Farmhouse 131

Chapter 131: Quack Doctor

Huang Xiangwen said, "We haven't divided our family estate, so where would the silver come from? All the silver we earn goes to the head of the family, and Mother is in charge of it. Youyou, if you want to collect silver, you need to ask your grandmother."

Gu Youyou wasn't really trying to collect silver, let alone whether she could get any from her grandmother. Even if she managed to, her grandfather and grandmother might end up in a huge quarrel over it.

For just a few coins, she felt it wasn't worth it.

She said this only because she wanted to disgust her second uncle.

How dare you despise the things given to you? I certainly owe you nothing.

Gu Youyou snorted and then said to Qin Changlin, "Oh, I thought some charlatan from the street had been brought here. But it turns out you're a doctor from Jisheng Hall. Doctor, even such a small wound could leave a scar! Your medical skills are not very impressive, are you even qualified yet?"

Well done, Qin Changlin, plotting against me. I told you not to inquire about my background, yet you dared to show up at my doorstep.

Qin Changlin chuckled and said, "I haven't completed my apprenticeship, still an apprentice!"

Upon hearing this, the hearts of Huang Xiangwen and Gu Wen jumped to their throats. Once they came to their senses, they immediately started cursing at Qin Changlin, "You dare to practice without completing your apprenticeship? You damned incompetent doctor, this is tantamount to plotting for wealth and causing harm! If anything happens to my daughter, our Gu Family won't let you off! Come on, we're going to see the official, I'm going to sue you!"

"That's right, see the official, make him compensate!"

Gu Wen grabbed Qin Changlin by the collar, ready to drag him to see the official.

Huang Xiangwen also let go of Sanya’s small hand and joined Gu Wen in subduing Qin Changlin.

Qin Changlin looked helplessly at Gu Youyou, who was watching him with a smirk that wasn’t quite a smile.

At this moment, Gu Feng and Old Madam Huang entered from outside and were startled by the scene.

"What on earth are you doing?" Gu Feng bellowed sternly.

Old Madam Huang scolded Huang Xiangwen, "Sanya is still lying in bed suffering from pain, and you’re causing a ruckus here? Let the doctor treat her quickly!"

Gu Wen protested, "Mother, he is just an incompetent doctor; he won’t be able to cure the injury. He himself said he hasn’t even completed his apprenticeship."

"What?" Old Madam Huang also grew anxious, her eyes widening as she looked at Qin Changlin.

Qin Changlin, being held captive by Gu Wen and his wife, said in resignation, "I haven’t completed my apprenticeship, true, but I never said that I couldn’t treat the wound! My master is Doctor Zhou; even high-ranking officials in Beijing request my master’s medical attention. Would I dare to tarnish my master’s reputation?"

On hearing this, it sounded somewhat reasonable.

Who was Doctor Zhou? A famous doctor known far and wide. Would he let an apprentice with poor skills go out and disgrace himself?

Gu Wen suddenly did not know where to put his hands that were holding Qin Changlin; to let go seemed improper, yet it didn’t seem right to keep holding him either!

But Gu Feng was quicker-witted and more adept at handling situations.

He said, "You ungrateful son, release him at once and apologize to Doctor Qin!"

Gu Wen and his wife immediately let go.

Old Madam Huang also realized the situation and shot Huang Xiangwen a fierce glare. She then said to Qin Changlin with a placating smile, "That's right, what Doctor Qin said makes sense. If Doctor Qin has not yet completed his apprenticeship, it's certainly not because his skills are lacking, but because Doctor Zhou has high standards!"

Now that's more like it.

The medicine Gu Youyou brought had been ground into powder, and Meng Qiuju served it, breaking the awkward tension in the room.

Qin Changlin was applying the medicine to Sanya, who cried out in pain again. Having cried too much, her voice had grown hoarse and she could only whimper, sounding heartbreaking!

Gu Feng spoke affectionately to Gu Youyou on the side, "Youyou, you should have let Dabao bring the medicine; why did you come yourself? Your health has improved significantly, but you still shouldn't tire yourself. Stop standing; please sit down!"

Chapter 132: Fighting for Candy to Eat

"Thank you, Grandpa!" Gu Youyou wasn't shy in taking a seat.

Matriarch Huang couldn't stand to see Gu Feng favor Gu Youyou, and her face showed her displeasure as she complained, "The little one is still lying in bed moaning, at least go upstairs and get a piece of candy to appease her, she's your granddaughter too, why such a difference?"

Hearing there might be candy for Sanya, both Gu Wen and Huang Xiangwen's faces changed, looking at Gu Feng with anticipation.

Meng Qiuju was slightly surprised, wondering since when the old lady become so generous?

Gu Feng's face darkened as he barked at Matriarch Huang, "What are you doing here then? How would I know where you've hidden those few pieces of candy? Why don't you go get them yourself?"

Matriarch Huang retorted with defiance, unwilling to back down, "If you won't get it, forget it, let her keep moaning then!"

The flicker of hope in the eyes of Gu's second son and his wife extinguished again.

Gu Youyou saw it all and felt incredibly conflicted.

It wasn't quite contempt, nor was it entirely sympathy.

She just felt that life was perhaps too harsh, were things so tough that comforting a child in pain with a mere piece of candy caused such a struggle?

It was just a few pieces of candy after all, and the grandmother was hoarding them, keeping it a family secret?

She thought about the candy Gu Feng had secretly given her before, just a little. Surely candy must have been extremely precious in those days, no wonder Jin Zijin had that expression when she used candy to make fish.

Upon reflection, Matriarch Huang decided to go get the candy. She thought that Gu Youyou cared, so she wanted to give a piece to Sanya, and let Gu Youyou just watch, drooling.

Candy, how many children had ever tasted candy before?

Luckily, Gu Youyou didn't know what was going through her mind, otherwise, she would have been both amused and frustrated.

After Matriarch Huang left, Gu Feng followed her out.

It wasn’t long before they heard Matriarch Huang wailing like a slaughtered pig.

"Ouch, you old geezer, you’re stealing my candy, you’re after my life..."

"Let go, old woman, let go of me!"

"I won’t let go! You take everything, what are you planning to do? You want to give it to that devil girl in front of me? My daughter gave this to me in filial piety, I can’t even bring myself to eat it!"

"How many teeth do you even have left, do you think you can eat it, can you even chew?"

"I can always suck on them... Ah, if you dare pass this door, I’ll fight you to the end."

Everyone inside was embarrassed, especially Gu Youyou!

Having lived two lifetimes, this was the first time she had heard of people fighting to the death over a few pieces of candy! And those two were a couple who had been together for generations, with a house full of children and grandchildren.

Soon after, amidst the shouts and curses of Matriarch Huang, they could hear the joyful voice of Gu Feng calling out like a child, "Dabao, Erbao, Sanya, and Erya, come out and get your candy!"

The children’s laughter soon followed, and Huang Xiangwen couldn’t sit still any longer, quickly making her way to the courtyard. She didn’t know how many pieces of candy Gu Feng had snatched from Matriarch Huang, but if there were enough, maybe she could get a piece as well.

"Oh my candy, you little brats, I hope it chokes you..." Matriarch Huang cried out over a few pieces of candy.

When the children each received a piece, Gu Feng returned to the room and offered one to Gu Youyou.

"Youyou, you should have one too!"

Gu Youyou glanced at it; it was wrapped with peanuts and sesame, likely some peanut candy. In her previous life, she was the Gu Family's young miss, what candy hadn't she tasted? She certainly didn't need to fight Matriarch Huang over a piece.

She shook her head and said, "No need, Grandpa, I'm too old for candy. Give it to Sanya, she's the one in pain."

Chapter 133: Don't Charge for the Diagnosis

Gu Youyou was well aware that if the children in this room ate the candy, Grandma wouldn't really mind, but if she were the one to eat it, a commotion would surely start anew.

Gu Feng, with three pieces still in hand, said, "Give her one piece, Sanya has suffered, let her have two."

As Gu Feng reached out, Youyou pushed his hand back with a smile and said, "Grandpa eats one, Sanya gets two!"

Madam Huang, with disheveled hair, stood in the doorway, her eyes fixed on the candy in Gu Feng's hand, as if ready to snatch it away the moment Youyou accepted it.

Seeing that Youyou was so considerate, she felt somewhat relieved.

Gu Feng, taken aback, sighed gently but chuckled, "Youyou has grown up, like a big sister. Alright, Sanya can have all three!"

Sanya had been eyeing the candy in grandpa's hand, blinking eagerly. Finally, when he handed her all three pieces, a sweet smile spread across her face.

It seemed as if getting three pieces of candy made the fall worthwhile.

With Sanya's accident seemingly minor, and it still being early in the day, Gu Feng called the household laborers out to work in the fields and suggested that Youyou head back early.

Youyou smiled and said, "I'll wait a bit longer, until Sanya's wound is properly dealt with!"

Qin Changlin had dressed Sanya's wound and prepared the powder she'd need for the next few days, dividing it into small packets. He handed them to Huang Xiangwen, instructing, "Change the dressing once a day, using one packet each time. Don't get it wrong!"

"Yes, yes! I'll remember, thank you, Doctor Qin!" Huang Xiangwen replied eagerly and gratefully.

Today was a windfall for her. Sanya got three pieces of candy, and in front of everyone, while nibbling on one, she had two more clenched in her hand. Once back inside, she would be able to enjoy a piece herself!

As she watched the children eating candy, Old Madam Huang felt as though they were nibbling at her heart. Even if the kids had to eat, couldn't they just break off a little piece each? Now, all the candy was going to these little brats.

The injury was treated, but would the doctor expect a fee, expecting her to pay? Old Madam Huang's face turned an indescribable shade of ugly. She grumbled at Qin Changlin, "We provided the Macrolepiota for the treatment ourselves, Doctor Qin, so perhaps the fee should be reduced a bit?"

Qin Changlin nodded vigorously, but before he could speak, Huang Xiangwen cut in.

"Youyou didn't bring any Macrolepiota; it's just a few random weeds treating Sanya. Who knows if it'll even work!"

Upon hearing this, Old Madam Huang immediately glared at Gu Youyou and demanded, "Why didn't you bring the Macrolepiota? Wasn't it said that only Macrolepiota can cure it?"

Gu Youyou snapped back unapologetically, "Didn’t have it. Do you think Macrolepiota is like wild grass by the roadside, visible everywhere?"

It was as if she owed them something.

"Hey, watch your tone! What kind of attitude is that?"

Qin Changlin, smiling, stepped in to diffuse the tension, "I never said that Macrolepiota was the only solution! Just that it might have been more effective. Ah, it’s also my fault, I got the season wrong. You really can’t find Macrolepiota this season, and even if you did, it wouldn’t be fit to be used as medicine!"

With a cold snort from Youyou, Old Madam Huang was once again infuriated.

Knowing all too well how sharp Youyou’s tongue could be, she directed her anger at Qin Changlin, snapping, "What kind of doctor are you, not bringing your own medicine for a house call? If you don’t have it, just say so. Why beat around the bush? I bet you’re nothing but a quack, and you will ruin the good name of Jisheng Hall sooner or later. We provided the herbs and even the water you drank. I reckon you shouldn’t charge us a consultation fee at all."

Chapter 134: Complaining Even When It’s Free

Oh, so not asking me for the water charge is generous, huh?

Old Madam Huang turned her face and scolded Qin Changlin so much he was left dumbfounded. He truly experienced what it meant for someone to turn their face faster than flipping a book.

It wasn’t like this just a moment ago!

Alright, his purpose for coming here was Gu Youyou after all. Otherwise, how could a small village afford a doctor from Jisheng Hall to make a house call? Since he had found out all there was to know about Gu Youyou, it didn’t really matter whether he charged those few coins or not.

Qin Changlin glanced at Gu Youyou and nodded, saying, "Alright, alright, the medicine was provided by you all, so consider the consultation fee as payment for that glass of tap water, farewell!"

Qin Changlin left in a huff, and Gu Youyou, with a forced smile, followed closely behind him.

Meanwhile, Old Madam Huang continued to mutter, "Really not going to take the money, huh? Could it be that he didn't cure our Sanya properly? That wouldn't be a doctor but an apprentice who hasn't graduated!"

Her voice was not low, and both Gu Youyou and Qin Changlin heard it.

Outside the Gu Family's gate, Qin Changlin indeed hadn't gone far.

Gu Youyou sneered and walked up to him.

"On purpose?" Gu Youyou cut to the chase and asked directly.

Qin Changlin responded with a forced laugh, "Sister Youyou, what do you mean 'on purpose'? I really don't understand!"

"You don't understand? How did you happen to come to make a house call in a small village?"

"Isn't it because they invited me? We run clinics to make a bit of money, don't we? If there's business knocking on the door, why wouldn't I take it, right?"

Gu Youyou's face turned cold, and she sneered, "So you're saying it was a coincidence?"

"Hehe, it was just a coincidence!"

"Coincidence my ass." Gu Youyou couldn't help but curse, "You didn't even take a consultation fee, and you still have the nerve to talk about making money?"

Thinking of Old Madam Huang's face and those last patronizing words after taking advantage of the situation, Qin Changlin's expression immediately darkened.

Gu Youyou, on the other hand, burst out laughing.

She thought to herself: This is the typical loser mentality. Complain if you charge them, and if you don’t, they suspect the quality of the service!

She laughed and said, "Do you believe if Sanya’s face ends up scarred, the label of ’incompetent doctor’ will be stuck on you for good?"

Qin Changlin was startled and asked, "What do you mean?" As the words left his mouth, realization dawned on him.

Considering the attitude of this mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, if the little girl ended up with a scar, they would likely make a fuss all the way to Jisheng Hall in the town.

That would spell trouble. After all, he had made a house call without permission, and he really hadn’t graduated yet!

Gu Youyou chuckled contemptuously, gave him a look that said he was on his own, and briskly walked toward the thatched hut to the north.

The location of that hut was quite unique. From below in Lotus Village, no matter which angle one looked from, the house on the hillside was almost invisible unless one looked very carefully. Yet, from the yard outside that house, the entire Lotus Village could be seen.

Jin Zijin had chosen such a location, surely with a lot of thought!

The doctor didn’t take a single penny and left, and while Old Madam Huang was uneasy, she was also secretly pleased.

Even though he was an apprentice, he was a doctor from Jisheng Hall. Using the services of a doctor from Jisheng Hall for free was something to brag about.

But this Sanya... she’s already five years old, a child who usually runs around haphazardly, how could she have fallen so terribly?

This season everyone is busy in the fields, and since there’s nothing much for Sanya to do, they all went out to work.

Old Madam Huang stayed behind, keeping Sanya company in the house. Sanya’s face was wrapped in cloth, fearing she might not see well and fall again.

Huang Xiangwen was busy in the kitchen preparing dinner for the whole family; today, it was her turn.

Chapter 135: The Trip Caused by Mother’s Foot

Sitting beside the bed with a little girl, Grandma Huang found it rather dull, so she started teasing Sanya in a joking manner.

"Sanya, tell Grandma, how did you fall? Where did you hurt yourself?"

With a sugar cube in her mouth, Sanya had stopped crying, but the white cloth wrapped around her face was painful to look at. Puffing her cheeks, she said crisply, "Grandma, I fell on a rock in the courtyard. It wasn’t because I walked badly, it was my mom who tripped me with her foot."

"What?" Grandma Huang was stunned for a second, and the next second she suddenly stood up, her face filled with surprise as she looked at Sanya.

"Your mom tripped you with her foot? Why would she trip you?"

Sanya tilted her head in thought then kept shaking it vigorously.

She was too young to understand all the complex thoughts inside Huang Xiangwen’s mind.

Grandma Huang’s heart skipped a beat, and her mind raced.

Children don’t lie, do they? But had Huang Xiangwen gone mad? Why would she trip Sanya?

She glanced at the smoking kitchen opposite the window and suddenly bellowed out loud.

"Huang Xiangwen, you heartless creature, you actually went through with it! Come here this instant!"

Grandma Huang’s voice was famously loud in Lotus Village. When she shouted intentionally like that, not only could Huang Xiangwen hear her from the opposite kitchen, but even the neighbors next door could hear.

Upon hearing her mother-in-law’s furious shout, Huang Xiangwen knew something was amiss.

At that moment, she was nibbling on Sanya’s sugar while making a fuss with the fire.

The shout was so loud it nearly made her drop the fire tongs on her foot.

Hurriedly using the fire tongs to snuff out the fire, she wolfed down the sugar in her mouth, dusted off her apron, and went to Grandma Huang’s room.

"Mother, did you call for me?" Huang Xiangwen asked with a forced smile, though her face was indescribably ugly.

Grandma Huang hugged Sanya close, gently blowing on the little girl’s face. Seeing Huang Xiangwen arrive, she yelled fiercely, "You actually had the nerve to do it, huh? She’s your own daughter, I watched her crawl out from your belly. Tell me, how dark has your heart become to do such a cruel thing?

You can even harm your own daughter, when I’m old, who knows what you might do to me? I always wondered why that little girl always seemed to hold a grudge against you. Tell me, have you been doing something unspeakable to her behind our backs?"

Huang Xiangwen’s face turned deathly pale, and with a thud she knelt on the floor, wailing, "Mother, I didn’t! How can you believe the word of a child?"

"It’s precisely because Sanya is young and doesn’t know how to lie that her words are trustworthy."

In her panic, Huang Xiangwen’s hands rubbed her apron continuously as she said, "Dad favors that little ghost so much, I wouldn’t dare. It’s such a pity, but yes, I caused Sanya’s injury. But I didn’t mean it, I swear! Mother, you must believe me — I’ve always been loyal to you."

"Hmph, don’t — for goodness’ sake, don’t say you’re loyal to me, I don’t have a heart as black as yours. Our Gu Family can’t afford to keep a Buddha like you around. I think I’ll talk to your brother-in-law. It’s better if we send you back to the Huang Family Village!"

"Ah, no, Mother... I’m your own flesh and blood, our relationship isn’t just mother-in-law and daughter-in-law; in terms of kinship, I even have to call you ’aunt.’ Please don’t tell anyone about this, or who knows what Gu Wen might do to me!"

Now Huang Xiangwen was truly frightened. Sent back to her family after being divorced? Unfavored by her brothers and unable to remarry, wouldn’t that ruin the rest of her life?

"Then tell me the truth, why did you do this to Sanya?"

Chapter 136: Talking to Dabao about Marriage

In a moment of desperation, she dared not hide anything anymore and confessed everything after old Madam Huang scared her.

"Mother, it was today that matchmaker Zhang came over. I had to do this because I was afraid she would bring up Dabao’s marriage proposal. What kind of marriage could matchmaker Zhang arrange for Dabao? It would just be some village girl from a nearby village. But our Dabao is the eldest grandson of the Gu Family. I want to find him a daughter-in-law from a good family background. In the future, when Erya and Sanya get married, and Erbao and Sanbao take wives, others will make comparisons, won’t they?

Even for a girl from the town, Dabao’s father and I are already looking for someone suitable. There is a young lady from the Tao Bowl Shop who is quite good. We’re planning to ask someone to check on that.

As for Sanya, mother, I was thinking that a light fall wouldn’t be a big deal. I didn’t expect her to hit her head on a rock and fall so heavily! Mother, she’s my own daughter, I wouldn’t bear for her to suffer like this..."

Seeing Huang Xiangwen crying so genuinely, old Madam Huang somewhat believed her, saying only, "I can understand your desire to find a good wife for Dabao, but currently, it is your father who calls the shots in our family. The person you favor won’t do; we need his agreement!"

"Then... what do you think I should do, mother?"

Old Madam Huang snorted coldly, "In my opinion, you should save your effort, stop stirring up trouble with your clever schemes."

Huang Xiangwen stood there, stunned, and then sat down on the ground with a thud, wailing, "Ah...? So my poor Sanya suffered for nothing!"

...

Knowing that she couldn’t discuss Gu Dabao’s marriage with Huang Xiangwen, matchmaker Zhang, seeing Gu Feng heading to the fields with the family’s laborers, followed them out as well.

On the narrow ridges of the field, matchmaker Zhang lifted her trousers carefully, afraid of stepping into the mud.

She was the most famous matchmaker among several nearby villages, and even some of the matches in the town were arranged by her. She made more money through matchmaking than the farming folks at home, which gave her a special status in their household; she didn’t have to toil in the fields.

Her responsibility was to keep a close watch on the eligible bachelors and bachelorettes of the villages, to understand their situations, and to arrange matches at the right time.

Because she didn’t work in the fields, she disdainfully thought of those who did as dirty. She took her time meandering along the half-meter-wide ridge before finally reaching the place where Gu Feng and the others were working.

From a distance, matchmaker Zhang called out loudly, "Old Gu, you’ve been busy all afternoon, why not take a rest? At your age, you shouldn’t overexert yourself. Take care of your health!"

Gu Feng raised his head in the field and, looking towards the person on the ridge, responded loudly, "Hey! I’m old now; my body isn’t what it used to be. It’s time for me to rest a bit."

It was obvious matchmaker Zhang had something to say to Gu Feng, and Gu Feng probably guessed what it was about. Seeing that both Dabao and Erya were of age, it was time to listen to what matchmaker Zhang had to say.

After quickly washing the mud off himself with water, Gu Feng approached matchmaker Zhang.

"The kids’ grandmother is at home. Why have you come to the fields? I don’t even have a cup of tea to offer you here," Gu Feng said politely.

Matchmaker Zhang, shrewd as she was, immediately replied, "In the Gu Family, it’s still Old Gu who makes the decisions. Even if you approached the old lady, it would ultimately come back to you. I came directly to you to avoid bothering with all that!"

Gu Feng laughed heartily, finding the words to his liking.

"So, should I just speak plainly?"

"Of course, of course. Go ahead, is it about finding a match for my Dabao, or has someone shown interest in Erya?"

Matchmaker Zhang waved her handkerchief and chuckled, "There is an order to these things; first, we’ll talk about Dabao. Once that’s settled, then we can discuss Erya. I hope you don’t mind me knocking on your door so often!"

Chapter 137: Experience the Matchmaker’s Mouth

Matchmaker Zhang loved to powder her face, and ordinarily the fluttering of her handkerchief wouldn’t have been an issue, but as she waved it, a pungent scent was released.

Gu Feng deeply frowned, sneezed, and stepped aside.

"Matchmaker Zhang, please don’t stand too close, my old nose can’t handle those strange scents."

Matchmaker Zhang’s face stiffened, and her complexion darkened.

The previously pleasant atmosphere regarding the marriage proposal had been disrupted just like that.

Ultimately not wanting to quarrel over money, Matchmaker Zhang quickly recovered her powdered chrysanthemum face.

Without further ado, she got to the point, "It’s like this, over in the east at Anqing Town, a Scholar passed away three years ago, and his family has a daughter, quite a looker and literate too, and not to mention knowledgeable and well-mannered. She was about to be proposed for marriage three years ago, but then the Scholar died, and things got delayed.

By our customs, if there’s a mourning period, one must observe three years of filial piety, and she has completed these three years by now, she’s eighteen this year. Her age has held her back, making it harder to find a match in the town. Later, her mother came to me and asked to find a well-off farming household, and amongst all the farming families I know, yours, the Gu Family, is the most prosperous, and it just so happens that Dabao is seeking a match. Tell me, isn’t this fate?"

"The Scholar’s Family’s daughter?" Gu Feng was taken aback, then said, "But she’s a full three years older than our Dabao. Besides, we farmers want wives who can work, what’s the use for one that can read?"

"Hey! That’s where you’re wrong!" Matchmaker Zhang said somewhat excitedly: "Old man Gu, it’s not that I mean to criticize you, you’re good in every other aspect, but you are a bit too old-fashioned. Who decreed that farmers must till the land generation after generation?

Tell me, with the wealth of the Gu Family, would it be difficult to support a scholar? You just lack the connections. Alas, despite your family's wealth, all the dozens in your household, not one is literate—your wealth alone won't earn respect.

In the social hierarchy of scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants, scholars are ranked above farmers, you..."

"Hold on!"

Matchmaker Zhang, ceaselessly chattering and causing Gu Feng a headache, was cut off as he sternly said, "Are you here to arrange a match for Dabao or to criticize that not a single person in my family is literate?"

Matchmaker Zhang stiffened, then slapped her thigh, laughing, "Oh my, look at me, once I start talking, I just can't stop. Yes, yes, of course, I am here to arrange a marriage for Dabao, precisely with the girl I mentioned, who just happens to be three years older than him.

There's a saying, 'A woman three years older is like a piece of gold,' these three years are truly no issue. As for her literacy and whether she can work, those are even less of a concern. If she can't do farm work, she can learn—she's managed to learn to read, haven't she? Are you worried she can't learn to farm your crops?

Being literate, well, that's only a good thing for your family. In the future, if there's ever a need to read some government decree or calculate some taxes, won't you have someone who can do it?"

Not just that, if anyone else in your family ever wants to attend a private school, you'll have that connection, won't you? Worse comes to worst, she can even start to teach the children at home early on, and I've heard that the earlier a child begins learning, the smarter they become. Other families might not have this opportunity, but if your family marries a literate granddaughter-in-law, you'll have it, and your great-grandchildren will surely be ahead of others..."

Matchmaker Zhang was famously known as a master matchmaker for ten miles around, her smooth tongue was no trifle, and once she started talking, it flowed like water.

On and on she went, not stopping until you nodded in agreement.

Chapter 138: What kind of wife do you want?

In the fields, the other members of the Gu Family saw the matchmaker chattering away to Gu Feng from a distance, but they were too far away to hear anything.

Gu Er asked Gu San, "What do you think Dad is talking about with the matchmaker? They've been at it for so long and still haven't finished. Are we still supposed to work or what?"

Gu San replied irritably, "What else could it be? It's about Dabao's marriage, of course!"

Upon hearing this, Gu Er objected, "How do you know it's about my Dabao's marriage? Maybe it's about your Erya's. Didn't your wife say just the other day that you should settle Erya's marriage early, before the autumn harvest?"

When he heard that, he sneered for quite a while.

Gu San squinted his eyes and said in a deep voice, "Second brother, how do you know what my wife tells me?"

Gu Er was startled and looked away unnaturally.

Could he tell Gu San that he had been eavesdropping by the wall?

It wasn't really his fault; Gu San and his wife were such schemers, whispering to each other all day long in their room. The eldest couple had passed away, Youyou was married off, and it was just the two brothers in the house now. He had to guard against him, didn't he?

"I... Our houses are separated by just a wall, and your wife has such a loud voice. You think I want to listen?"

Having yelled at Gu San, Gu Er moved to the other side to work!

Gu Dabao looked at his dad, then at his uncle with a gloomy face, and finally picked up his tools and went over to his dad’s side.

"Dad, Mom said she wanted to find me a wife from the town. What if Grandpa arranges someone from the village for me?"

Gu Er was taken aback, looked up at his eldest son, and chuckled, "So do you want to marry a girl from the town or one from the village?"

Gu Dabao thought for a moment and replied, "From the village!"

Gu Er looked at his son with some surprise and asked, "Don’t you want a pretty wife from the town? What’s so good about village girls, ugly and crude like your mother!"

Blushing, Gu Dabao said, "But Grandpa says village folks are honest and can work in the fields!"

"Hey, you silly boy!" Gu Er lifted his hand in exasperation and smacked Gu Dabao on the head, muttering angrily, "Are you stupid? If you marry a girl from the town, why would you have her work in the fields? Does our family lack fieldworkers? She would bring a dowry, and we’ll give her light tasks to do. Once you have a wife, you’ll forget about your mother, no, your father, and won’t bear to make her work at all!"

Gu Dabao, with a head covered in mud, asked, "So should I listen to Grandpa or Mom?"

"Of course, you should..." Gu Er turned his head and saw that Gu Feng and the matchmaker seemed to be having a great time talking; the deal was undoubtedly going through.

The matchmaker always emphasized a suitable match, unless there were specific requests; if neither party had any, they would follow her lead, which likely meant the other party was from the village.

Gu Feng, the head of the family, was in charge. Even if the mother made a fuss, it wouldn’t change anything if he had already agreed.

He sighed deeply and shook his head, "Just let it be..."

Gu Dabao: "..."

After a lot of persuasion, the matchmaker finally convinced Gu Feng.

In the past, due to unpleasant relations with the Lin Family, he had considered sending the children to private school, but the Gu family weren't made for studying; the children were unwilling to continue after just a few days.

Considering his family had been farmers generation after generation, maybe it was just their fate, so he never forced the issue.

Chapter 139: Completed

Now that Matchmaker Zhang had spoken such words, the thought of raising a scholar began to germinate in his heart.

If neither his children nor grandchildren had succeeded, then it would have to be his great-grandchildren. By marrying a girl from the Lei Family, he could teach the child to read from a young age, certainly making him better than other children!

Imagining a day when the descendants of the Gu Family could hold a position like the Lin Family, his heart bloomed with joy.

Seeing Gu Feng's expression, Matchmaker Zhang knew the deal was sealed. She smiled and urged, "Old Master Gu, is it settled or not? If it is, I'll talk to the girl's family and we can pick a date for you to propose!"

Gu Feng snapped out of his reverie and responded with a laugh, "Settled, how could it not be? I'll make the decision on this matter. Hurry and choose the date!"

"Alright, I'll go tomorrow!"

Matchmaker Zhang suddenly remembered something, took a few steps away, then turned back and said, "There's something I forgot to mention."

"What is it?" Gu Feng felt a jolt of anxiety as the conversation took an unexpected turn.

"Eh! It's nothing serious, just that the Lei Family originally came from Shishu Village. Lei the Scholar used to teach at a private school in Anqing Town, that's why they moved to the town. But after Lei the Scholar died, his widow and children couldn't stay in the town any longer and returned to Shishu Village.

So now, by all accounts, they're not considered town folks anymore. They are villagers just like you all. What do you think... is that alright?"

Gu Feng replied, "Of course, it's alright. Whether they're from the town or not, it doesn't make much of a difference. As long as you vouch for them, that's all that matters!"

Matchmaker Zhang laughed in relief, "That's the spirit! Old Master Gu is a wise man. Since you've said that, I can rest easy!"

...

Gu Youyou was washing clothes by the river at the bottom of the hill when she saw Wang Shun catching fish.

Gu Youyou's heart leaped with joy at the prospect of eating fish again. Should she trade some vegetables for it?

Uh, that might be a bit unfair to him! They were out of game at home, so she'd wait for Jin Zijin to return with some.

After washing and hanging the clothes to dry on the bamboo poles in the courtyard, Gu Youyou quickly gathered several handfuls of vegetables and excitedly ran to the riverbank, only to find Wang Shun had already caught the fish and was running off with his basket at a swift pace.

Gu Youyou shouted from behind, "Shunzi, wait for me!"

Unexpectedly, hearing Gu Youyou's voice behind him, Wang Shun ran even faster, as if chased by a ghost.

"Hey, why are you running? I won't cheat you!"

Wang Shun shouted back as he ran, "Sister, I can't trade this fish with you. This is to honor my future mother-in-law!"

Gu Youyou: "... What?" The words "future mother-in-law" struck Gu Youyou like a bolt from the blue.

Wang Shun appeared honest and simple, and Gu Youyou had thought him the kind of man who would blush at the mention of a bride. She never expected him to speak of a future mother-in-law so casually.

She hadn't heard Wang Shun's aunt mention any girl from another family that Wang Shun had taken a liking to.

The next day, Gu Youyou saw Wang Shun's aunt and asked her about it.

The aunt's expression was complicated as she sighed and then said, "I know about this. The girl he's taken a shine to is none other than your sister, Gu Xiaoqing."

Gu Youyou was startled, "Erya?"

She had heard nothing of this! But then again, Erya was of age to be discussed in marriage arrangements, being fifteen.

She just hadn't expected Wang Shun to set his sights on Erya.

Wang Shun’s aunt nodded and confirmed, "Yes, Gu Erya!"

Suddenly, Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Well, isn’t that nice? Why the long face, Auntie? Have you gone to propose yet?"

Chapter 140: Ancient Marriage Customs

Wang Family’s aunt shook her head and said, "There’s a natural order to these things, we’re waiting for Gu Dabao to settle down first. It’s just... sigh!"

"What happened?" Gu Youyou asked curiously when she saw the aunt sighing sadly.

The aunt from the Wang Family looked somewhat distressed and lowered her voice to say, "I’ve secretly inquired that your third uncle has found a son of the Bun Shop in town for Erya, just waiting for Dabao’s marriage to be settled before asking the matchmaker to propose. Don’t think your third uncle and third aunt are usually quiet, they have high hopes. With only one daughter Erya, naturally, they want her to marry well, how could they fancy my Shunzi?

"Shunzi is honest and simple-hearted, and yet he spends all day trying to please them in a sneaky way. As for the girl, she can’t have the final say in her own marriage matters, so isn’t he just wasting his efforts for nothing?"

"This..." Gu Youyou smiled awkwardly, not knowing what to say.

In those days, parental say and matchmakers’ words were the norm; if one sought their own match, that was considered a grave offense, especially for girls. This was deemed a private agreement, which was invalid; moreover, it could ruin one’s reputation.

Parents getting involved in arranging their children’s marriages is not uncommon even in modern times, let alone in the old days when people were more conservative.

Wang Shun, oh Wang Shun, you’re calling for your future mother-in-law so confidently, yet it’s still uncertain whose mother-in-law you’ll be. You’d better pray for good luck!

...

Gu Xiaoqing was a fifteen-year-old maiden, the eldest daughter of her third uncle. This year, she would begin to discuss marriage prospects. Once Gu Dabao married and brought home his wife, she was supposed to be married off next.

According to the village customs, a woman about to be married didn't have to do any chores; she would stay in her room and embroider her dowry. This period wasn't determined by age but by the date of engagement, naturally excluding those who had been betrothed as children.

Meng Qiuju, feeling sorry for her only eldest daughter, had been keeping an eye out for a suitable family. She also urged Gu's third uncle to inquire in the neighboring village, hoping to finalize the date sooner so that Gu Xiaoqing could have a break as soon as possible.

With the autumn harvest just two months away, work would increase; it was essential to have the marriage arranged before that.

Through a friend, Gu's third uncle became acquainted with a family from the Bun Shop in town. That family had four daughters before finally having a son, who was their treasure.

That Bun Shop was to be left to this treasured son, so as soon as Gu's third uncle heard about it, he immediately felt it was a good match.

Their son was just fifteen this year, the same age as Gu Xiaoqing. He had already planned that once Gu Dabao's situation had settled, he'd have the matchmaker who was dealing with it also speak for Gu Xiaoqing's marriage.

But unexpectedly, just as the matchmaker Zhang was visiting the Gu Family today, with hopes of having Zhang take a good look at his own daughter, he couldn't find her.

Gu's third uncle complained to Meng Qiuju, "Didn't I tell you not to let her go out today? Right now, matchmaker Zhang is discussing the betrothal to the Lei Family in our front yard. Where is Erya?"

Meng Qiuju looked innocent and said, "I told her, indeed. Just a while ago, I saw her in the room embroidering handkerchiefs, then I went to the kitchen to boil water. When I came out, she was gone."

"Do you know where she went?"

"How would I know where she's gone?"

Gu's third uncle suddenly thought of something, muttered to himself that it was bad, his entire face looking as though the sky had collapsed.

"I know where she went!"

"Where did she go?" Meng Qiuju asked.

Gu's third uncle looked at Meng Qiuju and suddenly asked in a stern voice, "Do you know where that fish we ate the other day came from?"

"My daughter honored me with it!" Meng Qiuju said.