Farmhouse 171

Chapter 171: You're Fired

Whether his words had a mocking tone or not, Gu Youyou took it as a joke at her expense, as if he was relishing her misfortune.

Since she was now a person of no use, she didn't believe that Jin Zijin would genuinely worry about her falling at this point.

Having clearly severed their ties, with nothing to do with each other, he actually dared to mock her?

Well, Gu Youyou wasn't one to be bullied easily.

Gu Youyou swiftly untied her belt and secured it around the tree trunk with a sturdy knot. As she turned around, she met Jin Zijin's eyes head-on.

That face was meaningful and carried a mocking smile.

Gu Youyou's face turned cold in an instant, and with a biting tone, she said, "Now that the gloves are off, you don't even bother to pretend anymore, huh? ... This actually suits you better than pretending to be honest and cute. It's honest. Because with that face, sheep's head and rat's eyes, pointed mouth and monkey cheeks, rooster fight triangle eyes, you're not born with a face of a good person! Showing your true colors seems more straightforward!"

Jin Zijin furrowed his brows, subconsciously touching his face.

Rough it might be, but was it as ugly as she described?

Knowing she was intentionally disparaging him, Jin Zijin couldn't help but find it somewhat amusing; his arms were getting sore from hanging for so long.

He surveyed the surroundings, noting several upside-down pines on the cliff face where he could temporarily rest his feet. He picked one he thought was sturdy enough and leapt up with agility, landing gracefully—a far more impressive display than Gu Youyou's cautious climb earlier.

Sitting on the trunk, Zijin finally said, "Bringing you out here wasn't solely my decision; your grandfather agreed to it."

Gu Youyou found it laughable, responding with a cold laugh, "Did he know you were placing me in danger, using me as bait? Do you have any idea what it's like to share a coffin with someone insane? You never know what crazy things they might do - they could strangle you in your sleep, or you wake up in the middle of the night to find yourself lying among a pile of abandoned skeletons..."

Thinking back on the experiences of the past few days, a nameless hatred welled up inside her.

Gu Youyou took a deep breath, closed her eyes, turned her head away, and looked at him no more.

In a low voice, she said, "Forget it, I've said it before—we're even. I don't owe you anything!"

Rather than waste time arguing with him about all this nonsense, it was better to figure out whether it was easier to go up the mountain or down.

They couldn't very well just hang there forever!

The clouds were thick in the mountains, with no sign of the top above or the bottom below. Even the sun couldn't penetrate the depths of this gorge.

She couldn't help but complain, of all places to jump, why this damned spot?

There were plenty of places to climb on the cliff face, but Gu Youyou didn't dare to climb.

Without any climbing equipment, a single slip could mean death.

She glanced unintentionally at Jin Zijin, thinking that he should be able to climb up on his own, but he hadn’t made the attempt and was instead looking at her thoughtfully.

Gu Youyou glared at him irritably and threw a rock she picked from the cliff face at him, cursing in anger, "The thing I regret most in this life is jumping down here! If you want to leave, then go quickly!"

"Finally admitting you jumped down yourself?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

"Do you really want to sever ties with me?" Zijin said with an open smile, "Don’t forget, I am your husband!"

He still dared to mention that damned husband? Gu Youyou picked up another rock and hurled it, seething with rage, "...Then from this moment on, you’re fired!"

"Fired?"

Chapter 172: A Dream in Nanke

It must be said that Gu Youyou sometimes exhibits very peculiar behavior. Besides her expected sickly appearance and her four yin constitution, she doesn’t have a single trait that matches what Gu Youyou should be like, especially her temperament!

She had medical skills and her techniques were mature; he had known this for some time, so he was certain that this woman couldn’t be the one who was confined to that room all year long.

But he had also investigated and found that over the years, she had not left that room, except for the two aunts from the Gu Family and the occasional visits from old Lady Huang, no other people had gone in.

If it was a case of switching places, the people of the Gu Family couldn’t possibly have been unaware.

The two fell silent for a moment, and Jin Zijin’s eyes darkened as he said, "Are you really Gu Youyou?"

"Of course I am!" Gu Youyou said.

"Then how can you explain the fact that you write such good calligraphy and possess advanced medical skills?"

Clinging tightly to the pine tree, Youyou furrowed her brow slightly but said with a smiling face, "Have you ever heard of the ’Southern branch one dream’?"

"A dream?"

"Things in dreams are not real, but that doesn’t mean they are completely joyless! I was locked in that specially made tomb as a child, thinking it would bury me for life.

In a confused state, I experienced many dreams, and those dreams brought significant changes to my life. In the world within one of those dreams, I was a normal, healthy person. Do you think all these things that defy logic were learned by me in that dream world? So, I am still me, Gu Youyou. Do you believe it?"

Jin Zijin’s unfathomably deep gaze didn’t reveal whether he believed or disbelieved her. Having been around each other for a long time, his pretense might not work on Gu Youyou, who knew he was half-doubtful.

She was incredibly pleased with herself, thinking that no matter how capable you are, you’ll never fully guess my origins in this lifetime.

A ’Southern branch one dream’ is enough to keep you pondering.

In the valley, the sky darkened quickly as night approached. The weather in July was still hot, so there was no need to worry about it being too cold at night, but spending the night on a cliff was not a wise decision. Even if this tender sapling could withstand another night of her hanging on, there was no guarantee she wouldn’t fall off while dozing.

It seemed she understood why that detestable man had not climbed up but instead sat leisurely with his eyes closed on that tree trunk, meditating.

He is probably waiting for her to ask for help, isn't he?

If that were the case, wouldn't she owe him her life again?

That wouldn't do; Gu Youyou prioritized her dignity above all else.

Humph, then just you wait; I'd rather fall and die than ask you for help.

Previously, Gu Youyou had injured her arm, and because she had already torn her dress into a half-skirt to save a wolf pup, tearing off another piece to wrap her injury would completely reduce it to a half skirt.

Luckily, she still wore half-length leggings underneath.

Fatigued and hungry, and having to remain fully alert, it was an uncomfortable situation. She wished simultaneously for darkness to fall slower and for it to come more quickly.

The landslides and the collapse were such major events, the villagers from the neighboring areas would know, and once they came into the mountain to investigate, they might find this place.

Speaking of the devil, she had not expected that the villagers searching the mountain would arrive so quickly.

They must have seen the bloodstains on the cliff and thought that someone might have fallen down.

"Is there anyone down there?"

The dense fog obscured the view, and the people on the mountain had no idea how high the cliff was, so they could only stand on the edge of the cliff and shout down!

Chapter 173: Rescued

Gu Youyou, upon hearing the voice, is overjoyed, hastily calling back loudly, "Someone's here, I'm hanging down here, Shunzi, quickly throw the rope down."

Judging by the voice, thankfully, the fall was not too deep, and with a rope tied around, it shouldn't be difficult to climb back up.

There were many villagers on the mountain, and under the organization of the village head, they split into several teams. It was Wang Shun's team who discovered this part of the cliff, and hearing Gu Youyou's voice, he was ecstatic, saying, "It's Sister Youyou, she's still alive, quickly get the rope out, and pull Sister Youyou up."

The others also never expected Gu Youyou to be alive; having been taken by wildmen for several days and still surviving was nothing short of a miracle!

In order to catch wildmen, they had brought plenty of ropes, tied them together, and threw them down, which was more than enough.

"Sister Youyou, the rope's coming down, grab onto it."

The valley was already very dark at this time, and the rope being thrown down was truly a lifesaver!

Seeing the rope not far away, Gu Youyou was overjoyed, she pouted towards Jin Zijin's direction and said, "I'll go up first, you see to yourself!"

"Shunzi, move a bit more to the right."

Gu Youyou tied the rope around herself, gave it a tug, it felt sturdy, and she called out loudly, "I'm ready, you can pull me up!"

Unexpectedly, there were so many people on top of the cliff, and all of them were men from the village. They probably had never seen Gu Youyou dressed quite like this, staring blankly at her fair and tender legs.

Gu Youyou also didn’t look too pleased; in modern times, wearing a mini skirt was nothing unusual, and she was even wearing mid-length leggings.

But in these ancient times, it was not the same, it was like being some rare animal.

People in ancient times were too feudal.

She quickly raised her arms, explaining, "My arm is injured, I can’t just do nothing."

Wang Shun was full of concern, asking, "Sister, are you alright?"

"Hmm? Something’s wrong, my arm’s injured."

"I mean the wildman. He didn’t do anything to you, did he?"

Gu Youyou narrowed her eyes, reflecting on his words, and then she realized what he was worried about.

In ancient times, the most important thing for a woman was her reputation, and he probably thought she had been violated by that wildman.

Gu Youyou chuckled dryly, pointing towards the cliff, "The wildman fell off, he must have died from the fall, I was lucky, I got snagged in a tree."

"It was I who caught you!"

The sentence that followed was intercepted by Jin Zijin; turning around, she saw a man with agile movements leaping up from below the cliff, unflustered.

Seeing her surrounded by a group of men, his face turned dark in an instant, and he quickly took off his clothes to wrap her in them.

"Youyou, how could you forget about me after getting up, didn't we agree you'd go up first, then throw the rope down to pull me up?"

Gu Youyou: "..." When did I ever say that?

"It's getting dark, let's hurry down the mountain. Shunzi, fellow villagers, thank you so much."

This man who suddenly leaped up from the bottom of the cliff was obviously beyond everyone's expectations, Wang Shun chuckled and said, "I was just wondering where Brother Jin had gone, turns out he had already found Sister Youyou. I knew it, how could Brother Jin not care for Sister Youyou, and see, he's the one who found her first!"

Jin Zijin succeeded in snatching his wife back from the wildman's grasp and even killed the wildman; this news spread quickly in the village.

Previously, there were rumors that Jin Zijin was indifferent to his wife and had married her intending to absorb her dowry, but this event disproved those rumors as he had rescued Gu Youyou.

This secluded little mountain village, once again, returned to its usual tranquility!

...

Chapter 174: Can't Wait Anymore

The day the Gu Family had agreed upon to propose marriage to the Lei Family had to be postponed due to the disappearance of Gu Youyou.

The girl from the Lei Family was already eighteen, and the family was worried that the Gu Family might change their minds. In the past few days, they had asked Matchmaker Zhang to inquire several times.

With a hint of helplessness, Matchmaker Zhang explained, "Lei Family's lady, there have been no changes on the part of the Gu Family, and I believe in Old Master Gu's character. What he has promised, he won't change, so you can rest assured and just wait for your daughter to get married this time."

"But how much longer do we have to wait? You know my daughter has already been delayed for three years because she was mourning her father. We can't afford any more delays."

"Oh, that's not up to me to decide. Haven't I already told you? Their eldest granddaughter had an accident while picking mushrooms in the mountains. Everyone in the village has gone up to search. Imagine, at this critical juncture, if they were preoccupied with matchmaking for their grandson, what would others think of them?

If the entire village is helping to search, and their own family doesn't show concern, they would be criticized by their neighbors, wouldn't you agree? You wouldn't feel assured marrying your daughter into such a family, would you?"

This lady from the Lei Family didn't care who had an accident; she was only worried about her daughter who couldn't wait any longer.

But Matchmaker Zhang had made things so clear that she had nothing more to say, only responding, "Then I must trouble you, Matchmaker Zhang, to visit Lotus Village when you have the time. See if the Gu Family's eldest granddaughter has been found. If you manage to finalize my daughter's marriage match, you'll certainly receive a generous gratitude gift!"

Upon hearing the mention of a gratitude gift, Matchmaker Zhang's face bloomed like a chrysanthemum, and she repeatedly assured, "I understand, I understand..."

Over at the Gu Family, Gu Feng had been in bed for several days, not until Gu Youyou appeared before him in good health.

In just a few days, Gu Feng seemed to have aged greatly, and his head full of white hair startled Gu Youyou.

"Grandfather, Youyou has worried you again!" Gu Youyou felt a pang of guilt and stealthily checked Gu Feng's pulse as she grasped his withered arm.

Jin Zijin had accompanied Gu Youyou on her return, and seeing Gu Feng distraught over her disappearance, she glared at him furiously.

'It's all your fault!' Gu Youyou communicated silently with her lips.

Struggling to sit up from the bed, Gu Feng finally recognized that the person before him was indeed Gu Youyou, and with tears streaming down his face, he cried, "Youyou, is that really you? Have you come back?"

"It's me, Grandfather, Youyou has returned. Don't be sad anymore; harming your health isn't worth it!"

Gu Feng's aged eyes showed a glint of life again as he sighed deeply, "You, my child, why do you have to suffer so much? The Gu Family hasn't done anything to deserve this. Why does my eldest granddaughter have to endure such hardship? If Heaven has any complaints, let them come at me. What kind of Heaven is this, that constantly torments a young girl..."

"Oh dear, old man, have you gone mad, daring to curse Heaven?"

Old Mrs. Huang, who had rushed in from the outside, happened to hear Gu Feng cursing Heaven. She spat twice and quickly ran back into the yard. Kneeling down, she began kowtowing and praying incessantly.

"Oh, Lord of Heaven, my old man is out of his mind; please don't take his words seriously. Don't blame him..."

Ancient people were superstitious, and rural villagers in ancient times even more so. Thus, Gu Feng speaking ill of Heaven was committing a great taboo!

When Matchmaker Zhang arrived and saw that the gate to the Gu Family's courtyard was open, she walked right in, only to witness this scene.

"Oh my, Old Madam Gu, what occasion is it today that has you bowing and praying to Heaven?"

Chapter 175: Every Family Has Its Problems

Old Mistress Huang stood up, not in a good mood, and said, "When have I ever needed to notify you before making vows to the heavens?"

Matchmaker Zhang was choked by the rebuff and, realizing Old Mistress Huang's prickly demeanor, knew she was unhappy. Still, she approached with a smile, "Madame Gu, who has upset you so? Why are you in such a bad temper?"

"Hmph..." Old Mistress Huang snorted coldly at Matchmaker Zhang, dusted off her knees, and went into the backyard. Soon after, her muttering and cursing could be heard coming from there.

"Who have I offended, that everyone should give me such aggravation? Was it easy for me to birth this bunch of you, only to suffer such humiliation in my old age!"

Huang Xiangwen stuck her head out of the window, then swiftly pulled back and said, "What's Mother so mad about? We wouldn't dare give her trouble."

Gu Feng gestured towards the master house and whispered, "Who else could it be? The debt collector came today!"

All these words fell clearly upon Gu Youyou's ears. She was speechless. Wasn't she also a victim? If there was someone to scold, it should be that person standing at the gate pretending to be a door god!

Outside the door, Matchmaker Zhang called out in her thin voice, "Patriarch Gu, are you feeling any better? Could you come out for a moment?"

"Ah! Please go to the main hall and wait for a bit!" Gu Feng naturally meant to get up.

Gu Youyou frowned and said, "Grandfather, you should rest if you're not feeling well; let my uncle and aunt handle it."

"No, I must get up!" Gu Feng was obstinate as he rose from his bed, with Jin Zijin coming over to support him.

He said, "Youyou, as head of this family, I must take care of your brother and sister's affairs. Your second and third uncles have already accused me of favoritism. Dabao is our eldest grandson, and if I don't preside over his matrimonial matters, they will grumble again."

It's said that every family has its own difficult scripture to chant, and the more people there are, the more issues arise. This saying couldn't be more true.

Gu Youyou had no choice but to flank Gu Feng on either side with Jin Zijin and help him to the main hall.

Matchmaker Zhang was already waiting there. Hearing that she had arrived, the second uncle and aunt also came out of their room and were waiting for Gu Feng in the main hall ahead of time.

Old Mistress Huang, filled with anger, did not show up.

Gu Dabao, Gu Hong, stood bashfully behind his second uncle like a shy maiden.

Upon seeing Gu Youyou, Matchmaker Zhang exclaimed in shock, "Oh my! I heard your Youyou was found, after a few days on the mountain, you must've suffered a lot, eh?"

On Jin Zijin's side, he quickly took over the conversation, "During those days on the mountain, I was taking care of her all along. How much hardship could she have faced?"

Gu Youyou hadn't realized the implication behind Matchmaker Zhang's words until she heard Jin Zijin's response, and then she was shocked to catch the undercurrent in Zhang's words.

She had been taken by a savage, and anyone uninformed might think she'd been violated. For ancient women, reputation was more important than life. If such rumors were confirmed, it would be a catastrophe.

Gu Feng, of course, also picked up on the subtext in Matchmaker Zhang's words and said displeased, "Matchmaker Zhang, what are you implying with your words today? If you're here to discuss Dabao's marriage, then please stick to the matter at hand. If you're here to check on Youyou, you've seen that she is perfectly fine. But if you're here to talk about Dabao's marriage with the Lei Family girl, then I would thank you to focus on the matter at hand and not stray into other topics."

"Patriarch Gu, look at what you're saying!" Matchmaker Zhang laughed and, fidgeting with her red flowered handkerchief, said, "Naturally, I came to inquire about the marriage between Gu Dabao and the Lei Family girl. Now that your Youyou has also returned, wouldn't it be appropriate to pick a date to visit the Lei

Chapter 176: Preparing to Move Out

"Hmm!" Gu Feng nodded and said, "Everything has been prepared early on. Instead of choosing a day, it's better to just take today, so let's make it tomorrow. Please trouble Matchmaker Zhang to make another trip to notify the Lei Family!"

"Ah, of course!" Matchmaker Zhang busily said with a smile.

...

She had thought that coming back would sever all ties with him, but to her surprise, days passed without much change.

Jin Zijin still went hunting in the mountains every day, and at night, he still firmly imprisoned her in his embrace.

Gu Youyou often felt quite suffocated; she couldn't push him away, couldn't beat him, and when she scolded him, he would just snore, really coming off as a rascal.

"Can you be more serious? Didn't we agree to separate amicably? You know better than anyone why we were tied together. Now that we've settled everything, we should stop sleeping together!"

"I’m just worried you would feel cold!" Jin Zijin said earnestly.

His hot breath gently exhaled on her neck, feeling somewhat scorching.

Gu Youyou pushed his hands away, stating righteously, "It’s July. Do you think I would feel cold?"

"Then it’s because I feel hot!"

Gu Youyou: "..."

Gu Youyou truly didn’t want to continue this vague and unclear entanglement. At this point, she still couldn’t pry a single word out about his affairs.

After counting her silver, Gu Youyou had nearly a hundred taels saved up. Ten taels were enough for her to rent a quiet courtyard in Qingshui Town for a year. She couldn’t return to the Gu Family, nor stay beside Jin Zijin, this dangerous person. She decided to become self-reliant and move out first.

In the summer heat, women in the village liked to wear cloth-wrapped conical hats to shade them from the sun; blending in with the locals, she also picked a breathable fabric to make one for herself.

In town, there were few people around at noon, and many homes had smoke rising from their cooking.

This was the difference between townfolk and villagers.

Villagers were busy working, eating more in the morning and evening, not at noon. In town, only those too poor to cover their expenses skipped lunch, while most others did eat.

When Gu Youyou arrived at Jisheng Hall, it happened to coincide with mealtime, and she felt a bit embarrassed.

Embarrassed, she truly hadn’t intended to drop by at lunchtime!

Qin Changlin invited her for lunch, and she shamelessly accepted. Inside Jisheng Hall, she still didn’t see that legendary Doctor Zhou.

Qin Changlin said, "My master has been quite busy lately with endless patient calls. Just now he headed to the Lu Family in Lu Town!"

Gu Youyou said, "Doctor Zhou dedicates himself to the welfare of others; people trust his medical skills and ethics, that’s why they come from far and wide to request his services."

Qin Changlin proudly declared, "That’s true. My master’s medical skills are recognized even by wealthy families in Beijing, comparable to an Imperial Physician!"

At the mention of the Imperial Court, Gu Youyou was slightly surprised!

She wondered about the medical skills of the Imperial Physician in the palace and even what level of medical expertise existed in this world; she had no idea, only knowing that the person who had poisoned her had used something beyond her knowledge.

Then there were those incidents she encountered in the mountains a few days ago...

Ah! There was really quite a lot she couldn’t figure out.

"Alright, I didn’t come today to see your master nor for the meal. You know this town well, help me out, find a house with good conditions and a fair price."

Qin Changlin was taken aback for a moment, then suddenly overjoyed, saying, "Sister Youyou, have you finally decided? Are you planning to open a medical practice in town?"

Chapter 177: Becoming a Doctor at Jisheng Hall

Gu Youyou was stunned for a moment before nodding and saying, "Hm? Ah! I'm opening a clinic! Colleague, why are you so happy about that, aren't you afraid that I'll steal your business?"

Qin Changlin was both shocked and delighted, saying, "Afraid? Not at all, I'd be thrilled if you opened a clinic in town. You don't know, ever since my teacher returned to the town, he's hardly ever in Jisheng Hall. I, having taken up this profession halfway, am simply like a duck being forced onto a perch. I'm scared of prescribing the wrong remedies and then having the patients report me to the county office.

If you really come, don't open a clinic on your own. First, a new clinic doesn't have a reputation, the neighbors won't trust it, and besides, the silver needed... it's not a small sum. How about this? I'll talk to my teacher and have you join us at Jisheng Hall as a consulting doctor, how does that sound?"

This proposition somewhat tempted Gu Youyou. She suppressed the excitement in her heart and said, "Is that possible? A female doctor?"

Qin Changlin assured her, "Yes, of course, it's possible. A female doctor is perfect, after all, many women who fall ill feel too embarrassed to seek out a male doctor, it's more convenient for them. Only...,"

His tone shifted, revealing his dilemma, "Last time, it was temporary, and deceiving everyone by sitting behind a curtain worked fine, but if you're going to consult permanently, sitting behind a curtain won't do. And... in our Zhuzhao Country, female doctors are indeed a pitiful sight. Occasionally, there are female doctors with decent medical skills who wind up having no patients to treat, and in the end, they can only go to Yanliu Lane to treat the sick girls there. So generally, women don't study medicine."

Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow, slightly astonished, and said, "Why is that?"

Qin Changlin explained, "Most medics are males, and it's inconvenient for a male teacher to take on a female apprentice, unless it's a wealthy family that hires a doctor specifically to teach at home. But the wealthy wouldn't let their daughters learn these things, thinking it's useless! Generally, female doctors are those girls from Yanliu Lane. Their skill levels are average; when they pass on their skills, they only teach how to treat diseases specific to girls! Such illnesses are inconvenient for a male doctor to treat, you see!"

After hearing this, Gu Youyou was dumbfounded; given the feudal society they lived in, it all made perfect sense.

So, with all my medical skills, I could only end up as a gynecologist? And in this world, gynecological diseases were synonymous with sexually transmitted diseases, making me an unpopular kind of gynecologist?

The gender discrimination in feudal society was simply too inhumane.

"So, in your opinion... I can only join Jisheng Hall?"

Qin Changlin chuckled dryly and said, "Sister Youyou, you can't put it that way. We, as healers, strive to help the world. As long as we can treat patients, what does it matter who we are, right?"

Gu Youyou looked at him with a forced smile and said, "Don't give me that nonsense, patients are also ranked by importance, whoever pays more gets treated first. Fine then, you've already figured out everything about me, and I can't afford to open a clinic by myself. Since your place happens to need a consulting doctor who can actually treat patients, I'll just join you!"

She emphasized the words "can actually treat" heavily, as if to remind Qin Changlin that although she was on his turf, he still relied on her.

You, an apprentice who can't treat patients!

"Haha, that's fantastic, when my teacher comes back tonight, I'll tell him about you joining our Jisheng Hall, and he will surely be delighted!"

"Hmm, how will the silver be divided?"

"Hehe, same old rules, your consultation fee is yours, and Jisheng Hall only takes the money for the medicine!"

...

Chapter 178: Being Followed

Regarding the house, Qin Changlin said he needed a few more days to find a comfortable place at a reasonable price. Since Gu Youyou planned to settle in the town for the long term, she wasn't in a hurry and went back.

But the road back didn't seem too peaceful.

In the scorching heat, people either visited the town very early or very late, but not under the blazing sun like her. So even though it was broad daylight, the road was deserted.

Yet Gu Youyou's hearing was much sharper than average, and she had already picked up rustling sounds from the nearby bushes as if someone was following her.

She felt a bit scared, thinking it would be terrible if a malefactor had targeted her. With her body neither able to fight nor flee, wouldn't she be utterly at their mercy?

Remembering her extraordinary performance in the mountains before, she still found it inexplicably dizzying. She had tried to replicate it afterwards, obviously in vain; after running only a few steps, she would be panting. Later, she attributed that burst of energy to being so infuriated by Jin Zijin that it unlocked her body's potential.

She wondered if she could trigger her body's potential again in the face of real danger.

That thing had followed Gu Youyou all the way, and now they were close to Lotus Village, but it still maintained a steady distance, never rushing nor lagging behind, which baffled her.

If it was indeed a villain trailing her, the hollow in the mountains had offered a perfect opportunity: no village in front, no shop behind—robbing her would be met with no aid from heaven or earth. Now that they were nearing residences, could a robbery still be possible?

Clearly, whoever was following her was no malefactor!

Who could it be?

Upon entering Lotus Village, Gu Youyou felt it was safe and finally stopped.

Turning around, she looked at the bush where the noises were coming from and coldly said, "Come out now, you've followed me all this way, and we're finally here!"

The rustling in the bushes ceased, as if something were lying in wait.

Gu Youyou frowned, focusing on that spot.

Such low bushes couldn't hide a person; was it an animal?

Being too far away, she naturally couldn't see.

Gu Youyou summoned her courage and took a few steps forward. The bushes moved again, and this time she saw a white object running back.

Indeed, it was an animal, and a small one at that.

Gu Youyou smiled, curious to learn what spirited little creature had followed her for so long.

She squatted down, gestured toward it, and softly chuckled, "Do you want to come home with me? If so, better hurry over, we'll be home soon!"

The little creature in the bushes hesitated and fell silent; after a moment, a fuzzy little head poked out, gazing at Gu Youyou with its large amber eyes.

So it was that one.

Gu Youyou was astonished—it was the wolf cub she had treated.

She had thought the pup would rejoin its pack after leaving the ancient tomb, yet unexpectedly, here it was.

In such hot weather, few people were around, but it was still a place frequented by humans. For it to dare follow her here, the cub was quite bold.

Gu Youyou beckoned again, and the little creature hesitantly started to approach her.

The wolf cub still had the ribbon tied around its leg, but now the bow was caked in dirt, looking quite tattered.

Gu Youyou gently stroked the top of its head, slowly calming it down as it affectionately rubbed its head against her palm.

Upon checking, she saw the cub's leg wound had healed. She removed the dirty ribbon and said, "Why didn't you go back home after escaping? Why come to me? Could it be you missed me and wanted to see me, hmm?"

Chapter 179: Give It a Name

The little fellow just whimpered and rubbed its head against her. Although it was a wolf, its demeanor was very much like the dogs Gu Youyou had raised before, which pleased her.

"How about you come back with me? From now on, I'll take care of you!"

Gu Youyou grabbed its two front paws, making it stand on its hind legs as she teased it, unilaterally deciding that she was pleased.

She decided to take it home and raise it as a pet wolf.

When Jin Zijin came back from hunting, sometimes he would catch a glimpse of that... little wolf at home, and he was clearly startled.

It looked somewhat familiar, with white fur and a tuft of yellow on its head—isn't this the one that ran out of the ancient tomb, with Gu Youyou's skirt fabric tied around its leg?

He glanced into the house. Gu Youyou was humming a tune as she cooked, the scent of meat bones filled the air; she must have stew the roe deer she caught yesterday.

"You're back! Go wash your hands first, and we can eat soon!"

"Hmm!"

Jin Zijin responded, put down his tools and a bag of grain, and then asked Gu Youyou, "Did it come on its own, or did you bring it back?"

Gu Youyou realized that Jin Zijin was asking about the little wolf pup and felt a bit surprised. She asked in return, "You've seen it before?"

Jin Zijin didn't deny it and nodded, "I saw your clothing on its leg, and when I saw it crawl out of a tree hole, that's how I knew where the entrance to the underground palace was."

Gu Youyou paused in her activity, looked at the wolf pup sitting by the door that really did look like a little dog, and couldn't help but smile bitterly. She didn't expect it to have actually saved her!

Alright, tonight you'll be rewarded with meat.

Gu Youyou smiled and said confidently, "I went to town today, and when I was coming back, I found that it kept following me, so I brought it home. From now on, it's my pet. It will eat with us. You'll have to hunt more because it needs to eat meat!"

Jin Zijin was stunned for a moment after hearing this, his lips twitched, and after pondering for a while, he finally said, "It can just eat bones."

"Are you abusing it? It's not a dog!"

Jin Zijin looked down at the little wolf pup sitting by the door and said, "It’s the offspring of a wild wolf and a stray dog in the mountains. It’s not wrong to call it a dog."

"What?" Gu Youyou walked away from the stove, seriously looking at the little creature on the ground.

She would never have guessed it was a crossbreed.

"How can you tell?"

Jin Zijin said, "Its eyes are amber-colored, but they don’t have the fierce gleam of a wolf’s, rather they are very gentle. Just looking into its eyes, you can tell that its wolf blood is not pure. It has a short muzzle, yet a broad back, and its tail is short and stiff. It doesn’t fully conform whether you say it’s a wolf or a dog.

And moreover, I’ve seen the wild wolf king in the mountains—it has this white fur. If I’m not wrong, it’s probably the offspring of the wild wolf king and a mountain stray dog. If it weren’t for its impure lineage, it wouldn’t have been chased out of its pack alone."

Listening to Jin Zijin’s analysis and looking more closely at the little guy, it seemed to make some sense.

A stray dog wouldn’t look like this, and wolves are very ferocious, obviously not as gentle as this one.

Gu Youyou squatted down and rubbed its head, smiling slightly, "Alright then, turns out you were driven away by your own kind. From now on, you’re with me. If you want bones, you’ll have bones; if you want meat, you’ll have meat. I’ll give you a name... Abao, how about that? Unloved by father and mother, but I’ll cherish you."

Jin Zijin’s lips twitched, he didn’t want to say anything, but upon hearing the name, he couldn’t help but speak, "Be careful or your grandma might come to make a fuss."

Chapter 180: Wolf or Dog?

Gu Youyou was confused and said, "It’s my pet, what does it have to do with her? I didn’t go to her house to pick up bones to feed Abao."

"You couldn’t pick any other name but Abao? Your brothers’ nicknames all include the character ’bao’," Jin Zijin couldn’t help but remind her.

Gu Youyou rolled her eyes in disdain, saying, "The world is so big, there are bound to be many with the same name. If she insists on competing with a dog, I can’t help it. If I named it Agou, would Auntie Chen come to find trouble with me too? Her grandson’s nickname is Agou!"

Jin Zijin: "..."

So, she had made up her mind to keep this little guy and had even decided on such a provocative name? Jin Zijin wanted to say something else but eventually didn’t.

He took some clean clothes from inside the house and went to bathe in the river.

In the hot summer, the men of the village loved to bathe in the river, and Jin Zijin was no exception.

However, the spot he chose wasn’t where the villagers usually went; it was closer to the valley.

The water there was very cold, and most people dared not use it for fear of catching a chill and having to spend silver to get treated. Perhaps only someone like Jin Zijin, whose body was much warmer than the average person, would bathe in such chilly water.

Only when enveloped by the cool mountain spring water did he feel a bit more comfortable. But this bone-chilling coldness only relieved the heat on the surface of his skin. It was only she, who came into his life with her frost and snow, that could serve as his antidote.

...

When Wang Shun came to Gu Youyou’s house to deliver firewood, he was tremendously startled to see a snow-white wolf crouching in her haystack.

"Goodness, Sister Youyou, you have a wolf in your house!" he exclaimed, dropping the firewood from his back and picking up a stick to throw at the little wolf pup.

Gu Youyou saw it and shouted in alarm, "What are you doing? You don’t beat a dog before its owner!"

The little wolf pup was agile and ran away, escaping unharmed.

Gu Youyou dropped the winnowing basket she was holding, positioning herself in front of Wang Shun like a protective mother, and snatched the stick from his hands.

"Sister Youyou, this..." Wang Shun didn’t understand and looked at her with surprise, his eyes on the creature behind her, baring its teeth at him.

"It’s my... dog," said Gu Youyou impatiently.

"A dog? It looks more like a wolf to me," said Wang Shun, sticking out his tongue in confusion.

Gu Youyou picked up the little wolf pup from behind her, waved its cute paws at Wang Shun, and laughed, saying, "What wolf? This is just a dog."

"But why doesn’t it wag its tail? Its tail hangs down. My dad says only wolves have tails like that."

"Because it’s a wolfdog," Gu Youyou asserted as if it were obvious.

"A wolfdog? So is it a wolf or a dog?" Wang Shun was even more confused.

"Of course it’s a dog, one that looks like a wolf," Gu Youyou explained with a smile.

"But dogs wag their tails," Wang Shun still felt that what Gu Youyou was holding was no dog.

Gu Youyou’s expression darkened, and she said irritably, "It’s a dog that looks like a wolf. Have you ever seen a wolf wag its tail?"

"No," Wang Shun shook his head.

"There you go, so it’s a wolfdog that doesn’t wag its tail."

Wang Shun: "..." He felt dizzy with confusion; was this a wolf or a dog?

...

Initially, the Gu Family intended to wait until Dabao’s bride entered the household before marrying off Gu Erya.

Yet, on the night they settled on a wedding date with the Lei Family, a commotion erupted in the west wing where the third son of the Gu family lived.