Farmhouse 911

Chapter 911: Where Did the Jade Pendant Come From?

The Empress also laughed and said, "Of course, of course, you're a merchant, we can't let you suffer a loss. You've been wronged by today's incidents at the palace and even witnessed quite a farce, which is truly... Ah, right, even though you bought that Jade Pendant with your own silver, holding onto it is really inappropriate. Youyou, why don't I make a decision to buy that Jade Pendant from you with a thousand pieces of gold?"

Speaking honestly, Gu Youyou felt suddenly touched by the Empress Dowager and the Empress.

Although she couldn't be sure about the Emperor's thoughts, the actions of the Empress Dowager and the Empress did indeed give her enough face.

Not to mention a torn dress or a lost Jade Pendant, such matters of the Imperial Family, where could one find any logic?

They could forcefully seize yours and even pin a false charge of theft on you.

One offered to compensate for her dress and the other offered a thousand gold for her Jade Pendant; she really didn't know what to say.

Of course, Gu Youyou was well aware that the Empress Dowager was acting this way because she remembered that Gu Youyou had once treated her leg.

The Empress was also trying to embarrass Jin Fengzhao.

She was confined to Zongrenfu, yet Gu Youyou was treated thus by the Empress Dowager and the Empress; didn't this imply she, the Princess, was less important than a common girl?

Gu Youyou shivered and said, "There's no need, the Jade Pendant isn't expensive, I only spent ten pieces of silver..."

"Where exactly did it come from?"

Before Gu Youyou could finish speaking, the Emperor, who had been silent for a long while, spoke.

And it wasn’t with the faint tone from before but with a sudden loud rebuke that intimidated everyone in the room.

Gu Youyou knew the Emperor was not so easily deceived, but she hadn’t expected such a fierce explosion of anger.

She sensed something ominous.

"I don’t understand what the Emperor means, the Jade Pendant was indeed bought by me from the Boater for ten pieces of silver."

"Being stubborn?" The Emperor gave a faint smile, which made Gu Youyou a bit dazed.

He resembled Jin Zijin so much when he smiled like that.

The Emperor looked at the woman standing before him, poised and calm in her response, and gently raised his hand.

Behind him, Wan Decheng saw this and immediately whispered to the Eunuch beside him.

The Eunuch nodded, ducked his head, and quickly walked out.

Gu Youyou felt a chill in her heart; she had clearly heard what Eunuch Wan had said.

Now the Empress Dowager seemed to realize something; the trouble Gu Youyou was in wasn’t because Jin Fengzhao was coveting her dress, but also... the Jade Pendant in the Emperor’s hand.

What exactly was this Jade Pendant?

"Your Majesty, that Jade Pendant..."

The Emperor, very respectful towards the Empress Dowager, softly said, "Mother, this Jade Pendant is the Qingluan Jade Pendant that I had given to Qinqin in the past."

Hiss...

The Empress Dowager inhaled sharply.

So it was that Jade Pendant?

Although she had never seen it, she had heard of it.

But how did the Jade Pendant end up in Gu Youyou's hands?

Gu Youyou had just said that she bought it from the Boater, but from the looks of it, the Emperor didn't believe her?

The Empress stared at the Jade Pendant in the Emperor's hand, then back at Gu Youyou, extremely anxious.

Gu Youyou managed to enter the palace, largely because of her (the Empress's) relationship. And since Gu Youyou was considered one of the Lin Family, her people, she naturally did not wish any harm to befall them.

It's very possible that this Jade Pendant was lost to the Boater during the time Xiao Qinqin was pursued and fled to Lingnan.

This incident was a secret she must not disclose, she knew well, and so did the Emperor, but she couldn’t mention it out loud.

Chapter 912: Weighing the Pros and Cons

"If she spoke, wouldn’t she admit that she had investigated Xiao Qinqin’s whereabouts in the past?"

But if she didn’t speak, how could she defend Gu Youyou?

The Empress thought for a long while, then whispered to the Emperor, "Your Majesty, Doctor Gu said that she bought the jade pendant. It seems it might have ended up among the common people and was inadvertently bought by Doctor Gu. Sister Xiao has been dead for over twenty years; Youyou wasn’t even born then."

That was the only way she could remind the Emperor and clear Gu Youyou from any connection with Xiao Qinqin. Whether Gu Youyou could pass this trial set by the Emperor depended on her own fate.

The Emperor seemed not to hear the Empress’s words and only stared at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou, head bowed, did not look at them, thoughts racing in her mind.

How could she save herself without implicating Jin Zijin?

Or perhaps, should she just reveal Jin Zijin’s matter and thus push forward the matter of his recognizing his family?

But with the Dao Sect in trouble, from Jin Zijin’s attitude, he had no plans to recognize his family.

If the matter of the Dao Sect was handled well, allowing him to proceed with his plans, maybe he would change the previous plan and decide against recognizing his family?

And considering the spoiled Jin Fengzhao, what would the Emperor feel if he knew his beloved daughter of many years was fake?

Before Gu Youyou could sort out her thoughts, several men dressed as guards, accompanied by a eunuch, arrived.

This was the task that Emperor had assigned to Eunuch Wan.

She was not a woman of the palace, so, to carry out punishment, they didn't use the palace eunuch but called men from outside.

Allowing several men to beat her with paddles was also a great humiliation for a young woman like Gu Youyou.

Both the Empress and the Empress Dowager were startled and watched as the four guards brought in a long bench into Zhaoyang Hall, saluted the Emperor, and grabbed Gu Youyou, pressing her onto the bench.

Gu Youyou's heart was in turmoil, but she bit her lip firmly.

In this case, she could either honestly betray Jin Zijin or take the punishment quietly, resolved not to speak.

If she spoke, Jin Zijin would inevitably become the target of everyone, which was precisely the best time for him to confront Xuanzong.

So he would have to split his attention between dealing with Xuanzong and fending off court politics.

"I'll give you one last chance, will you speak or not?" the Emperor asked in a voice that was mild yet carried an undeniable authority.

Both the Empress and the Empress Dowager were too shocked to know what to say.

Although they didn't want Gu Youyou to get hit, they were also curious why the Emperor was fixating on Gu Youyou.

The Emperor was always wise; he must have discovered something? Or perhaps he was certain that Gu Youyou wasn’t telling the truth.

The Empress Dowager, supported by a palace maiden, stood up and walked to Gu Youyou, whispering softly, "Youyou, just speak whatever you need to; this beating will be harsher than those given by eunuchs. With your weak constitution, you won’t survive ten blows; just tell the truth, and the Emperor won’t trouble you anymore."

Gu Youyou internally cursed.

To die from ten blows? How forceful would they be?

She had thought at worst she’d be severely bruised and would recover in a few days.

Somewhat frightened but after a thought, she still clenched her lips tightly and shook her head, "Empress Dowager, Youyou is telling the truth. I indeed bought the jade pendant from the Boater for ten Silvers."

"Oh, it seems you are not planning to tell the truth," the Emperor said coldly.

The Empress Dowager shook her head and sighed; the girl was truly stubborn.

Chapter 913: Helping Xiao Qinqin Inquire

"But..." Just as His Majesty was about to order her to be punished with flogging, Gu Youyou suddenly remembered something.

With his hand raised, the Emperor lowered it and asked in a low voice, "But what?"

On the Empress’ end, anxiety turned into astonishment.

Could it be that the girl had really lied to deceive her? Then how did that Jade Pendant end up in her hands?

Gu Youyou thought of the story that Lun Yu had told her, the story's conclusion—Xiao Qinqin still had questions for Jin Moning.

Gu Youyou lifted her head to look at this elderly man with streaks of grey at his temples and suddenly didn't know what to say.

She sighed and said, "There is someone who wants to ask His Majesty whether she has always been treated as a pawn in the struggle for power?"

The Emperor visibly started, staggered, and nearly lost his footing.

Seeing the Emperor's reaction, Gu Youyou suddenly breathed a sigh of relief.

Lun Tong hadn't asked this question for her, but now she had the opportunity to ask it.

Even if she were to be beaten to death by the flogging, she would have done one thing as Zijin's mother.

The noble consort staggered, her eyes wide with shock.

"Who's asking?" The Empress' reaction was even more vehement than the Emperor's.

She wasn't foolish—the Jade Pendant of Xiao Qinqin was in Gu Youyou's hand, and now these words.

Besides Xiao Qinqin, who would ask such a question?

She was no longer the reckless young girl willing to throw caution to the winds for love; she naturally knew why she had received so much of the Emperor's affection and why she held the honored position of Empress.

It was all because of the power their families wielded behind them.

Thinking of Xiao Qinqin's tragic and pitiful death, who had even asked such a foolish question at the end, she suddenly felt that she didn't hate her as much.

In fact, they were all the same, merely pawns in the Emperor's power struggle.

Back then, when the Xiao Family was prestigious, the Emperor married Xiao Qinqin and doted on her greatly. After the Xiao Family's downfall, he married her and showered her with the same immense favor.

At that time, they didn't understand—Xiao Qinqin died too early, she would never understand, but Jin Yushu now understood, yet she had resigned herself to her fate.

Unable to have this man's love, at least she was the Empress, the most noble woman in the world.

She had to rely on the title of the Empress, and her family, the Ducal Residence, to push her son onto the throne.

For a woman, a life like this was worth it.

The Emperor paused for a long while before gradually closing his eyes.

But when he opened them again, his face was once more filled with a harsh expression.

"Who told you that?"

Who told you that? That was exactly what the Empress wanted to ask as well.

Everyone in the room turned to look at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou, adhering to the principle of never betraying her own but rather those outside her circle, promptly sold out Lun Tong without any hesitation.

"The man known in the jianghu as ’Bai Xiaosheng’ has two hobbies. He likes to change his appearance and enjoys collecting various interesting stories, which he writes into booklets for his collection. As it happens, I also share the hobby of writing stories, so I had the fortune of getting to know Lun Tong. At the time, I exchanged a story I wrote with Lun Tong for one of his stories."

Lun Yu had then come to Qi Mountain in the guise of Lun Tong to find her—her statement was faultless.

The Emperor trembled slightly and asked, "Where is the booklet?"

"The booklet has been burned," Gu Youyou said. "Lun Tong mentioned that such stories, if they spread, could bring about fatal danger. So after letting me read it, she suggested that I burn it."

"What story?"

This time, before the Emperor could speak, the already perturbed Empress asked.

Gu Youyou honestly answered, "It’s the story of a woman whose husband betrayed her. She turned from love to hate and regretted it for a lifetime."

The Empress froze, and the Emperor froze as well.

Chapter 914: Jin Zijin Rushes Over

Empress Shen’s eyes brimmed with a row of tears.

After a long while, the Empress, having tried and tried again to hold back, eventually couldn’t restrain herself and laughed loudly.

The Emperor’s face turned ashen, unable to utter a word for quite some time.

Empress Dowager sighed and looked toward the Emperor, wanting to say something, but in the end, she couldn’t speak.

Finally, she issued an imperial decree.

At any cost, they were to find Lun Tong and summon the renowned Bai Xiaosheng from the martial arts community.

Gu Youyou thought she had gotten through this ordeal, but in reality, the Emperor had made up his mind today that this matter had to be resolved.

After his sorrow passed, he turned his gaze back to Gu Youyou and said indifferently, "You still haven’t explained the origin of this Jade Pendant."

Gu Youyou was also stunned.

It seemed that betraying her fellow Daoist still hadn’t saved her from her dire straits?

"Carry out the punishment!" The Emperor’s voice was as calm and indifferent as ever.

A board struck Gu Youyou’s buttocks, and the pain was surprisingly worse than when Yu Jizi had kicked her and broken her ribs.

Gu Youyou admitted to herself that she wasn’t a tomboy like Searcy, and involuntarily cried out at the impact, her loud and pitiful scream clear and audible even two li away from the hall.

After the pain subsided, Gu Youyou was clear-headed enough to know that this strike hadn’t damaged her bones, having hit the flesh, causing intense pain.

But if the Empress Dowager had declared ten strikes would be fatal, was the method of this strike meant to be so straightforward or was there a hidden meaning behind it?

Soon, a second board was about to fall, but before she could think further, she quickly closed her eyes and clenched her teeth.

However, this time the board didn’t land on her, and the powerful guard who was supposed to carry out the punishment screamed and flew back a good distance, spitting blood immediately.

Dead silence fell within Zhaoyang Hall, and Gu Youyou, enduring the pain, opened her eyes only to find Jin Zijin appearing out of nowhere, standing by her side.

Behind him, Yue Rujing had hurriedly rushed over.

Seeing this scene, Yue Rujing went pale, hurriedly knelt down, and pleaded guilty to the Emperor.

"Your Majesty, please calm your anger. My senior brother... he was just too anxious and acted impulsively."

The Emperor’s gaze shifted from Jin Zijin’s face to Yue Rujing.

Yue Rujing hurriedly said, "Doctor Gu’s fate is tied to the life and death of our master. The incidents at Tianmen Mountain, what she knows might be useful to us. My senior brother and I have come today to ask to borrow her from Your Majesty."

"What if I refuse to lend her?" The Emperor asked coolly.

Yue Rujing was taken aback, and then gritted his teeth, "Then what would it take for Your Majesty to agree?"

"I only wish to hear the truth."

What truth?

Yue Rujing looked toward Gu Youyou.

Having no idea what trouble she had caused this time, they had rushed to the palace upon hearing she was in danger, hearing her wails even before they arrived.

Gu Youyou, however, looked toward Jin Zijin, noticing a faint sweat on his face, his complexion also slightly pale.

Truth be told, she felt guilty.

Had she known the trouble this Jade Pendant would cause, it might have been better to have discarded it.

Yet in front of everyone, Jin Zijin made a bold move, bending down to lift Gu Youyou, carrying her out past the Emperor without so much as a glance.

What was even more astonishing was that the Emperor, who had just stated his refusal, didn't stop him. It was unclear whether he had forgotten or something else was at play.

Faced with this situation, the guards were also unsure of what to do.

Even if you were the senior brother of Tianzong, you wouldn't dare to disregard the Emperor. How could he... to take away a woman ordered by the Emperor to be executed right before his eyes?

Chapter 915: Protecting Each Other

Yue Rujing broke out in a cold sweat, "I haven't even become the State Preceptor yet."

Indeed, he thought his senior brother was particularly masculine at the moment, but this... was showing far too little respect for the Emperor. After all, the man was the Emperor.

And both the Empress Dowager and the Empress were present.

Right, the Empress.

The Emperor’s silence did not mean the Empress would remain silent.

"Stop," the Empress commanded sternly.

Jin Zijin did not heed her and continued walking forward with Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou tugged at his clothing, saying, "Maybe we shouldn’t leave just yet."

After all, as a senior brother of Tianzong, as long as he did not cross the Emperor’s red line, there would be no problem.

But now he was clearly challenging the bottom line, defying the dignity of the Imperial Family? She feared that if the Emperor, in a fit of anger, ordered them to be killed by a chaotic blade, it would be a great injustice.

Jin Zijin still did not stop, as if no one could prevent him from taking her away.

At this time, the Emperor swiftly came out of Zhaoyang Hall and blocked Jin Zijin’s path.

He raised his hand, released it, and a piece of bluish-green Jade Pendant appeared before Jin Zijin; his pupils suddenly constricted.

He was not clear on the specifics of Gu Youyou’s situation. The messenger had only mentioned that Gu Youyou had a dispute with Jin Fengzhao and was taken to the palace by her.

He knew this woman was capable of abusing private punishment, and killing a commoner was definitely within her means, which was why he had hurried to the Imperial Palace.

As for stirring up the Emperor, the Empress Dowager, the Empress, and even Jin Fengzhao being detained in Zongrenfu, these were all things Yue Rujing had learned from questioning a small eunuch after entering the palace.

But in his heart, no matter what Youyou had done, he had to protect her.

So he didn't need to ask and directly tried to take her away.

What he had never expected was that the calamity that befell her was because of this Jade Pendant.

He had given this Jade Pendant to the Boater, and Youyou had gotten it back.

He looked down at her, his eyes filled with a sense of helplessness.

Well, perhaps this was destiny.

Unavoidable, inescapable.

"Where did you get this Jade Pendant? Just tell the truth, and I will spare you," the Emperor said.

Gu Youyou thought to herself: The Emperor really is persistent, clinging to this matter of the Jade Pendant.

When Yue Rujing arrived and saw the Jade Pendant, he understood.

However, he did not know the Jade Pendant had reached Gu Youyou's hands through such bizarre twists and turns; he thought it was given to her by Jin Zijin.

Senior brother, honestly, if you gave it just say so, making him worry for nothing by saying it was lost.

But... wait, there has been a lot going on recently; it is not the best time for a reunion.

"Senior brother!" He set his gaze on Jin Zijin, considering that right now was a good opportunity for a reckoning, straightforward due to the Jade Pendant, but the timing was not good.

In Yue Rujing’s eyes, whether they acknowledged it or not was fine.

Both parties stared at each other for a long while with no one speaking, while the Empress Dowager, who had hurried over, seemed somewhat impatient.

"Doctor Gu, just say whatever you need to say," she truly did not hope for Gu Youyou to be executed by authority.

The Empress’s gaze was complicated; she had previously felt that Jin Zijin bore some resemblance to the Emperor. But considering the other princes of the Imperial Family and their descendants, who also shared some resemblance, especially the eyes of the men from the Jin Imperial Clan, she did not give it much thought.

The Jin family was a great clan, which had once been one big family many years ago, so sharing similar features was natural.

But now, thinking about it, she smelled something different.

With the Qingluan Jade in Gu Youyou’s hands and Jin Zijin being a senior brother of Tianzong, clearly protecting Gu Youyou, such an embrace suggested a not so ordinary relationship. And if he were to also resemble the Emperor...

Chapter 916: The Child Was Swapped by Mistake Back Then

"The jade pendant is mine."

Amidst the Empress’s vexation, she suddenly heard Jin Zijin utter such words.

The pieces she couldn’t connect in her mind immediately fell into place upon his declaration. His, his...

Right, Jin Zijin and Jin Fengzhao seemed to be about the same age. Back then, someone found Xiao Qinqin's grave near Qi Mountain, and they saw an old crone worshiping there with a three-year-old girl.

At that time, whether it was people from the Crown Prince Residence or those secretly trained by the Ducal Residence, they had been searching for Xiao Qinqin for a long time.

They traced her to Lingnan but then lost her trail. She had already inquired about this, Xiao Qinqin had a special relationship with Yue Tingfang of the Lingnan Marquis Residence, suspecting that Yue Tingfang had hidden Xiao Qinqin.

The Ducal Residence had significant influence in Beijing, but it was not suitable to reach out to Lingnan... until years later, when someone discovered Xiao Qinqin's grave at the foot of Qi Mountain.

It was then that she realized Xiao Qinqin had left Lingnan long ago, hidden by Yue Tingfang on Qi Mountain.

Her heart skipped a beat.

What if someone had deliberately switched the children?

She heard that Tian Jizi had also adopted Jin Zijin from a young age.

One stone stirred up a thousand waves, and there was no one present who wasn't shocked.

Gu Youyou had clearly stated that she bought the stone from the Boater. The Empress Dowager watched her, and she didn't appear to be lying. This... this child, this could be a crime of deceiving the emperor.

Gu Youyou didn't know what to say, she tightly grasped Jin Zijin's clothes and said, "You gave the jade pendant to the Boater instead of me; I thought it was too much of a waste to give such a nice thing to him. The Boater doesn't know its value anyway, so I just took ten silvers and exchanged with him."

Jin Zijin said, "If no one cherishes the jade pendant, then it is only worth the boat fare. You want it, there are better things. It’s all right to give up this jade pendant."

He glanced at the emperor standing in front of him, saw that the emperor had no intention of making way, and had to speak up, "This is the truth, I’ve said it, can we leave now?"

Without waiting for his response, he had already embraced her and bypassed the emperor, striding away.

Yue Rujing watched his senior brother leave the Imperial Palace unhindered with Gu Youyou in his arms, then glanced at the emperor, who was in a daze, and ultimately decided to follow his senior brother.

This matter was of great significance; he thought the emperor might need a long time to digest it.

Not just the emperor, the Empress and the Empress Dowager also needed a long time to digest this.

By the time they came to their senses, the others were already far away.

The Empress Dowager guessed that Jin Zijin hadn’t left the palace so quickly and hurriedly reminded the emperor.

"Moning, the jade pendant is his. Perhaps we got it wrong about that incident back then. You must have someone stop them quickly."

The Empress’s face turned pale, and she staggered back two steps, barely able to stand.

This was like Cheng Yaojin appearing out of nowhere. She was fully confident in dealing with Sheng Qiaoyue and her son; what if the emperor was partial? The court’s ministers would not be.

Her son was the legitimate eldest son, traditionally, the eldest is recognized over the younger, the legitimate over the illegitimate; she gave birth to the eldest son, fittingly legitimate; who would dare to disobey?

But now, how had this... unexpected turn arisen?

The emperor sighed after a long while and said, "Mother, you are tired today; let your son take you back to rest first."

"Ah...?" The Empress Dowager was stunned and said, "How can I rest at such a critical moment? I won't rest!"

Noble Consort Sheng's behavior was the most unusual; she appeared very calm, and in a low voice, she advised the Empress Dowager, "Mother, the emperor needs to think about this carefully; you should return to the palace to rest first."

The Empress Dowager wanted to say more, but she ended up just sighing, allowing the palace maids to help her leave.

...

Chapter 917: The Awkwardness of Applying Medicine

Inside Sanqing Temple, everyone was stunned.

Their eldest disciple brother had brought back a woman, and she was not just any woman but doctor Gu Youyou, who had once treated their master.

"What happened to doctor Gu?"

The young disciples respected Gu Youyou immensely; she was a doctor with extraordinary medical skills who had treated their master before.

Everyone had seen clearly what happened at the battle at Tianmen Mountain. Back then, their master was well and not mad.

It must have been doctor Gu who cured him. If not for doctor Gu curing their master's mind, they would have been disastrously defeated in that battle.

Fortunately, it ended in a draw with both sides battered.

Jin Zijin stopped behind Yue Rujing, who glared at a loquacious disciple and said, "It's none of your business. Go do whatever you're supposed to be doing. If you're really that bored, go next door and find some trouble."

The disciples of Tianzong and Xuanzong lived in Sanqing Temple, separated only by a wall.

The fact that people who were fiercely fighting before now were only divided by a wall, which remained intact, was nothing short of miraculous.

Yue Rujing continued to follow closely but just as he was about to step into Qianyuan Hall, he was stopped by the sound of a door slamming shut.

Stunned by the rebuff, Yue Rujing paused briefly before starting to question himself.

"What the hell was I following for?"

He felt like he was being bullied.

Behind him, a crowd of bright-faced young disciples stretched their necks. Yue Rujing, annoyed, said, "What are you looking at? Go about your business."

Though the spanking was painful, it didn't damage any bones, just some flesh wounds.

His buttocks were extremely sore.

Now, Gu Youyou was grimacing in pain.

And it was incredibly embarrassing.

"Hey, can you not pull down my pants? Call Searcy."

They were just chatting under the covers, and having him apply medicine to her buttocks was truly making her feel like finding a hole to crawl into.

If this were her patient, she would have utterly despised them but now that she was the patient...

Jin Zijin’s expression was grim as he pulled away her hand, saying, "Had I known it would come to this, why did I ever?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

"You’ve become more and more squeamish."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Then, he still pulled down her pants.

Fine, just imagine there’s a seasoned doctor behind her.

Her rear felt cool, but he hadn’t moved yet.

Gu Youyou, with her eyes shut, lay on the bed trying to hypnotize herself that this was nothing serious, that the person behind was a doctor and she was just a patient. There was nothing to be embarrassed about.

But why wasn’t he doing anything? Perhaps he was zoning out?

She opened her eyes and turned her head, asking, "How is it?"

Jin Zijin replied indifferently, "It’s nothing serious, just some swelling, no real harm. I’ll apply some anti-inflammatory medicine for you!"

The process of applying the medicine was even more embarrassing. Gu Youyou’s face turned as red as her buttocks.

Luckily, nobody made a fuss anymore. After the medicine was applied and her clothes were tidied, they covered her with a blanket.

They had to face the matter of the Jade Pendant.

Jin Zijin sat opposite her, straightened her face towards him, and asked, "Why did you bring that jade pendant back?"

"It was cheap, why not bring it back? I only spent ten Silver pieces." Gu Youyou didn’t know how to explain, so she simply dodged the question.

"What do you plan to do now with that jade pendant?" He already knew, but Gu Youyou was more concerned about the consequences.

"Why didn’t you tell the truth even when you were spanked?" Jin Zijin asked her again.

Gu Youyou hesitated, then said, "I don’t know what you’re thinking. I was scared..."

Chapter 918: My Mother is Xiao Qinqin

Jin Zijin was somewhat annoyed as he interrupted her, "Haven't I told you many times? Nothing is more important than your life. Why do you always have to make people worry and be afraid? If something happened to you, what would you have me do?"

Gu Youyou was at a loss for words; he was right. The feeling of being cherished always warmed her heart. Faced with his questioning, she lowered her head.

She murmured softly, "I thought I couldn't be too cowardly, to be beaten with a board and betray you."

Jin Zijin sighed and said, "I wish you were more cowardly. You're a lady, not a warrior ready to die. It's not shameful to fear death and cling to life. In such situations, to save your own skin, betraying anyone is acceptable. I don't mind."

Gu Youyou felt somewhat stifled and asked, "So you don't blame me for taking the Jade Pendant? I... I actually took it because I saw how much you treasured it before. I've been wanting to find a chance to return it to you. I've always carried it close to my body, sewn into my clothes. I never anticipated that Jin Fengzhao would be so sick, to strip my clothes from my body, and then... when she and the Empress were fighting, the Jade Pendant fell out."

Jin Zijin touched her face, which was red and somewhat swollen, and asked, "Did she do this?"

Gu Youyou also touched her own face and said, "She hit me once. Are you going to hit her back for me?"

A flash of anger flickered through Jin Zijin's eyes as he gently covered her with the blanket, speaking in a low voice, "You rest now. Don't go back today; I'll notify the Lin Residence."

Gu Youyou watched him leave the room in a huff and felt a sudden lurch in her heart. Could he really be going to seek revenge?

Oh, that image, although satisfying, wouldn't be very graceful. He wouldn't lose his composure like that.

...

At this moment, Jin Zijin was standing in Baohe Palace.

The Emperor sat atop the Dragon Throne, with the Empress Dowager, the Empress, and Noble Consort Sheng seated on either side.

The Empress Dowager seemed very agitated, constantly staring at Jin Zijin. There was much she wanted to say but, overwhelmed with emotion, she didn’t know where to begin.

The Empress’s face was somewhat pale, her fists clenched so tightly that her knuckles turned white, betraying her outward composure.

Noble Consort Sheng was teary-eyed and equally agitated, striving as hard as the Empress to maintain her facade of calm.

The Emperor appeared much more composed, though, of course, his external indifference did not necessarily reflect a serene heart.

"Where did you get this Jade Pendant?" asked the Emperor calmly.

Standing alone in the center of the hall, with a calmness akin to a windless lake, Jin Zijin answered, "It was left by my mother."

The Empress could no longer maintain her composure, slapping the armrest of her chair, "And from where did your mother acquire this Jade Pendant?"

She refused to acknowledge that the mother he spoke of was Xiao Qinqin, even though she had already guessed it. Clinging to the last shred of possibility, it was just a coincidence, Xiao Qinqin had given the Jade Pendant to another woman.

But in reality, there was no other woman. Jin Zijin spoke plainly and unequivocally.

"I don’t know where my mother got it from, but my mother is Xiao Qinqin. There is no need for you to believe me, so I need not offer any further explanation. Since I had let go of this Jade Pendant once, I will not take it back now. Whoever wants it may take it."

"Humph, then what are you doing here?" The Empress’s hands trembled. Hadn’t he left with Gu Youyou? Why had he returned so soon?

The Emperor had not summoned him; maybe the Emperor didn’t even care about who was Xiao Qinqin’s child after all?

Chapter 919: I Come to Seek Justice

After all, he had favored Jin Fengzhao for thirty years.

Thirty years, even if she was not his biological child, he must have developed some feelings, right?

Zijin said indifferently, "I am here to seek justice for Gu Youyou."

The people inside the hall gasped.

How arrogant and bold, he was here not for his own identity but to seek justice for Gu Youyou?

If you are not a phoenix’s descendant, on what basis...

Right, he was Tianzong’s eldest senior brother, the hot candidate for the next State Preceptor. Given that the State Preceptor, despite being from the Dao Family, held a status no less than that of the emperor, it’s no wonder he dared.

The emperor composed himself and said, "What kind of justice does the real person wish to seek?"

Zijin replied calmly, "She was stripped and slapped in the Imperial Palace, and someone forcefully took a priceless jade pendant from her. Does the emperor intend to explain this?"

...Was he making the emperor’s princess out to be a robber?

The palace maidens and eunuchs standing there thought this was really too...

But then again, although civilians have no say in front of the imperial family, due to the special nature of Zhuzhao Country and the current situation of the Dao Family, Zijin now had the rights to reason with the emperor and seek justice.

The atmosphere in the hall turned heavy; the Empress Dowager was in tears.

She didn’t know much about the affairs of the previous Dao Family, but looking at Zijin’s demeanor, she felt as if she was seeing Jin Moning from many years ago.

Her former master had died, leaving a young child to struggle for survival.

She knew Zijin hated them. Xiao Qinqin had died tragically, and she heard that when the emperor found her, the grass over her grave was already very tall.

Not even a coffin, just wrapped in a straw mat, buried in a pit, and that tombstone was just a dilapidated piece of wood.

The emperor ignored what he had asked for and holding the jade pendant, he asked in a low voice, "Is your mother Xiao Qinqin? Having been in Tianzong for so many years, you must clearly know who Xiao Qinqin is. Then why didn’t you come to the Imperial Palace with this jade pendant earlier to find me?"

"What for?" Zijin suddenly sneered coldly, "Since birth, I have been in Qi Mountain. I was raised by my master from a young age. Why would I come to the Imperial Palace to find the emperor?"

"You are my eldest son; this world needs you."

"But I am also Tianzong's eldest senior brother, and my master has high hopes for me. The position of the State Preceptor is no less significant than that of the emperor, and I really do not need to wade into these muddy waters."

"But I am still your father," the emperor said, becoming agitated.

The hall fell into a dead silence.

"Oh, is that so?" After a moment, Zijin said indifferently, his tone extremely contemptuous.

The Empress was emotionally disturbed; she didn't care about their entanglements but was concerned whether this person would try to seize the throne.

"Your current status..." the emperor sighed, his face showing the signs of age, "Forget it, if you want justice, I will give you justice."

Zijin bowed and said, "Then I thank the emperor, I take my leave."

Everyone just watched as he came and then left.

The Empress Dowager, supported by a palace maiden, stood up, agitatedly said, "How could he just leave like that, is he really born of Qinqin? Moning, why did you let him go like that."

"We can't rush this matter; as for whether he is born of Qinqin... seemingly so," the emperor sighed helplessly.

"Oh, how can we not be anxious, it has been thirty years. Moning, go to the Xiao Family and ask. If he really is a child born by Qinqin, we must have him acknowledge his ancestry. He is the legitimate eldest son, he..."

Chapter 920: Interrogation

The Crown Prince suddenly saw the Empress's pale face, and abruptly stopped talking. After a moment, she continued, "It's tough for the Imperial Family to have heirs, especially Moning. It was not easy for

you to have your first child all those years ago, and you absolutely cannot let him end up wandering outside. Also, if he really is Qinqin's child, then who is Feng Zhao? And who brought her back? Oh my, my head is spinning. What on earth is going on?"

...

Gu Youyou was taken back to the Lin Residence, where she was now under strict supervision.

Jin Zijin's identity had not yet been officially revealed, but in just one day, the news had spread wildly among the civil and military officials.

Was this true or false? Since the Emperor hadn't officially recognized it, no one dared to be certain, they only discussed it secretly.

Today, Madam Lin received an invitation from the Empress wanting her to come to the palace for a talk.

After the morning court concluded, news about the eldest Prince had been released. By the afternoon, the Empress had sent out the invitation. It didn't specify tomorrow, but pointed out specifically today. What was so urgent?

She guessed it probably related to this matter, and that it was also connected with the family nemesis at home.

Yesterday, a Taoist boy from Tianzong had come to the Lin Residence to deliver a message, saying Gu Youyou would not be returning and would spend a night at the Sanqing Temple. For what reason did she need to stay at the Sanqing Temple? Wasn't she supposed to enter the Imperial Palace? Why did she end up going to Sanqing Temple? Only this morning was she brought back.

Having thought it through, Madam Lin felt she should first visit Gu Youyou to ask all the necessary questions before moving on.

Madam Lin, accompanied by a group of servants, hurriedly arrived at Gu Youyou's dwelling. In fact, Lin Xingyi had just left, perhaps for the same reason she had, to inquire about Jin Zijin's affairs.

Gu Youyou stepped forward to greet them, calling her "Aunt".

Madam Lin said to her, "No, don't call me Aunt. If you tell me the truth today, I'll even call you ancestor tomorrow."

Madam Lin's face looked unusually grim, and Gu Youyou knew trouble was brewing.

These things were bound to happen eventually. Now, she actually felt much lighter in her heart.

What would you like to ask, Aunt?" Gu Youyou inquired.

Madam Lin sat down, and Xiang Chun hurriedly served her tea, knowing to do so without being asked.

She looked at the obedient girl in front of her, and though she wanted to scold her, she refrained and merely asked indifferently, "What exactly happened in the palace yesterday?"

Gu Youyou stood by the window, not sitting down because her behind hurt.

She spoke softly, "Yesterday, I wore a new dress from Manxiu Building to the Imperial Palace and encountered the Princess. We had a conflict over that dress."

"What conflict?"

"She fancied my dress and ordered her people to forcibly strip it from me. And then... then the Empress arrived, and the Princess had a conflict with the Empress, their palace maids fought, tearing the Princess's clothes, and a jade pendant I had hidden inside fell out. That pendant... I've heard it's of significant origin, called the Qingluan Jade."

"The Qingluan Jade?" Madam Lin was shocked, tea spewing from her mouth.

She pointed at Gu Youyou, almost fainting.

How dare you hide this jade pendant? Do you understand what this pendant signifies? Right, how did you come to possess this jade?"

Gu Youyou responded honestly, "I didn’t know before, but I understand now. The jade belonged to Jin Zijin; he gave it to the Boater, and I bought it back for ten pieces of silver after seeing the quality of the jade."

Madam Lin was speechless, and after pondering over it several times, she almost understood what was happening.

The appearance of this jade pendant drew out the person behind it.

But...

"Why didn’t you return directly to the residence, and how did you end up at the Sanqing Temple?"