aside from causing trouble, going against her, and being a constant source of worry, she had never really done anything for her.

Chapter 729: Punished

Thus, she turned her head and glanced over.

She saw that the pastries in the box were the size of small bowls and exquisitely beautiful, the flowers adorning the pastries were also lifelike.

This was clearly a beautiful trinket, and yet it was a plate of pastries?

She looked at Lin Qianqing in surprise and asked, "You went to all this trouble to leave the city just for this thing?"

Lin Qianqing said in a low voice, "Yes, Madam, these pastries are very difficult to make with such delicacy, and even more difficult to make them taste good. Please, have a taste!"

"Have a taste?" Madam Lin picked up a spoon, and just as she was about to touch the pastries under the expectant gaze of Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing, she withdrew her hand again.

Her expression darkened once more as she said, "I think it’s better to leave it as it is for now. Don’t think that a pastry can settle today’s matter."

She nearly got hoodwinked by the two young girls, how could she forget the principle that one who receives a person’s favor becomes beholden to them.

Lin Qianqing and Gu Youyou then honestly lowered their heads and admitted their faults.

"Aunt, this was my idea. Please don’t be hard on my cousin, she can’t stay at home for much longer," Gu Youyou said.

Gu Youyou always used to take the blame for Lin Qianqing, showing rare loyalty.

She was determined, this time she would take the blame for Lin Qianqing.

But Lin Qianqing said, "No, no, it was my idea. I pestered my cousin to take me out with her. She never likes to go out and would rather sleep at home for a day if it were not for me."

Gu Youyou: "..." Is this the kind of person I am?

Seeing them taking responsibility for each other, Madam Lin's face turned stern as she slapped the table and said coldly, "Don't think I don't know anything. Neither of you will get away with this."

She clapped her hands, and several sturdy maids entered. Madam Lin instructed them, "Go, take them back to their courtyards and have them copy the Women's Four Books a hundred times. If they do not finish, they are not to leave."

Gu Youyou: "..." Am I supposed to copy until next year?

Lin Qianqing breathed a sigh of relief, a fortunate smile on her lips.

Gu Youyou thought to herself: I have to find a way to gather information on how quickly Lin Qianqing copes. I don't believe this girl doesn't have some tricks for copying assignments; she finished a hundred times in just two days last time.

...

Since copying the Women's Four Books a hundred times would be quite time-consuming even if it were printed, Gu Youyou decided to ignore it.

It was a good opportunity to concentrate on her medicinal research before the major selection. It didn't matter to her whether she could go out or not since Jin Zijin would come every night to warm her bed. She could also get him to bring her whatever she needed.

During the major selection, her aunt would inevitably need her to go out.

The Gu Youyou totally engrossed in the essence of medicine had no idea that while she was confined, her aunt was also busy.

Due to Gu Youyou's commotion, regardless of the intentions of the Ducal Residence or Lin Xingyi's thoughts, Madam Lin was resolute about marrying off Gu Youyou.

She had already found a famous matchmaker in Beijing to propose a marriage to the Hu Family.

The head of the Hu Family was a minor official; establishing a connection with the Lin Family was Madam Lin's will. Whether it was a Miss or a cousin, Mr. Hu was delighted beyond measure.

But the concubine of Hu's son did not agree, saying, "Our Yu Qing might be born of a concubine, but he excels in scholarship and has a great chance of high honors in tomorrow's imperial examination. My lord, we shouldn't rush this marriage. Let's talk about it after the examination tomorrow. If Yu Qing ranks high, that cousin of the Lin Family wouldn't be a match for our son at all."

Chapter 730: Matchmaking

"Foolish!" Mr. Hu huffed coldly, "If we don't agree to the marriage with the Lin Family, do you think Yu Qing has any chance of becoming Top Scholar?"

"What do you mean?"

"Ignorant woman, who becomes Top Scholar and who doesn't, isn't it up to those few important figures who control the court? If Yu Qing doesn't marry the young lady from the Lin Family, why should they let him become Top Scholar? Do you or do you not believe that in next year's spring imperial examination, amongst the top three ranks, there will certainly be one who is that Miss Gu's husband."

"Ah...?" The concubine was so frightened that she thumped to the ground, wailing about the injustice of the world.

Mr. Hu paid no heed to this ignorant woman and personally went to the front hall to see the matchmaker summoned by Madam Lin.

The matchmakers, of course, praised the girl to the skies and ground below, as three of them put on a performance, one after another, embellishing the story of Gu Youyou's sole handling of typhoid treatment in Lingnan.

And then there was the foundation of Jisheng Hall, the first to propose medicine taken with a rinse, creating various fruit-flavored pediatric medicines, addressing the issue of children finding it difficult to take medicine.

And her unrivaled intelligence; if only she hadn't been born a girl, where would there be a place for men to become Top Scholars, and so on—such was the unceasing praise from their eloquent tongues. To them, the young lady from the Lin Family, Gu Youyou, truly was unparalleled above and below the heavens.

Mr. Hu listened with delight; such a daughter-in-law was indeed rare, apart from her own family having little background.

Of course, this wasn't a problem because she was Lin Xingyi's only niece. As long as the Lin Family approved the marriage, that would suffice, since their goal was to attach themselves to the Lin Family, to the Ducal Residence.

The matchmakers' eyes became slits as they beamed with joy, "Mr. Hu, I know your son Yu Qing may be a child born out of wedlock, but he is incredibly talented, in no way inferior to those born to noble families. You too have high standards, but this Miss Gu isn't bad either; her medical skills are exceptional, even the Empress Dowager's leg ailment was cured by her, and even the Princess respectfully addresses her as teacher.

Although she was born to a humble family... ah, don't say anything more, Miss Gu's situation is actually quite similar to your son Yu Qing's, both born of humble origins but inherently extraordinary. Oh my, they really are a match made in heaven!"

When speaking of humble birth, Mr. Hu's expression darkened slightly, but considering they were inherently extraordinary, he became reassured.

Being such a minor official, but having such a promising son, he could walk anywhere with pride.

Listening to the matchmakers' words, Mr. Hu found himself more convinced of the suitability of the Lin Family's young lady for his son.

Exactly, in these times, one must not despise low birth, for the Emperor favors those of ordinary background with extraordinary talents, just look at Mr. Lin.

Mr. Hu stroked his beard and laughed, "Indeed, indeed, go on."

Another matchmaker stepped forward, "Mr. Hu, you must have burned high incense in a past life to come across such a good fortune, to have caught Madam Lin's favorable attention. You're a sensible man; don't you understand Madam Lin's meaning? She has taken a liking to your son Yu Qing, regardless of birth. With the Ducal Residence and Lin Residence around, need you worry about your son's future prospects?"

"Ha-ha, naturally!" Mr. Hu laughed, slapping his thigh.

"Since the boy and that Miss Gu are indeed a match made by heaven and earth, we naturally should comply with fate. This matter... shall we trouble you ladies to proceed?"

The matchmakers smiled broadly.

"No problem at all, we will return and report to Madam Lin at once. You, sir, just wait for the good news from the Lin Family."

"Yes, yes, and get the betrothal gifts ready in advance."

...