Farmhouse 931

Chapter 931: Talking Dirty Jokes All Night

Gu Youyou looked at him and nodded gently.

She had always respected his choices, even if he refused to acknowledge them, she would go along with him. Now, she was becoming more open-minded about it.

Being alive was more important than anything else, a truth only those who had faced life and death could understand.

Jin Zijin softly kissed the corner of her mouth, touching it as briefly as a dragonfly skimming the water, before pulling away and whispering, "Then, I'll have to step back from the Dao Family, but only in name. Ajing will take over my position. Now that Xuanzong is no longer a threat, Ajing is more than capable of handling Huo Li. And then..."

Suddenly, he stopped and didn't continue.

Hearing only half of it, Gu Youyou tugged at his arm, saying, "And then what? Just finish what you're saying!"

Jin Zijin started to laugh and said, "I've promised to marry you with honor, and then... naturally, you will be waiting to be the bride."

Overflowing with joy that almost burst from her heart, Gu Youyou grabbed his collar and asked, "So, are you also planning on marrying a main wife in the first month, two consorts in the second month, and then four concubines in the third month, just like King Jin and Prince Qin?"

Jin Zijin laughed heartily, as if after years of planning, they could finally be together openly. He was rarely this happy.

Jin Zijin lay flat on the bed, his hands under his head, staring at the canopy above and said, "I'm not like them; I can only handle one like you. If you prefer it to be lively, why don't you give me a few jabs with the needle? You said you could do it before, I wonder if you have the skills, hmm?"

The color of Gu Youyou’s face fluctuated between red and white as she climbed on top of him, her hands pinching his face into various shapes, and she threatened fiercely, "If you dare, I’ll make sure to turn you into a frostbitten eggplant..."

"So, are you planning to remain a chaste widow? I remember you’re quite..."

"Ah... shut up!"

They ended up exchanging jokes all night long. Jin Zijin’s thick-skinned moments were truly a surprise to her.

...

Eunuch Wan Decheng, the emperor’s favorite, had been standing outside Sanqing Temple with the imperial edict for several days. Poor Wan Decheng, who was usually received as an honored guest and thanked profusely wherever he delivered the edict, was now repeatedly turned away from Sanqing Temple.

The young Daoist, seeing Eunuch Wan Decheng waiting in the cold despite his age, felt pity and stepped forward to advise, "Eunuch Wan Decheng, you should return for today. The Dao Sect has been busy lately, as you know. Our senior brother is so busy that he hasn’t had a moment’s rest for days; how could he have the time to see you?"

He was the only one in the world who could dismiss Eunuch Wan Decheng’s delivery of the edict so casually.

Even the Heavenly Master Tian Jizi and the State Preceptor Yu Jizi had to give him some courtesy, and Eunuch Wan Decheng had been favored by the emperor for many years for a reason.

But he was helpless before this one individual.

Shivering with cold, Wan Decheng sneezed again, clearly unable to bear it any longer, yet he resolutely decided to keep waiting.

"This old servant will continue to wait. The Prince holds a distinguished status; it is only proper for me to wait."

Seeing that he could not be persuaded, the Daoist youth reluctantly fetched an umbrella from inside and said, "Then please take this umbrella. It's better than nothing."

"Ah, thank you, young Taoist."

Inside Qianyuan Hall, Yue Rujing frowned and said, "Brother, Wan Decheng has been waiting for eight days now. How long do you plan to keep him hanging? The whole court is watching; some are even betting on how many days it will take before Wan Decheng can get you to agree."

Chapter 932: How Long to Air Out?

"Initially, it was three days, then it became seven days, and today I've heard that someone has laid a bet for ten days," Jin Zijin looked indifferently at him and said, "You think I am deliberately putting on airs by making him wait, don't you?"

Uh... Whether this was the case or not, Yue Rujing felt that he could not say it that way. He chuckled and said, "Why would I think so? Outsiders don't understand, and that's what they might believe. But I grew up with you since we were little. Don't I know you? You are avenging the old Crown Princess Consort. Her Majesty worked so hard to protect her child, how could we let him just take advantage so easily, right?"

Yeah, now that you put it that way, it is right to keep him hanging. But I pity Eunuch Wan; it has been snowing these days. That old eunuch is also very stubborn, refusing to wait inside the courtyard, insisting on waiting right in front of the gate, and not even in a carriage. Hmph, this old geezer must be doing this on purpose to show others, right? Ah, brother, this old eunuch has no good intentions. By keeping him waiting like this, what would the court officials think? The fight for inheritance hasn't even started, and they may have already branded you as arrogant and conceited."

"That's exactly what I want," Jin Zijin said. "That's the purpose of my actions."

But then Yue Rujing was puzzled. Blinking his eyes, he asked, "What do you mean? Why would you do that? You... should be winning over the court officials, right? It seems like you are muddled."

"No, I want them to think that I've offended the Emperor, that even if I am acknowledged as a royal descendant, the Emperor won't favor me, denying me any chance for the throne!"

He looked at the snowflakes outside, which seemed to grow heavier, and said, "You don't need to worry about it too much, I have it all planned out. Have all the charges against Yu Jizi been sorted out?"

Yue Rujing solemnly nodded, saying, "Brother, you're moving too fast. I can't keep up. Those sour pickled matters of Yu Jizi have been mostly handled."

Jin Zijin nodded, "That's good. Keep them safe; these are all important pieces of evidence," he sighed and said, "I had intended to deal with him and then make other plans, but I didn't expect..." His tone shifted, and he continued, "If I withdraw from the Dao Family, you can't continue to be as lax as you are now. If you can't handle Huo Li, the master will surely not forgive you when he returns one day."

"Me, not able to handle Huo Li?" Yue Rujing jumped up, feeling a great insult.

"All right, just wait and see if I don't turn that Huo Li into a subordinate."

Jin Zijin did not pay attention to his boasting, simply saying, "When I'm not here, don't clash with him head-on; you can't beat him."

Yue Rujing: "..." Brother, why do you have to tell the truth?

He felt like he took ten thousand points of damage.

...

Because of Gu Youyou’s story, the Emperor ordered the arrest of Lun Tong, known in the jianghu as ’Bai Xiaosheng,’ but Lun Tong had not been in Zhuzhao Country for many years—where could they possibly capture him?

So the one they arrested was actually Lun Yu, who often liked to dress up as her.

Lately, Lun Yu had fallen on hard times, even harboring the thought of silencing Gu Youyou forever.

Whatever happened to not selling each other out, did the revolutionary friendship get eaten by dogs?

Fuming, he disguised himself as a servant delivering coal to the Lin Residence. Seizing this opportunity, he arrived at Gu Youyou’s courtyard.

Xiang Chun directed him to store the coal properly in the cellar, noting that the heating stove in the young miss’s room couldn’t stop.

Lun Yu nodded and bowed to Xiang Chun while fiddling with the coal.

Chapter 933: Lun Yu Comes Looking

But how was he supposed to handle these matters? Not only did he fail to place the wood charcoal properly, but he also caused it to collapse all over the place.

The dark wood charcoal dirtied the light-yellow embroidered surface of Xiang Chun’s shoes, infuriating her to the point of cursing out loud.

"Which family’s charcoal delivery are you? How can you be so stupid? You can’t even place charcoal properly; you might as well quit this business."

Back then at Qi Mountain, it was this girl who chased him with a broom. Lun Yu’s mouth curved into a smile as an idea came to him, and he quickly said, "Oh dear, Miss, listen to you! We run a small business, barely making a living. If I don’t do this, I would starve. Let me wipe your shoes for you."

With his hands covered in black ash, he grabbed Xiang Chun’s shoes and vigorously wiped, only making them dirtier until their original color was unrecognizable.

Xiang Chun almost cried and shouted, "Get away! I don’t want you to wipe them, ah, let go of me..."

"Oh, my apologies, miss!" Lun Yu raised his hands.

But as he suddenly let go, Xiang Chun lost her balance and immediately fell backwards.

She fell into the pitch-black pile of wood charcoal, and not just her shoes, her light-yellow clothes couldn’t escape being stained. Her clothes and face were all smeared with dark charcoal ash.

This time Xiang Chun really cried and shouted, "You... you just wait."

She rushed out of the cellar to find Gu Youyou.

Xiang Chun looked terribly disheveled, especially since she was wearing light-yellow clothes today, which made the charcoal stains particularly noticeable.

"What in the world happened? Don’t rush to cry, explain yourself."

"Whimper, it was that charcoal delivery man; clumsy and inept. Miss, please talk to the manager, tell them not to pay the charcoal delivery man. He can’t do a simple task properly, he might as well not do it at all."

Gu Youyou felt she was being a bit harsh—the man was delivering wood charcoal in the dead of winter, earning his livelihood through hard work.

In such cold weather, perhaps his whole family was depending on this little bit of money, this girl.

"Did you detain that man?" Gu Youyou asked.

"Yes, I asked him to wait in the cellar."

Seeing Xiang Chun in her pitiful state, Gu Youyou held back her reprimands and said, "Go change your clothes first; I'll go and see what happened."

She was very curious, how could one get covered in so much ash?

In the cellar, Lun Yu sat quietly on one side, and smiled when he saw a familiar face enter.

He knew Gu Youyou would come.

On seeing the charcoal delivery boy, Gu Youyou noted that although he appeared honest and simple, his eyes did not seem as naively honest as his appearance suggested; rather, they were shrewdly alert.

She looked at the chaotic ground, pointed at the wood charcoal, and said, "Is this how you deliver charcoal?"

It seemed Xiang Chun had not unjustly accused him; his attitude towards his work was unacceptable. Even if it was an accident initially, after all this time, he shouldn't just sit idly by the wall, instead of promptly fixing the customer's property.

Gu Youyou's gaze became stern, not too pleasant.

Meanwhile, the young man's expression also grew increasingly peculiar, staring at Gu Youyou with a half-smiling look that seemed somewhat familiar.

Suddenly, Gu Youyou felt that this was not the demeanor of a simple charcoal deliverer; her expression darkened further, and she slipped her hand into her sleeve.

If this fellow dared to try anything, she would stab him with a needle.

"Who are you?" Gu Youyou asked.

Chapter 934: Buying Lun Yu Back

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"Heh, who am I?" Lun Yu's chilly laugh sounded, "Well done, Gu Youyou, you've really done a number on me..."

Without any voice disguise, Gu Youyou immediately recognized who the guy was.

Gu Youyou was slightly startled and said, "You're Lun Yu?"

"You... how did you know I was Lun Yu?" He quickly remembered the Jin Zijin incident and said, "Right, you knew all along that I was Lun Yu."

Gu Youyou replied irritably, "I thought we had settled everything, what are you doing looking for me?"

And using this sneaky approach?

Lun Yu said, "You have the nerve to ask me? I don't remember offending you, why did you betray me?"

Gu Youyou's heart skipped a beat, remembering the incident in the Imperial Palace where she had trapped Lun Yu without any hesitation, and felt somewhat embarrassed, "The situation was dire, I had no choice, I'm sorry, I'll pay double for the charcoal, and I won't expose you either, please just go."

Lun Yu's mouth twitched fiercely and he said, "You make it sound so easy, do you have any idea how badly you've ruined me?"

"Oh, how badly?" Gu Youyou really didn't know, she had been under confinement, cut off from news.

"You..." Lun Yu felt like stamping his foot, grinding his teeth he said, "At each of the four city gates, they installed huge cauldrons with water boiling day and night, every person entering or leaving the city must

wash their face first. My real face has even been drawn and posted on the walls at the city gates, how miserable do you think I am?"

Gu Youyou stared at him, dumbfounded.

This...

What should she say?

If she said he had it coming or that she couldn't help, it wouldn't seem righteous, especially after betraying him in a moment of desperation.

But his predicament... it really fitted the saying, whether you're plain-faced or not, just a basin of water is needed.

No matter how skilled you are at makeup and disguise, a single basin of water will reveal your true self.

"You must ensure my safety, hmph!" Lun Yu said arrogantly, crossing his legs and sitting in the cellar.

Gu Youyou frowned, thinking of a solution. If she let him stay in her courtyard, having a man there was definitely not going to work. After pondering, she said, "How about this, you apply some makeup to look like a woman, and tomorrow during 7-9 AM wait at the small gate in the southeast corner to be sold into servitude, I'll have someone purchase you to come into my residence as a maid."

Lun Yu curled his lip and said, "Then I guess I have no choice but to reluctantly become a maid!"

So he got a bargain and was still playing coy, huh?

...

The next morning, Gu Youyou sent Searcy out to buy a person.

"That freak from Qi Mountain who had cross-dressed last time, I did something wrong to him, and now he’s got nowhere to turn, I plan to save his life, and settle this karma."

Searcy looked at Gu Youyou in surprise and said, "You believe in karma?"

Gu Youyou said vaguely, "People who have died once tend to believe a bit in it, don’t ask now, just go, wait outside the small gate at the southeast corner, first bring him in. Remember, this time he’s disguised as a little maid, with your discernment you should be able to recognize him."

In order to avoid mistakes, Gu Youyou felt it was more reliable to have Searcy handle this matter than Xiang Chun, moreover, Lun Yu had just offended Xiang Chun the day before, if by some chance that maid suddenly got smart and noticed something off, it would be bad.

Following Gu Youyou’s instructions, Searcy took the silver and headed for the small gate in the southeast corner.

Pushing open the door, she began looking for the women selling themselves into slavery but saw not far away, opposite the side door of the house of a certain Minister Chen, a woman dressed in white hemp knelt on the ground, weeping and wailing, with a piece of grass stuck in her hair.

Chapter 935: Bought the Wrong One

That means selling oneself to bury one’s father.

Indeed, beside her was a roll of straw mat, which seemed to be wrapping around a person.

Searcy guessed that the pervert Gu Youyou wanted her to buy was him, truly perverse enough, acting out the scene of selling oneself for a father’s burial.

It looked quite real.

"Miss, oh, truly pitiable, how much silver to sell yourself?"

Searcy, noticing trouble, saw a managing old maid from Chen Family's side door inquiring about the girl's price, which would be bad if someone beat her to it.

She immediately stepped forward and threw the bag of silver Gu Youyou had given her in front of the girl, saying, "Come with me, the silver is yours."

The young miss's swollen eyes resembled walnuts, her act quite convincing. She was startled upon seeing such a large bag of silver, as if she couldn't believe someone was willing to pay so much for her.

And the old maid who had asked her price was also startled by Searcy's generous bag of silver, but after a moment's shock, she felt belittled.

Having silver makes you great, huh? Does the Chen Residence not have silver?

She said angrily, "Where did this wench come from, didn't you see I was here first? I've bought this girl, take your silver and leave quickly."

"I was the first to pay," Searcy said indifferently.

"I was about to take out the silver when you, this shameless wench, jumped the gun. I had already made a deal with this miss, and you're trying to force the sale."

Searcy harrumphed, glanced at the walls of Chen Residence, and said disdainfully, "Lin Residence wants to buy this servant, Chen Residence also wants to, so what you're saying is, I should go back and consult our Madam, right?"

"Lin..." The old maid glanced at a small door opening at the front of the alley and whispered, "You're from Lin Residence?"

"What else?" Searcy kicked the large bag of silver to show off her wealth and grandeur.

The Chen Family didn’t compare to Lin Family in grandeur, and Minister Chen was two ranks below Minister Lin in official status, naturally not daring to compete with Lin Residence for a maid.

She then said, "Old woman, I did not recognize Mount Tai. Miss, you paid first, so the girl is yours."

The maid wearily entered the house, cursing her bad luck.

Searcy, looking down, told the kneeling girl, "Come with me."

The girl stood up, bowed slightly, and said, "Thank you, Miss. Since I’ve accepted your silver, Yin Shuang is no longer her own. Miss, could you please wait, I need to bury my father first."

Searcy twitched the corners of her mouth and said, "That’s about enough, what are you still pretending for?"

The girl named Yin Shuang turned pale upon hearing this, "Miss, what are you talking about? Yin Shuang selling herself for a father’s burial is a big deal, how could it be pretend?"

Searcy sized up the girl, now detecting something amiss, could it be a mix-up?

But in this alley, there was only one selling herself, right?

It was supposed to be at the southeast corner’s small gate, no mistake.

At that moment, a panting woman ran up to her, crying out loudly, "Miss, my family was struck by plague and all have perished, with no choice I came to Beijing to seek relatives, but failing to find them, my money has run out. In absolute desperation, I’ve decided to sell myself into servitude, Miss, how about you give some silver and buy me?"

This sly and charming attitude, this was Lun Yu.

For the first time, Searcy felt what it was like to have her head spinning, ending up in a blunder.

And this Lun Yu, wasn't it agreed to be at 7-9 AM? Why didn't he come earlier?

Chapter 936: Living in Zhongcui Palace

Searcy held her forehead and sighed, "Lately, we've just happened to be short of people in the residence. You two go together. You first help this young lady bury her father, then come to the residence to report."

As soon as Searcy finished speaking, she turned her head and walked away, leaving Lun Yu petrified.

Wasn't it agreed that he would enter the residence to enjoy the life of a maid? Why was he asked to help someone with their father's funeral right off the bat?

Searcy's instructions regarding Gu Youyou were: "Bought two, one to sell herself for her father's burial, the other looking like an alluring and otherworldly woman. I think both of them seem rather peculiar, so I bought them together."

Having said that, she plunged headfirst into the pharmacy.

Gu Youyou: "..."

Couldn't you be a bit more considerate?

Fine, two it is, then. After all, one more or one less person in the Lin Residence doesn't make much difference.

...

On the tenth day of waiting outside the Sanqing Temple, Eunuch Wan finally saw Jin Zijin emerge.

Upon seeing him, Eunuch Wan almost burst into tears of relief.

Fortunately, his body was still strong, allowing him to see the Crown Prince accept the imperial decree in his lifetime.

When reading the sacred edict, Eunuch Wan's teeth were chattering. After announcing imperial decrees for many years, this was the first time he shakily completed reading one.

"Crown Prince, three days from now in Taihe Hall, with all the civil and military officials present, you absolutely must not be absent!"

His identity was special. If one were to talk about Tianzong's eldest spiritual brother, he was on par with the Princes who might ascend to the throne in the future. Thus, Eunuch Wan was unsure whether he might abandon his duties at that moment.

Having received the lustrous yellow imperial decree, Jin Zijin simply said, "Since I've accepted the decree, naturally I will not be absent."

After he finished speaking, he turned and went back.

"Ah, thank you, Your Highness, Crown Prince!" Eunuch Wan gratefully retreated, ready to report back to the palace.

Three days later, at the court assembly, it was Jin Zijin's first time standing there.

He was still dressed in Tianzong Dao Family attire, a white Daoist robe standing out starkly in the splendor of the grand hall.

The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne with a smile on his face.

"I have ascertained that Jin Yan is indeed the son of Empress Xiaochen. Previously, Jin Fengzhao was swapped by a treacherous person to disrupt the Imperial Family's lineage. Fortuitously, Jin Yan has returned to court, and his identity should be rectified; he is the Crown Prince."

All the ministers below chorused: "Congratulations to Your Majesty, congratulations to the Crown Prince!"

The Emperor laughed heartily, "My lords, please rise!"

With a wave of his hand, eunuchs hastily brought forward a tray carrying a set of Prince's court attire and some items that verified his identity.

"Ziln, even though you have come of age, we have not prearranged for a palace to be constructed outside for you. Your current identity is inappropriate to continue residing in Sanqing Temple. It is better to first reside within the palace."

"In the palace? That might be inconvenient!" Jin Zijin frowned as he spoke.

However, the Emperor said, "As a Prince, fate has played its hand, yet you have never lived within the palace walls. I have already had Zhongcui Palace prepared for you. You can enter the palace and live in Zhongcui Palace directly. Do not worry; it won't be for long. The existing residences outside the palace are slow to construct, but I have already ordered the refurbishment of the palace I lived in when I was Crown Prince. It will be restored in a few months."

Zhongcui Palace? Living in the former Crown Prince Residence after leaving home?

The faces of the court ministers all showed surprise. The Duke from the Ducal Residence had already changed color; Zhongcui Palace was the Crown Prince's palace, and the Crown Prince was to live there before reaching adulthood.

Back then, he dearly wished to send his grandson, the former Crown Prince, into Zhongcui Palace, but the plan never came to fruition even after the grandson left the palace to establish his own residence.

Therefore, to this day, no Prince has ever resided in this generation's Zhongcui

Chapter 937: Investigated Lotus Village

The residence where His Majesty used to live, although not necessarily reserved for the Crown Prince and not very large, held special significance.

Generally speaking, it either rewarded a Minister who had achieved great merit or was passed to a favored Prince. Similarly, King Jin had asked for it before leaving the palace but was refused by His Majesty.

King Jin's face turned pale, his eyes filled with bitterness as he stared at this suddenly emerged older brother. As soon as he returned, he had obtained something he had always wanted but never received. Was he now being called the First Prince, a title people had referred to him by for many years?

Why would he ignore the readily available position of State Preceptor and meddle in the court affairs instead?

Prince Qin's expression was much calmer, as if having one more or one less brother made no difference to him. Being illegitimate, it didn't matter much whether there was one legitimate brother above him or two.

Jin Zijin glanced at Ducal Residence's face, which was changing unpredictably, and said lightly with cupped hands, "Thank you for Father Emperor's grace!"

...

The people the Empress sent to Lotus Village returned, and upon hearing the news, her mood could not calm down for a long time.

She asked for King Jin to come to the palace to discuss matters.

"Mother Empress, what is so urgent that you summoned your son?"

These days, King Jin felt his consort was much more lively, and his mood had been good, even the bad feelings from the sudden appearance of an older brother, who took all the blessings, had disappeared.

But seeing his mother’s somewhat neurotic expression, he felt down again.

"Mother Empress, has something happened?"

The Empress motioned for him to come closer, saying, "Come here."

King Jin sat down next to the Empress on a stool, looking puzzled.

"Everyone leave." Afterward, the Empress waved her hand to clear the room of people.

She was in Kunning Palace, her own bedroom, where King Jin was summoned. The underfloor heating was very warm, and the Empress, dressed only in light spring clothing, found it just right.

King Jin, despite the snow, entered the palace and soon felt hot.

He took off his coat and, since there were no palace maids left in the hall, stood up to hang it on the dragon hook himself.

"I don’t know why, but the snow is particularly heavy this year. I thought it was turning to spring, but it snowed again," said King Jin.

The Empress’s face was stern as she said softly, "There are unusual signs in the sky, hence many troubles. My son, this year is a season full of troubles."

"Mother Empress, what exactly happened?" King Jin felt increasingly that something was not right with the Empress.

The Empress twirled a sharp hairpin in her hand, her gaze cold, "I feel that the Lin Family, or at least Lin Xingyi, might not truly be on our side."

"How could that be?" King Jin scoffed, "Qianqing is his most beloved daughter, the only legitimate lady of their family. If he is not with me, would he side with Jin Zijin and Jin Tingyu?"

The Empress was truly as sharp as a veteran, gently shaking her head, "No, Lin Xingyi is only loyal to His Majesty, he does not favor anyone. I thought with the connection of the Ducal Residence and your marriage to Qianqing, he would lean towards us. I was wrong."

Seeing the serious expression on the Empress's face, King Jin also put away his smile, his expression becoming solemn.

"Mother Empress, why would you suddenly think this way?"

The Empress said, "It's not sudden, but rather... I had someone visit Lin Xingyi's hometown a few days ago, to check on the Lin Family and the Gu Family. Lin Xingyi's branch had severed ties with the other members of the family in the older generation. It was Madam Lin who brought Lin Xingyi to the capital on her own. Their family doesn't have anything special. But that Gu Family... I discovered some interesting things..."

Chapter 938: What Was Found

She suddenly pricked her finger on the sharp hairpin in her hand.

King Jin hurriedly stood up, seeing that blood had already started to flow from the Empress's finger, he quickly called for someone.

The Empress stopped him, saying, "No need to call anyone, it's just a minor injury."

She wrapped her wound with her own handkerchief.

"How can Your Majesty's precious body be treated so hastily?", King Jin objected as he brought out some white cloth, meticulously cleaned the Empress's wound, and properly bandaged it up.

After bandaging, he saw the blood-beaded hairpin and slightly furrowed his brow.

He tossed the injurious hairpin to the side, sighing lightly, "Mother, why weren't you more careful? At first glance, this hairpin looks unsightly, but upon closer inspection, it's as sharp as a blade, too easily injuring someone. Mother, you shouldn't use it anymore. If you fancy this design, your son will find a craftsman to make you one."

A fierce look flashed in the Empress's eyes as she said indifferently, "Indeed, at first glance, it looks unattractive, but upon closer inspection... Hmph!"

"Mother, what is really going on?" The Empress seemed particularly different today.

"That Gu Youyou is just like this hairpin, unassuming in appearance. I thought she was just a poor relative of the Lin Family, but upon careful thought and investigation, she is indeed extraordinary."

"What has Mother discovered?" King Jin's brow twitched.

"Hmph!", the Empress coldly snorted, "She claims to be frail and sickly, but in fact, she is a 'medicine person' raised by the Dao Sect."

"A 'medicine person'?", King Jin didn't know what a medicine person was.

"My son need not understand, it's a matter for the Dao Sect. The Dao Sect isn't as clean as it appears on the surface, not detached from worldly affairs, they have too many unclean things internally. Gu Youyou has been raised as a medicine person since she was young, and I guess Lin Xingyi must also know some inside stories. He sends Silver to her every year, but the amount isn't much.

To say he cares about his niece, it seems he hasn't done enough, but to say he doesn't care, it would not go so far as to keep her in the Lin Family all this time. In my view, it's more like a cover-up.

What's stranger is that she only escaped because of Jin Zijin. Jin Zijin lived in Lotus Village for six years disguised as a common hunter, and everything was safe and sound until the last year when he took Gu Youyou out.

And he did so with the ceremony of a wedding. Of course, later they claimed that Jin Zijin did so to repay a life-saving debt to the Gu Family, Gu Feng, to treat Youyou's illness under disguise, to say they weren't really related.

But why did he rush to the Imperial Palace that day in Zhaoyang Hall? Because he got the news and came to rescue Youyou.

I don't believe Lin Xingyi knows nothing about these matters, hence he is not truly aligned with us."

Listening to the Empress say so much all at once, King Jin's mind couldn't quite make sense of it all.

The Empress, somewhat frustrated and stifled by her own son's lack of acumen, resignedly said, "I say all this, just to make a few points. First, the Lin Family and Gu Youyou staying with them—there's something wrong. Jin Zijin is not as he appears, not solely devoted to the Dao Family and disinterested in royal power. Just by the fact that he was able to enter the palace and rescue Youyou immediately, it shows that he has spies placed in the palace."

The Empress shifted her position and gently touched her injured finger, whispering, "To place spies right under my eyes, and I remain completely unaware... I can't tell whether he placed them after he came to the capital in recent years or had planned and planted them many years ago. In any case, this man poses a much greater threat to us than Sheng Qiaoyue and her son. In the future, you cannot simply focus your attention on Jin Tingyu; you must spend more effort on Jin Zijin."

Chapter 939: Gave Birth to a Fool

King Jin clenched his fists tightly, his heart seething with anger. Moments later, he gradually relaxed and smiled.

"Mother, rest assured, I am confident in dealing with him."

The Empress raised an eyebrow, "Oh? Has my son grown capable?"

"Mother, now that he has acknowledged his ancestors, he is no longer the elder brother of Tianzong. The current Jin Zijin is merely a lonely Prince. He has no connections among the court ministers and is clueless about court affairs. I think he is even inferior to Jin Tingyu."

"Hah..." The Empress felt a pang of pain in her heart upon hearing these words.

She thought to herself, having been so intelligent all her life, standing out among many sisters in her family, she had given birth to such a fool.

Fortunately, he wasn't completely useless.

She said indifferently, "Alright, continue to keep a close watch on Jin Tingyu."

As for Jin Zijin, she would handle him personally.

King Jin didn't say much and responded affirmatively.

"Ah, there are two more tasks for you to handle."

"Mother, what tasks?"

The Empress's expression darkened. "Deploy the Hidden Guard you have trained, as the Heavenly Master and the State Preceptor have disappeared, and everyone is searching. We cannot idle either. Jin Zijin once hid in Lotus Village under a false identity and lived as a hunter for six years. Last year, Tianzong and Xuanzong encountered a significant event precisely at the back mountain of Lotus Village, it would be best to find out what they were actually doing there.

The other matter... Qianqing had a good relationship with Gu Youyou before she was married. This woman is his weakness. If Qianqing wishes to visit her parental home, accompany her. You understand how to proceed discreetly, right?"

King Jin bowed and said, "Your son understands."

"Alright, I'm weary now, you may go."

King Jin stood up and bowed to leave, "Your son takes his leave."

The Empress waved her hand and propped her head, leaning against the back of her chair, her eyes closed, not speaking.

It seemed like she was resting.

However, King Jin re-entered the palace shortly after leaving.

The Empress opened her eyes, puzzled, "Xiaoran, is there anything else?"

With a solemn expression, King Jin spoke softly to the Empress, "Mother, just now you asked your son to investigate the Heavenly Master and the State Preceptor. Suddenly, I remembered something."

Seeing her son being so earnest for once, the Empress also grew serious.

"What is it?"

King Jin drew closer to the Empress, lowering his voice, "That day, the general of Yangguan City deployed troops to seal off Tianmen Mountain. No one could enter or leave without permission, yet they unexpectedly captured someone."

"Who?" the Empress frowned, her son’s words indicating that this person was not simple.

She had always been paying attention to these matters, yet she hadn’t received this news.

King Jin whispered, "They captured Madam Ru and a group of her subordinates."

"Madam Ru?" The Empress looked even more puzzled. "What was she doing in those deep mountains?"

This woman always gave her a very frail impression; she couldn’t imagine such a woman venturing into the deep mountains for nothing.

Could she be related to that mysterious matter with the Dao Family?

"Her people carried a coffin out; the coffin contained only a skeleton, and its identity remains unknown."

"Oh... a skeleton?" The Empress’s expression carried a hint of mystery.

King Jin said, "Madam Ru’s status is rather sensitive, so the general of Yangguan City didn’t publicize the incident. Instead, he secretly sent a confidential letter to the emperor. However, for some reason, the emperor suppressed it. If your son hadn’t arranged for people in Yangguan City, we would not know of this secretive matter either."

"My son is thoughtful," the Empress squinted her eyes, her expression even more enigmatically mysterious.

Chapter 940: It’s Time to Settle Down

"In the year of the princes’ rebellion, she was no fool, how could she be unaware of the trickery within? That Madam Ru who offered up the last will and testament to demonstrate her loyalty, how clean was she really? Or was she harboring a malicious heart, without a shred of cleanliness?"

"That year, it was rumored that the third Prince and his son had both disappeared; the fact that Madam Ru personally went to welcome them back meant it was surely one of those two."

"If she could know of such matters, how could the Emperor, intelligent as he is, not be aware?"

"Yet the imperial will is unfathomable, and she was no longer inclined to guess at his intentions."

"Now her greatest enemy had arrived."

...

"Family banquets in the Imperial Palace are rare occasions where everyone is able to sit together."

"They did not follow the common practice where men and women dine at separate tables; instead, the Empress Dowager, the Emperor, and the Empress sat at the head table, each at their own table, with the princes, princesses, and concubines seated below according to rank."

"With musical instruments and dancing to liven up the atmosphere, the banquet was much more festive and extravagant than those of ordinary households."

"It’s rare for our family to sit together like this; this time it feels like a true reunion." The Empress Dowager had aged, her legs not as steady, her eyesight not as clear, and she was particularly prone to being moved, her words soon accompanied by a stream of tears.

"The Emperor, seated beside her, consoled her, ’Mother, today is a day for happiness.’"

"Yes, yes, a happy day. Let’s all relax, there are no outsiders here, the dishes have been served, let’s eat and chat about family matters!" The Empress Dowager hurriedly wiped away her tears.

"As the music played and the dances went on, seeing the Empress Dowager, the Emperor, and the Empress all start to eat and drink with smiles on their faces, everyone else also let go of their reservations. Between toasting and passing cups, they paid their respects to the three esteemed elders seated above them, and also began to talk and laugh with those next to them."

"Jin Zijin, too, had to attend. He sat alone at the edge of a table, not drinking alcohol, but requesting a pot of tea instead."

"Since childhood, he had lived on Qi Mountain and was not fond of alcohol."

"Across from Lin Qianqing sat not Prince Qin’s official wife but his consort, Xie Qinyun. At the moment, Xie Qinyun was making faces at Lin Qianqing, impossible to ignore."

"Lin Qianqing looked at her in slight surprise, wondering why the official wife was not present at this family banquet which required her to be there, yet Xie Qinyun, the consort, had come instead."

"Above them, the Empress soon took note of this issue as well."

"She put down her wine cup, raising her voice slightly above the music, ’Why has Prince Qin’s wife not come today, instead Consort Xie is here?’"

"Though the Empress’s voice was not loud, everyone seated had heard it. The Empress Dowager and the Emperor both looked over in this direction!"

"Since the Empress had brought it up, Prince Qin naturally could not overlook it. He stood up, pulling Xie Qinyun with him, and replied with respect, ’Answering Mother, my wife is unwell and resting at home. Ayun likes liveliness, so I brought her to see.’"

"The Empress Dowager was in good spirits today and quickly replied with a smile, ’It’s nice to have a consort here, better than being alone.’ Her gaze inadvertently swept toward Jin Zijin, who sat drinking by himself without uttering a word, and she felt another wave of sadness. She said, ’Xiaoran and Tingyu are both married now. Zijin, as the eldest, is already past thirty, yet he remains alone. Emperor, this is not good for the heir.’"

"The Emperor whispered back to her, ’The methods of the Dao Family have the power to prolong life. Mother, look at the State Preceptor and the Heavenly Master, one over eighty and the other over a hundred, yet they are healthier than most young men. Zijin has been with the Heavenly Master of Qi Mountain since he was young, learning the natural ways of the Dao; we cannot judge him by the age of normal men!’"

"And yet... after all, he is past thirty, he used to cultivate the Dao, but now he does not. He is of an age when he should marry."