Farmhouse 761

Chapter 761: Hijacking the Bridal Procession

However, a Prince’s marriage is unlike other families. This month, Jin Xiaoran is marrying Lin Qianqing, and next month he will welcome two Consorts and four noble concubines at the same time.

Speaking of these Consorts, their status and background are not inferior to Lin Qianqing’s. The reason they couldn’t secure the position of the official wife is that they don’t have the Empress as their patron. Who doesn’t know that Lin Qianqing’s mother comes from the same family as the Empress?

Whether one is the official wife or not, it’s just a matter of current glory. In the future, whether one can truly become the master of the Crown Prince Residence depends on one’s own schemes.

Underneath the big red bridal veil, Lin Qianqing was not as happy as the bustling scene outside suggested.

She rubbed the handkerchief in her hands with a worried look. Her cousin went to Qi Mountain and didn’t even come to her wedding. What on earth is going on?

In the eyes of these people, the Dao Family is an existence not to be offended. Even high-ranking officials of the Imperial Court would not dare to compete with the Dao Family for people.

Madam Lin originally told Lin Xingyi that since Qianqing was getting married, he should speak to the Dao Family and ask Youyou to come back and send her off, as the two cousins had a good relationship.

But Lin Xingyi outright refused on the spot, saying, "The person was taken away right from under the Emperor’s nose. Do you think I can demand her back?"

"But how will you know if you don’t ask?"

"The marriage of the Crown Prince and Qianqing is a big event known throughout the land. If they intend to send her back, they will do so without you having to ask. If they don’t intend to, asking will be of no use."

A few words thwarted Madam Lin.

"That’s far too overbearing and unreasonable!" Lin Qianqing muttered under her breath.

Her maid, Long Luo, quietly reminded her, "Miss, we’re almost there. Please don’t speak."

It is said that a bride under the bridal veil must not speak during the marriage procession, or she will be laughed at.

Lin Qianqing closed her mouth. They should be arriving at the Crown Prince’s residence outside the palace soon.

Both the Crown Prince and the second Prince have not yet been granted royal titles. According to the rules of Zhuzhao Country, only after princes have established their residences and married their official wives can they be conferred royal titles.

The wedding procession was grand, spanning ten miles.

Figures dressed in black watched the nuptial parade from above and sneered coldly.

The glory that accompanied such an occasion should have been his by right. How could a usurper be worth it?

He gestured to his men, and suddenly, amid the ten-mile-long procession of splendor, countless figures in black emerged, disrupting the dazzling array of colors.

"Assassins..." Someone in the crowd bellowed, and immediately the procession descended into chaos.

"Assassins, protect the Crown Prince and his wife!"

In no time, the guards were entangled in battle with Jin Ziyuan’s men, creating a chaotic melee.

Lin Qianqing tore off the red veil from her head and lifted the curtain to peek outside.

Her maid, Long Luo, hurriedly pushed her back into the palanquin, saying anxiously, "Miss, you can't come out; it's dangerous outside."

"How could there be assassins?" Lin Qianqing's voice was fearful but tinged with excitement.

With assassins present, she couldn't help thinking that it would be good if they took her away.

Only by this means could she leave the Lin Family forever and avoid implicating them.

"Miss, don't be afraid. General Xiao is here; we'll be fine," Long Luo said, nearly crying and hugging Lin Qianqing as she trembled.

General Xiao? Xiao Jinyan? Such a dandy!

He's one of the second Prince's men.

With this thought, Lin Qianqing's excitement grew even more.

People of the second Prince's faction would rejoice at the Crown Prince's misfortune, wouldn't they? If the Crown Prince's bride were to be captured by bandits, they wouldn't be able to contain their joy. Perhaps these assassins were arranged by the second Prince himself.

Chapter 762: Kidnapping the Bride

"No, I must go out and see for myself."

Since that was the case, she had to go out and see for herself.

Lin Qianqing threw off her bridal veil, pushed past Long Luo, and quickly stepped outside the palanquin.

Seeing the woman in red emerge, Jin Ziyuan’s smile became even more unfettered.

He intended to kidnap this woman and see how they could proceed with the wedding to the Lin Family.

He wanted to make Jin Moning’s eldest son the laughingstock of everyone.

"Go on, seize Miss Lin," he said with a faint smile.

A lucid flower like glaze unfolded from his smiling face, entrancing Lin Qianqing who stood beside the palanquin.

Seeing those in black charge towards the bride in her vivid red wedding attire, Prince Jin Xiaoran felt his nose twist with anger.

Where did these thieves spring from? They were targeting his bride; did they intend to make him the laughingstock of everyone?

Upon reflection, if he lost his bride on his wedding day, Jin Tingyu would likely be the happiest of all.

You’re good, Jin Tingyu, daring to provoke on the first; on the fifteenth, I’ll see how I’ll deal with you.

"Protect the Prince’s consort."

The guards swarmed to Lin Qianqing’s side to block the assailants. As one fell, another took its place. Blood ran like a river in front of the bride’s palanquin, that river of blood outdoing her vibrant red wedding dress.

Madam Lin was so frightened she nearly fainted, crying out, "What are we to do? Where did these assassins come from? Why are they all after our Daya, Lin Xingyi? Did you offend someone while in office?"

Lin Xingyi glanced at her indifferently and said, "The people I've offended wouldn't dare to trouble the Prince on a day like today. If something happens to Qianqing, it's the Prince's face that's lost."

Upon hearing this, she felt there was some sense to it. So who could be brazen enough to cause trouble today, and why was her daughter the target?

By the looks of it, they weren't after her life, but her person!

"What are we to do?" Madam Lin had turned pale, her whole body trembling.

"Unable to lift with the shoulder or carry with the hand, what can you do? Just watch."

"How can you just watch at a time like this..." But as soon as she spoke, she realized that aside from watching, there really wasn't much she could do.

Witnessing the terrifying scene before her, Madam Lin could do nothing but cry her heart out, devoid of any decorum.

Jin Ziyuan had come prepared, dead set on taking Lin Qianqing. His trained assassins in black were no match for the guards by the Prince's side, and in no time, the outcome was decided.

Lin Qianqing was lifted by two men in black and whisked away. Around the corner, an inconspicuous carriage drove up, and the men in black stuffed her into it.

The Prince, furious, was about to explode, brandishing his long sword and shouting his intent to rescue his wife, vowing to dismember those who had ruined his wedding.

Inside the carriage, Lin Qianqing couldn't make sense of her feelings, a mix of fear and anticipation.

She didn't know who was there to kidnap her, but it was clear these people meant her no harm.

And that person through the window... that fleeting glance!

Madam Lin, seeing Lin Qianqing having been taken by the thieves, was so scared she fainted on the spot.

Lin Xingyi supported her, shouting, "Quick, take Madam back and call for the doctor."

Elsewhere, Xiao Jinyan saw that the situation was nearly settled, gestured to the people behind him, and immediately a large group of guards charged towards the carriage that had made off with the prize.

He had been warned in advance by Jin Zijin and dared not underestimate Jin Ziyuan’s backing. For this reason, he had specifically gone to his elder brother and borrowed a few highly skilled deputies to oversee the situation.

Chapter 763: You Do One Thing, I Respond with Something Greater

The two factions were evenly matched in strength, and managed to stop Jin Ziyuan’s people in their tracks.

Jin Ziyuan’s complexion became somewhat unsightly as his eyes deepened further.

The person behind him whispered to him, "Young Prince, something doesn’t seem right. They... seem to have been prepared."

"You Jiang, who has let the information slip?" Jin Ziyuan turned his head.

"Apart from our own people, it could only have been Jin Zijin that night."

"Jin Zijin?" Jin Ziyuan’s expression suddenly darkened as he snorted coldly, "He refuses to join us in our revenge, but does he also want to be Jin Moning’s dog?"

You Jiang’s face was solemn as he said, "What do we do now? The Imperial Army will be here soon from within the city."

Jin Ziyuan coldly smiled and said, "The effect is almost enough; withdraw!"

At his command, the men dressed in black retreated as swiftly as the tide, coming fast and leaving just as quickly, soon vanishing without a trace.

Lin Qianqing sat forlornly inside the unassuming little carriage, her heartbeat never quite settling down.

The eldest Prince, sword in hand and with a gloomy expression, approached the carriage and lifted the curtain. Only when he saw that the person inside was unharmed did he breathe a sigh of relief and said, "Cousin, are you frightened?"

Lin Qianqing stared blankly at the disheveled Prince; he was here, so did that mean she was not abducted?

She just stared at him blankly, neither speaking nor nodding.

The eldest Prince sighed and called over the petrified Long Luo, saying, "Have you not quickly fetched the bridal veil and helped your mistress back onto the bridal sedan?"

A wedding procession stained with blood was not a good omen.

The wedding party, still in shock, suffered severe casualties. It was unclear who had picked up her dowry, who had gathered her bridal makeup.

Lin Qianqing was dizzily aided back to her own bridal sedan and, amid bustle and noise, eventually still entered that glittering golden cage.

The eldest Prince’s face was ashen as he summoned his strategist, Bao Shiqin, and asked, "Do you know who did this?"

Bao Shiqin said, "Judging by the method... it looks like the work of the second Prince."

The eldest Prince, infuriated, smashed a stool beside him to pieces and shouted, "To dare make a move on the day of my wedding, he’s asking for death. I shall see the emperor at once!"

"That’s not advisable," Bao Shiqin hurriedly stopped him and said, "The second Prince has always been favored by the emperor. Without concrete evidence, rashly accusing him in front of the emperor will only provoke His Majesty’s displeasure towards Your Highness."

Although that was the case, the eldest Prince still couldn’t swallow his pride.

He thought to himself, Very well, if you dare to make the first move, don’t blame me for responding in kind.

Come next month on your wedding day, watch me abduct your bride.

"Your Highness, the most important thing right now is to reassure the guests. Let’s first proceed with the ceremony. As for other matters, we can plan in detail later," Bao Shiqin said.

...

After a day of turmoil, nightfall arrived.

Lin Qianqing sat on the bridal bed, her thoughts a tangled mess.

How did it fail?

"Eldest Prince!" At the call of "eldest Prince," her thoughts snapped back, and she promptly sat up straight on the bridal bed.

"You all may leave; I don’t need your services anymore."

Lin Qianqing knew he had arrived.

The sounds of the maids leaving echoed, and after a while, an unpleasant smell of alcohol wafted into Lin Qianqing’s nostrils, making her frown slightly.

"Cousin, fair cousin!" Jin Xiaoran chuckled as he lifted her bridal veil and said, "My love, from now on, I must address you this way... "

Lin Qianqing’s heart skipped a beat, and she forced a smile with difficulty.

She still married a cousin, but it wasn’t the cousin she had thought of before.

Looking at the man whose face was flushed from drinking too much, she felt that none of her cousins were any good.

Chapter 764: Cousin’s Wedding Gift

"Cousin, you’re drunk."

Lin Qianqing steadied Jin Xiaoran, who was swaying on his feet, and helped him sit down on the couch by the bed.

Jin Xiaoran belched a drunken hiccup, chuckled, and said, "Yes... a bit much, but it won’t interfere with our wedding night."

The men of the Jin Family were not lacking in looks, and Jin Xiaoran, who had just reached the age of twenty last year, was especially handsome. Lin Qianqing had seen him many times since they were children and had affectionately called him ’cousin,’ but she had never fancied him as a man.

Facing the impending wedding night, she was at a loss.

Jin Xiaoran’s face loomed before her eyes, and she turned her head away.

In that glance, her gaze happened to sweep over to a brocade box on the table. She suddenly said, "Right, that's a congratulatory gift from my cousin. I haven't had the chance to look at it yet. Cousin, you sit here for a moment; I'm going to see what she sent me."

Jin Xiaoran made a grab at nothing, his face showing a touch of displeasure. Yet, he also stood up, curious about Lin Qianqing's treasured gift.

"You've received enough congratulatory gifts to keep you busy for days. Why are you in such a hurry to look at this one?"

As Lin Qianqing untied the silk ribbon on the box, she replied, "It's from my cousin."

"Which cousin?" It seemed Lin Qianqing had quite a number of cousins.

"The cousin from the Gu Family," she said.

Jin Xiaoran's displeasure became apparent as he said, "The country girl from the Gu Family, the doctor from Jisheng Hall?"

If it had been a cousin from the Ducal Residence, it would have been one thing—they were his own cousins—and yet, the gift she prized was from the Gu Family cousin.

The relatives from Lin Xingyi's side were all poor kin who toiled in the soil.

What kind of congratulatory gift could a poor, unsophisticated relative possibly offer that she would treasure so much?

He, too, wanted to see.

Lin Qianqing opened the box and took out the painting that was inside.

Jin Xiaoran raised an eyebrow, commenting, "This silk is indeed high-quality, but it’s nothing special in my estate. If you like it, I’ll send you a whole bunch tomorrow."

Lin Qianqing paid him no mind and rapidly unfurled the scroll.

The painting showed a dark expanse dotted with strange points of light—something utterly foreign to Jin Xiaoran, who had no understanding of the universe.

He pointed at the painting and laughed loudly, "What’s this mess? Is this the painting your bumpkin cousin sent you? Hilarious..."

But Lin Qianqing did not share his sentiment, instead, she cherished the painting, looking for the perfect spot in the room. Selecting a suitable location, she took down a genuine masterpiece from the wall and carefully hung up the painting Gu Youyou had given her.

Jin Xiaoran was startled by her strange behavior, and said, "My love, your own paintings are quite splendid. Wouldn’t a painting of your own be a hundred, a thousand times better than this pitch-black mess? Why treat it like a treasure?"

Lin Qianqing laughed softly and said, "You don’t understand this... This is the whole world!" She pointed to the painting as she spoke.

"What?" Jin Xiaoran tried to show patience as he looked with her at the odd piece of art.

Suddenly, Lin Qianqing pointed excitedly at one of the beautiful spheres and said, "See? This is the land we live on."

Jin Xiaoran felt sober; it must be Lin Qianqing who was drunk. He pointed at another sphere, chuckling, "And what about this one?"

"This one?" Lin Qianqing pondered, recalling the words Gu Youyou had once told her.

A moment later, she exclaimed again, "This must be the sun."

Jin Xiaoran rolled his eyes, taking her whimsical childlike fantasies in stride, he said, "Alright, this is the sun, but now is not the time to study it. My love, come here, let me help you change."

Chapter 765: Shocked

"No, I'll do it myself!" Lin Qianqing's complexion turned a shade paler, clinging to her clothes without daring to undress.

Jin Xiaoran's face stiffened, feeling that he had given her enough face for the night; continuing this act of coyness was simply too much. His displeasure began to show.

"Lin Qianqing, from today on you are the official wife in my residence, a married woman. Has no one taught you how to behave as one?"

"I..." Lin Qianqing said softly, "I was startled during the day, I'm still... somewhat afraid."

Recalling the frustrations of the day, Jin Xiaoran's burgeoning desires were immediately extinguished by cold water.

Indeed, Lin Qianqing was still young. A mere girl startled so severely by the day's events had good reason to be acting so strangely tonight.

It wasn't her fault; if there was blame, it lay with that damned Jin Tingyu.

He pulled Lin Qianqing to his shoulder and gently patted her back, whispering, "You were truly startled today. Tomorrow I'll have someone stew a sedative herbal soup for you. It's late; let's sleep for now, I won't touch you tonight."

She was now his wife, yet also the little cousin he had watched grow up; he was far more patient with her than with other women in the residence.

If he scared her again, it would be no good. He had to give face to his own mother and aunt.

...

In the blink of an eye, Gu Youyou had already stayed in Qi Mountain for three months, and the New Year had arrived.

Xiang Chun was busy tidying up the room, cleaning every inch inside and out to welcome the coming of the New Year.

At the same time, her face was filled with melancholy.

"Ah! It’s really something, not even letting us go back for the New Year. Miss Cousin, when will the Heavenly Master’s illness be cured?"

Gu Youyou, neither arrogant nor impatient, was actually very pleased. With Searcy joining her research team, their achievements had further developed.

She turned to Xiang Chun, who wore a face of sorrow, and said with a faint smile, "It can’t be cured. We should thank the heavens if his senile dementia doesn’t worsen, how could it be completely cured?"

"Ah...?" Xiang Chun was shocked into astonishment, "It... it can’t be cured? Then what are we staying here for?"

Gu Youyou said, "An incurable disease doesn’t mean we can’t treat it; we are here to treat him."

Xiang Chun internally complained, asserting she couldn’t understand at all.

So, with that said... "When can we go back?"

"You want to go back?" Gu Youyou asked, tilting her head at Xiang Chun.

Xiang Chun thought about it. She only felt that she should go back; after all, she was a maid of the Lin Residence, and if not returning to the Lin Family in Beijing, where else could she go?

But upon further reflection, the days at the Lin Residence were not as carefree as in Qi Mountain. She realized she didn't particularly long to go back.

Yet...

"We have to go back eventually, don't we? We can't stay here forever. This place is a Taoist Temple."

"Then we'll stay as long as we can," Gu Youyou said nonchalantly.

Well, she did miss Jin Zijin, but thinking that he would come to the mountain for the New Year made her feel that celebrating it anywhere was just the same.

Qi Mountain had many advantages over Beijing, the best being that even in the depth of winter, it wasn't cold. She was still wearing her slightly thicker autumn clothes; the winter clothes she brought had been unnecessary.

Since Searcy joined Gu Youyou's research team, the girl, true to her upbringing in poison research, took over the task of extracting venom from the Ice Snake. Moreover, she could harvest the best venom at just the right moments.

Chapter 766: Ghost Doctor's Miraculous Hands

Gu Youyou feared an accident during the poison collection process and might get bitten by a snake, so she prepared several vials of antivenom for ice poison.

The serum couldn't be stored for a long time, so after a while, she would discard some and continue making more.

Searcy didn't understand this though and said, "You keep making these things, then keep throwing them away, and keep making more. Aren't you tired? Even the snakes must feel tired."

Gu Youyou couldn’t be bothered with her and commanded, "Hurry up, tell me what ingredients are in here."

This was a sample of poison that Gu Youyou had collected, not the kind of cold poison they commonly used. It was a different type, one that didn’t use Youying Grass, yet produced an effect akin to the cold poison that did.

After Searcy had a look, her eyes shone, and she couldn’t suppress her excitement as she asked, "Where did this come from?"

Gu Youyou squinted her eyes and looked at her with folded arms, asking, "Seeing how excited you are, could it be that this poison has something to do with your family?"

"Yes, it indeed comes from the hands of our Ghost Doctor." She said.

Gu Youyou’s heart skipped a beat, and she snatched the poison sample away.

"Hey, where exactly did you get this?" She was the only surviving descendant of the Ghost Doctor’s family; it was impossible for such a medicine to have been leaked.

Gu Youyou’s expression turned cold, and she looked at Searcy with a complex gaze.

She had a bold suspicion that perhaps the extermination of the Ghost Doctor’s family wasn’t because they did too many bad things, but instead ...

After pondering for a moment, holding the medicine pouch, Gu Youyou spoke in a faint voice, "I don’t know. I’ll have to ask the person who delivered the medicine."

Searcy’s face showed a rare emotion as she stared at the medicine in Gu Youyou’s hand, wanting to reach for it. After a moment of thought, however, she still couldn’t bring herself to ask for it.

...

Gu Youyou was in Qi Mountain, but her sources of information were far from sealed off.

Accounts from the Jisheng Hall branches from all over were sent to her at the end of the year, along with news about Lin Qianqing.

The information was sparse, mentioning only that she was attacked on her wedding day. Jin Xiaoran was convinced that it was the doing of Prince Jin Tingyu, and in retaliation, Jin Xiaoran had someone exact revenge on the day of Jin Tingyu's wedding.

However, he didn't have the same tact as his opponent. He caused trouble indeed but ended up capturing a live witness, who couldn't withstand heavy torture and spilled everything in the Ministry of Punishment's Prison.

The Emperor flew into a rage, gave him a beating, and had everyone from the Crown Prince Residence confined, not to be released before New Year's.

Therefore, due to Jin Xiaoran's troubles, Lin Qianqing couldn't even think of returning to her parent's home for the New Year.

Holding the letter in her hand, Gu Youyou asked Xiang Chun who was by her side, "Has the Lin Residence sent any letters?"

Xiang Chun replied, "There haven't been any letters, but the old madam sent a message. She said if the young lady finds an opportunity to return home during the New Year, she should try to make the trip. She hasn't spent a New Year together with the young lady yet!"

Gu Youyou paused and then put away the letter after a moment, sighing deeply, "I'm not going back now for a reason. Later, tell Qingyang I need to borrow their kitchen to make some pastries."

Xiang Chun's eyes lit up and said, "Are you making pastries to send back to the old madam?"

"Right, you're going to help me."

Xiang Chun smiled, remembering the pastries made by the young lady; she couldn’t help but swallow her saliva, excitedly saying, "Okay, okay, I’ll start preparing right now."

After Xiang Chun left, Gu Youyou picked up another account book, which also contained a letter.

It was from the Jisheng Hall branch in Qingshui Town. Because it was a small place, it had the lowest income. However, this Jisheng Hall was particularly meaningful to Gu Youyou; it was the headquarters of the Jisheng Hall chain. The legend of Jisheng Hall started there; nobody dared to take it lightly.

Chapter 767: Jin Zijin Returns to Qi Mountain for the New Year

Gu Youyou took a deep breath and opened the letter.

Uncle Gu Wen had been imprisoned for a year and had been released. Initially, he made a fuss about Gu Youyou’s decisions, considering how much silver and land had been divided between Erya and Dabao, he naturally wouldn’t be satisfied.

But after Gu Youyou had divided everything, all the related procedures were done in front of the village head, and everything that needed to be done had been properly completed. There was nothing he could do about it, even if he wanted to make a fuss.

All that land made the households of both families, though not extremely wealthy, quite comfortable by village standards.

Dabao hadn’t remarried, and although Huang Xiangwen was keen on him taking another wife, he remained apprehensive.

Perhaps the incidents with Lei Qianqian hadn’t been erased from his heart; he needed more time to accept the idea.

Erya and Shunzi had a boy on their first try, and now she was expecting their second child. The letter also mentioned asking Gu Youyou to name the child.

Gu Youyou smiled as she read the letter, considering a plethora of names in her mind, but when she picked up the pen, she still didn't write down a single one.

With a light sigh, she took the five-page letter and lit it on the fire, watching it turn to ashes.

It wasn't that she didn't want to inquire about their well-being over the past year, nor was she cold-hearted and unwilling to reply to their letters; it was to protect them.

Some in the village said that Gu Youyou had gone to her maternal family in Beijing and was living a good life, not bothering anymore with the poor relatives of the Gu Family in Lotus Village. It was better that way.

She feared that the things she cared about would become leverage in someone else's hands.

As the Chinese New Year approached, Jin Zijin arrived at Qi Mountain to celebrate.

Having not seen him for several months, Gu Youyou noticed from afar that he looked much leaner.

Surrounded by his disciples, he glanced at Gu Youyou from a distance before following them to meet Tian Jizi.

Yue Rujing hadn't come; it was heard that he had left for Xining earlier to attend to an important matter. After completing it, he didn't return to Beijing but quickly went on to Lingnan. With the New Year imminent, he likely wouldn't return until after the celebrations.

There weren't many whom Jin Zijin trusted. Without Yue Rujing's overt involvement in many court matters, he must have struggled to handle things alone, hence his weight loss.

Xiang Chun whispered to Gu Youyou, "Is that their eldest disciple brother returning? We're staying in his courtyard; now that he is back, won't he be angry and drive us out?"

Gu Youyou gave her a look and said, "You're overthinking it. If he lacked even that much magnanimity, how could he be the eldest disciple? Besides, it was his arrangement for us to stay here."

"Ah...? Then... where will he stay now that he's back?"

Gu Youyou gently tapped on Xiang Chun's head and said, "You're just a maid; focus on your work and don't ask so many questions. With so many buildings in Qi Mountain, are you really worried he won't have a place to stay?"

Gu Youyou led Xiang Chun back to the house, but suddenly a big dog leapt into the courtyard, pouncing towards Gu Youyou.

Xiang Chun screamed in fright, dropping the basket she was carrying.

Gu Youyou, on the other hand, laughed and embraced the huge dog's head, saying, "You came along too? Come here, let's see if you've gotten any fatter recently!"

Unable to wag its tail like an ordinary dog, Abao merely stretched out its tongue and kicked its hind legs to show how happy it was at the moment.

Still shaken, Xiang Chun patted her chest and said, "Miss, how did your dog find its way here?"

Gu Youyou cheerfully answered, "It's coming to spend New Year's with me. Xiang Chun, go see if there's any meat in the kitchen."

Knowing that Gu Youyou wanted meat to feed the dog, Xiang Chun swallowed dryly before carefully making her way past Abao and out of the courtyard.

...

Chapter 768: The Stubborn Taoist

Gu Youyou knew that Jin Zijin would come at night, so she had put some medicine in the water she gave to Xiang Chun to drink ahead of time.

It really was tough on the girl, but there was no other way, it was better that she did not know. Such things are hard to explain!

The deep night at Qi Mountain was especially silent; when he arrived, the glow of the crescent moon had already filled the windowsill.

Gu Youyou tucked herself into the quilt pretending to be asleep. The visitor's steps were light, but he knew that she had heard him, her hearing was extraordinary.

"Pretending?" He gently lifted a corner of the quilt, a pronounced smile on his lips.

"Mhm!" The person under the quilt responded with a voice trembling with suppressed laughter, barely able to contain the urge to jump out and pull him into the quilt.

"Well then, I'll come back later." He probably knew she had been holding back uncomfortably, so he pretended to leave.

This time, Gu Youyou couldn't hold back anymore. She threw back the quilt with one swift motion, and with that force, she hooked her arms around his neck, pulling him onto the bed.

Gu Youyou, panting heavily, pushed Jin Zijin away and spoke with a tinge of complaint, "When will you finally marry me openly and honestly? Is it because I can't take it anymore? We are not saints, ah, you as a Taoist surely don't understand."

Jin Zijin held her tightly, slowly calming his racing heart, and said, "Why do I feel like 'Taoist' is a word you use with disdain when you speak of it?"

Gu Youyou said, "That's right, in our place 'Taoist' is indeed a term people disdain."

"Why?" Jin Zijin's expression shifted, considering he had been with her for so long, he still didn't know what the existence of a Taoist meant to her.

Gu Youyou started laughing and said, "For example... an old bull-nosed Taoist. Bulls are more stubborn than stubborn, and people use it to describe the stubborn temperament of Taoists, just like you."

(This was said in jest by Youyou, do not take it seriously. The term ’bull-nosed Taoist’ has significant meaning and isn’t meant as a joke.)

"So you actually disrespect Taoists?" Jin Zijin frowned.

"Those who believe in Taoism naturally respect it, those who don’t take Taoist culture as a joke. After all, different families have their specialties, and quite a few people believe in Buddhism. Really, in our area, many Taoists are charlatans who cheat and deceive; the true Taoists still receive respect. Don’t take it to heart; a Taoist of your status would definitely be respected where we are," Gu Youyou explained.

Jin Zijin turned Gu Youyou’s face towards him, speaking seriously, "It doesn’t matter if others mock, but you must not mock me."

"That depends on whether you deceive me or not," Gu Youyou replied playfully.

"When have I ever deceived you?"

"Oh yes, back in Lotus Village, when you gave me a sachet, you used it to make me help you find Jin Ziyuan and his son. Weren’t you deceiving me?"

Jin Zijin blinked awkwardly, sheepishly said, "You still remember something that happened so long ago, you really hold a grudge, so petty."

Gu Youyou, looking into his face seriously, said, "Back then, we didn’t trust each other; you used me, and I didn’t have good intentions either, so it doesn’t count. But from now on, you can’t deceive me, especially when I’m not by your side, otherwise..."

"Otherwise what?"

Gu Youyou chuckled, "I've recently taken on an expert in poisons, anger me and I'll poison you to death."

Chapter 769: Who Benefits?

Jin Zijin couldn't help but give a bitter smile, grabbing her hand and said, "If I don't hold you any longer, I might succumb to the poison without you having to do anything. Ah, finally I don't need to take medicine anymore. Quick, take off your clothes so I can cool off properly."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Having not seen each other for several months, there was so much to say that she wished she could say it all in one breath.

However, having waited for him, Gu Youyou had already become sleepy, so after a few words, she began to yawn endlessly and dream about Duke Zhou.

...

When she woke up in the morning, Jin Zijin was already gone. After Gu Youyou freshened up and had the rice porridge brought by Xiang Chun, she saw Qingyang coming with Jin Zijin following behind.

Qingyang said to Gu Youyou, "Doctor Gu, the eldest senior brother came back yesterday. He said he wanted to ask you about master's situation."

Gu Youyou greeted Jin Zijin with proper manners, then spoke with some difficulty, "This matter is a long story. If the Immortal doesn't mind, may we step aside to talk?"

Jin Zijin stood upright, looking very much the part.

He glanced at Qingyang, who quickly understood and promptly took Xiang Chun to leave.

Knowing they were far away, Gu Youyou couldn’t help but laugh, "Is pretending not to recognize me that amusing?"

"Naughty," Jin Zijin said, pulling her hand to go inside, and then he added, "But also clever!"

Looking at his slightly emaciated face from below the window sill, she said, "Have you been eating less at Sanqing Temple these past few months? You’ve lost weight."

Jin Zijin grabbed her hand and said, "Not at all. Back in Lotus Village, we had plain meals every day and got along just fine. It’s just that things have been quite busy lately."

"When will Yue Rujing return?" asked Gu Youyou.

"He should be back after the New Year, soon."

"You too, if it really wasn’t working, you could have had Xiao Jinyan handle it. Why must it be Yue Rujing?"

"He can’t expose himself yet, his identity... it’s not convenient for him to appear in some affairs, and... he’s had a lot of personal matters to deal with recently."

Gu Youyou raised her eyebrows, "Does it have to do with the Crown Prince’s wedding attack?"

Jin Zijin smiled slightly and then sighed, "Yes, he was responsible for security, but still, quite a few dowries got smashed, and the bride almost got kidnapped. Although the issue was smoothed out afterwards, it was indeed his negligence."

"My cousin is alright, isn’t she?" When hearing that the bride almost got kidnapped, Gu Youyou was still a bit worried.

Jin Zijin said, "The other party’s intent was merely to provoke conflict between the Crown Prince and the second prince; your cousin is naturally fine."

"To provoke conflict between the Crown Prince and the second prince?" Gu Youyou was shocked, "Isn't it said that it was the second prince's doing? He initiated the matter, and the Crown Prince responded in kind, and because of this, the Crown Prince Residence is still sealed."

Jin Zijin looked at her with a teasing expression, "You seem to know quite a bit. But do you really think it was the second prince who did it?"

Gu Youyou was taken aback, blinking her eyes and said, "Wasn't it him?"

Wasn't it him? Wasn't it said that the Crown Prince's greatest enemy was the second prince?

"Could it be you?"

If one were to provoke a fight between the Crown Prince and the second prince, it seemed that Jin Zijin was the one who stood to benefit the most.

"Don't jump to conclusions," Jin Zijin said irritably, "Think again, who benefits most if they fight?" Seeing Gu Youyou's affirmative gaze fixed on him, he added, "Besides me."

Gu Youyou turned her head away and fell silent for a moment.

If the Crown Prince and the second prince were to clash, then surely their supporters would start to openly jostle for position.

Chapter 770: Unraveling the Eldest Young Master

To them, unaware of the existence of another son of the Emperor, the throne must be contested between these two, and once the dispute escalated, the contradictions would only intensify. If things went south, it might even lead to civil unrest and rivers of blood in the struggle for succession, allowing foreign enemies to invade at a time of weakness...

Wait, foreign enemies?

Gu Youyou suddenly startled, said, "Are you suggesting it was done by Jin Ziyuan?"

Jin Zijin nodded and said, "Indeed, it was his doing."

"Hehe!" Gu Youyou chuckled dryly and said, "It seems I worried about him for nothing in the past; the power behind him is even stronger than we imagined."

Jin Zijin looked deeply at Gu Youyou, then sneered and said, "It's just a pity that while the praying mantis hunts the cicada, the oriole lies in wait. Forget it, let's not talk about him. I'll take you to walk around the back mountain. I've heard you've been on Qi Mountain for so long and haven't left this courtyard; you must be feeling stifled."

Gu Youyou was stunned for a moment, then smiled again.

"Sure, I haven't really gone out."

Gu Youyou walked around the pile of experimental products. Actually, whether she went out for a walk or not made no difference; she didn't feel bored.

...

Over these years, the Jie Family's New Year must be the loneliest this year.

Xie Qinyun was married off; she married the second Prince, which fortunately spared her the awkwardness of serving the same husband as Lin Qianqing.

However, with her status, she still didn't secure the position of the principal wife, but that of a Consort.

This infuriated her immensely, blaming it all on her second brother. Empress Dowager Jie declared the Jie family's inner court too chaotic, fearing her misconduct.

Before she was even married, she was scorned by her mother-in-law, causing her to be laughed at by the other women entering the second Prince's palace for a long time.

The eldest son of the Jie family returned from Dongzhou to Beijing for the New Year. Jie Da, accompanied by his two sons, stayed up through the night. Looking at his two sons, Jie Da was beyond frustrated.

"Eldest, you're getting married this time before you leave. If you can't bring back a wife to continue the family line, don't bother going back to Dongzhou."

The eldest son of the Jie family saluted his father with a fist and said, "Military orders are like mountains; General Che has granted me only one month of leave. I dare not disobey."

"You..." Jie Da, infuriated, slammed the table and, looking at the silent and desolate mansion, said, "You are nearly thirty; your wife has been dead for almost five years – do you plan to live alone for the rest of your life?"

The eldest son of the Jie family replied righteously, "A man of honor prioritizes the state and his duty to the nation. When Father sent me to join the military, I followed your decree. Even if I die in battle, it is the lifelong honor of a soldier. I see nothing inappropriate about that."

"But you don't have a son yet. How can you recklessly speak of death? How could you face our ancestors in doing so?"

The eldest son of the Jie family kept a stern face and snorted, "Isn't this what you hoped for, Father? When Xi Yue was still alive, why didn't you consider the importance of progeny? If you had allowed her to join me in the East Sea, she may not have died young in this Jie family's rear estate, and I might have seen her one last time."

"You... you resent me?" Jie Da suddenly stood up, and the soup in front of him spilled all over the table.

The maid standing aside saw the scene and quickly took a clean cloth to wipe the soup off the table, then quietly retreated to the side, not daring to breathe loudly.

Ever since the passing of the eldest lady, every year the eldest master returned home, it would lead to a quarrel with the master. They were accustomed to it.

The second son of the Jie family watched the tense standoff between his big brother and father, wanting to intervene, but remembering his father would turn on him next after finishing with his brother, he kept his mouth shut, not daring to utter a word.