Farmhouse 861

Chapter 861: Going to the Back Mountain of Lotus Village

A carriage approached from the front, and Yu Jizi stopped, his follower Jin Ziyuan also halted.

The person who alighted from the carriage, upon seeing Yu Jizi, hurriedly jumped down and clasped his hands in salute: "Master."

Yu Jizi gave a slight nod and said, "Take him up, to the ancient tomb."

No one would have imagined that Jin Ziyuan could be taken away by Yu Jizi so easily.

However, apart from Yu Jizi, Tian Jizi was aware. He had heard from Yue Rujing's report that Jin Ziyuan was left at the East Sea military camp, guarded by tens of thousands, unable to escape.

Hearing this, he knew that Jin Ziyuan must have already fallen into the hands of Yu Jizi.

He did not directly ask Jin Zijin to look for Jin Ziyuan, instead, he said, "It would be enough if we find the place where Yu Jizi conducts his rituals. Do not worry about Jin Ziyuan anymore. He has many of his men in the East Sea. He probably already knew when you guys set up the suspicious plot."

Yue Rujing was severely struck by this, yet she had nothing to say.

The master was always accurate, except when he was confused.

Jin Zijin said, "He is not near Beijing now, the world is so vast, where could he take them?"

Tian Jizi stroked his beard, his face inscrutable, "The Soul Transfer Formation requires the gathering of the spiritual energy of heaven and earth to succeed. And after generations of exploration by the Sect Leader of Xuanzong, a location has been found that is very suited for setting up the formation."

"Where?" Jin Zijin asked anxiously.

"The place chosen by the great ancestor of Xuanzong," Tian Jizi said indifferently. "You should know where it is already."

The place selected by that predecessor of Xuanzong, isn't it the hill behind Lotus Village?

Indeed, that area's mountainous terrain is naturally endowed, a truly suitable place, but...

Jin Zijin bowed slightly, a look of surprise on his face as he said to Tian Jizi, "The tomb of Xuanzong's predecessor at that location has been destroyed and the feng shui is already ruined. Master, they likely won't conduct the ritual there."

Tian Jizi, however, smiled and said, "The dragon in 'dragon veins'—how could it only have one eye? Just find the corresponding other eye of the dragon."

He put on his sword case and said to Yue Rujing, "The rest is up to you. Zijin, come with your master and go."

...

After a long journey, the temperature inside the carriage became higher and higher.

As it neared a small river, the carriage stopped.

"Madam, the journey ahead is long, and the weather these past few days has been exceptionally scorching. Why not stop at the nearby town? We will surely ensure the safety of the Young Prince on his return."

As Madam stepped down from the carriage and looked at the fierce sun in the sky, the scorching sun made her dizzy and nauseated.

Yet she clenched her teeth and endured, saying, "No, You Jiang, I must go myself. Mo Shu's body is there. Shall I allow Ziyuan to remain there as well? Even if I can't change anything, I must go and bring their bodies back myself, not letting them rot in the wilderness."

"Madam," You Jiang advised, "Madam, the Young Prince will be fine. He just needs help completing the ceremony, this is what he promised us back then. Just rest assured and wait here, You Jiang will surely bring back both the Prince's and the Young Prince's bodies."

Madam shook her head and said, "I haven't had the chance to see him for so many years, this time I must go myself."

"Madam..."

"You Jiang, stop talking," Madam interrupted You Jiang from continuing, then she said to a maid by the side, "Go fetch some water from the river, and let's continue our journey."

This time, You Jiang had secretly brought Madam out of the Ningwang Residence with few people, all loyal followers who had survived the years.

Chapter 862: The Promise Made That Year

After resupplying water, they continued on their journey.

Just as another carriage arrived by the small He to add water, the carriage curtain was lifted by the wind. That inadvertent glimpse caused Madam Ru to become rooted to the spot, unable to move.

"You Jiang..." Madam Ru, clutching her wildly beating heart, loudly called out to You Jiang outside the carriage, "Stop the carriage, stop it quickly."

They had just refilled with water and had just started moving again.

"What's the matter, Madam?" You Jiang, puzzled by her sudden shout, hurriedly had the carriage stopped at the side of the road.

With urgency, Madam Ru lifted her skirt and stepped down from the carriage, excitedly telling You Jiang, "The carriage in the back, I saw Ziyuan."

How could that be...?

You Jiang looked toward the carriage heading toward the riverbank, a modest carriage pulled by a single horse, looking very inconspicuous, just like one hired by an ordinary person.

"Madam, could it be that you miss the Young Prince so much that you mistook someone else for him? The Young Prince should have already arrived there by this time."

"No mistake, I saw him, it's Ziyuan, he's in that carriage," Madam Ru insisted, her voice full of excitement as she lifted her skirt and chased after the carriage.

The attendants all looked at You Jiang. You Jiang fell silent for a moment, then motioned for everyone to follow.

The people from the carriage alighted; a young Taoist holding a water jug went down to the river to fetch water, and an old man with white hair stood by the carriage, watching the approaching figures.

"Madam Ru." Yu Jizi greeted with a smile on his face, as normal as could be.

"Is it really you?" Madam Ru stopped, catching her breath lightly.

It was indeed him. So, the person inside the carriage...

"Is Ziyuan inside?" Madam Ru suppressed her pounding heart.

"Indeed." Yu Jizi did not intend to hide it from her, "What a coincidence, after parting for so many years, to encounter Madam Ru here."

Madam Ru sighed, "After so many years, the State Preceptor hasn't changed a bit." In high spirits.

"Indeed, I've grown old. When one reaches a certain age, there's not much change," Yu Jizi said with a laugh.

Madam Ru clenched her hands into fists, staring intently at the unremarkable carriage, and said, "I want to see him."

Yu Jizi's face bore a smile as he stepped aside, gesturing with an inviting motion, "As you please!"

Madam Ru was somewhat surprised; Yu Jizi had so readily agreed to let her see Jin Ziyuan.

Something felt off to her, but, frantic with yearning for her son, she could not care for anything else as she approached the carriage with an uneasy heart.

You Jiang followed behind, throwing an anxious glance at Madam Ru as she walked toward the carriage, then turned his gaze back to Yu Jizi and bowed respectfully.

"State Preceptor, all well with you?"

Yu Jizi's face still bore a gracious smile, "You Jiang, after many years, you still remember this old man."

You Jiang said tersely, "State Preceptor, I hope you have not forgotten what you promised. Otherwise, even at the risk of our lives, we shall not let you get away easily."

Yu Jizi laughed heartily, "Of course, I've always kept my word."

Madam Ru lifted the carriage curtain. Jin Ziyuan inside was expressionless. Upon seeing someone entering the carriage, he seemed not to see her, his eyes both dull and clear. Madam Ru, seeing Jin Ziyuan like this, immediately collapsed, crying out loud.

"Why has it come to this? How could you become like this? Ziyuan, say something, I’m your mother..."

You Jiang, who was in conversation with Yu Jizi below, heard this and his expression changed instantly. He cast a deep look at the State Preceptor and strode toward the carriage.

Chapter 863: The Deal with Yu Jizi

The Daoist acolyte who fetched water from the river returned and hurriedly explained upon seeing the scene, "Don’t panic, it’s just sleeping medicine. This older brother caused trouble all the way, and Master had no choice but to drug him and bring him along."

Madam was overwhelmed with emotion, how could she remain calm upon seeing her son in such a state?

What was her restraint over the years for? If her son could only end up like this, how could she continue living?

"No more, I’ve changed my mind!" Madam rushed to Yu Jizi, pleading tearfully, "Please let us go, we have changed our minds. Release my son, from now on, whether we live or die, it will have nothing to do with you."

You Jiang stared blankly at Madam and Yu Jizi, his mind a complete blank, unsure of his mistake.

"Madam, what nonsense are you talking about?" Yu Jizi said indifferently, "You are the true lineage of the Imperial Family, the Emperor had passed the throne to the third prince, aren’t you clear about this? If you regret now, weren’t those who died for you all those years ago dying in vain, making you a sinner through the ages?"

"No..." Madam’s face was streaked with tears, she shook her head and said, "So many years have passed, I no longer think about those things. Who cares who becomes the Emperor, what does it have to do with me? I just want Jin Yi to live well, even if he has to hide for his entire life..."

"Madam!" Yu Jizi’s expression darkened, showing rare impatience as he said, "I’ve told you, I will keep him safe, he will not die. He will not only survive, but he will also overthrow Jin Moning and become the Emperor to avenge his father. We’re close to success, as long as he helps me complete that task, soon all your long-awaited hopes and wishes will be fulfilled."

"But he does not wish to, we've always been forcing him to do things he doesn't want to."

"He just hasn't seen the light yet; when he does, he will thank me. Children, their thoughts are never long-term," Yu Jizi said with a faint smile.

"Madam, there is no turning back for you now," Yu Jizi spoke softly, "What you need to do now is to stay honestly in the Prince Residence in Xining and wait. One day, the truth about the past will come out, and then you can return to the Imperial Palace openly."

You Jiang stood beside the carriage, feeling indescribable strangeness in his heart.

Why did he have to do this?

They had underestimated the Emperor's strength back then, knowing they would fail, they initially planned to fight to the death.

But then Yu Jizi appeared, telling them that dying in battle meant nothing.

It was better to place themselves in a dead-end situation to preserve strength and wait for an opportunity.

He even calculated that Jin Moning still had over a decade of an Emperor's fate left; rebelling now would not affect him and only increase casualties.

Indeed, the intelligence they had received at the time confirmed this; they couldn't touch him, Jin Moning was just waiting for them to rebel, which would give him the perfect excuse to eliminate them all at once.

So, they followed Yu Jizi's advice, sacrificed one prince to save another.

Originally, the third prince and the fifth prince competed over who should go, eventually settling it by drawing lots.

The third prince drew the lot to die, Yu Jizi then suggested a way to ensure the princess and the Young Prince would survive, but the cost...

His thoughts were interrupted, Yu Jizi had left the crying Madam and approached the carriage.

"You Jiang, you are a clever man, you should know that only by listening to me do you have a hope. Madam is emotionally agitated, please go and console her."

Chapter 864: No More Medicine for Him

Having said that, he turned to the young tauist boy who was driving the carriage.

"Is the water all loaded?"

"It’s all loaded, Master." The little tauist boy replied earnestly with a smile.

He only recognized his Master, he didn’t recognize any of those strange people.

He didn’t know what his Master was planning to do, but from the few words he overheard, it seemed like his Master was helping them, and that woman couldn’t bear to let her son suffer, as if she wanted to go back on her word?

Hmph, he was determined to listen to his Master and only trust his Master. The person in the carriage was highly skilled in martial arts and troublesome. How else could they take him away without doing this?

What a hassle.

"Let’s set off then," Yu Jizi told the tauist boy.

"Yes, Master." The tauist boy climbed onto the horse carriage.

Sitting atop the carriage, the tauist boy then addressed You Jiang, who was blocking the way, "Uncle, could you please step aside? We still need to continue our journey."

You Jiang reluctantly moved to the side, watching helplessly as Yu Jizi took Jin Ziyuan away.

Madam Ru climbed onto the carriage and continued to sob quietly. You Jiang tried to comfort her, "Madam, there's no turning back for us now. If it weren't for the State Preceptor's protection, we would have all died over a decade ago. Since we have trusted him for so many years, why not trust him one more time?"

Madam Ru nodded her head, wiped away her tears, and said, "Let's catch up. It wasn't easy to receive news about the Prince. We must now go and retrieve the Prince's remains."

On the carriage ahead, the tauist boy who was driving furrowed his eyebrows.

Why are they following us? Didn't Master make it very clear?

"Master, they are following us," he said.

Yu Jizi, without opening his eyes and continuing his meditation, replied, "Let them follow."

Tauist boy: Alas! Master is always so kind-hearted. If it were up to him, he would drive them away harshly, or simply not help them at all.

At night, they stopped at a small town, and Madam Ru's carriage that was following also stopped in the same town.

There was only one inn in the small town with less than ideal conditions, so they had to stay in the same inn.

The tauist boy brought the medicine that Jin Ziyuan was supposed to drink, and Yu Jizi, who was sitting cross-legged in front of the bed, opened his eyes.

"Let’s not give him the medicine tonight," he said.

The tauist boy was stunned, "Master, what if he wakes up and runs away during the night?"

"It’s alright, I will keep an eye on him personally. He won’t be able to escape."

Wouldn’t that mean Master can’t sleep?

The tauist boy became worried, "Master, we have to continue our journey tomorrow, and you are getting on in years, you should rest properly. Maybe your disciple should watch him for you."

"No." Yu Jizi said, "I’m old enough that I don’t need to sleep. Go to sleep yourself. You’ve been driving the carriage all day, and you need to continue tomorrow."

The tauist boy respected his Master greatly; his Master was truly good to him. He would never defy his Master, so he could only nod and take the bowl of thick black medicine out with him.

In the middle of the night, Jin Ziyuan indeed woke up.

He felt confused; where was he, and how had he ended up here?

In an instant, he saw Yu Jizi sitting across from him, his eyes closed, sitting still like a statue, with no sound of breathing, motionless.

Looking at Yu Jizi, the cause of his inhuman suffering, hatred was the only thing in his heart. Jin Ziyuan drew a short sword, intending to pierce it into Yu Jizi. But after taking only a few steps, he stopped and leapt out of the room.

At the moment he left, Yu Jizi opened his eyes, his expression a mix of a smile and not a smile, and heaved a sigh.

"Why bother, honestly!"

...

Chapter 865: A Night Visit to Madam Ru

"Madam, it’s well past midnight; why aren’t you asleep yet?" The maid attending to Madam Ru fought back her drowsiness, but if Madam Ru didn’t sleep, they wouldn’t dare to either.

"You all go to sleep, I’ll sit for a while longer," she said, gently stroking a sash in her hands.

How could she sleep when her son was right in the next room?

What sort of potion had they fed him to make him act like a fool?

The night wind was strong, blowing open the decrepit window, and a pale silhouette stood by it in the moonlight, staring straight into the room.

A maid shielded the candle flame while another rose to close the window that the wind had blown open.

She screamed in fright upon seeing the person outside.

Startled by the scream, Madam Ru inside and another maid turned their heads, and the sash Madam Ru was holding dropped to the floor.

"Ziyuan..."

The two maids, confidants of Madam Ru, quietly exited the room upon seeing the situation.

Jin Ziyuan leaped in from the window and shut it behind him.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

Madam Ru's shock turned into joy as she replied, "Are you better?"

Jin Ziyuan furrowed his brow; he knew he had been drugged, and when the drug took effect, he even lost his memory.

He didn't answer her but looked at her intently, awaiting her response.

Madam Ru seemed uncomfortably evasive as she said, "I... I had learned of your father's whereabouts a few days ago, and I was just about to bring him back."

"Bring him back where?" Jin Ziyuan sneered derisively, "To Jin Mocong's place? To have your current husband help bury your former one?"

Madam Ru's face turned ashen, her eyes welling up with tears.

Jin Ziyuan scoffed mercilessly, "Save your tears; they're worthless to me and only make me despise you more."

"It's not what you think," Madam Ru said weakly in her defense, "In that situation back then, I had no choice. If I hadn't done that, we would not have survived."

"But so many women in the Prince Residence would have bravely faced death; why was it just you who feared death so much? Father loved you the most, and yet it was you, the only one who betrayed him."

Hate filled Jin Ziyuan's eyes, and his words felt like an invisible hand strangling her, leaving her with no room for rebuttal.

"It was you, the noblest woman in the Prince Residence, who was the first to betray us when trouble befell us. Instead, the other women, lowlier than you, even the humble maids, hanged themselves within the Prince Residence to avoid disgrace. But you? To this day you're still making excuses for your cowardice?"

"No... it's not what you think; I'm not like them; I couldn't die, I..."

"Silence," Jin Ziyuan interrupted, "If you had any dignity, you should have hanged yourself right then. But your cowardice led you to offer up to Jin Moning the imperial edict, once treasured by our father as his prized possession. The edict left by our imperial grandfather was the only thing that could have vindicated us, but you traded it for your own glory and riches."

"I had no choice; I couldn't die! You can't hate me for that reason..."

"I really want to kill you with one strike!" said Jin Ziyuan, "And how dare you now say you wish to retrieve Father's remains? Let me tell you, there's no need; I buried Father with my own hands, and I'm sure he would never wish to see you again."

Chapter 866: He Has No Tongue

"No, he was always waiting for me." Madam suddenly stood up, shouting loudly, "Where did you bury him? How did he die? He must have mentioned me to you before he died, right? Why didn't he tell you the truth about those things back then?"

Madam was visibly agitated, her words somewhat incoherent.

"He never mentioned you," Jin Ziyuan said coldly.

He raised his head, a tear glistening as it fell down his cheek, saying, "My father had no tongue, he could never speak of you."

"You... what are you saying?" Madam fell to the ground as if struck by lightning, clutching at Jin Ziyuan's hem, "Why didn't he have a tongue? Where have you all been all these years?"

"I think it’s better not to ask," Jin Ziyuan said as he pushed Madam’s hand away.

"Go back to your Xining, be the favorite concubine of the Prince of Xining."

Jin Ziyuan then left Madam’s room and fled southward.

A moment later, someone came out of another room in the inn.

Yu Jizi stood at the entrance to Madam’s room and said lightly, "Madam, why bother? You see, you wanted him to awaken, and once he did, he stopped being so obedient, causing you heartache again."

Madam shook her head, "He just doesn’t know, I don’t blame him."

Seeing the silent night, she asked, "What exactly did you do to them back then? Why does Ziyuan say the Prince had no tongue?"

Yu Jizi looked into the dark somewhere and sighed softly, "One must pay a price to stay alive. Since that farewell, I have not seen the Prince again."

...

Jin Ziyuan fled hundreds of miles south.

He had heard that Gu Youyou had been taken away by Yu Jizi and had already guessed where she might have been taken.

So... was that thing she mentioned about to start?

At this thought, he felt surprisingly expectant.

It was finally going to end, whether in life or in death, there had to be a result.

If so? Why then did he flee?

So he started running aimlessly towards the mountain, his pale face alternating between flushing and being as transparent as glass.

His body alternated between cold and hot, suffering immensely.

He knew it had finally begun to take effect, he kept walking until he could barely stand.

A woodcutter on the road saw him and couldn’t help but go over and lend a hand.

"Young man, you don’t look well, do you need help?"

"Thank you!" Jin Ziyuan said, "No need, I have a hidden ailment that I fear might spread to you."

Hearing this, the woodcutter jumped back in fright.

Picking up his firewood, he ran as fast as he could, murmuring about bad luck.

Jin Ziyuan gave a wry smile, "Perhaps I will really become a monster that everyone avoids."

Behind him, the sound of a carriage approached. Jin Ziyuan turned his head and saw a familiar carriage.

He murmured quietly, "They have come after all, well, riding in a carriage is more comfortable than walking."

He suppressed the restlessness in his heart and stood on the side of the road, unmoving.

The carriage stopped right in front of Jin Ziyuan, the faced groom seemed full of complaints, his face flushing red.

"You've run away after all," he said harshly.

"I shouldn't have felt sorry for you—should have let you die," he said.

Jin Ziyuan didn't respond, just gazed at the carriage.

Soon, Yu Jizi's voice came from inside the carriage, "Come on in, there must be a result."

Yes, there must be a result, they were all awaiting this outcome.

Jin Ziyuan burst into laughter, nearly laughing to tears.

Chapter 867: No One Will Survive

Jin Ziyuan, who laughed like a madman, surprised the coachman who was driving the carriage. Just as the coachman was about to say something, Jin Ziyuan spoke first.

"Do you still have that medicine?"

The coachman was somewhat astonished and blankly picked up the pot used for brewing the medicine.

Jin Ziyuan grabbed it from him and then drank the entire contents of the pot in one gulp.

Rather than going sober, it's better not to see and not to be troubled.

Sometimes, being a bit confused isn't necessarily a bad thing.

...

In the ancient tomb, Gu Youyou had already become familiar with the other medicated women.

Because they had taken Gu Youyou's medicine in Lingnan, the toxins in their bodies had been more or less suppressed. Coupled with newfound hopes for the future, they felt much more spirited.

However, they didn't expect to still be captured and couldn't help but feel despair again.

But now, hearing that Gu Youyou was the doctor who had provided them with the medicine, a slow, renewed sense of hope began to ignite within them.

Their emotions fluctuated greatly, causing each of them to appear somewhat mentally unstable.

"Sister Zhuo, do you see something wrong with them? They act silly one moment and normal the next."

Zhuo Qing grunted, "Why do you care so much? As long as they don't die, it's fine. Go on, get back to your duties!"

The girls waited until the guards watching them had walked away before daring to speak softly.

"Doctor Gu, do you know what they plan to do with us?"

Gu Youyou had heard that they were to be sacrificed in a blood ritual, but she was unclear about the exact method of sacrifice. It might involve draining their blood in a cruel manner, or perhaps it would only involve taking some of their blood, not fatally.

But she guessed that no matter how much blood was needed, they shouldn't expect to survive.

Not just them—no one here should expect to survive.

If that defying-heaven method succeeded, Yu Jizi wouldn’t let anyone here live in order to keep this secret.

This tomb might just become their burial site.

But she couldn’t tell them this; as long as it wasn’t the very last step, they shouldn’t abandon hope.

And she wasn’t sure if she might be overheard by those few men; if she dared to say something inappropriate, they would immediately intervene, and then it would be difficult to move around freely in this ancient tomb.

Gu Youyou thought for a moment and then said to them, "I really don’t know that. I heard we were supposed to help with something, you could try asking them."

She pointed at the men in black.

Zhuo Qing’s sinister gaze swept towards Gu Youyou; he was always highly wary of her.

"Don’t play tricks, now that you’re here, no one can save you."

Gu Youyou paused for a moment, snorted towards him, and ignored him.

Zhuo Qing was no gentleman; on their first day here, she had personally witnessed this bastard severely beating a woman who had stirred everyone to escape. She was still lying in the corner moaning.

She glanced at the pitiful woman and held back her venomous words.

Zhuo Qing, reflecting on his past losses under Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing, had no intention of letting Gu Youyou off the hook.

He walked over to Gu Youyou, crouched down, and looked her in the eyes, saying, "Jin Zijin is also a heartless person. Do you think he treated you well? Hah, he only wanted to use you to get at us.

How about it? Now that you've been locked up here for so long, where is he? Haha, do you really think he would offend my master for you?"

Gu Youyou replied indifferently, "Don't get too pleased with yourself; if I can't survive, you can't either."

Chapter 868: This is the Kitchen Maid

Zhuo Qing let out a cold laugh full of disdain, "Do you want to kill yourself? Oh right, how did you put it before? You'd rather die than leave with us. That night, you even threw yourself against my knife. You did it to save Jin Zijin, but he, he doesn't care about your life at all. Haha, look how foolish you are, using your own life to save someone who's just using you."

"I'm willing," Gu Youyou retorted, her tone far from cheerful, "at least he wouldn't feed me those poisons."

Indeed, since she had been locked up here, she had started drinking those poisons again.

It was just for a few more days, she could endure.

But Zhuo Qing, this bastard, was truly pitiable. He had become a discarded pawn without realizing it, even complacently so, sorrier even than they were.

A moment later, the stone door opened, and Searcy along with Gui Yunxi, bowing and scraping, came in carrying a food box.

When Searcy first arrived, she was quite arrogant, secretly poisoning and tampering with the food during cooking, but by now she had been beaten into submission.

She was even limping as she walked.

Daring to poison the food, if not for the fact that she was brought back by Yu Jizi, and since Yu Jizi had not specified how to deal with her, they might have already killed her.

Gu Youyou had advised her, saying that one should know when to bend or stand tall. It was acceptable to act subservient when necessary and to take revenge when the opportunity arose. There was no shame in that.

Playing tough without the power to back it up was just foolhardy bravado, and she would be the one to suffer.

Now, with a limping foot, it would be even harder to escape when an opportunity arose.

In this world, only Gu Youyou could get Searcy to listen slightly, so she still took her words to heart.

Feeling that her advice made sense, to survive and leave this place, she should ensure her own safety, and save her energy to deal with these bastards, right?

So, these past few days, she had been very compliant.

As for Gui Yunxi, there's no need to mention him, he was just a timid commoner, not worth confronting these tyrants.

However, while they seemed subservient on the surface, they weren't idle.

Secretly, Searcy placed the meals on the lid of the sarcophagus and winked at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou was slightly stunned, it seemed Searcy had succeeded.

"Everyone, it's time to eat," Gui Yunxi cheerfully called out to the men in black, "Today's wild boar is exceptionally tasty, cooked by my own hands, assuredly better than what the head chef of Wanjia Building could manage."

The men in black didn’t acknowledge Gui Yunxi’s gesture, merely giving him a cold glare and signaling him to stand aside.

These two, one claimed to be a coachman, the other a kitchen maid.

Whether the one claiming to be a coachman could drive a carriage was uncertain, but the kitchen maid, her cooking was so bad that even dogs wouldn’t eat it.

She simply couldn’t cook.

If not for the unpalatability of her cooking, they might have actually been poisoned to death by now.

And, surprisingly, the cooking of the so-called coachman turned out to be quite decent.

Zhuo Qing sat down first, picked up some of each dish, and placed them on a separate plate, signaling Searcy to come eat.

After the poisoning incident, they had started to be wary of these two. While they cooked, they had someone watch over them exclusively. But that wasn’t enough; the food they prepared had to be tasted by Searcy first, only after she had eaten would they start.

Searcy ate the dishes, holding the empty plate and smiling, "See, perfectly fine. No poison."

Only then did Zhuo Qing and the others relax.

Gu Youyou was squatting by a wall, and Searcy also came to squat by the wall, right next to Gu Youyou.

Chapter 869: Cooking in the Ancient Tomb

Gu Youyou gestured an OK sign to her, and she gently nodded her head.

After Zhuo Qing and the others had their fill, these medicinal labors finally had the chance to satisfy their hunger.

Zhuo Qing glanced at everyone and decided to go to the side chamber for an afternoon nap.

Guarding these people was truly boring; they were all ordinary folks, yet his master had assigned him to watch over them; it was a wasteful use of his abilities.

There were a total of four side chambers in the tomb, which conveniently became the bedrooms for these four men in black.

They had always operated with two people on guard and two resting and sleeping.

Taking advantage of this moment, Gui Yunxi quickly finished the rice in his bowl and followed after Zhuo Qing.

"Daoist priest, please wait."

Zhuo Qing stopped and turned to look at Gui Yunxi.

Of the people here, it was this seemingly honest man who was most trustworthy; his cooking was delicious, and he didn’t stir up trouble.

"What is it?"

Gui Yunxi said, "Well, today the mountain wind is very strong, making it difficult for us to light the fire outside for cooking. I wonder, Daoist priest, could you allow us to move the stove inside to cook?"

"You want to cook here?" Zhuo Qing raised an eyebrow, thinking about the smoke from the fire and how choking it could be.

Gui Yunxi hastily said, "Rest assured, Daoist priest, we’ve made a clay stove recently. We don’t need to light a fire; we use charcoal to cook, and it won’t produce any strong odors."

"There won’t be any smoke?" Zhuo Qing asked.

Gui Yunxi promptly assured, "You have my word, there absolutely won’t be any smoke."

Zhuo Qing yawned and said, "In that case, bring your clay stove inside."

"Ah, thank you for your understanding, Daoist priest!"

By the afternoon, Searcy and Gui Yunxi carried a half-human-tall clay stove inside. Searcy, a girl, sat down on the ground exhausted, gasping for breath after setting it down.

"I’m dead tired, Gui Yunxi. You’re moving it yourself when we leave."

Gu Youyou gave her a drink, telling her to rest on the side for a while.

They took out the prepared charcoal and lit it, placing it inside the clay stove. Soon the charcoal was ablaze, glowing red.

Then he put the iron pot on top and started cooking and stir-frying.

Zhuo Qing came out of the side chamber and found that the clay stove Gui Yunxi was using indeed did not produce smoke like a fire would. It did have a scent, which was the aroma of food and not unpleasant.

And with the charcoal fire, the entire frigid tomb seemed to warm up a bit.

He thought that from now on, it might not be a bad idea to let them cook inside the ancient tomb and personally supervise them.

The food was ready, and its aroma was enticing. The charcoal fire in the clay stove had not gone out.

After setting up the meal, Gui Yunxi proposed, "Daoist priest, there's still plenty of fire left in the stove; it would be a pity to put it out. How about letting me move this stove into your room to warm it up?"

"You've put thought into this; go ahead!"

It was summer now, but inside the ancient tomb, especially at night, lying on the cold stone slabs was indeed a bit cold.

Gui Yunxi gave Searcy a meaningful look, and despite her cursing, she still went to help move it.

The medicinal workers were all cold-natured, especially in such a damp and chilly place.

Gu Youyou and a few other workers, along with Searcy, huddled together, sleeping in a daze.

One of the men in black was responsible for the night watch, sleeping at the stone gateway.

This was Gui Yunxi's first time undertaking such a task; he was timid and didn't dare to fall asleep all night with his eyes closed.

It was impossible to tell day from night in the ancient tomb, but the men in black had a sandglass similar to an alarm clock; when dawn arrived, the guard would wake them up.

Chapter 870: Killing Zhuo Qing

Searcy was kicked by the dark-clothed figure, and as she groggily opened her eyes, she stared with wide eyes at the person.

The faint scar on her face really made her look unappealing.

The dark-clothed figure cast a disgusted glance at her and said coldly, "Go, cook outside."

Gui Yunxi hurried over, scurrying and said, "Taoist Priest, our earthen stove is in senior priest Zhuo's room, do you think we could... perhaps cook later?"

Zhuo Qing was their leader, and early in the morning, he didn't dare to knock on the door.

But they had to cook, as everybody would get up soon and need to eat, and he was waiting to finish breakfast so he could change shifts; he had been guarding the tomb entrance all night and was eager to go rest.

The dark-clothed figure looked down at Searcy and said menacingly, "Get up, go knock on senior brother Zhuo's door."

Oh, he was afraid to do it himself so he was making her go?

Searcy pursed her lips, got up, and went to the ear chamber to knock on the stone door.

"Taoist Priest, are you awake, we need to get the earthen stove for cooking."

There was no movement inside the ear chamber, so Searcy knocked on the stone door again, "Taoist Priest, Zhuo Qing, I'm coming in now."

Still, there was no response.

She turned her head to the dark-clothed figure and said, "Perhaps he's sleeping deeply; there's no way to tell dawn from dusk in this tomb chamber, I'll just open the door and take it."

The dark-clothed figure thought it strange, for senior brother Zhuo was not one to sleep so soundly.

He nodded and said, "Open it."

He wanted to see as well.

The stone door opened, and there lay Zhuo Qing peacefully, as though deeply asleep.

But Searcy knew, he was already dead.

She turned back to Gui Yunxi and said, "What are you standing around for? Come and carry the earthen stove. The Taoist Priest is sleeping!"

Gui Yunxi hurriedly came forward, but his legs were clearly shaking.

Having heard that placing the earthen stove in Zhuo Qing's resting ear chamber would kill him, he had been skeptical, but now he had no choice but to believe.

If he were not dead, why was there not the slightest movement from him?

The two of them carried out the earthen stove, and Zhuo Qing still hadn't woken up; the dark-clothed figure finally sensed that something was wrong.

Even if he was extremely tired, Zhuo Qing couldn't possibly continue sleeping with all this commotion.

He strode into Zhuo Qing's resting ear chamber, and upon seeing the Straight-laying Zhuo Qing, his complexion changed instantly.

He crouched down and pushed Zhuo Qing forcefully, shouting, "Senior brother Zhuo, wake up!"

Zhuo Qing did not react, and he carefully placed his hand near his nose; there was not the slightest breath of life, he was dead.

This revelation caused the dark-clothed figure to collapse weakly to the ground.

Zhuo Qing was dead?

How could he have died so inexplicably?

Among the junior members of Xuanzong, he was ranked in the top ten, and the eldest senior disciple Huo Li had held him in high regard, so many of the junior disciples were always trying to ingratiate themselves with him.

But now he lay dead here without any clear reason.

He simply couldn't believe it, so he stretched out his hand again to feel for his pulse.

The neck pulse was still, was he really... dead?

The dark-clothed figure's eyes widened, staring fixedly at the dead Zhuo Qing.

He couldn't understand how someone healthy could have just died.

He felt dizzy, his chest was stuffy, he felt nauseous and even had difficulty breathing.

With a loud boom, the stone door to the ear chamber was closed.

The dark-clothed figure felt increasingly off, as if he had been poisoned.

But that woman had been closely watched by them these past few days; they never let her go into the mountains to dig for wild vegetables, and they closely monitored everything she ate, so she had no chance to poison them.

Could it be... there was something wrong with that earthen stove?