Farmhouse 111

Chapter 111 Giving Two Dustpans

Huang Xiangwen’s eyes burst with malevolence as she dragged the old Huang with her, "Mother, look, Youyou has grown up looking like a rich young lady from the city, not at all like a rural child! Isn’t this all thanks to our Gu Family that she was raised so well? But she’s so ungrateful, not even remembering our kindness, and instead blames us for treating her poorly."

Uh... as if the meat on her bones grew in the Gu Family’s home? Gu Youyou sneered!

"Mother, you tell me, isn’t father always talking about sending the best food to Youyou’s room for every meal? At your and father’s advanced age, you’ve never had a meal better than hers!"

Heh, the food brought to her might have been fine, but whether it was fine once eaten, that remained to be seen.

However, Huang Xiangwen’s last few words did strike a chord with the old Huang.

Indeed, that old fool at home is so biased, always favoring this sickly child with anything good.

Now that she’s recovered, she doesn’t show any gratitude at all.

She, Huang Xiangwen, nodded in agreement and looked at Gu Youyou with a fierce light in her eyes, "Your second aunt is right, our family has given you anything good we had. And how do you repay us? You get married and then disown us, don’t you? Such ingratitude is a curse from heaven itself!"

Gu Youyou sneered and looked at Huang Xiangwen, who stood behind the old Huang, "Grandmother, you’re mistaken, I won’t be struck by lightning from heaven, it’s liars who get struck by lightning! Isn’t that right, Huang Xiangwen?"

Huang Xiangwen stomped her foot and cursed, "You little wretch, what do you mean by that?"

Gu Youyou spoke unhurriedly, "You know very well what I mean, there's no point in pretending otherwise. It's all in the past now, you wouldn't want to spell things out too clearly, would you!"

"You..."

The old Huang knew that her daughters-in-law outwardly obeyed but secretly opposed, skimping on Gu Youyou's food, but she did not know about Huang Xiangwen giving Gu Youyou rat poison, nor did she know the extent of the skimping.

So when Gu Youyou voiced these words, she just snorted and put on an elder's airs, "There's a saying, 'At the bedside of a chronic illness, there is no filial child', and you're just a niece. After looking after you for so many years, it's understandable that your aunt has some complaints, and sometimes may not do things quite right, but your total lack of recognition, isn't that a bit too much?"

"Heh heh..."

Gu Youyou let out a dry laugh!

She could understand the saying, 'At the bedside of a chronic illness, there is no filial child'. She could understand when the family was poor and hungry, they would steal her portion of the meal. They got tired of looking after her and wished she would die sooner, even giving her rat poison she could comprehend!

But how could you, Huang Xiangwen, explain the numerous times you poured out the food rather than giving it to me?

Why would you administer rat poison neither early nor late, but just before my wedding? How do you explain that?

Plainly speaking, you have no conscience, after all those years of service, what you coveted was the silver from the Lin Family and the possessions left by my parents. Giving me a bowl of rat poison on my way out, what you eyed was nothing more than those dowries!

Even if everything you, Huang Xiangwen, did could be understood, that doesn’t stop me—that Gu Youyou—from hating you all.

Had it not been for your deliberate humiliations, she could have held on for another half a year, persisted until she could leave that haunted house!

The old Huang, her eyes gleaming at the sight of the new winnowing baskets, was already putting aside the recent unpleasantness, busily saying, "Since you’ve said so yourself, it’s all in the past now, let’s not bring up those matters. I came today to take two winnowing baskets! All the baskets at our house are broken, and we have so much land and so much work, and no time for repairs. I see you’ve got plenty of baskets here, surely you can spare one or two, right?"

"No way!" Gu Youyou refused without hesitation!

Chapter 112: I sent it away

"What? You won’t give it?" Old Lady Huang knew that Gu Youyou would refuse, but she hadn’t expected the refusal to be so forthright.

Glaring at Gu Youyou with her triangular eyes, she said harshly, "That’s because I care about your grandfather. He’s the only one in our family who knows how to make these dustpans. Our dustpans have broken, and with all the farm work he has to do, he doesn’t have time to fix them. If you don’t give us one, he’ll have to repair them by the light of an oil lamp. He’s old and can’t afford to stay up late!"

Old man Gu was fond of Gu Youyou, and Old Lady Huang was well aware of this; however, Gu Youyou, intractable as she was, cared deeply for her grandfather.

Just consider when old master Gu was working in the fields, she even boiled water to make tea and personally brought it out to him!

Of the whole family working in the fields, who other than the old master could have tea provided by this stubborn girl?

Gu Youyou did indeed care for Gu Feng, the only one in the world who treated her well, but she was not willing to simply give things to Old Lady Huang.

Gu Youyou had no idea whether the Gu Family's dustpans were really broken, but if Gu Feng needed one, she would certainly provide it.

Gu Youyou's expression softened, and the two women from the Huang Family also began to smile.

They thought to themselves: If a cord of hemp breaks, replace it with a chain of iron—I refuse to believe I can't hold onto you!

Wang Shun, ever so straightforward, upon hearing Old Lady Huang speak like this, casually took a finished dustpan and asked Gu Youyou, "Sister, why don't... you just give one to Granny Gu?"

Gu Youyou waved her hand, "It's yours anyway; take it if you want to."

"Eh!" he stood up, pleased, taking the dustpan to Old Lady Huang and simultaneously feeling relieved.

He was afraid of women quarreling, especially the two Huang women sitting across from him. He knew he had to build a good relationship with them!

"Hold on!" Just as Huang Xiangwen was about to take the smiling dustpan, Gu Youyou swiftly reached out and grabbed it first, saying with a smile to Old Lady Huang, "Granny, how could we let you fetch it yourself? I'll make a trip tomorrow and bring it over to you!"

The expression on Old Lady Huang's face stiffened as she coldly said, "If you're unwell, just rest up at home. I can take it back myself!"

She had already made the trip over; how could she leave empty-handed?

Moreover, seeing Gu Youyou's behavior, Old Lady Huang feared that she was up to no good!

In the past, with Gu Youyou spending all day in bed, Old Lady Huang hadn't realized just how cunning the girl could be. Then she thought, if someone could survive ten years of illness without dying,

subsisting as a mere bag of bones and still endure, how could her cunning be matched by that of ordinary people?

This girl frightened her!

Still, she was unwilling to just leave like this, so she reached out to take the dustpan from Gu Youyou's hand.

With a clever turn, Gu Youyou took the dustpan straight into the house and then stood at the doorway, "Granny, let me take it. It's been so long since I visited the Gu Family, I should go and see how they are doing!"

Gu Youyou said this meaningfully, causing the two women from the Huang Family to grow even more uneasy.

Could Gu Youyou truly be so kind-hearted?

But Gu Youyou, without any rush, gathered up the finished dustpans into the house, leaving Old Lady Huang looking worse than ever.

Huang Xiangwen whispered to Old Lady Huang, "Mother, I think this girl is up to no good. Let's just go into her room and take it!"

Old Lady Huang narrowed her triangular eyes thoughtfully, then waved her hand dismissively, "Forget it. If she dares not to bring it tomorrow, I'll come looking for trouble. I refuse to believe that this wretched girl can turn the world upside down!"

She glanced at Jin Zijin, who sat there quietly, and somehow felt that this hunter, who seemed so honest and simple, was even more unsettling than Gu Youyou!

...

The next day, Gu Youyou packed up some dry mushrooms she had picked and one dustpan and went to the Gu Family's home!

She timed her visit perfectly, arriving just as Gu Feng and the others were returning from the fields!

Chapter 113: Return to the Gu Family

Having waited all day, the old woman from the Huang Family's face finally looked better when she saw Gu Youyou had at last arrived.

Latter, Gu Youyou heard from Dabao that grandma had been cursing at home all afternoon! Of course, that was a later story.

"Youyou, why have you come?" Gu Feng had just changed into clean clothes and came out to wash his hands, ready to eat dinner. Seeing Gu Youyou, he was quite surprised!

Gu Youyou, holding a winnowing basket, entered the yard of the Gu Family and said, "Grandpa, I've brought you a winnowing basket!"

"Winnowing basket?" Gu Feng certainly didn't understand why Gu Youyou was inexplicably bringing a winnowing basket!

The old woman from the Huang Family heard Gu Youyou talking in the kitchen, hurried out, took the winnowing basket from Gu Youyou's hand, and said to Gu Feng with a smile and a wink, "Yesterday, Youyou's family was making winnowing baskets, they made quite a few! Our winnowing basket is broken, and your eyes aren't good at night because of your age. You care about Youyou so much, and naturally, she also cares about you. What's wrong? Can't she give you a winnowing basket?"

Completely baffled, Gu Feng exclaimed, "When did our winnowing basket break? Aren't there two new ones hanging on the wall that haven't been used? I made them last year!"

Seeing that Gu Feng was not reacting as she wanted, the old woman from the Huang Family, wishing she could knock some sense into his head, scolded, "You old fool, this is your granddaughter's way of showing her respect. Her family can't offer anything else, so what if it's just a winnowing basket, can't you just accept it?"

"I...?"

"Sigh, this is Youyou’s goodwill; she has brought it all the way here, you surely can’t make her take it back now? Youyou’s not well, it wasn’t easy for her to carry it here, and she doesn’t have the strength to take it back!"

Gu Youyou just smiled faintly without saying a word!

After listening to so much from the old woman of the Huang Family, Gu Feng realized what was going on. Having been husband and wife for decades, how could he not know what his old lady was like? She definitely demanded it from Youyou.

He glowered and angrily said, "Old woman, did you go to Youyou’s place yesterday? Did you ask her for this winnowing basket?"

The woman’s face changed as she said, "Don’t talk nonsense; I did nothing of the sort!"

She didn’t care; holding the winnowing basket, she hummed and returned to the house!

I’ll just accept it no matter what you say!

"Just go ahead!" Gu Feng was exasperated with the woman from the Huang Family and could do nothing about her. He turned to Gu Youyou and said, "Tell grandpa, what is this about? Your family doesn’t have fields to farm, what are you doing making so many winnowing baskets for?"

Gu Youyou replied, "I use them to dry shiitake mushrooms and also some medicinal herbs! Grandpa, my illness requires long-term medication, and buying them from the pharmacy is too expensive. The game that Zijin catches is just enough for us to eat, we can’t afford the cost of my medicine. So when he goes hunting, I go with him into the mountains to collect some mountain goods for money, and it’s even better when I find herbs that I can use! It saves us from having to buy them."

Gu Feng was shocked and said, "You’re gathering medicinal herbs yourself? Youyou, these herbs are not like other things, don’t make a mistake and eat something that causes problems!"

"Don’t worry, I won’t!"

Dismissing her assurances, Gu Feng said, "If you lack money for medicine, just tell grandpa. I can skip a few meals, but it won’t reduce the money for your medicine! You used to be sick all the time and never left the house, how did you suddenly learn about medicinal plants?"

Gu Youyou shook her head gently saying, "Zijin teaches me! He runs around the mountains all day long; he knows everything in there!"

Gu Youyou brought up Jin Zijin, watching carefully for the old man Gu’s reaction!

She wanted to know, what exactly was the relationship between Gu Feng and Jin Zijin?

Indeed, upon mentioning Jin Zijin, Gu Feng’s face took on an unnatural look, and he merely said, "Since it was Zijin’s idea, then let it be so!"

Chapter 114: Eating a Meal with Meat

He actually trusted Jin Zijin so much that he never doubted why a hunter would know so much, or find any issue with that!

This made Gu Youyou increasingly uneasy.

She did not know how much Gu Feng understood about Jin Zijin, or what kind of dealings they had with each other.

Regardless, Gu Feng would never harm her, Gu Youyou was very clear about this, so no matter how many secrets about Jin Zijin she discovered, she still dared to stay by his side peacefully.

Gu Youyou took out the dried mushrooms she had prepared earlier and handed them to Gu Feng, saying, "Grandfather, these are the mushrooms I picked on the mountain. Keep them and stew them to eat!"

"Mushrooms?" Gu Feng opened the coarse cloth bundle, casually taking out some dried mushrooms.

He only recognized a few and knew they were edible, but most of them were unfamiliar to him.

He looked at Gu Youyou somewhat surprised and asked, "These mushrooms can really be eaten?"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Of course, they can be eaten. Would I dare to give grandfather something inedible?"

There were all sorts of mushrooms on the mountain, and many were poisonous. People from ancient times did not recognize many types of mushrooms or know which could be eaten.

Unlike other plants, if mushrooms were poisonous, eating them could result in death, so they never touched mushrooms they did not recognize. Since most of the mushrooms Gu Youyou brought were unfamiliar to them, Gu Feng naturally did not dare to try them hastily.

He picked up one and asked Gu Youyou, "What is this? I think I've seen this kind of mushroom before, can it be eaten?"

"This is a pine mushroom, very fragrant. However, they are best when fresh. Next time I find some, I won't dry them; I'll bring them directly to grandfather!"

Pine mushrooms did not grow just anywhere, and Gu Youyou was also quite surprised to have found so many in the back mountain!

Such mushrooms were rare and precious in and of themselves, and it was fortunate that the people here did not recognize them or know their value!

Gu Feng's face was filled with satisfaction. Seeing Gu Youyou had recovered and was so capable, he finally felt at ease.

In the future, when his time came, and he had to face his eldest son and daughter-in-law, he would have something to account for!

"Youyou, don’t go back for dinner tonight. Stay and have a meal with us!" he said.

"This..." Gu Youyou looked toward the kitchen with difficulty, saying, "Better not, Zijin is cooking dinner!"

Gu Feng knew what Gu Youyou was worried about, but at that moment, he became stubborn, huffing, "What’s wrong with my granddaughter having dinner at home? I’d like to see that old woman say something about it!"

Without further discussion, he pushed Gu Youyou into the house.

At the dining table, the Gu family stared at each other with big eyes and small eyes until finally, all eyes turned to Gu Youyou.

The grandmother’s eyeballs nearly popped out of her head, but Gu Feng kept a stern face and, in the end, she held back and said nothing.

Today, the Gu family was having meat, a rare luxury for a farming family, and Gu Youyou just happened to have arrived on such a day.

There wasn’t much meat to begin with, and now with one more person sharing, how could they not be angry?

Before the meat was served, they were all gulping down saliva, waiting for Huang Xiangwen to bring a bowl of meat to the table. The younger ones even couldn’t help but reach out their hands.

The old Mrs. Huang was seething with anger and had nowhere to vent. Seeing these youngsters reaching out before she even made a move, she found her opening and hit Gu Erbao and Gu Sanbao on the back of their hands with her chopsticks.

The children’s hands were tender, and immediately, red marks appeared on their little hands.

Gu Sanya, who was just about to stand up and join in, was fortunately seated far enough away to avoid being hit as well.

Chapter 115 Argument

Huang Xiangwen hurriedly pulled Sanya back to her seat, warning her with a stern look.

"You heartless little wretches, my old lady hasn’t even started eating yet, and here you are, reaching for the food! One after another, all you do is freeload without working a bit, a bunch of thankless wretches," bellowed Mother Huang in fury.

The one being indirectly scolded was clearly Gu Youyou!

Gu Erbao, feeling wronged, said, "Grandma, I did work!"

Gu Sanbao also blinked back tears of grievance and said, "I worked too, I herded the cattle!"

She sneered disdainfully at Gu Youyou and said, "Not one of you has any conscience, all of you are heartless, ungrateful wretches!"

"Enough!" Gu Feng slammed his chopsticks onto the table with a slap, and now even less so did anyone dare to eat, just staring at the meat on the table with drooling mouths!

Gu Feng glared at Mother Huang, his anger evident as he snorted, "Who are you implying with that roundabout criticism? Youyou is your granddaughter too. Yes, she doesn’t work, but is it because she doesn’t want to? If she were in good health, would she lie in bed all day waiting to be fed and watered?

When you’re so old you can’t get up anymore and you lie in bed every day waiting to be fed and watered, I won’t say a word about you either!"

Mother Huang did not like this at all and retorted angrily at Gu Feng, "You old fool, who are you saying spends all day in bed waiting to be waited on hand and foot? I'm as fit as a fiddle, and I'll still be in fine fettle when you're buried and rotting to bits!"

"You..." That was cursing him to an early grave, and Gu Feng, overwhelmed by rage, couldn't catch his breath and collapsed to the floor with his eyes rolling back.

The whole family was stunned, especially Gu Youyou!

She had been thinking that since Grandpa had offered the food so kindly, it was a good time to eat her fill and annoy Grandma, but it would be a loss if Grandpa were really to be angered into a bad state.

"Oh dear, Dad, what's happened to you!"

Gu's second son, who was sitting next to him, immediately crouched down and helped him up.

Mother Huang, too, was taken aback, standing there speechless for quite some time.

The whole family gathered around, and Gu Youyou, who was squeezed to the outside, also made a strenuous effort to push her way in.

Grandpa was in distress, and she was more anxious than anyone else.

But there was Huang Xiangwen, still pushing her away and yelling, "It's all because of you, you jinx! If it wasn't for you, would Mom and Dad have quarreled? Would Dad have fainted?"

"Right, it's all your fault. Our family doesn't welcome you; we don't like you coming to steal our meat. Get out!" Gu Erbao also chimed in with his mother and forcefully pushed Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou was furious. Even at this critical moment, they were more concerned with shifting the blame than with helping.

To scold her was one thing, but this certainly wasn’t the time!

She said urgently, "Please understand the situation. My grandpa is still sick. If you’re really worried about him, you should go to the next village and fetch the doctor immediately, not waste time holding onto me here!"

Huang Xiangwen snapped, "You should be the one to go. If it wasn’t for you, would Dad have ended up like this?"

...There was really no reasoning with these village women. Gu Youyou glared coldly at her and said sternly, "Step aside; I need to see my Grandpa!"

"Aren’t you worried about your Grandpa? Then you go get the doctor now!"

Gu Youyou scoffed. With so many people around, none went, but they expected me, the sickly one, to go?

Such filial piety they all had. Were they not afraid the sickly one would faint on the way and delay things even more?

Gu Youyou, furious, scanned the Gu Family members and exclaimed, "I am unwell and can’t move quickly. Grandpa can’t afford the delay. No matter what, it shouldn’t be me who goes!"

Chapter 116: Trouble Caused by Scrounging

Moreover, she was a doctor and had to stay to see what was going on with Grandpa!

The elder Mrs. Huang was stunned for a moment before realizing what happened and then flung herself onto Gu Feng, wailing, "Old man, you immortal, what’s happened to you? Don’t scare me, our family can’t be without you..."

After all, they had been husband and wife for decades; no matter how much they argued, the affection remained. Seeing that Gu Feng really had been angered by her, she was both worried and afraid.

Gu Youyou was anxious to check on Gu Feng's condition, while Huang Xiangwen yelled at the top of her lungs.

The grandchildren and two younger daughters were all crying and wailing. Two sons were supporting their father, one on each side.

The third son's wife had been sent to the kitchen to boil water by her son.

The whole Huang Family was in chaos, and it was only then that elder Mrs. Huang started to appreciate Gu Feng's goodness.

In this family, no one but him really held authority.

She glared at Huang Xiangwen, who was relentlessly pestering Gu Youyou, and scolded furiously, "What's with all the useless yelling? Are you the only one sitting idle? Go fetch Doctor Sun from the next village at once."

"Ah...? Me?" Huang Xiangwen was reluctant and looked incredulously at the elder Mrs. Huang.

Having been married into the family for so many years, elder Mrs. Huang had always sided with her, and over time, Huang Xiangwen had come to understand elder Mrs. Huang's temperament very clear. She thought that elder Mrs. Huang would agree with her to scold the troublemaker Gu Youyou excessively.

But what was with elder Mrs. Huang's attitude now, as if she was blaming her?

Elder Mrs. Huang scolded, "Who else but you? Are you really depending on Gu Youyou to go? By the time she gets there, the old man might be out of breath."

They were his own father after all, and both Gu Feng's second and third sons were extremely anxious, pinching his acupressure points and patting his face, trying to wake him up.

Gu Feng’s second son cursed at his wife Huang Xiangwen, "Doctor Sun is lecherous, if Youyou goes looking like this and doesn’t bring him back, she might very well fall into the wolf’s den. And you’re still not moving?"

Elder Mrs. Huang scolded her, and she bore it, but what right did Gu Feng’s second son have to scold her?

She stamped her foot and retorted, "You heartless man, you know Doctor Sun is a lecher, yet you send me? Oh, so your niece is a woman, but I’m not? Are you hoping that I get taken advantage of by that Doctor Sun?"

"You, with that wrinkly face? Rest assured and go, you’ll be very safe!"

"What? Gu Feng’s second son, are you saying I’m old? You heartless man! I married you when I was still a young girl, bore you several children, and now you despise my old age..."

The couple was in the middle of a fierce argument, and no one was stopping Gu Youyou, so she finally reached Gu Feng.

After feeling Gu Feng’s pulse and prying open his tightly shut eyes to look, Gu Youyou also felt relieved.

Grandpa had simply been overcome with anger and blood rush, nothing more.

She unobtrusively manipulated various pressure points to calm her grandfather.

As their quarrel went on endlessly, elder Mrs. Huang had no choice but to send her third son off to find Doctor Sun.

Gu Youyou’s unusual actions finally caught elder Mrs. Huang’s attention.

"Gu Youyou, what are you doing?"

Gu Youyou ignored her and couldn’t explain, simply hastening her actions.

"I’m asking you, what are you doing?"

Elder Mrs. Huang suddenly pushed Gu Youyou away.

Huang Xiangwen wasn’t wrong yesterday; it was all because of this wretched girl. If it hadn’t been for her coming to freeload during meal times, she wouldn’t have made the old man so angry.

If anything happened to the old man, she would fight this wretched girl to the death.

The star of doom; it could be said that it was her who had caused the death of her own parents.

Just at that moment, Gu Feng came to.

Chapter 117 Going Back

He grunted, his eyes still closed, only to be greeted by the surrounding clamor, which caused him a terrible headache.

"Dad, are you awake?"

"Grandpa is awake!"

With sounds of joy erupting, the old Huang Family finally let go of Gu Youyou and looked toward Gu Feng.

"Old man, are you alright? How do you feel now? If there’s any discomfort, you must tell me."

Gu Youyou made a hushing gesture to the children, and they stopped their crying!

In the quiet environment, Gu Feng started to feel more comfortable and slowly opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was the wrinkled face of the old Huang Family, covering his entire view. Her concerned expression warmed his heart.

No matter how noisy or troublesome the old lady was, they shared decades of affection after all.

He opened his mouth and said, "Bring me some water!"

Meng Qiuju, the third son’s wife, standing nearby with warm water, hurried to bring it to his lips when she heard Gu Feng ask for it.

After Gu Feng had a sip of water, he finally felt relieved.

Looking at his anxious family, he felt disconcerted but still managed to scold with a stern face, "I’m not dying, what are you all crying for? Go have dinner already!"

Grandpa had aged, perhaps due to constant worries. He was only one year older than the old lady Huang, yet he looked much older than her.

Even his eyes were cloudy.

Such eyes, in modern times, would belong to someone over seventy, but Grandpa...

Gu Youyou sighed softly and said, "Grandpa, Youyou is not hungry. I won’t eat, I’ll head back first!"

Making the women of the Gu Family upset was one thing, but upsetting Grandpa was something she was unwilling to do.

"Youyou!" Gu Feng struggled to stand up.

Gu Wen, the second uncle, quickly helped him up and settled him on a stool.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Zijin said he would hunt a palm civet for dinner today; he should be back by now. If he doesn’t see me, he’ll worry."

Assuming that the doctor Sun would arrive soon, and knowing Grandpa’s condition was not serious, just needing less anger and more rest, there was no need for her to say more.

The doctor Sun would surely notice this as well, so she didn’t need to dwell on it.

"Ah!" Gu Feng heaved a long sigh, waving his hand, his tone filled with endless vicissitudes.

"Leave it, go back! Walk slowly, don’t tire yourself."

"Yes!"

It had been a while since sunset, the sky was not yet fully dark, but the moon had already climbed high into the treetops!

A faint mist drifted along the country lane, making the world seem blurry like the hearts of people; the more you try to see clearly, the less you can...

...

"Youyou, we’re having palm civet tonight!"

Jin Zijin held up the skinned palm civet and told her.

Gu Youyou was startled, then smiled again.

She had mentioned it casually at the Gu Family; she hadn't expected that their meal tonight would indeed be palm civet!

"Sounds good, let's see your cooking skills!"

Heh, it was always Jin Zijin's cooking skills on display at mealtime.

In fact, his cooking wasn't great, but as peasants, they didn't have lunch and were hungry after a whole day, so who cared if it tasted good? As long as there was food, that was enough.

Seeing Gu Youyou's forced and bizarre smile, Jin Zijin asked with a gentle smile, "Did you get upset again at the Gu Family?"

"Hm?" Gu Youyou touched her face and chuckled, "Is it that obvious?"

"Yes, it's written all over your face!" Jin Zijin said bluntly.

Gu Youyou: "..."

Gu Youyou had become quite adept at managing the fire, and recently when cooking, it was always Gu Youyou tending to the fire while Jin Zijin handled the wok!

Chapter 118: Exchange Fish

Having experienced the incident of nearly setting the house on fire last time, Gu Youyou got into the habit of keeping a bucket full of water close by the stove so that if an accident were to happen again, she could put out the fire with sufficient water and prevent a tragedy.

After having her meal, Gu Youyou gathered up the dried herbs, wrapped them in coarse cloth, and handed them over to Jin Zijin, saying, "You should take a trip to town tomorrow, sell these things, and bring back some oil, either rapeseed oil or soy oil will do."

People in this era would press oil from rapeseeds, soybeans, and such, and she had tried it at Jisheng Hall; vegetable oils were much healthier than the traditional animal fats used by rural families.

Jin Zijin simply gave her a detached look and agreed.

As always, Jin Zijin had the habit of sleeping with her in his arms, yet he never made a move on her.

Since the time they kissed last, they hadn't made any other intimate gestures besides sleeping together.

With Jin Zijin by her side, the bed was always very warm.

...

Gu Youyou visited her grandfather at Gu Family's home, mainly wanting to secretly check his pulse. On her way back, she saw Wang Shun fishing in the river.

In his basket, there were already several fish, big and small ones alike.

Jin Zijin only knew how to hunt in the mountains and had never fished in the river, so although Youyou had eaten plenty of mountain delicacies, she had yet to try the fish from Lotus Village's river.

Looking at the lively jumping fish made her eyes and mouth crave.

She said to Wang Shun, "Hey, Shunzi, how about I trade you half a masked palm civet for a fish, ok?"

Wang Shun climbed out of the river, awkwardly dressing under Gu Youyou's watchful gaze.

He wore clothes when he was in the river, just an undergarment, rather thin and hardly any different from being naked once it got wet.

But Gu Youyou seemed to be a curious kind of woman; had it been any other woman, they would've likely gotten embarrassed and run off, but she just stood there, as if completely unaware of any awkwardness, eagerly waiting for his response.

His face flushed, he hurried to the basket, grabbed the biggest fish, tied its mouth with grass from the roadside, and handed it over to Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou gladly accepted it and said, "Wait here for me, I'll bring you the masked palm civet!"

"No, don't!" Wang Shun quickly said, "If you like my fish, I'll give it to you to eat, how could I take your masked palm civet?"

"I insist, I can't just take it for nothing! Just wait here, if you leave, I'll deliver it to your house."

With that, Gu Youyou ran home with the fish in hand!

Wang Shun called out loudly from behind, "Really, there's no need, I can go into the mountains with Brother Jin if I want to eat a masked palm civet."

Gu Youyou quickened her pace, "Anyway, if you don't wait, I'll take it to your house!"

How could Wang Shun let Gu Youyou make the trip again? So, he had no choice but to wait.

Gu Youyou quickly returned, with half of a salted masked palm civet in her hand, prepared the night before.

Wang Shun scratched his head, extremely embarrassed, but under Gu Youyou's insistence, he finally accepted it.

As Gu Youyou walked away, he still looked in the direction she left, muttering softly, "Sister is really nice, are all Gu Family's girls like this?"

With keen ears, Gu Youyou heard Wang Shun's words, which weren't meant for her, but she couldn't help but smile knowingly.

When she was in modern times, Gu Youyou had lived by herself for a long while. She liked to cook for herself after work, and she loved fish, especially the heavily seasoned dishes—a real pleasure only to be found in the fiery numbing spiciness!

Chapter 119: The Professional Chef

Such a pity that the people here don't yet eat chili peppers. In this era, the main spices were Sichuan pepper, ginger, and cornelian cherry, with chili peppers only used as ornamental plants and medicine. Such a good thing, utterly wasted!

Gu Youyou found some wild chilies not far from the hill behind her house. At this time of the year, the chilies were still tender and not as spicy as the ripe red ones, so she picked a few more.

She started by gutting and cleaning the fish, then salted it for marinating, and stuffed the fish belly with Sichuan pepper, chili, and ginger.

Start the fire for cooking rice first!

When Jin Zijin returned, he could see the smoke rising from his house from a distance, and he quickened his pace in slight surprise.

At this moment, Gu Youyou was putting the fish into the pan, and a thick enticing fragrance wafted from the pot—it was the aroma of various spices she had sautéed in oil!

"Zijin is back, have a seat for a while, we'll be eating soon. We're having fish today, and you can also taste my cooking skills!"

Was this the first time Gu Youyou cooked alone, and the first time she took charge of the wok, and she chose to cook fish which is the most difficult?

This fish had a strong fishy smell, hard to make palatable if not handled properly. Not many in the farming community were good cooks, so they rarely ate fish.

Yet there were plenty of fish in the river, as long as one was willing to eat, there would be more than enough!

Jin Zijin put down his tools and the newly bought soybean oil, looking intrigued, and then sat by the stove to stoke the fire!

"You know how to cook fish?"

Gu Youyou was taken aback, feeling slighted, and said, "Are you the only one allowed to be capable? Can’t I be capable as well?"

Jin Zijin: "..." Was her way of speaking always so pointed?

In fact, Gu Youyou was just concerned about Jin Zijin’s own secrets, and his continual, subtle attempts to coax information out of her!

Never did she expect Jin Zijin to say, "I can’t cook fish!"

Well... no wonder she had never tasted fish cooked by him.

"Fish is very fishy, I don’t like that smell!"

Gu Youyou turned to look at him, smiling slightly and said, "The fish I cook isn’t fishy!"

Jin Zijin said, "To make fish that isn’t fishy, one must be a professional chef!"

Hearing this, Gu Youyou’s expression darkened.

After a while, she said, "Alright then, I am a professional chef!"

Jin Zijin looked at her and inexplicably chuckled!

Gu Youyou knew what he meant, always trying to pry words out of her and not allowing her to get annoyed!

"Make the fire a little smaller!" Gu Youyou said irritably.

After smelling the aroma, which was spicy and delightful, she sprinkled a little sugar into the pot to enhance the umami taste of the fish!

This sugar had been secretly given to Gu Youyou by Gu Feng, who said her medicine was too bitter, and a little sugar would make it more bearable.

She hadn’t taken her medicine for a long time, and as sugar was a valuable commodity, she had kept it.

But to use sugar for cooking fish... Jin Zijin seemed to have never seen this, so he asked curiously, "Is the sugar for removing the fishy smell?"

"No!" Gu Youyou shook her head and said, "Adding some sugar makes the fish taste better!"

Jin Zijin frowned and said, "The sugar Grandfather bought you was to ease the bitterness of your medicine after drinking it. Are you wasting it on fish?"

Gu Youyou couldn’t stand to hear this and justified herself, "This isn’t wasting, it’s to make the fish tastier!"

"Being able to eat one’s fill is enough, what’s the need for fussing over taste? Look at the villagers of Lotus Village, who cares whether their food tastes good or not?"

Gu Youyou was left speechless!

She never expected that Jin Zijin would be such a miser. It was just a bit of sugar, was it worth making such a fuss over?

Chapter 120 What End

She used to speculate that Jin Zijin might have some clout in Beijing; otherwise, how could he have brought back Doctor Zhou so quickly? But seeing his stingy manner now, she was unsure again.

Perhaps he was a fallen noble or even a criminal sanctioned by the Imperial Court.

Fine, if he won’t let me add sugar, I’ll do it just to spite him, and even add a bit more.

As the pot was almost ready, Gu Youyou sprinkled a bit more sugar into it.

She smugly turned her head towards Jin Zijin, who was frowning, and said, "Someone like you, whose pursuit of food stops at merely getting full, will never understand the wonderful intricacies of gourmet cuisine!"

Jin Zijin: "..." In fact, he didn’t even like sweet things!

The fragrant fish was served, and Gu Youyou swallowed her saliva!

It wasn’t her first time eating fish, but it was her first time eating fish with chili peppers!

With a mouthful of fish, that long-missed sensation of numbness and spiciness filled her mouth, and she wanted to shout ’How refreshing!’

If only she could pair it with a little wine, it would be even better.

But, alas, wine was something she could only think about.

Jin Zijin just pushed the rice around in his bowl, hesitating to pick up his chopsticks to eat the fish.

Watching Gu Youyou deliberately savoring her meal, he couldn’t help but want to try it too.

But what were those strange things inside...?

Gu Youyou had chopped the chili peppers very finely, and Jin Zijin noticed that, aside from the common ingredients, there seemed to be things he had never seen on the dining table before.

Seeing his confusion, Gu Youyou took the initiative to place a piece of fish into his bowl, smiling and saying, "This is a new type of spice, very aromatic. I guarantee that after you try it once, you’ll never forget it! You might even find yourself unable to do without it in every dish you cook in the future!"

After extolling its virtues with a hint of secrecy, Jin Zijin, still doubtful, nevertheless brought the piece of fish to his mouth.

This taste...

For someone trying chili peppers for the first time, it was simply unbearable!

Jin Zijin’s face stiffened, and he turned his head, ready to spit it out.

Gu Youyou quickly covered his mouth with her hand, saying, "Wasting food is shameful. Swallow this bite, and you’ll definitely fall in love with it!"

Jin Zijin’s face was beet red.

Trying to hold back her laughter, Gu Youyou gently consoled, "Be good, my husband. Whether or not we can make money may depend on this. If you don’t eat it, how can others fall in love with it?"

Gu Youyou was also thinking of making chili powder and chili sauce to exchange for silver.

The people here didn’t eat chili peppers, and wild chili peppers weren’t plentiful, but she could save seeds to plant herself, which to her, was a business opportunity!

Gu Youyou firmly covered his mouth, and Jin Zijin looked at her with wide, surprised eyes but ended up swallowing it with a gulp.

His complexion was indescribably awful.

Jin Zijin ran to the water bucket, poured himself half a ladle of water and drank it down, before sitting back at the table.

He glared at Gu Youyou, as if she had just fed him poison.

He seemed angry, and Gu Youyou blinked, asking cautiously, "Is it really that bad?"

Jin Zijin replied coldly, "Do you know the consequences of forcing me to eat something?"

"I..." Gu Youyou was taken aback, and after a moment’s confrontation, she forced a smile, "You are a strong and healthy man, and I am but a weak woman, long confined to illness. If you did not wish it, how could I have forced you to eat that fish?"

Jin Zijin’s gaze flickered, and his expression gradually softened.

He said, "It’s not that the fish isn’t delicious, it’s just when I tasted that weird flavor..." He paused.