Farmhouse 801

Chapter 801: Stricken with Languish for Love

The visage of springtime longing on the face of Lin Qianqing instantly gave Gu Youyou a headache.

The one known for his purity and ability to charm people was mostly Jin Ziyuan, the rascal.

It was his people who had caused trouble that day, how did Lin Qianqing come to see it?

Gu Youyou sighed, "Those robbers are all desperate felons, you mustn't fantasize about them. People like them have no future."

Lin Qianqing asked in confusion, "They were just causing a ruckus, they wouldn't dare really do anything to me, cousin has already figured out who those people are."

Oh dear, girl, how stupid is your cousin to believe?

Unfortunately, Gu Youyou couldn't explain this to her and said, "Just listen to your sister; if you do take a liking to someone, even if it's not your cousin, it cannot be those robbers."

Gu Youyou felt that she had truly missed out on quite a spectacle by going to Qi Mountain, yet she was unaware that the little girl's depression and anxiety were not due to being confined in the Prince Residence, but rather from lovesickness.

Thinking about it, Lin Qianqing was only fifteen or sixteen years old, a girl this age would just be starting high school in modern times. Young girls at the dawn of their romantic awakening are the most susceptible to temptation, and for someone like Qianqing, who also harbored some rebellious feelings, a bad boy, a little mysterious, a man with good looks like Jin Ziyuan, proved fatally enticing to her.

Gu Youyou wondered if her warning had any effect. In her view, it was fine for Lin Qianqing to make a fuss over anything else; she would support her decision, except falling for Jin Ziyuan was out of the question.

That guy had no future—he was even more tragic than she was. If they failed, perhaps he would really be taken by the devious old Yu Jizi, who would exchange their souls—oh heavens, the thought was terrifying.

...

Having not visited the Imperial Palace for a long time, Gu Youyou rested at the Lin Residence for a few days, prepared the medicine, and after arranging some simple lessons for the children, she went to the palace.

The connection to the Imperial Palace couldn’t be severed for now.

The two children hadn’t seen Gu Youyou for a while and were extremely happy.

They were still young, especially Cui Yingying. Her family was teaching her their ancestral medical skills, and at her age, learning the basic concepts and simple medical theory sufficed.

As for the Ninth Princess Jin Liuying, she seemed timid in front of the noble ladies in the palace, but in private, she loved to draw mountains and rivers, even though she had never truly seen such landscapes. She could only gaze at the paintings on the walls and use her imagination.

This time, Gu Youyou brought her numerous copies of paintings about rivers and mountains from all across Zhuzhao Country, including a wide variety of landscapes in a thick album, which would delight her for a long time.

"Master, the snow mountains here are so much prettier than the snow at the palace," she said.

Gu Youyou stroked her hair and said, "Princess, you’re still young. When you grow up, you can go see them with your own eyes."

Jin Liuying lowered her gaze and then asked excitedly, "Are they even more beautiful than in these paintings?"

Gu Youyou replied, "Of course, Zhuzhao Country’s landscapes are very beautiful."

"Have you seen them all, Master?"

Gu Youyou shook her head, "Zhuzhao Country is so vast, how could I have seen everything? I’ve only seen some. But there are tales of it everywhere! The grasslands in the north, the magnificent mountains and rivers in the south, the vast desert in the west, and the big seas in the east. All are views unmatched by neighboring nations!"

Cui Yingying, who had been earnestly studying a medical book, turned her head and said to Gu Youyou, "Master, my aunt said that I can go out into the world at fifteen and only return to serve in the palace at eighteen. I will have three years to witness the landscapes of Zhuzhao Country."

Chapter 802: Huo Li Comes to Visit

Gu Youyou was slightly surprised and said, "Really? Has Yingying thought about how to go there?"

Cui Yingying laughed, her cute dimples showing as she said, "I can learn to ride horses next year, I’ll ride there. If Master and the Princess could go on this training journey with Yingying, that would be great!"

Jin Liuying showed an excited expression, looking at Gu Youyou expectantly.

Gu Youyou felt helpless—she couldn’t make decisions for the Princess’s itinerary, but there were still several years to go... perhaps it could happen.

She smiled at them and said, "If when you turn fifteen Master happens to be free, I will agree."

Gu Youyou was having a great time chatting with the two young girls when a familiar eunuch arrived.

It was the Emperor’s eunuch. Initially, Gu Youyou had been captured and taken to the Baohe Palace by this old eunuch.

"Eunuch has seen the Ninth Princess!" The old eunuch bowed respectfully to Jin Liuying.

Being someone from the Emperor’s side, he usually didn’t visit without important reason.

The Ninth Princess, surprised, asked, "Eunuch Wan, has Father summoned me?"

Eunuch Wan said, "The Emperor has sent this old servant to call for Doctor Gu, and asks the Ninth Princess for permission."

The three were surprised and confused. Although they didn’t know what the Emperor wanted, Gu Youyou had no choice but to go.

All the way there, Gu Youyou wondered what the Emperor wanted with her again? Could it be about the last incident, maybe another game of chess?

Or perhaps he would beat her for stealing the Flame Pool water—she truly realized her mistake.

She shouldn’t have acted on her own; it would have been better to let Yue Rujing handle the task.

Only when they reached the Baohe Palace did she realize the importance of the situation.

Being beaten was a minor issue, playing chess with the Emperor was also trivial, but the serious matter was that Huo Li stood beside the Emperor.

What good could come from encountering Huo Li? Clearly none, and most likely it spelled great trouble.

Gu Youyou bowed with trembling reverence, not daring to raise her eyes.

Yet in her heart, she cursed that treacherous and perverse man repeatedly.

Today, she had left without consulting the almanac—what bad luck!

The vile Emperor looked at Gu Youyou with a smile and said, "Doctor Gu, I have heard that your medical skills are exceptional, you can treat epidemics, reattach severed fingers, and even cure the Heavenly Master's bewildering ailments?"

In a low voice, Gu Youyou responded, "This humble girl's talents are limited, Your Majesty flatters me. I can treat some epidemics, and reattaching fingers was merely fortuitous, but I have not managed to cure the Heavenly Master's illness. I have always felt very ashamed about it!"

"Oh...? You didn't cure the Heavenly Master's illness?"

Both the Emperor and Huo Li were taken aback, though Huo Li was naturally pleased. It would be better if Tian Jizi were utterly ruined, given his age, it was about time.

But the Emperor looked grave. He had assumed that Gu Youyou's return meant that Tian Jizi's illness had healed.

However, Huo Li said, "Even the most skilled doctors can encounter illnesses they cannot cure, Doctor Gu should not undervalue herself. Today I come to ask a favor of Doctor Gu to accompany me to see the State Preceptor's illness."

Ah...?

Gu Youyou was stunned, her mind momentarily blanking out.

Huo Li looked at her with a smirk that turned his face hideously cunning.

Gu Youyou was not an idiot—if Yu Jizi truly needed her medical attention, could Huo Li remain so composed?

This was clearly his excuse.

Such a strategy—healing with their own methods. Last time, Jin Zijin used this method to hide her in Qi Mountain while he and Yue Rujing had free rein to deal with Huo Li firmly. Now, just a few days after her return, he was using the same method to retaliate.

Chapter 803: Go to Find the State Preceptor

Gu Youyou knew that if she followed him, it would be like a lamb entering a tiger's den, but did she have any right to refuse?

Gu Youyou's face turned pale as she cast her only hope towards the contemptible Emperor, praying he would not agree. Maybe then there would still be a chance to turn things around.

At least to give Jin Zijin time to send a message.

Unfortunately, Emperor Jin Moning disappointed her. As if he had not seen the resistance in her eyes, he smiled and said to her, "In that case, Doctor Gu, please go and have a look. The State Preceptor's health is vital to the nation's lifeline and must not be neglected."

Damn your 'must not be neglected'!

The Emperor's words were like a decree; with both involved parties present, he had laid down the command, and Gu Youyou had no choice but to accept.

Huo Li smiled triumphantly and said, "Doctor Gu, thank you for your troubles, please!"

"I didn't bring my medicine box. May I return to Lin Residence to get it?"

Huo Li shook his head with a smile and said, "The National Advisor Residence's pharmacy can rival that of the Imperial Medical Bureau. Whatever you need, they have it. There's no need for you to trouble yourself!"

Clearly, they were not going to give her any chance to make excuses to stay or to send out a message.

Filled with despair, Gu Youyou had no choice but to follow Huo Li into the carriage.

In the carriage, Huo Li sat opposite her with a dark face, staring at her as if she were a criminal, driving her nearly insane.

"With you looking like this, I won’t be able to cure your master’s illness," Gu Youyou said indifferently.

"Heh..." No need to pretend anymore, Huo Li looked at her mockingly with cold irony and gritted his teeth, "If you can’t cure the State Preceptor, it will cost you your life."

Gu Youyou shifted back, forced a dry laugh, and lifted the curtain of the carriage window to look outside.

She realized that this was not the way to Sanqing Temple, and since the National Advisor Residence was within the Sanqing Temple, hadn’t he said they were going to the National Advisor Residence to see Yu Jizi?

Gu Youyou was shocked and asked, "This isn’t the way to the National Advisor Residence; where are you taking me?"

Huo Li sneered, "Who told you I was taking you to the National Advisor Residence?"

"You’re deceiving the Emperor, that’s treason!" Gu Youyou said through clenched teeth, but she was powerless.

Huo Li laughed and said, "My master has gone to recuperate in a deserted yet idyllic place. Since you’re going to treat him, you naturally have to go too. How can that be considered treason?"

Damn it!

Gu Youyou ground her back teeth.

The carriage was luxurious and spacious, fully equipped and drawn by four horses. Although it moved swiftly, the ride inside was quite smooth.

Gu Youyou guessed that they had been on the road for over an hour, leaving the city. She sat obediently in the carriage, slowly causing Huo Li to lower his guard.

After another hour and a half, they stopped at a midway station for restocking. Huo Li had the carriage parked far in front of the station and ordered someone to prepare something.

Soon after, some food was brought over, along with an exquisite stove on which a kettle of tea was being warmed.

He sure knew how to enjoy life.

Now in the evening, the carriage started moving again. Huo Li sat inside and had a lavish dinner, then leisurely began to sip tea.

It was a pity that Gu Youyou could only watch the food and swallow hard; in the end, all she got was a plain steamed bun.

The bastard, mistreating a prisoner.

Gu Youyou decided to fight for her dignity this meal and, without hesitation, threw the plain steamed bun at Huo Li's forehead.

Of course, with his reflexes, she could not hit him. He dodged, and the bun flew over his head and out of the window.

Huo Li didn't say anything, yet the smile on his face grew even more sarcastic.

Chapter 804: The Bug Left by Jin Ziyuan

This can't go on, Gu Youyou could only rack her brain for ways to self-rescue, as a means of diverting her attention.

She didn’t know whether Huo Li taking her away had been noticed by Jin Zijin’s spies left in Beijing. Had they informed Jin Zijin?

If they had, he should be able to catch up quickly on horseback, right?

But being taken away by Huo Li was a critical issue. She couldn’t afford to wait and hope for Jin Zijin to come to her rescue. Perhaps...

Looking at the small stove warming the teapot, an idea suddenly struck her. She reached to a specific spot on her clothes.

There was an item, just like the Jade Pendant, that Gu Youyou had treasured and hidden away.

It was tucked within the folds of her clothing.

That was a bell given to her by Jin Ziyuan, who had told her it contained a Poisonous Insect. If she heated the bell over a fire, he would come for her.

Coincidentally, Jin Ziyuan was indeed near Beijing at this moment.

But with Huo Li watching her like this, how could she extract the Poisonous Insect to heat it?

Her thoughts shifted, and suddenly, Gu Youyou began pounding on the carriage door, shouting, "Stop, stop for a moment!"

The carriage didn’t halt. Huo Li’s face darkened as he said, "Barely two or three hours out of Beijing and you’re already restless? I advise you to stay still. It would be wise not to bring pain upon yourself."

Gu Youyou clutched her stomach, saying, "I have an urgent need. If you don’t stop the carriage, I’m going to pee right inside it."

Huo Li almost stumbled, nearly falling off the seat inside the carriage.

In all his life, he had not encountered such a brazen woman. Weren't the daughters of officials in Beijing all cultured and polite? Oh, that's right, she wasn't. She was a village girl.

"Stop!" Huo Li commanded, unable to bear it any longer, and the carriage finally halted.

Gu Youyou immediately got up to leave the carriage, but Huo Li reached out to stop her, saying coldly, "Stay put inside the carriage."

"Hmm...?" How was she supposed to take care of her personal needs then?

"I'm getting out!" Huo Li said, grinding his back teeth fiercely.

After Huo Li stepped out, a chamber pot was soon thrown onto the carriage.

Gu Youyou, "..."

Great, and she was worried about the inconvenience of using flint.

Gu Youyou quickly undid her sash and pried out the small bell sewn into her clothing, tossing it directly into the small stove with warm tea water.

That Poisonous Insect had been with her for a long time; she didn't know if it was dead already, so she didn't hesitate to get rid of it in the stove as evidence.

Then, fearing the Poisonous Insect might not work and might instead arouse Huo Li's suspicion, she had no choice but to actually use the chamber pot to take care of her personal needs.

So embarrassing! She had never been so humiliated in both her lifetimes combined.

Hearing the trickling sound from inside the carriage, Huo Li, standing guard outside, had a face as dark as the bottom of a pot.

"I'm done, here's the chamber pot for you!"

A while later, Gu Youyou's hand extended from inside the carriage, holding the chamber pot.

He was supposed to carry a chamber pot for her?

Enraged to the point of explosion, Huo Li kicked the chamber pot away and climbed back onto the carriage.

Of course, he didn't get inside the carriage. The woman inside had just... he couldn't stand the smell. Instead, he sat next to the coachman on the carriage seat.

Gu Youyou, who had been suffocated the whole trip, had never felt so relieved.

...

Jin Ziyuan stared blankly at the bell in his palm that was jumping wildly.

Years ago, he had given the other one to Gu Youyou, telling her that when she had made up her mind to leave with him, she was to heat the bell over a fire.

The Poisonous Insect inside the bell would die upon encountering the flame. Once one of them died, the other could sense it and would frantically collide with the bell. He would then be able to find her by following the direction of the insect's collisions and then take her away.

Chapter 805: Eclipse Worm

After three years, he thought she had long forgotten, but unexpectedly, he finally heard the bells ring.

"You Jiang, take your men and come with me, quickly!"

You Jiang had never seen Jin Ziyuan this eager, which startled him.

"What's wrong?"

Jin Ziyuan said, "There's no time to explain, just follow me."

Having said that, he took the lead in mounting his horse and galloped towards the direction of the worm impact.

The plains and grasslands dominate the North, so a single rider on a horse could move swiftly. Before midnight, he had caught up with the carriage where Gu Youyou was.

"Seize that carriage for me, slay the men on the spot, and take the women back to be the bandit chiefs' wives. Bring back the gold, silver, and jewels to reward our brothers!" Jin Ziyuan's order was rife with hooliganism, and the bandits following him, upon seeing the luxurious carriage ahead, were already excitedly ready for action. As soon as his words fell, they brandished their broadswords and began to surround the carriage where Gu Youyou was.

Huo Li felt like he had been fucked over by a dog upon seeing this band of bandits.

In recent years, Huo Li had been down on his luck; could it be that now even bandits dared to rob him?

The coachman driving the carriage was a mute, and he trembled as he looked at Huo Li.

He had only taken on this job to feed his family, never thinking he would lose his life here.

But he had heard the shouts of the bandits clearly.

Huo Li said coldly, "Just sit tight on the carriage, keep an eye on the people inside. Once this is over, double the silver."

The mute coachman felt like crying; success had to come first.

Everyone says that two fists can't beat four hands, but there was a horde of bandits, if not a hundred, then at least eighty, right?

Heaven, he had elders above and young ones below, he didn't want to die yet.

He couldn't speak, so he could only keep kowtowing to Huo Li.

Huo Li gave him a cold stare and grabbed him, tossing him into the carriage.

Gu Youyou, who was peeking through the window gap, was startled by the person suddenly thrown in, but relaxed when she saw it was the coachman.

She asked, "What's happening outside?"

The coachman had a bitter expression, pointed to his own mouth, shook his head, and looked as if he was on the verge of tears.

Gu Youyou understood, realizing that this coachman must have been hired by Huo Li, who had taken her from the palace without alerting anyone; probably no one in Xuanzong's circle even knew.

Clever, Huo Li.

She just didn't know if the people outside were Jin Ziyuan or not. The voice seemed different, as though artificially changed.

But with the showy carriage Huo Li had arranged, it was possible it had caught the eye of bandits.

Not knowing the situation outside, Gu Youyou decided to hide inside the carriage and see what Huo Li planned to do next.

The coachman, terrified out of his wits, was huddled in a corner of the carriage.

Huo Li watched the crowd with a cold gaze and, without another word, drew his sword.

A longsword emitted a cold light as pure as moonlight, and Huo Li yelled at the crowd, "Tonight, none of you will leave here alive."

His eyes bloodshot, he looked like a grim reaper, the vigor erupting from him causing dust to fly around his body. And the sword... centered on the sword, a blue circle rapidly expanded.

Gu Youyou, hidden in the carriage and looking out the window, was stunned by the spectacle before her, feeling as if Huo Li was performing some sort of sorcery.

What were those things?

It seemed as if something was continuously flowing out from the hilt of the sword, expanding outward.

Jin Ziyuan furrowed his brow tightly and whispered to You Jiang behind him, "Those are Eclipse Worms. Pass the word, everyone retreat quickly."

Chapter 806: Call Me Grandpa and I'll Tell You

Jin Ziyuan's voice was soft, but it didn't change, and Gu Youyou recognized it was him.

Despite hearing that these creatures were bugs, Gu Youyou couldn't help but shiver.

The long sword Huo Li carried was filled with so many bugs, good lord, that's not scientific!

Given she had arrived at this ghostly place and encountered so many unscientific things, she gradually came to terms with it.

Gu Youyou watched for a while, then turned to the carriage driver, who was curled up in fear, and said, "Take this chance and run, whoever wins, you won't live."

The carriage driver was stunned for a moment but then gestured to Gu Youyou to flee with him, knowing she had also been captured.

However, Gu Youyou said, "I can't run, I will be fine, you just go."

The carriage driver, looking out for himself and seeing Gu Youyou insist, didn't hesitate any longer, quickly got off the carriage, and quietly left.

Seeing Huo Li's bugs spreading all around, it was clear they were unstoppable.

The bandits were all holding torches, trying to use them to stop the bugs from approaching, but it was of no use, and they could only keep retreating.

Jin Ziyuan shouted angrily, "Who has tung oil, pour tung oil and set it on fire!"

These bugs only feared tung oil fire and Tianzong's Chixiao sword.

(Forgive me for changing the sword name Chixiao into a dagger.)

"I have it!" someone in the crowd shouted, and quickly, that person handed a pot of tung oil to Jin Ziyuan.

The season was just right, when the tung trees were producing tung oil.

These people, nomadic as bandits, always carried their necessities wherever they went, and since tung oil was the most readily obtainable combustible oil of the season, several of them responsible for fires had brought it.

They quickly took out their tung oil, followed Jin Ziyuan's instructions to pour it on the spreading pale blue bugs, and set them on fire.

The bugs, glowing pale blue, instantly began to wilt, rolling a few times, then lost their luster.

Huo Li felt a wrenching pain in his heart, knowing how hard these little creatures were to raise.

Seeing the situation turn against him, he quickly twisted the hilt of his sword to recall the Eclipse Worms.

Jin Ziyuan was overjoyed, and shouted loudly, "Everyone, on him, capture this man and flay him!"

Then, just like a bunch of bandits, they all rushed towards Huo Li while shouting.

Huo Li watched them coldly, as he considered the bandits beneath him. How could Huo Li be afraid of these riffraff?

If one came, he killed one; if two came, he killed both.

What he didn't expect was that these bandits were so formidable. While he didn't care for one or two, when about a dozen surrounded him, he couldn't gain the upper hand.

These weren't bandits?

He finally realized.

The dead soldiers under Jin Ziyuan's command were all desperate fighters, nothing like ordinary bandits.

"What exactly are you people?" Huo Li couldn’t help but grow anxious.

Both Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing had been snared by his trap, so it couldn’t be them. Who were these people daring to rob his carriage?

"Ha ha, hand over gold, jewels, and beauties, then kneel and call me grandpa, and I’ll tell you who we are."

This was definitively the behavior of a group of bandits, and Huo Li was infuriated.

Huo Li was surrounded, and Jin Ziyuan had already moved to the carriage.

He opened the carriage door, and at first glance he saw Gu Youyou.

"Is it really you?" He was ecstatic, smiling as purely and impeccably as a night-blooming cereus.

Chapter 807: Jin Ziyuan’s Brain Trust

"You’ve finally come to your senses," he said, delighted.

Gu Youyou replied, "I’m quite surprised myself. I burned that bug and you really came. It’s been three years—I thought that bug would have died a long time ago."

"That bug can live for twenty years," he said with a happy laugh.

Gu Youyou glanced outside and said, "Let’s not talk about that now, we need to hurry. I’ll trouble you to escort me for a while, but when we’re close to Beijing, I’ll make my own way back."

The smile on Jin Ziyuan’s face instantly froze, and he exclaimed in shock, "You aren’t willing to go with me?"

Gu Youyou: "...What?"

Seeing Gu Youyou's reaction, she had clearly forgotten what she had said when she had given her the bug.

Today, she burned the bug simply because she wanted him to come to her rescue.

Well, she had saved him a few times as well, so this could be considered repaying her once.

Jin Ziyuan stiffened for a moment, then sighed and said, "It's nothing. Let's go."

He exited the carriage and took his place on the outside, driving the cart.

Huo Li knew he could not defeat this group of 'bandits' and had already gritted his teeth and slipped away early. His meticulously arranged plans had failed—it was truly infuriating and hateful.

You Jiang climbed onto the carriage and said to Jin Ziyuan, who was driving, "Our hasty actions this time must have attracted Tianzong's attention. Young Prince, it is best if we refrain from any activities for the coming month."

"Mm!" Jin Ziyuan agreed, unusually obedient.

You Jiang glanced back at the carriage and asked, "Is there a lady inside? Young Prince, did you do all this to rescue her?"

Jin Ziyuan pondered for a moment, then said, "She's the one who provided me with the antidote."

Since that was his response, You Jiang knew who it was and had nothing more to say.

After a prolonged period of intense alertness, Gu Youyou suddenly relaxed and felt a bit sleepy.

She leaned inside the carriage and decided to sleep for a while.

You Jiang took over driving immediately, but the direction he chose was not towards Beijing.

After a long silence in the carriage, Jin Ziyuan stood up and entered the carriage.

The night was at its deepest, and it was the coldest hour of the day.

Jin Ziyuan added some coal to the furnace of warm tea, stoking the fire to make it burn brighter, and then moved closer to Gu Youyou.

After doing all this, he came out again.

You Jiang turned his head to look at Jin Ziyuan and suggested, "We should split into three groups. Otherwise, we won't be able to evade their pursuit."

Jin Ziyuan gave a simple 'mm' in agreement, then fell silent.

You Jiang was a middle-aged man in his late thirties, one of the few survivors after that failed uprising, and at the same time, he was a crucial figure—the strategist by the side of three princes.

Jin Ziyuan trusted him greatly.

"We can't return to Beijing for now. When Miss Gu wakes up, she can't stay on the carriage either. Send a few people to take the carriage towards Xining; that territory belongs to the fifth prince. With this move, we can deceive Huo Li."

Jin Ziyuan nodded his head in agreement but remained silent.

He didn’t even know what he was thinking at the moment, feeling a void in his mind, unwilling to think about anything.

You Jiang sighed and continued, "For the second route, we need to find a woman of similar build to Miss Gu and have her wear Gu’s clothes, then ride towards Lingnan. Young Prince, you also need to find someone to impersonate you and travel to Lingnan as well."

Jin Ziyuan finally showed emotion, looking at him in surprise.

"It’s fine to deceive Huo Li, but why do we need someone to impersonate Youyou and me and go to Lingnan?"

You Jiang sighed and said, "Young Prince, I know you don’t want to send Miss Gu back, and this move can deceive Jin Zijin."

Jin Ziyuan paused for a moment, then let out a bitter laugh, "It’s often said you are cunning and crafty, and it’s certainly true. Alright then, what third route have you arranged for us?"

Chapter 808: Going to the East Sea

"You and Miss Gu mustn’t take the carriage or ride horses, but rather walk eastward. Pay attention along the way, don’t leave any traces. Jin Zijin will soon realize he’s been fooled, but we can’t let him find us that easily."

...

The carriage wheels bumped harshly over the stones, jolting Gu Youyou awake.

She yawned and lifted the carriage curtain to ask Jin Ziyuan outside, "What time is it now?"

Jin Ziyuan turned his head and said, "It must be almost dawn."

Almost dawn? Are they almost there?

Gu Youyou hurriedly tidied up her somewhat disheveled clothing and said, "There's no need to enter the city, just let me off in the outskirts, thank you Jin Ziyuan. I don't have much to thank you with, some other day I'll make more medicinal pellets for you."

The Jin Ziyuan driving the carriage remained silent without responding; Gu Youyou awkwardly twisted her mouth, lowered the curtain, and returned inside.

After a long while, Jin Ziyuan's voice came through, "This isn't the way back to Beijing."

Gu Youyou suddenly stood up and pulled open the curtain.

"Not the way back to Beijing?"

Looking at the faintly bright sky, Gu Youyou realized they had reached a hilly area, whereas Beijing belonged to the flat plains of Beiping, without such terrain.

Her expression darkened as she asked coldly, "Where are you taking me?"

What a Jin Ziyuan, was he repaying kindness with vengeance?

She hadn't returned all night, and the Lin Family was still alright—if an eunuch from the Emperor conveyed a message that she was out on a medical call, all would be well. But could Jin Zijin believe that? He must be dead worried mad.

"I want to go back to Beijing!" she said.

Jin Ziyuan said, "The way back to Beijing is full of Huo Li's men, going back now would be walking into a trap."

"But..." She was about to say that Jin Zijin must be looking for her, but Jin Ziyuan interrupted her.

"Don’t count on Jin Zijin. If he were free enough to come rescue you, you wouldn’t have been taken out of the city by Huo Li so easily. Follow me to the East Sea to hide for a while; once he’s dealt with the trouble that is Huo Li, he’ll come looking for you."

Gu Youyou paused, then stopped talking.

She didn’t believe that Jin Zijin would have anything more important than her own safety—mainly, it was hearing Jin Ziyuan suggest going to the East Sea that matched her own intentions.

The two meteorites had come from the East Sea; perhaps, there could be discoveries to be made there.

Moreover, if Jin Zijin really had troubles, without her as a hindrance, he could deal with Huo Li with peace of mind.

"Fine, I’ll write a letter to him, and you find a way to get it to him, so he won’t worry."

Jin Ziyuan turned his head, his voice indifferent, "There’s no need for a letter, I will have someone deliver a message."

Gu Youyou pursed her lips and stopped talking, turning back into the carriage.

After moving forward for a while, the carriage gradually came to a stop.

Jin Ziyuan brought a boy around fifteen or sixteen years old, slender and small, to Gu Youyou and said, "Huo Li isn’t easy to fool, exchange clothes with him."

Gu Youyou looked at the skinny boy and gave a slight nod.

Since she chose to let Jin Ziyuan rescue her, she would just have to trust him.

Changing clothes was just swapping her outer robe; Gu Youyou quickly changed and stepped down from the carriage.

She donned men’s clothing and men’s hairstyle. Added to the fact that her walking posture wasn’t like the delicate steps of dainty young ladies—if not for her face being too delicate, she could almost pass off as a man.

Jin Ziyuan also changed into a set of clothes, very plain ones. Seeing Gu Youyou’s disguise, he was slightly taken aback.

He said, "I’m sorry you have to walk, can you manage?"

Chapter 809: Left with Jin Ziyuan

In recent years, Gu Youyou’s health had become indistinguishable from that of a common person, so naturally, there was no problem.

She said, "Let’s go. If you can walk, then I can walk."

The two of them quickly packed their belongings and began their journey eastward.

In a world untainted by pollution, the air and the earth were clear and crisp. Jin Ziyuan moved at a brisk pace, and Gu Youyou found it somewhat difficult to keep up.

Even though she normally didn’t sweat, by dawn, she was drenched in perspiration.

Upon seeing this, Jin Ziyuan had no choice but to slow down and wait for her.

"We’ll walk a bit further. Once we get past the village ahead, we’ll reach the market where we can buy horses," he said.

Gu Youyou wiped her sweat and nodded lightly.

She thought to herself that her body was still not as strong as her own, but it was far better than that of an ordinary girl. To walk at such a speed for nearly four hours was exhausting for most people.

Biting her teeth, Gu Youyou picked up her bundle and followed Jin Ziyuan.

After a while, Jin Ziyuan stopped again, glanced at the narrowing field ridge, and said, "You rest here for a moment and wait for me."

Gu Youyou sat down on a rock at the side of the road, drank some water, and ate a few bites of steamed buns.

She had put on a brave face in front of Huo Li the day before and had gone without eating; now she was really hungry.

Looking up, she saw that Jin Ziyuan had chopped off a thick branch from a large tree by the roadside and fashioned it into the shape of a cane.

In the chilly May weather of the north which grew warmer as they traveled eastward, the bucolic roads echoed with birdsong and the fragrance of flowers, and she saw many villagers busily at work in the distance.

This scene made Gu Youyou think of Lotus Village.

That year, she too stood high on a hillside, looking down at the toiling villagers of Lotus Village.

At that time, Grandfather Gu was still alive, guiding oxen in the fields.

Jin Ziyuan brought her the finished cane, placed it in front of Gu Youyou, and said, "Walk with this. It will save you some effort."

Seeing Gu Youyou’s gaze fixed on the busy villagers, he pursed his lips and said, "Taking the countryside roads is for safety, although they are not as easy to travel as the imperial roads."

Gu Youyou cracked a smile and replied, "Thank you. I understand."

...

After Huo Li returned, he couldn’t worry about whom the news would disturb; he immediately summoned a multitude of Xuanzong disciples to pursue them.

At the same time, he had someone inform the Emperor that Doctor Gu had been abducted by bandits on the road.

How dare these bandits be so bold? The Emperor, Jin Moning, was shocked and immediately summoned Xiao Jinyan into the palace, ordering him to lead troops to aid Huo Li in rescuing Doctor Gu.

Meanwhile, the Lin Family was in turmoil.

The elderly Madam Lin clutched Lin Xingyi’s hand and quivered as she asked, "Didn’t they just say yesterday that she went to treat the State Preceptor? How did she get abducted by bandits so quickly?"

Lin Xingyi tried to calm his mother, saying, "Mother, don’t worry. The Emperor has already dispatched General Xiao and his men to the rescue, and Huo Li of Xuanzong is doing his best to save her. There will be no trouble."

Madam Lin was beside herself, exclaiming loudly, "What do you mean, no trouble? She’s been taken by bandits! Who are those brigands? If a young woman spends a single night in the hands of bandits, everything is ruined—her chastity is lost, and she will never be able to marry." She peered intently at Lin Xingyi and continued, "I’ve always said a girl shouldn’t show her face in public, let alone open a clinic or a clothing store. Look at what’s happened now. If she hadn’t been treating patients, none of this would have occurred."

Lin Xingyi’s expression darkened, and he angrily retorted, "You have the narrow outlook of a woman—what do you know? If she hadn’t opened a clinic in Beijing, would no one know of her medical skills? Don’t forget, her reputation was established in Lingnan long ago. She was called directly to serve the

Emperor; he couldn’t refuse the Dao Family’s request, and as his subjects, we can only obey the Emperor’s orders."

Chapter 810: Pursuit

Madam Lin couldn’t explain this away, and she began to complain about how he had stopped her from arranging a marriage for Gu Youyou.

"I said long ago that marrying her off earlier would keep her out of trouble, but you just wouldn’t listen. If she’d been married off by now, none of this would have happened."

Lin Xingyi replied impatiently, "Every time something happens, you know only to blame this and that. Why don’t you mention how you brought her to the palace in the first place? If she hadn’t gone to the palace, none of this would have happened."

"You..." Madam Lin was so taken aback that she was speechless.

"What do we do now? Even if we rescue her, she’s ruined. How can a woman without her chastity continue to live?"

Lin Xingyi was getting angry and snorted coldly, "What nonsense are you talking about? We don’t even know Youyou’s situation yet, and you’re here making wild guesses. Let me tell you, don’t worry about Youyou’s marriage; just take good care of yourself!"

Old Madam Lin was so agitated by their argument that she nearly fainted, but Daya, the maid beside her, quickly steadied her.

"Old Madam, please don’t be anxious, have a seat first."

Dizzy with panic, they remembered that the old lady had been there all along, listening to them.

They stopped arguing and went to check on the old lady together.

Lin Xingyi glared fiercely at Madam Lin and deliberately shoved her away.

Madam Lin stood behind him, gritting her teeth, wanting to say something, but seeing the old lady was genuinely upset, she swallowed back the words she was about to say.

"Mother, don’t be anxious, nothing will happen. Many people have gone out to search; please make sure not to get too worked up."

Old Madam Lin cried with tears streaming down, "Oh, how can I not be anxious? This child has suffered since she was young, and I thought that being in Beijing under my watch, she would be able to live peacefully. But one thing after another, it never stops, her life is truly bitter..."

Xiang Chun got wind of the situation and quickly went to the backyard to inform Searcy.

At the time, Searcy was feeding rats. Seeing this, Xiang Chun said urgently, "Oh, are you still in the mood to feed rats? The young lady’s in trouble, and your good days are probably over."

Searcy’s movements paused as she turned around.

"She’s in trouble? What happened?"

"The young lady has been kidnapped by bandits, and the whole family is almost driven mad with worry. And here you are, still having the heart to feed the rats."

Searcy was suddenly shocked, and the bowl with food fell to the ground as she grabbed Xiang Chun’s shoulder, "When did this happen?"

"Just last night!" Searcy’s cold demeanor was quite frightening, and Xiang Chun jumped in surprise.

"Last night, didn’t they say she went out for a medical call?"

Xiang Chun kept shaking her head and timidly said, "I... I don’t know!"

...

Two teams of men rode out in pursuit, and just as You Jiang had predicted, Huo Li quickly found the tracks his carriage had left. Not only that, but he also discovered the subtle clues You Jiang had intentionally had people leave behind, allowing him to guess their identity.

He said to his men coldly, "Heading for Xining, huh? Hmm, that’s right, besides Xining, who would dare shelter them."

They set off toward Xining.

Behind them were the men led by Xiao Jinyan, along with Jin Zijin.

After some investigation, Jin Zijin seemed contemplative.

Xiao Jinyan, however, was smiling, "Huo Li has been duped; she likely hasn’t been taken to Xining." Pointing towards the southern road, he said, "There are two horses that went this way. Looking at these hoof prints, one of them is probably of lighter weight, most likely Doctor Gu. The other person, well..." He smiled in a particularly irritating manner, "I wonder if cousin can guess who it might be, someone who could get Doctor Gu to willingly follow him?"