Farmhouse 991

Chapter 991: The Grand Wedding

The scorching sun blazed, and she sat in the palanquin, longing to lift the red veil to catch a glimpse of Jin Zijin on horseback. He, today, must be burning with a passion fiercer than the fiery sun itself.

Yet thinking of how much he valued every detail of the wedding, she decided against it.

It wouldn't do for her to undermine his efforts while he was setting the stage at the front.

When in Rome, do as the Romans do. Although the tedious formalities of this wedding method were headache-inducing, on the very wedding rites she equally cherished, she could endure anything.

Their wedding location was not Jin Zijin's former residence, Zhongcui Palace, but the newly refurbished former Crown Prince Residence, now the residence of the first prince.

Once they were married, Jin Zijin would be titled king, and by then, the nameplate would have to be changed.

The Emperor had few sons, only three. The rest were daughters; therefore, for the weddings of his three sons, he personally sat at the upper seat, waiting for his sons and daughters-in-law to kneel and bow.

Three kneels and nine bows later, guided by Xiaobian, who was holding the Dragon and Phoenix Candles, they held the flower ball and entered the bridal chamber.

As they nearly reached the chamber, Gu Youyou felt an unusual sensation under her feet.

She looked down to see a sack made of hemp lying on the ground. There were five of them in total, and they had to walk on these hemp sacks.

This was said to signify the continuation of the family lineage, with five sacks representing five generations under one roof.

Considering that people in ancient times married quite early, seeing five generations together wasn't uncommon, providing one didn't die young.

All these ceremonial rituals had been waived for their first wedding.

That time, she was directly carried through the door by him, tossed onto the wooden bed, and then he went out to drink and feast.

Jin Zijin had returned her to the nuptial room and then went out again, waiting until it got dark.

"Miss Gu, are you hungry? The Crown Prince may not come for a while. Shall I discreetly get you something to eat?"

What was a little hunger? Gu Youyou took this wedding seriously.

She replied, "I'm not hungry. You go down too and check on Searcy and the others, don't cause any trouble."

She was going to get married, naturally arranging for her people to come over in advance.

Only Searcy's identity was sensitive, and she was genuinely worried that she would cause unnecessary trouble if seen by the Lu Family.

On an ordinary day, she, Gu Youyou, wasn't one to fear trouble, but on this particular day, she did not wish for any mishaps.

"Alright, I will go check on them."

On the table, a pair of Dragon and Phoenix Candles flickered gently. The sun set in the west, and it became later and later. After a long while, she finally heard the voice of Jin Zijin.

"Everyone, leave; I won’t need any attendance tonight."

"Yes, Your Highness, the Crown Prince."

As his footsteps neared, Gu Youyou’s heart grew more tense.

She felt her face might be getting hot.

Even though they were already very familiar with each other, she began to feel a shyness common to newlyweds.

Right, they were newlyweds, after all. The previous occasion didn’t count since they hadn’t even paid respects to heaven and earth.

They hadn’t even consummated the marriage yet.

Oh, now it was time for the bridal chamber.

Ah, how nerve-wracking.

He picked up a red wedding handkerchief with exquisite embroidery and gently lifted her bright red veil.

Her cheeks, rosy and delicate, suddenly appeared before his eyes.

Seeing her so different for the first time, Jin Zijin paused slightly.

"Your makeup today is quite special," he said.

Gu Youyou felt unbearably embarrassed by her lack of composure, secretly pinching herself and then flashing him a radiant smile, saying, "Change it to a word that makes me happy."

Chapter 992: What Position?

Jin Zijin’s expression darkened, and he lowered his head, then reached out to lift her delicate chin.

"Especially... beautiful!" His voice was hoarse, laced with a hint of ambiguity.

The atmosphere between the two shifted in an instant.

She retracted her smile and her throat moved slightly in nervousness as she took a step backward.

He caught this subtle detail, his eyes darkening further.

"Weren’t you quite capable before? Why are you scared now?"

Gu Youyou’s mouth twitched as if she wanted to slap away his mood-killing words.

"Scared of who? I’ve prepared silver needles, in case you can’t handle it, I could just... mmm..."

Jin Zijin kissed her fiercely on the lips, finding her mouth cuter when it wasn’t talking.

The infuriating words she could have said were swallowed back down, and a muffled sound of resistance emanated from her mouth.

It was as if an aphrodisiac swiftly fermented between them, he gently sucked on her lips, slowly easing the pressure.

Kissing her was routine for him, but tonight’s kiss felt different, an internally glowing warmth kindled deep within, hotter and more unbearable than the heat of the Zhuzhao Pearl within her body, seeking a quick release for this wave of heat.

"Youyou!" He released her and pushed the panting girl onto the nuptial bed.

He towered over her, their eyes close to one another. In the bridal chamber, the robust Dragon and Phoenix Candles lit up the room, allowing them to see themselves in each other's eyes.

The girl blooming with the ardor of spring was particularly enchanting. Gu Youyou's eyes, brimming with passion, were seductively soft, each glance scraping against his heart, making him want to devour her immediately, and yet he was somewhat at a loss.

It was Youyou's first time; should he be rough or gentle?

She seemed to like it rough, but that would certainly hurt her, he thought it best to take things slowly, gently approaching her.

In his mind, Jin Zijin was imagining various positions, trying to pick one that balanced passion with tenderness.

Meanwhile, Gu Youyou's desire began to fade amidst his ever-changing and hesitant gaze.

She stared at him with wide eyes; he was visibly moved but still slow to act. What was he thinking?

Could he have any reservations?

That couldn't be; what reservations could he have at such a time?

With these thoughts, her lust turned into frustration, uncontrollable.

Who cared about being shy now?

The meat that was before her had flown away several times already; this time, she would not let him escape no matter what.

Gu Youyou assertively pushed Jin Zijin away, then flipped him over and pinned him down, starting to tear at his clothes.

Tonight, she would be the aggressor, determined to have him completely.

This was the only thought in the fiery heart of Gu Youyou.

"Hey, Youyou!" Jin Zijin came back to his senses, guarding his clothes.

He felt something was off; wasn't it his role to tear off clothes?

But seeing her ferocious, wolf-like expression, he felt even more bewildered.

"Youyou, take it easy, the clothes will tear."

"I'll compensate you with a carriage tomorrow." Gu Youyou continued undressing him, finally managing to rip off his clothes.

Chapter 993: Can't Wake Up in the Morning

She leered at him with a lascivious grin and proudly declared, "Little guy, don't even think about escaping from my Mount Wuzhi tonight. Be smart and surrender obediently, or else if I accidentally hurt you, don't blame me for not being gentle."

"Youyou, don't add fuel to the fire!" Jin Zijin sighed helplessly, "I just wanted the atmosphere to be better."

Gu Youyou: "..."

How was she supposed to know he was imagining such things? She thought he was reluctant again.

Her movements stiffened.

Jin Zijin lay flat on the bed, lifted his hands, and cushioned them behind his head, presenting himself for her pleasure with a submissive look.

He curled up the corners of his lips and chuckled softly, "Look at how anxious you are."

Damn...

You repressed man!

Gu Youyou, feeling embarrassed, lost her balance and fell onto him.

Jin Zijin chuckled softly, comforting her.

The night before, Gu Youyou's aunt had sneakily delivered to her an ancient, hardcover edition of the Spring Palace Map, along with an old, bashful woman to explain it.

Following the old cliché, the old woman would get more and more enthusiastic as she spoke, while the girl would blush more and more, and in extreme cases, might even burst into tears.

But the old woman had misjudged, vastly underestimating Gu Youyou's thick skin. In the end, it was Gu Youyou who gave the old woman a lecture on physiological sex education, turning the old woman's face alternately red with embarrassment and pale with awkwardness.

When she left, her expression was as if she had seen a ghost.

Madam Lin waited outside the courtyard and asked her how it went. Did she understand?

She said, "Your young mistress is like a goddess descending to earth; Madam, you worry too much."

Madam Lin’s face was a sight to behold.

Had it been any other compliment, she would have been very pleased, but what was the meaning of being praised for this?

Gu Youyou always had to have the last word, and she retorted immediately.

"If you don’t understand, just say so. I can teach you!"

She felt Jin Zijin’s thick skin wasn’t as thick as that old woman’s last night.

After hearing this, Jin Zijin’s eyes darkened. He sat up straight, firmly pulling her onto his lap and said, "It seems I really have worried too much!"

When she woke up, the bed was no longer occupied by just her, rare mornings when she could see him lying beside her.

On countless nights they had embraced in their sleep, but when she woke up in the morning, he was always gone, leaving her feeling bereft, unsure if it had all been just a dream.

Now, she could turn her head and see his face, brimming with a gentle smile; this was real.

Gu Youyou slowly moved closer and gently kissed his face.

Jin Zijin, whose eyes hadn’t opened yet, immediately pulled her into an embrace and whispered without opening his eyes, "Sleep, you can rest easy; we don’t need to go to the palace to greet the Empress."

Gu Youyou paused slightly and said, "Is that really okay?"

According to the rules, they should have gotten up early to go to the palace and present tea to the Empress.

"It’s exhausting to keep up appearances," he said.

Since that was the case, Gu Youyou didn’t know what else to say.

Jin Zijin had reached a point where he didn’t even want to pretend anymore.

Gu Youyou remembered that Jin Zijin had always been good at keeping up appearances; it seemed the Empress had disgusted him to the extreme, to a point where he didn’t even want to pretend.

"Do we still need to meet the Emperor then?"

Last time Gu Youyou saw that Jin Zijin didn’t seem to dislike his father as much as she had thought; they appeared rather harmonious.

"No need," said Jin Zijin upon hearing this. "Both of them are the same."

Hearing such words, Gu Youyou was stunned for a moment.

The sky was already bright, and her body still felt extremely lethargic.

Squinting her eyes, Gu Youyou unconsciously fell asleep again.

She was a disciplined person who seldom indulged in sleeping in, let alone continuing to sleep after waking up late.

Jin Zijin was even more disciplined than Gu Youyou; he had never had such a relaxed moment in his life, so he too continued to sleep in.

Outside, the maids waiting to serve their masters were a sight to behold; breakfast time had passed, and it was almost time for lunch. Why hadn't they called for service yet?

Warm water was replaced again and again; their legs had gone numb from standing.

"Move aside, everyone. The master hasn't called yet, what are you all doing crowding the doorway?" Xiang Chun, as the most capable maid at the mistress's side in this residence, straightened her back, trying not to let the other maids in the house look down on her.

She knew that the maids by this mistress were not like ordinary maids; they were all palace maidens brought from the palace, always deeming themselves superior.

The maid holding the basin looked disdainfully at Xiang Chun and huffed, "This is the etiquette that must be adhered to. What would a disrespectful girl like you know? If you don't understand, just stay out."

Indeed, they were very impolite to her.

Xiang Chun, unfazed, countered with her hands on her hips, "I may not know what the rules are, but I know how to make the Prince's wife comfortable. Standing around the doorway like this will make our mistress uncomfortable, understand?"

This was something Gu Youyou had told her before; she informed her that the maids in this residence were all palace maidens from the palace, suggesting she deflate their arrogance.

As Xiang Chun reasoned, Gu Youyou guessed that among these maids were people from the Empress, not all entirely trustworthy.

Yue Rujing looked over from a distance, petting Abao's soft fur and sighed softly, "It's about time the master had a lazy morning; he's still not up yet."

Chapter 994: Blocking the Door Early in the Morning

Searcy came from behind, glanced at Yue Rujing, and walked past him, heading straight for the new house of Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin.

"Hey, stop." Yue Rujing stopped her.

"What?" Searcy stopped and asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You can’t go now, they haven’t gotten up yet," Yue Rujing said, somewhat embarrassed.

Searcy looked at the sun high in the sky and muttered softly, "Why aren’t they up yet? She’s not that kind of person."

She had urgent business with Gu Youyou.

So, she continued forward after speaking.

"Hey!" Yue Rujing continued to block her, chuckling, "Things are different today, young lady, you don’t understand, do you?"

"I don’t understand?" As far as Searcy was concerned, there was nothing she didn’t know.

"It must be that lover who has thrown her off balance. She definitely shouldn’t grow a lazy disposition because of that," Searcy said, then pushed past Yue Rujing and strode toward the new house.

Yue Rujing’s mouth twitched, and he stood there stunned, twitching again.

Gu Youyou herself was a remarkable oddity, but why were the women around her like this?

Actually calling her husband a lover?

This is unbearable...

"Hey, hey, stop! They are husband and wife."

"Hey, hey, did you hear? They are newlyweds!"

"My senior brother isn’t the type you imagine; if anyone’s negligent, it’s because of Gu Youyou."

"Come on, Abao, let’s follow her."

Since Madam Lin didn’t allow big dogs at Lin Residence, Abao had been following Yue Rujing since they left, becoming as close as cross-species best friends.

With all the noise outside, how could they sleep?

Gu Youyou stirred restlessly and drew circles on his chest with her pale fingers.

Jin Zijin grabbed her restless hand, frowned, and said unpleasantly,

"There’s really no peace anywhere."

After speaking, he sat up and yelled to the people outside, "Prepare the warm water for the bath."

Finally, the people inside were up, and the crowd outside stopped making noise.

Searcy sat casually in the outer room chair and said to the stunned maid, "What are you stunned for, go in with the water."

"Ha..." Yue Rujing coldly laughed while sitting aside.

This woman was strange; he needed to keep an eye on her.

The maids looked at each other, this wasn’t quite what they had anticipated, but they quickly adapted, replacing the basin with large buckets, and carried bucket after bucket of hot water to the bathroom at the back of the room.

The bathroom had two doors, one entering from the bedroom and the other for the maids to use in their duties.

Soon, the sound of splashing water filled the air, and the tub was quickly filled.

"Should we go out and handle them first? Both Searcy and Yue Rujing are outside," Gu Youyou said with a face red enough to bleed, this was embarrassingly awkward.

How could those two be so inconsiderate, coming to block the door of someone’s bridal room early in the morning?

Jin Zijin’s expression was also not good. He whispered softly, "Never mind them, come, let’s go for a bath."

After speaking, Jin Zijin picked her up and carried her into the back bathroom.

When Xiang Chun returned, she saw this scene: Searcy and Yue Rujing were sitting in the outer hall, while the waiting maids stood in a row like they were waiting to interrogate prisoners.

As a loyal servant, she firmly couldn’t let these two inexplicably block the door.

With a serious face, she slightly bowed and said, "Princely Heir, this is not quite appropriate..."

Seeing Abao sitting next to Yue Rujing, she felt somewhat intimidated, so she kept some distance.

Chapter 995: Too Embarrassing

Yue Rujing turned her gaze toward Searcy.

Xiang Chun was somewhat fearful of her and shrank her neck, mustering her courage to say, "Searcy, do you have some urgent matter that you must come looking for Miss Gu at this time?"

"Can you even understand if I tell you?" Searcy disdainfully looked at her and said irritably.

Xiang Chun's face flushed with embarrassment as she choked, "I may not understand, but I know it's not right for you to block the way here now."

"Oh, oh, haven't seen you for a few days and you've gotten braver?" Searcy said in surprise.

As the noisy arguing was truly unseemly, Yue Rujing had to stand up and say, "It's time for lunch, why don't we go back and eat first? If there's a pressing matter regarding Gu Youyou, you should fill your stomach first, right?"

Right then, Searcy's stomach growled, since due to this bothersome matter, she hadn't even eaten breakfast.

Seeing that the two people in the room wouldn't be coming out from their love bath anytime soon, Searcy could only very unhappily go back to eat.

Yue Rujing also left with Abao, leaving Xiang Chun awkwardly standing on the spot.

What kind of situation was this?

After half an hour of fussing, they finally came out and changed into clean clothes, and Gu Youyou was too embarrassed to look anyone in the eye again.

There were eight maids tending to her, adding Xiang Chun made nine.

This damn Xiang Chun kept staring at her, barely holding back her laughter. Taking advantage of when others were not paying attention, she secretly said to Gu Youyou, "Miss Gu, this maid will certainly report truthfully to Madam and the Old Madam, to put their minds at ease."

"Xiang Chun, you dare?" Gu Youyou threatened, "Dare to talk nonsense? I'll hand you over to Searcy for some training."

Dressed neatly, Jin Zijin glanced back at her with the corners of his mouth slightly turned up.

A woman's hair ornamentation was quite complicated and took a long time to set right.

However, Gu Youyou was willing to put up her long hair for him.

It had been a long time since they had sat at the same table as husband and wife, sitting opposite and dining together, long enough that they had almost forgotten what that felt like.

Jin Zijin sent all the servants out of the house, leaving just the two of them in the room, which made the atmosphere just right.

Jin Zijin picked out her favorite fish for Gu Youyou, knowing what kind of fish she liked to eat. For this, he even personally guided the chef many times to get the taste to his satisfaction.

Spicy and numbing, just the way she liked it.

Gu Youyou's face lit up with surprise, and naturally, she enjoyed this meal immensely.

But during this time, the chefs were not supposed to use chili peppers in dishes, achieving this flavor was the real challenge.

She asked in surprise, "Did you have the chef prepare it this way?"

Jin Zijin's dining movements were elegant, he hummed softly and said, "I remembered you liked this flavor, using this herb to season it."

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "It’s not just an herb, it’s an important spice. Once you like it, you can’t ever forget its taste." Gu Youyou picked up a piece of fish and placed it in Jin Zijin’s bowl, saying, "You should try it too. Now that the poison in your body is gone, you don’t have to eat so blandly."

"Okay," he said with a smile.

A maid outside said, "Prince, Princess, Miss Searcy requests an audience."

Gu Youyou furrowed her brows and said, "No, tell her I will not see anyone these days."

Chapter 996: Searcy’s Urgent Matter

Can’t people just live a little in their own world anymore?

Searcy was anxious to see me, I knew it the moment she blocked the door.

The maid outside spoke with difficulty, "But Miss Searcy is very adamant and insists on seeing you."

Gu Youyou frowned deeply, put down her chopsticks, and said to Jin Zijin, "If it were up to me, really, nobody could handle her. You keep eating, I’ll be back in a moment."

Just to avoid being constantly disturbed every other day.

"Go ahead!" Jin Zijin still looked as gentle as ever, showing no sign of anger.

Outside in the courtyard was Searcy’s resentful face. She had been blocked by Jin Zijin’s people from entering, and upon seeing Gu Youyou come out, she was infuriated.

"Hmph, lust blinds the wise."

Gu Youyou stumbled and nearly took a fall.

"Bring her in," Gu Youyou said indifferently.

In a side room, Gu Youyou sat down, resting her arms on the armrest, and after sending the maids away, she asked, "What urgent matter do you have that can't wait for me to get married in peace? Is there anything more urgent than my own wedding? I am already in my twenties, just getting married now, do you think that was easy for me?"

"It's all the trouble you caused me," Searcy said irritably. "The last time you rendered King Jin impotent but made me treat him with acupuncture. Since then, whenever he sees me, he's like a cat that's seen a fish. Yesterday, he got drunk and went mad in the backyard, almost violating me. If I hadn't knocked him out with a needle, I might have lost my chastity by now."

Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow; she had anticipated that Searcy might run into trouble yesterday, but she thought it would be with the Lu Family, not King Jin.

Last time, Gu Youyou went to Lin Qianqing's flower appreciation event and was almost tricked by King Jin. In retaliation, she turned the tables on him and left the mess for Searcy to deal with, never expecting to cause Searcy such a rotten peach blossom (trouble).

"What do you want me to do?" Gu Youyou asked playfully, feeling a bit like she was enjoying a disaster.

Searcy had really met her nemesis.

Searcy said, "It's your mess, so naturally you should solve it. I don't care, just deal with King Jin's issue, or I'll spread the word about your impotence curse on him. The first to know will be the eldest Prince, and he'd surely love to hear such gossip about his new bride."

"Heh..." Gu Youyou laughed. "Zijin would just clap and cheer if he knew!"

Searcy scowled and said, "Anyway, find a solution, or I'll just poison King Jin and end it all."

Gu Youyou's mouth twitched; she believed Searcy was capable of such an act.

Joking aside, King Jin was the lifeline of the Empress and the Ducal Residence. If their lifeline were cut, they'd turn into mad dogs out for blood, and the whole Zhuzhao Country would fall into chaos.

Gu Youyou sighed and said helplessly, "Just hide here in the residence, don't go anywhere, and he won't be able to do anything to you."

After all, everyone still needed to maintain appearances publicly.

Searcy remained silent while Gu Youyou added, "Actually, we're in need of a coachman. In a few days, I'll have someone talk to the Gui family outside the city to see if they're willing to hire a professional coachman for a high salary."

Searcy's eyes lit up, but she still huffed, "What kind of professional coachman would they have? Someone like Gui Yunxi, who can drive a carriage into a ditch?"

"That's because he was so hungry he was seeing stars."

Gu Youyou had indeed heard about Searcy's notorious treatment of her slaves.

"Whatever, it's your Silver being spent," Searcy said irritably.

Then she stood up and left the courtyard.

Chapter 997: He Will Not Enter the Palace to Request a Title

Gu Youyou sighed with relief before continuing her search for Jin Zijin.

She had managed to send Searcy away.

However, Searcy had shifted from working undercover to openly serving as a doctor at Jisheng Hall; suddenly not showing up would likely cause issues at Jisheng Hall again.

It seemed necessary to resolve the matter with King Jin as soon as possible.

...

In the Crown Prince Residence, the maids included spies for the Empress, and their every move quickly reached the Empress' ears, including King Jin's interest in a female doctor close to Gu Youyou.

"Bring King Jin to me," the Empress commanded furiously, often losing her composure since Jin Zijin's return to court.

The Empress had risen early that day, expecting Gu Youyou to visit the palace to offer her greetings and tea. Instead, she learned that both of them had only gotten out of bed at noon. Greetings with tea? Nonsense, they did not regard her as their mother and had no intention of offering tea.

A running eunuch had already left the palace to find King Jin, as Lady Li whispered to the Empress.

"No way. The Crown Prince was supposed to come to the palace today to request his title, a matter of great importance. How could he sleep until the sun was high in the sky?"

"Hmph, request his title?" the Empress scoffed. "The Emperor has already honored King Jin and Prince Qin. What more can be bestowed upon him? As the legitimate eldest son, he cannot be given a title lower than his younger brothers. Aside from the title of Crown Prince, there isn't likely anything else that would catch his eye."

Lady Li, startled, found the Empress' reasoning sound.

Otherwise, why would he abandon his senior brother duties in the Tianzong and return to be a prince?

Of course, Lady Li was aware of matters unearthed in Lotus Village; it seemed Jin Zijin could no longer endure solitude and wanted to marry.

Thinking this, her aged face broke into a reminiscent smile, and she flattered the Empress: "Your Majesty, since he cannot bear the solitude and seeks common pleasures, why not cater to his

preferences? There are so many young ladies in Beijing. As the nation's mother, it is natural for you to take extra care in arranging marriages for the Imperial sons."

The Empress, remembering a report from a Palace Attendant that embarrassed her, agreed with Lady Li's logic.

However, by tradition, a chief wife must be in the palace for a month before a consort can be married, and a consort must be in the palace for a month before taking concubines. Thus, within a month, she would have enough time to find a woman to trouble Gu Youyou.

Soon, King Jin arrived, still looking unwell from the previous night's drinking.

"Mother, for what reason have you summoned your son?"

"Kneel," the Empress commanded sternly.

There were no outsiders in the hall, only the Empress, Lady Li, and King Jin.

King Jin sobered up considerably at the Empress' shout.

"Mother, what has upset you?"

The Empress said, "I heard you've taken an interest in a female doctor who often visits Jisheng Hall. Is she one of Gu Youyou's associates?"

King Jin's expression darkened, his mind racing.

Who had told Mother? His own people were very loyal; it was unlikely this information had leaked from them.

Could it be that he had drunk too much yesterday at Jin Zijin’s residence, behaved inappropriately, and been spotted by a spy Mother had placed there?

"Is it true?" the Empress pressed, seeing his evasive look.

"No!" King Jin replied. "Recently, I fell ill, and the Imperial Physician was helpless; out of necessity, I visited Jisheng Hall. My multiple visits to Jisheng Hall were solely to seek treatment. I did not inform Mother to spare her worry."

The Empress’s demeanor softened somewhat, and she signaled to Lady Li with her eyes.

Understanding, Lady Li bowed and exited.

Chapter 998: Memorial to the Emperor

Even though it was her own son, the Empress did not trust him, and immediately sent Mama Li to verify with the Imperial Medical Bureau.

King Jin breathed a sigh of relief because the matter was indeed true, and he was not afraid of having the Empress send someone to inquire.

The Empress watched King Jin and said indifferently, "Xiaoran, remember, you are of noble birth, and those lowly women are not even fit to be your concubines. If you fancy a woman, you can choose any unmarried lady in Beijing, but you mustn’t pick up some lowly woman to bring back, much less a female physician from Gu Youyou’s side."

King Jin bowed his head and said, "Your son will heed Mother’s instructions."

He was very aware of the Empress’s decisiveness; only by complying with her could he calm this situation down.

...

After several serene days spent just with each other, filled with warmth, romance, and sweetness.

She would personally tie up his hair, and he would try his hand at drawing her eyebrows.

In leisure moments, they would sip tea and play a game of chess, discussing strategies as they faced the board.

Gu Youyou was a special woman, and only someone like her could talk about men without falling short.

In the study, Jin Zijin was reading memorials, while Gu Youyou stood before the window painting.

She painted a summer dress with such ethereal grace that it seemed to float enchantingly. After blowing the ink dry, she turned to look at Jin Zijin.

"Why are you reading memorials too?" Are you looking at them at home as well?

Without taking his eyes off the memorial, Jin Zijin replied softly, "Wan Decheng sent them to me, asking me to read them."

Gu Youyou knew that the ’he’ he referred to was the Emperor. It was common for Princes to read memorials, but they were usually called to the Imperial Study, and after reading one, the Emperor would question them on the spot.

But to have a whole basketful delivered to Jin Zijin for him to read at home was quite unusual.

"What does the Emperor mean by this?" Gu Youyou couldn’t help but ask.

Jin Zijin put down one memorial, annotated it, picked up another, and said, "He wants me to clean up his mess."

Upon seeing this particular memorial, his brow furrowed intensely.

Noticing his change in expression, Gu Youyou quickly asked, "What’s the matter?"

After asking, she moved beside him to look together.

The memorial was from Yangguan City, detailing how ongoing heavy rains had caused a flash flood, particularly in Qingshui Town, which had been engulfed by the deluge.

Countless people had died or been injured, and those who survived were displaced...

Recently, Gu Youyou had received the account books from Qin Changlin as well as a secret letter of well-being from Qingshui Town.

"When did this happen?" Gu Youyou asked anxiously.

Jin Zijin said, "It was probably around the time we got married."

That meant it had already been about ten days.

The flood in Yangguan City made communication difficult, so it took ten days for news to reach Beijing, which was no easy feat.

Jin Zijin set the memorial on the table and began to grind the ink.

Gu Youyou took it and read carefully.

She said, "This must be handled as soon as possible, the surviving people must have fled everywhere."

"Yes," Jin Zijin said: "The fastest ones should be nearing Beijing’s borders by now. According to previous practices, they will likely be denied entry to the city; many people will starve to death outside its walls. Fortunately, it is not winter, or they would freeze to death outside the city."

Gu Youyou took a deep breath; she naturally understood how the authorities of this era treated refugees.

It wasn't that they were heartless; in an era of scarce resources, a country didn't have the capacity to save large numbers of refugees.

Gu Youyou said, "I have to go out, to save as many as I can; at the very least, I must find the people of the Gu Family."

Chapter 999: Competing to Achieve Merits

"Wait, I'll go with you," Jin Zijin said, picking up a brush and quickly writing something.

"I'll go prepare first," Gu Youyou said.

After writing several letters, one of which he carefully folded and put into the memorial, he got up and walked out.

Gu Youyou was a person of decisive action, instructing Xiang Chun as they walked.

"Go to Gui Yunxi, inform him that I need to make a long trip, and ask him to prepare a larger carriage."

"Yin Shuang, prepare the items necessary for the journey, remember to pack extra clothing and food, focusing mainly on substantial flatbreads to sustain us."

"Searcy, make a trip over to Jisheng Hall, ask Shopkeeper Hu to prepare some emergency medicines, easy to carry, mainly for treating colds. Also, you'll come with me."

"After I leave, keep a low profile at home and take good care of it."

Jin Zijin was also preparing to leave, equally efficiently and orderly. Soon, everything was ready, and they both boarded the carriage.

The news quickly reached the Imperial Palace.

The Emperor, holding the memorial sent back by Jin Zijin, frowned and remained silent for a long time.

Eunuch Wan stepped forward to advise, "Emperor, the Crown Prince personally rushing to the disaster area to empathize with the people's plight is a good thing."

"But since his grand wedding, he has not entered the palace again."

Eunuch Wan's mouth twitched, saying, "But the Crown Prince has seriously read these memorials. His absence doesn't deter significant affairs. It's normal for young men to indulge in the pleasures of spring post-marriage."

The Emperor was amused by Eunuch Wan's words, looking meaningfully at him, "A eunuch like you also knows about indulging in pleasures of spring?"

"This... Heh heh, I might not have eaten pork, but I've seen pigs walk, Your Majesty jokes at my expense."

"Ha ha..." The Emperor laughed heartily, sitting back on the large Dragon Throne and said, "Since he has gone to empathize with the common people, I shall make his mission officially recognized. Dispatch someone from the palace to summon Jie Huanzhi. Disaster relief is a mentally and physically taxing task, and among those at court, he is the idlest. Let him assist the Crown Prince in this task."

"Yes, Emperor."

Eunuch Wan took the Emperor's decree to summon Jie Huanzhi from outside the palace, and the Emperor's expression once again became serious.

He whispered softly to himself, "You are reluctant to enter the palace, but have you guessed that I plan to name you as the Crown Prince? So, you actually don't want to be the Crown Prince. Sigh! I spent the first half of my life scheming for the throne, and the second half... for whom?"

...

King Jin and the Protector of the Nation rushed into the palace to see the Emperor. The Protector of the Nation requested a decree for King Jin to leave the palace and face the disaster situation in Yangguan City directly.

The reason being, no sooner had news of the flood reached Beijing than the Crown Prince had hurriedly left the city. King Jin’s most significant rival right now was Jin Zijin; how could he fall behind?

Their speed entering the palace matched that of the Emperor summoning Jie Huanzhi into the palace.

"Huanzhi, I summoned you to discuss the flood disaster in Yangguan City. What urgent matter has Xiaoran and the Protector of the Nation come into the palace for?"

"Emperor, this old servant came for the same matter regarding Yangguan City," the Protector of the Nation hastily bowed and said.

"Please rise and speak, Protector of the Nation."

He was another rare old man in Zhuzhao Country, the Empress’s paternal grandfather, now over eighty years old.

Despite his advanced age, he couldn’t keep up with the old men from the Dao Family; he was out of breath from moving fast, and the Emperor had someone quickly offer him a seat.

"Protector of the Nation, what are your thoughts on the flood disaster in Yangguan City?"

The Protector of the Nation, sitting on a stool, cupped his hands towards the Emperor, "Emperor, I believe the flood disaster in Yangguan City is no trivial matter and must be given significant attention. It is not sufficient for just the Crown Prince to go. King Jin must also go..."

Chapter 1000: Encountering Yuancheng

The lengthy discourse of the Protectorate Duke was simply that Jin Zijin had returned from abroad, and furthermore, his previous identity was indeed a member of the Dao Family. His disaster relief efforts might well lead the common people to attribute this merit to the Dao Family, which had nothing to do with the Imperial Court in the end.

After all, Jin Zijin's influence within the Dao Family far exceeded that of the Imperial Court.

But King Jin was different. He was the mutual child of the Emperor and Empress, of unmatched noble status. It would be a grand display of the Emperor's grace for King Jin to make an appearance, truly representing the Imperial Family and the Imperial Court.

The Emperor, seeming enlightened, listened to the Protectorate Duke finish his lengthy speech, then nodded, saying, "The Protectorate Duke has deep foresight and speaks very sensibly. Let Xiaoran go together with Huanzhi for disaster relief, and if they encounter Zijin..." The Emperor sighed and said, "If they meet him, have him return at once!"

The Protectorate Duke's concerns were not unknown to the Emperor; however, it was not yet the time to compete with them for merits.

Moreover, the severity of this disaster meant the merits were not so easily contended for.

Nonetheless, they were indeed mistaken. Jin Zijin had no intentions of competing for merit; he was merely accompanying his newlywed wife to fetch her maternal relatives.

...

Along the way, they encountered many disaster victims, and if Jin Zijin's companions had not been highly skilled in martial arts, it was likely their caravan would have already been looted several times over.

Gu Youyou inquired about the whereabouts of the Gu Family all along the way. After three days, having come across countless disaster victims, they still had no news of them.

On the fourth day, however, they encountered the fleeing Yuancheng.

Yuancheng was originally a graceful young scholar, exuding a strong bookish aura, but the escape had made him look more like a beggar.

"Sister Youyou, Sister Youyou..." He seemed extremely excited upon seeing Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou got down from the carriage and hurriedly comforted him.

"Don’t speak for now; have some water and eat something."

There were many disaster victims with him, and Gu Youyou dared not take out food openly. She had him get on the carriage first.

His companions envied Yuancheng and were jealous—why could this little beggar get on the carriage while they could not?

"We want to get on the carriage too, we want to eat as well, honorable gentlemen, please be kind and give us a way to live."

Jin Zijin stepped in front of the carriage and told them, "Continue northwards. The Imperial Court’s disaster relief Ministers are already on their way, and they will arrange your accommodations. We are only here to search for relatives affected in Yangguan City, our abilities are limited, and we cannot save everyone."

Though their carriage was large, it did not appear luxurious, and Jin Zijin and his companions were all dressed plainly in common cloths, so the disaster victims quickly let them go.

They were all poor, desperate to find family members affected by the disaster, and they had not yet reached the point of starving to the extent of cannibalism—how could they give these people trouble?

Besides, these groups of people had little strength left and naturally could not forcefully rob them.

Inside the carriage, Yuancheng drank some water and ate some food, and after washing his dirty face, he slowly recounted his experiences over those days.

"It rained heavily for half a month straight, and the intensity showed no signs of decreasing but only got stronger. Finally, flash floods broke out, and everyone scrambled to flee for their lives."

"And how come you're alone, where are the others?" Gu Youyou asked, worried.

Yuancheng wiped the tears from his eyes and said, "On that day, Big Brother Qin went out to visit patients, he went to our Gu Family in Lotus Village because he heard that Sister Youyou's second uncle was seriously ill, looking very severe. Lotus Village faced the worst of the disaster, and the others from Jisheng Hall fled first, I kept waiting for Big Brother Qin to come back, but he never did. Later, I followed the last group of refugees from Qingshui Town and headed north. Sister Youyou, I don't know what has happened to Big Brother Qin, whether he, whether he might not be able to make it out..."