Farmhouse 921

Chapter 921: No Need for a Reason to Beat You

"This... I can’t say now," said Gu Youyou. "Aunt, it’s better not to ask about this matter. What I can tell you, I naturally will. This matter, for the time being, can’t be mentioned, but I will definitely tell you later."

"You... you really are!" Madam Lin felt that maybe she was too old, and her heart was tired.

Considering that the Empress in the palace was still waiting for her, she didn’t have the time to interrogate her.

Forget it, let’s see what the Empress says first.

"I’ll deal with you when I get back," Madam Lin said with a stern face.

Listenting to this, Gu Youyou felt baffled and asked the maid beside her.

"Where is my aunt going?"

The maid said, "Someone from the palace has come to say that Her Majesty the Empress has invited Madam to the palace for a chat."

Gu Youyou looked up at the sky outside the window. It was almost mid-afternoon. Going back and forth, wouldn’t it be time for the palace curfew after just a few words?

The Empress is so eager to have my aunt go... Gu Youyou felt a sudden thump in her heart, sensing that something was amiss and that she should remind her aunt to be cautious.

But Madam Lin was already far away.

...

"You shameless woman, dare to deceive me!" In the Kunning Palace, just after Madam Lin paid her respects to the Empress, she was met with a slap in the face from her.

Madam Lin stood there, stunned, clueless about the reason for this.

"Her Majesty the Empress?" Madam Lin's face was full of shock.

To talk about the old days in the Ducal Residence, they were only related through a connection two generations back. The Empress Jin Yushu was the legitimate eldest daughter of the Ducal Residence, the most honored miss.

Although Jin Yuan was also a daughter born in the main line of the family, she was from a collateral branch.

Their relationship wasn't as good as it appeared to outsiders; Jin Yushu was so much older than her that when Jin Yuan got married, she was still an ignorant little girl. How could she have had a profound relationship with her elder sister?

But even so, Jin Yushu had never hit her before. Because her husband, Lin Xingyi's official post kept rising higher and higher, and he was deeply trusted by the Emperor, their cousin relationship became better over time.

Madam Lin was after all a legitimate daughter, and since marrying into the Lin Family, she had never been bullied. Growing up, this was the first time she had been slapped, and for such a bewildering reason—she was struck without an explanation. Her eyes reddened in the moment, as she suppressed her rising anger.

"Her Majesty the Empress is entitled to discipline, and no one dares to utter a word against it. Though I also come from the same Ducal Residence as Her Majesty, we are still related by marriage, and I am still a first-grade granted Madam. If Her Majesty is going to hit me, shouldn't there be a reason given?"

The Empress's face turned to iron, not feeling the slightest bit improper about having hit her.

She said, "I am the older sister, disciplining a disobedient younger sister, do I need to explain it to you?"

Madam Lin took several deep breaths, continuing to contain her anger.

She said, "If the older sister disciplines the younger sister, naturally there's no need for an explanation. Is it that Her Majesty has summoned me here today for a family matter?"

"Humph!" The Empress snorted coldly, sitting down on her phoenix seat, looking down imperiously at Madam Lin below, and said, "You were born a daughter of the Ducal Residence. Even though you have married into the Lin Family and become a wife of the Lin Family, you cannot fail to put the interests of the Ducal Residence first. I would have thought that your uncle had made everything clear to you, yet it seems the Ducal Residence has raised an ingrate—you forget your own family the moment you marry off.

Don't forget, if you were not a miss of the Ducal Residence, you would have had no standing to marry into the Lin Family at all. Everything you have now is given to you by the Ducal Residence."

The more Madam Lin listened, the more baffled she became. Setting aside the fact that the Empress had slapped her for no apparent reason, she urgently asked, "I beg Her Majesty the Empress not to speak in riddles anymore. What exactly has happened?"

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"What else is there?" the Empress's anger slowly subsided, yet her tone remained harsh, "Don't tell me you're unaware of the Emperor suddenly acknowledging an elder Prince."

This matter?

How did they manage to pin the 'ungrateful wretch' on her head? What did it have to do with her?

Madam Lin said indifferently, "This consort only found out today. This matter... indeed, it was unexpected."

"Unexpected, indeed." the Empress slammed her palm on the armrest and angrily said, "What's the deal with that niece of Lin Xingyi? Who is she? I think she's long been aware of Jin Zijin's identity. You live with her in the same courtyard every day and yet you also helped to keep it a secret."

Madam Lin was startled, how could Gu Youyou have known this early? She replied, "I do not know of this matter, and as for Youyou, I have recently noticed she indeed has some relationship with Jin Zijin. However, when I asked her today, she told me it wasn't convenient to tell me now. Besides, the Empress summoned me urgently, so naturally, I prioritized coming to the Imperial Palace to see you."

The Empress scoffed coldly and said, "Of course, she wouldn't find it convenient to speak. A woman of over twenty years who has never been betrothed—it's because she's already engaged in a secret affair with a man. Jin Zijin's hasty entry into the palace yesterday was for her sake. Everyone else's attention might be fixed on the Jade Pendant, but I see everything clearly.

So, your niece, she had a secret affair with Jin Zijin, and you, managing the household, were completely oblivious. I really want to ask you, are you truly unaware, or have you developed a disloyal heart towards the Ducal Residence and are colluding with Lin Xingyi to deceive me?"

Madam Lin took a deep breath. To her, this was quite unexpected. Jin Zijin was Tianzong's eldest senior brother, wasn't he the favorite candidate for the next State Preceptor? How could such a person fall for a woman?

Thus, she had never even considered this possibility.

Even if she thought about Gu Youyou having a secret affair with Yue Rujing, she never would have imagined Gu Youyou having anything to do with Jin Zijin.

Even if there was something, the Empress had no right to slap her so recklessly.

Madam Lin was extremely displeased and managed to say indifferently, suppressing the pain on her face, "The Empress is overly concerned. The Lin Residence naturally would not be disloyal to the Ducal Residence; after all, my only daughter is married to King Jin."

The Empress heaved a sigh of relief and said, "That’s precisely the reason I continue to trust you. Gu Youyou is not simple; make sure to keep a close eye on her after you return. I will have someone look into her background, and before I have ascertained the facts, there must be no slip-ups."

...

The aunt who used to be cold on the outside but warm at heart toward Gu Youyou, this time, truly turned cold inside as well.

Upon her return from the Imperial Palace, Madam Lin immediately ordered that Gu Youyou was not allowed to leave under any circumstances. She also assigned additional people to guard her courtyard and took aside all the servants from her courtyard, except for Xiang Chun, for a serious scolding. When they returned, each had seemingly changed.

The news swiftly reached Old Madam Lin’s ears. She, of course, would not tolerate her granddaughter being bullied for no reason and immediately sent for Madam Lin.

"I heard you’ve confined Youyou again; what exactly happened?"

Madam Lin, now trusting no one, said, "Youyou spent the night at Sanqing Temple yesterday. If word got out, what would happen to her, an unmarried lady? I confine her for her own good."

"She’s not spending the night at Sanqing Temple for the first time. Previously, when the Heavenly Master was ill, she stayed there for quite a long time. You didn’t act like this back then. So speak, what’s truly going on?"

Chapter 923: Jin Ziyuan Appears Again

"Mother, you’d better not ask about this matter. After all, she was confined for her own good."

"Ah, but there should be a reason, shouldn’t there? As a doctor, she needs to go out frequently. If she can’t go to Jisheng Hall, and you feel the patients who come seeking her help bring bad luck, not letting them enter our residence, you just like to meddle too much."

"Mother!" Madam Lin really felt weary at heart. The Empress was suspicious of her having ulterior motives, and now the dowager was pestering her for a reason?

She sighed and said, "I have other matters to attend to, so I'll take my leave now. Mother, if you have any doubts, why not go and ask Xingyi? He probably knows more than I do."

"Ai, you..."

Seeing Madam Lin's rarely serious expression, the Eldest Madam Lin felt that the issue might not be so simple.

"Go call Xiang Chun. Oh no, don't call Xiang Chun yet. Watch the adults closely, and as soon as one comes back, have him come see me immediately. Ah, it's so late already. Where has Xingyi gone? Why hasn't he returned yet?"

Madam Lin had been pulling people aside for talks since returning from the Imperial Palace, and now that she had been summoned by the Eldest Madam Lin, it had already grown dark. Normally at this time, she would already be asleep.

As for Gu Youyou, all the servants had been taken away by Madam Lin for a lecture, including Xiang Chun, and Searcy had been called along as well.

Searcy was very dissatisfied. "What is this about in the middle of the night? Doesn't anyone want to sleep? I'm not a servant of the Lin Residence. Don't go too far."

Madam Lin's personal maid, Hen Xiang, responded, "You live at the Lin Residence, you eat at the Lin Residence, and yet you think it's too much for our lady to ask you to answer a few questions? If you don't want to go, that's fine, but don't blame me for accurately reporting to Madam Lin and having you sent out of the residence immediately."

In Hen Xiang's eyes, Searcy was the only one in the Lin Residence living there without contributing anything. She wasn't a relative of the Lin family, yet she had the nerve to be very comfortable with that.

Gu Youyou sighed and said, "Go on, at least you haven’t been locked up."

With a huff, Searcy went along with Xiang Chun, mainly out of respect for Gu Youyou.

They had just left when a person silently arrived in Gu Youyou’s room.

Gu Youyou was startled and turned around to see Jin Ziyuan’s pale face.

She hadn’t seen him since they parted at the ancient tomb that day, nor had there been any news of him from the outside. It was as if he had vanished into thin air, and now, unexpectedly, he was here?

"Why are you here?" Gu Youyou asked.

She quickly glanced around the doorway to make sure no one had seen him, then securely closed the doors and windows.

"While Yu Jizi’s fate is uncertain now that the formation has been broken, and he won’t be able to cultivate that many medicine men in a short period, we are temporarily safe. Oh, right, have you cured the cold poison in your body? If not, I have a new medicine here that can cure it."

Gu Youyou grabbed Jin Ziyuan’s wrist and took his pulse.

She found that his cold poison had been cured.

Yes, she remembered now; Jin Ziyuan had taken the Zhuzhao Pearl.

She sighed and said, "You’d better throw away that pearl. In fact, even without it, I can cure the poison. I have already developed an antidote."

By now, the poison in Gu Youyou, Jin Zijin, and Jin Ziyuan had all been cured.

Jin Ziyuan remained silent, listening to Gu Youyou’s endless chatter, which showed her concern for him in every word.

After hiding and struggling for so long, enduring so much hardship and suffering, and even risking his life to save her, he felt it was all worthwhile.

Originally, he was planning to continue hiding while searching for Yu Jizi’s whereabouts.

Chapter 924: Come with Me

At this time, it was not suitable for him to show his face, yet today a piece of news spread... Jin Zijin was different from him after all; he was not the son of the rebel king but the child of Xiao Qinqin, cast away among the common folk.

Thinking of this, he couldn’t contain himself any longer, he missed her and wanted to see her.

"I’ve come to see you," Jin Ziyuan said softly. "When I left that day, you were severely injured, and I’ve been wanting to check on you, but I’ve been having some problems with my own health, so I never found the opportunity to visit. Later on, you returned to Beijing."

Gu Youyou chuckled lightly, appearing very relaxed, and said, "Luckily we are both alive, and we’re doing quite well. Let’s not think about the past anymore; let’s think about the future. You... your identity really doesn’t suit living near Beijing. The world is so vast; there are always places beyond the emperor’s reach. Find a place where no one knows you and live well."

Jin Ziyuan gave a bitter smile. Could he really live on? After the failure of the Third Prince, he shouldn’t have remained in this world.

But seeing her filled with confidence about the future, he couldn’t bring himself to utter such words.

He nodded gently and said, "You’re right, I am actually planning to find a place where no one knows me to carry on living. I’ve come to ask you something, and if you don’t agree, consider it my farewell to you."

"What is it?" Gu Youyou became serious.

Jin Ziyuan felt comforted by her attitude.

Back then, the moment he saw her, he felt a sense of shared suffering with her. The several times he helped her were because he felt Jin Ziyuan could offer a sense of alliance to her in the face of that terrible affair, at least she was not alone; Jin Ziyuan was also there.

Now that she had escaped it, she naturally hoped Jin Ziyuan could also break free and live on.

Jin Ziyuan said, "I've asked you once before, back then I was a stranger to you, you didn't trust me, and I don't blame you. Now, I ask you again, will you... come with me?"

"Come with you?" Gu Youyou was stunned, "Where to?" The poison was cured, and that terrible affair was over; it seemed they had no further connection.

If there was a connection, it was the acquaintance they had, the shared suffering they once felt, perhaps friends.

"Why are you so confused right now?" Jin Ziyuan suddenly seized Gu Youyou's shoulders with agitation.

"What's so good about him? Are you attracted to his status? Anything you want, just ask, and I can be yours just the same."

"What are you doing?" Gu Youyou pushed Jin Ziyuan away, taking a deep breath.

She looked at Jin Ziyuan as if he were a monster. What was this? An invitation, a declaration of love?

Previously, she had only been on guard, as it had been right when Jin Zijin had taken advantage of her, so she didn't dare to trust anyone and had guarded her heart against everyone. When Jin Ziyuan had extended the invitation, she had only weighed the pros and cons—whether it was more likely to survive with him or with Jin Zijin—and had not thought of anything else.

But this time... Jin Ziyuan had made it so blatantly obvious that if she still didn’t understand, she truly would be an idiot.

"Come with me, deceit and manipulation are not for you; I can give you the life you want," Jin Ziyuan pleaded weakly, hoping so much that she would agree.

Yet looking at Gu Youyou’s calm expression, he couldn’t deceive himself—she would not come with him.

Chapter 925: Rejection of Confession

As expected, Gu Youyou was very shocked, but calmly told him, "Between us lies a distance as vast as Mount Everest, and I do not like a life of hiding and secrecy."

"You’re talking nonsense." Jin Ziyuan knew she would reject him, yet he had not anticipated such a reason, "You don’t like a life of hiding? Then all these years, haven’t you been living exactly that way? In Lotus Village, in Lingnan, at the Lin Residence. You could hide for him, why can’t you do the same for me?"

Hearing this, she truly had been living that way over the years. Yet precisely because she disliked such a life, she had always been striving, alongside Jin Zijin, to change this situation, from darkness to light, to live together openly and honorably.

That was only because...

"I like him, not you," Gu Youyou sighed softly.

Jin Ziyuan staggered backward, he had anticipated this outcome, but hearing it from her still caused him a heart-wrenching pain.

The most heart-devouring love in the world is to love someone who belongs to an enemy.

She did not like him and unfortunately liked that person.

Jin Ziyuan took a deep breath, pushing the overwhelming thoughts back into the depths of his heart.

He said softly, "Very well, since that is the case, I shall bid you farewell and take my leave!"

He had arrived quickly and left just as swiftly, vanishing into the darkness in a blink.

Gu Youyou stared at the dark sky, unable to speak for a long time.

In modern times, many men had tried to pursue her, but she had never seriously considered any of them.

Those men were either after her money or her status, none genuinely cared for her.

She was thankful that besides Jin Zijin, there was one more person who had truly cared for her. Yet love is a selfish thing, so selfish that it does not allow for any third person to share it.

Leaning on Jin Zijin's back, basking in the warm sun, feeling the mountain breeze, breathing the freshest air, those days were as vivid in her mind as if they were yesterday.

She thanked heaven for sending him to her side in her most desperate moments, leading her out of the ceaseless darkness.

Her love contained only Jin Zijin.

For in this mournful passage of time, the only thing that could give her peace and safety was his broad back. The only thing that could warm her like spring was his fiery embrace. Unknowingly, she had lost herself in the vast sea of stars in his eyes.

...

Over in Searcy, her straightforward nature had fully exposed Gu Youyou.

"Yes, Jin Zijin is her clandestine lover!"

Pfft...

Hearing such words shocked Madam Lin to the core.

Where did this uncouth gossip come from? How could a young woman use such words so freely?

"Since when did this start?" Madam Lin asked, pressing down her anger.

Searcy replied calmly, "How would I know? I've only known Gu Youyou for a few days. Ever since I met her, the Taoist comes to Qi Mountain once a month, and during his stays, he spends every night in Gu Youyou's house. Oh wait, the house Gu Youyou stays in actually belongs to Jin Zijin, so technically, he is just returning to sleep with Gu Youyou in his own house."

Madam Lin felt as if thunder was rolling in a clear sky, scorching her inside out.

She had been a well-read woman from childhood, a proper lady in the Ducal Residence, and after marrying, always remained demure and dignified. From a young age, she knew the decorum women should maintain.

Chapter 926: Miss Biao Steals a Man

"But what is this behavior of Gu Youyou? It's far worse than a secret exchange; it's pre-marital affairs. Soaking her in a pig cage would not be too much."

She knew this girl was bold, but she had never imagined she would be this daring.

How could she dare...

Madam Lin was at a loss for words for a long while, her face turning from red to pale, then from pale to ashen.

Xiang Chun was trembling with fear upon hearing these words.

Jin was the mistress’s lover? And they had... they had even shared a bed? How could she not know?

As her personal maid, not knowing these things, she didn’t know how Madam would deal with her.

She was scared to death.

"Xiang Chun, why are you trembling? Don’t you plan to give your mistress a proper explanation?"

Startled, Xiang Chun hastily kowtowed, "Madam, spare my life, please spare your servant..."

"Kneel and speak properly. Whether I spare you depends on your performance."

"I’ll tell, I’ll tell everything!"

So Xiang Chun betrayed Gu Youyou as well.

"Mistress has always been strange; ever since I came to her courtyard, I have slept especially well at night, never waking before dawn. I’m not afraid of being laughed at by Madam, but... one night I ate too much watermelon and... I wet the bed and didn’t even wake up..."

Saying this, Xiang Chun cautiously looked up at Madam Lin, whose face was still an iron blue, her gaze ferocious like she could eat someone.

Xiang Chun was on the verge of tears as she continued, "Mistress has a specialty; every night she rewards me with a delicious bowl of soup. I suspect... it’s that soup that has something wrong with it... wuwu, I really didn’t know about the mistress stealing a man..."

Luckily, Gu Youyou wasn’t here, or she would be furious to death.

She had been so good to Xiang Chun and Searcy, yet they just sold her out like that, Searcy saying she had a lover, Xiang Chun saying she was stealing a man; what a display, what a fine display from each and every one of them.

"So you mean to say she’s been having secret meetings every day within the manor?" Madam Lin said through gritted teeth.

Xiang Chun cried out, "Madam, I really didn’t know, I only knew that after drinking the mistress’s soup, I would sleep especially soundly."

Madam Lin almost fainted with anger, lying back in her chair and had Hen Xiang pour her a cup of water.

After some time, she gradually regained her composure.

Such shameless acts had never been dared in her world, yet someone had done it right under her nose; how could she bear it?

She felt like a failure as a butler.

Eventually calming down, she felt that this matter should not be leaked.

There were four people in the room; Hen Xiang was her own person.

She stared at Xiang Chun and Searcy, "If anyone lets even half a word of today’s events leak out, don’t blame me for being ruthless."

Xiang Chun hurriedly said, "I wouldn’t dare, I wouldn’t dare utter a single word."

Searcy snorted coldly but said nothing.

"Go, go, go!" Madam Lin shooed them away, irritable.

This matter was of great importance, and she felt that it required careful consideration.

The Empress was usually pleasant to everyone, but to reach her position, could she really be as charitable as she seemed?

If she were truly kind-hearted, how could Xiao Qinqin have died outside years ago?

The slap she received during the day had awoken her; the Empress was inherently a tyrant, only putting on a show of charity. But after repressing it for too long, once she encountered something or someone that endangered her, her true nature would reveal itself.

She told herself to go home and thoroughly investigate Gu Youyou, but the things she found out today, she could not report truthfully to the Empress.

Chapter 927: Identity

She had to secure a backup plan for herself and for the Lin Residence.

The Empress was unreliable, and now with the emergence of a legitimate eldest Prince, it was still unclear what attitude the Emperor and court officials had towards him.

This was the legitimate eldest son, not like Prince Qin, who had no background, no power, and was a younger sibling born out of wedlock.

Since she couldn’t rely on the Empress, she indeed needed to prepare thoroughly for herself and the Lin Residence, rather than foolishly handing everything over.

No, this matter was of great importance; she had to discuss it thoroughly with Lin Xingyi.

"Hen Xiang, go see if the master has returned. If he has, tell him that Madam has important matters to discuss with him."

Thus, the maid of the old Madam and the maid of Mrs. Lin both stood by the main gate, eagerly waiting.

Meanwhile, the main subject, Lin Xingyi, a man who always abided by the rules and was very self-disciplined, wouldn't come home in the middle of the night unless summoned by the Emperor. Yet, tonight, no one knew where he had gone.

...

Upon realizing she had been betrayed, Gu Youyou was extremely furious.

"All of you ingrates, I've been providing for you well, and this is how you repay me? I don't expect you to maintain your integrity in wealth or poverty, or remain unbent in the face of power. But at least be smart about it, don't blurt out everything you shouldn't! Sigh, Xiang Chun doesn't matter, but Searcy, aren't you usually clever? How could you not handle such a small matter?"

Yet Searcy simply responded indifferently, "Should I waste my thoughts on such trivial matters? Boring."

Gu Youyou: "...Damn it all!"

"What are you worried about? Your sneaky ways aren't a long-term plan anyway. Isn't it better this way? Why not take this chance and clear things up? Even if you're just a concubine, at least it's a recognized status. What do you count as by following him this way?"

Gu Youyou leaned on the table by the window, stunned. She wanted to sit down, but her buttocks still hurt, so she had been leaning there all day.

Her thoughts, unlike those of Searcy, always diverged; after all, she was a woman brought up in a plentiful ancient household, always believing that social status was of utmost importance, hence she couldn't understand Gu Youyou's actions.

Xiang Chun stood to one side, tears reddening her eyes, said, "Miss, apart from your low birth, you're superior in every way. You mustn't belittle yourself by willingly becoming a shady woman. Searcy is

right, even being a concubine would grant you some status. If that man won’t even give you that much, you should stop associating with him. Madam wants to keep this matter under wraps. As long as it doesn’t get out, your reputation will remain intact—no need to worry!"

Facing such advice, Gu Youyou truly didn’t know what to say.

She sighed deeply, looking out at the pitch-black sky, feeling as dark inside as the heavens.

"I can’t get through to you, it’s a severe generation gap. Anyway, don’t worry about this matter, I won’t become anyone’s concubine or mistress. As for the specifics, I can’t clearly explain them to you right now; it’s late, everyone should go wash up and sleep!"

Searcy just snorted and went off to sleep.

Seeing Gu Youyou’s attitude, Xiang Chun couldn’t help but worry excessively, still earnestly advising, "Miss, this isn’t a matter to be taken lightly; it’s crucial, affecting your whole future. You mustn’t be so capricious; please think it through."

Gu Youyou, supporting her still aching back, walked to the bed and said, "For now, I’ll focus on my lower body, still hurt from the beating I received yesterday in the palace. Xiang Chun, help me to bed."

...

Chapter 928: The Emperor’s Instructions

Today, Xiang Chun received some critical news and, ignoring her appearance, rushed into Gu Youyou’s pharmacy to tell her about the earth-shattering event.

"What’s the hurry for running like this? There’s water on the table, catch your breath before you speak."

Panting heavily, Xiang Chun poured herself a glass of water and gulped it down.

She said, "It’s said that the Emperor found out the Princess was an imposter and was furious. She has already been stripped of her imperial family membership and directly expelled from Beijing."

"Is that so?" Gu Youyou put down her work and turned around, "Considering she impersonated an heir, and they didn't behead her, just stripped her of her family status and expelled her from Beijing?"

"Impersonating an heir is a crime punishable by death. However, because she was quite young at the time, and she doesn't even remember anything from before she was three, everyone said such a small child must have been used by others. The fault was not hers. The Emperor raised her, and there was some affection, so in his kindness, he didn't have her killed, just expelled her from Beijing."

Gu Youyou nodded blankly, thinking that even if not sentenced to death, they should have at least detained her to investigate who was behind the incident from those years before deciding on her punishment. Why did they just let her go?

But the thoughts of the Imperial Family are not always ones that can be derived from common reasoning.

Who knows the deeper intentions of the Emperor in making such a decision.

"Where has she gone now?"

Jin Fengzhao must now be like a dog who has lost its home, her once proud identity gone. Gu Youyou touched her face, remembering the humiliation of that day. She indeed wanted to add insult to injury.

Xiang Chun said, "Besides being a Princess, she is still Madam of the Great General of the Xiao Family. Having been expelled from Beijing, she naturally went to Jinxiu City to return to the General Residence."

Back to the General Residence, huh? Gu Youyou couldn't help but smirk.

If she remembered correctly, she reigned supreme in the General Residence, untouchable due to her status as a Princess. If not for her status, the Great General would have likely hacked her to death long ago. It's said that she is why the Great General still has no heirs to this day.

This is not the Emperor being merciful by letting her go; sending her back to the Xiao Family is a fate worse than death.

Thirty years to the east of the river, thirty years to the west, in the second half of her life in the Xiao Family's inner residence, all those concubines she had bullied surely would bully her in return mercilessly?

At this moment, a maid rushed in and said to Gu Youyou, "Cousin Miss, the Emperor has sent a Eunuch from the palace to find you."

As Gu Youyou was relishing the misfortune, hearing that a Eunuch had come looking for her, her face immediately fell.

Jin Fengzhao had just met with disaster; could it be that she was involved so soon?

Going to the Imperial Palace truly brought a lot of trouble.

Gu Youyou followed the maid out, with Xiang Chun worriedly tagging along.

"Cousin Miss, be tactful and don't act impulsively."

The visitor was Eunuch Wan, whom Gu Youyou knew. Aunt Lin Madam had him seated in the flower hall, sitting respectfully opposite.

Seeing Gu Youyou arrive, his aged face broke into a smile like a blooming chrysanthemum. He quickly stood up, taking out a beautifully crafted box.

"This humble servant is here to run an errand for the Emperor, returning something belonging to Doctor Gu."

Surprised, Gu Youyou took the box, opened it, and shocked, she quickly closed the lid.

"May I ask, Eunuch, what is the Emperor’s intention?"

Eunuch Wan, ever so slick, hastily smiled and said, "This humble servant wouldn’t dare presume to grasp the divine will. After personally delivering it into Doctor Gu’s own hands and ensuring everything is in order, this servant will return to the palace to report."

Chapter 929: Jin Zijin Climbs the Wall Again

Gu Youyou’s heart was in turmoil. Wasn’t the Qingluan Jade Pendant supposed to be a symbol of the Empress’s position? The Emperor had clearly reclaimed it, so what did it mean that he had given it back to her?

Of course, from Gu Youyou’s perspective, it was only right for her to have it since she was a merchant. The pendant wasn’t stolen or robbed; she had legitimately bought it with ten pieces of silver, so it belonged to her.

After Eunuch Wan left, Gu Youyou bid her farewell to Madam Lin.

Madam Lin’s face was stern as she called out to her.

"Stop."

"Is there anything else you need, Aunt?" Gu Youyou asked in a low voice.

"What was given to you?" Madam Lin eyed the box in Gu Youyou’s hands.

With a slight tug at the corner of her mouth, Gu Youyou replied, "I can’t say that. It’s a secret from the Emperor!"

Now that such an important item as the Qingluan Jade Pendant was back in her hands, she hadn’t forgotten that this aunt was part of the Empress’s faction. She had to be cautious around her.

Madam Lin’s face turned pale as she said, "Since you call me ’Aunt’, I am your elder. What could there be that I can’t see?"

Gu Youyou, using the Emperor as her shield, answered, "I really can’t show or tell anyone about the contents of this box. Aunt, please don’t make it difficult for me. If you don’t believe me, go ask Eunuch Wan; he might not have gone far yet."

"Go on, go on, who cares to see it anyway?" Madam Lin stomped her foot in anger.

This girl was becoming more and more complex to figure out— that evening, she had sent someone to summon Lin Xingyi, but he had disappeared until nearly dawn.

It was the first time in many years that Lin Xingyi had not returned home at night since marrying into the Lin Residence.

Moreover, upon his return, he didn’t come to his own courtyard but was taken away by Lusun, Old Madam’s aide. He wasn’t seen until almost noon.

She had shared with him both the information she managed to extract and her own suspicions, yet he revealed nothing useful in return, merely commenting that she had done very well, as the Empress was indeed selfish and untrustworthy, advising more caution towards her.

Is that a compliment, or does he dislike how naive I was before?

Now she was indeed trapped in a dilemma, hoping poor Qianqing wouldn’t get dragged into this mess.

If only she had known earlier... But even then, resignation was the only option since the Emperor had started favoring Lin Xingyi when Qianqing was still young, her future had been destined. She had sensed something back then, which is why she intentionally let Qianqing interact with Jin Wei.

Jin Wei was her eldest brother’s eldest son, and the Ducal Residence was brimming with talented individuals. Although not comparable to Prince Jin, with her own parents, elder brother, and sister-in-law watching over her, life there should be more comfortable than at Prince Jin Residence.

But plans couldn’t keep up with changes; how could the Emperor allow a high official’s descendant to remain uninvolved?

...

That night, Jin Zijin came.

Actually, since the incident with the Jade Pendant, he had stopped climbing over the wall to avoid suspicion.

Gu Youyou had been confined, so they hadn’t seen each other for many days and had no contact.

She had been worrying about him, not knowing his circumstances, and now that he had come, it was timely.

"I heard that the court hall was buzzing with discussions about your identity. How come you have the leisure to climb over the walls of the Lin Residence?"

Jin Zijin scooped her up in one motion, and Gu Youyou’s face immediately reddened.

Because one of his hands was supporting her buttocks.

"Let me see if it’s healed," his warm breath caressed her ear.

Gu Youyou pulled his hand away, saying, "It’s healed, of course. If you want to take advantage, just say it. I’ll let you take your fill; no need to use such a poor excuse."

Chapter 930: Recognize Kin or Not?

Jin Zijin chuckled softly and lowered his voice, "Keep being stubborn, one day I’ll deal with you."

"Mhm, I’m waiting!" Gu Youyou replied, not backing down.

They blew out the lamp and closed the window, then snuggled together under the covers.

The weather in the north was cold, but since the cold poison in Gu Youyou's body had been cleared, she felt that the world had become much nicer. Even in the cold winter, warmth was everywhere.

A floor heater warmed the room, and with the thick blankets, she started to sweat lightly.

Jin Zijin asked, "Did you receive something today?"

"What thing?" Gu Youyou asked curiously.

"Something from the palace."

Gu Youyou paused slightly and said, "Are you referring to the jade pendant that Eunuch Wan sent? Is it related to you?"

Jin Zijin said, "He mentioned he'd provide an explanation, so I guessed the jade pendant would end up back in your hands. My mother has passed, and perhaps to some, this jade pendant no longer holds any significance. The Dao Sect has encountered great calamity recently, and the political winds may shift... Ah, the imperial court is not peaceful either. That person always tries to balance the powers of various families and naturally wouldn't want to stir trouble at this time."

Gu Youyou listened, half-understanding, and after thinking for a moment said, "I know you don't like the Emperor, you even hate him, but I think you might be biased against him. He showed favoritism toward the Princess and even brought back your mother's remains, now he is overly affectionate toward the unattractive Empress Sheng and her son... Also, regarding the Xiao Family, it seems like he's trying to make amends. You can't fail to see that, right? Maybe he just wants to make amends with you, and it has nothing to do with the Dao Family or the imperial court."

Gu Youyou felt that what the Emperor did to Xiao Qinqin years ago was somewhat despicable; a man who sacrifices his wife and child for power lacks the ability to protect even a single family, let alone a nation.

But later, he seemed to be genuinely trying to make up for it.

Everyone makes mistakes, isn't there an old saying that knowing your mistakes and correcting them is the greatest virtue? Since it's like this, why not give him a chance to make amends?

Lin Qianqing had once said that the general of the Xiao Family was directly promoted by the Emperor without any military achievements. For an emperor, that wasn't a rational choice; who knows what pressure he faced to make that decision.

"Let him think whatever he wants," Jin Zijin said, somewhat annoyed.

Knowing that the damage wasn't done overnight, Gu Youyou understood very well and didn't continue to persuade Jin Zijin. She only asked, "As for the matter of reclaiming your ancestral identity in the imperial court, how do you plan to handle it?"

Previously, they had feared they couldn't handle Yu Jizi, and they didn't even dare to dream they would reach this stage. No one expected that Tian Jizi had already laid a trap for Yu Jizi, just waiting for this day. Now, with both old men missing, presumed dead or alive unknown.

Now, with the current state of Xuanzong, their entire hope hinged on the return of Yu Jizi. Without him returning, they could only keep a low profile. Yu Jizi had his plans and never groomed Huo Li as his successor. Without Yu Jizi, Xuanzong wouldn't pose a threat anymore.

If they took this opportunity to withdraw from the Dao Family...

While Gu Youyou was lost in her thoughts, Jin Zijin broke the silence.

"The person who replaced my identity with Jin Fengzhao was never uncovered. Back then, it was an old woman who brought Jin Fengzhao, discovered by Jin Moning's people; that old woman has been dead for years, and Jin Fengzhao was too young to remember, so that matter also lost its lead. However, I found it was related to the inner dealings of the Imperial Family, so naturally, recognizing my kin is still necessary."