Farmhouse 281

Chapter 281 Stabilizing the Soul with Needles

Suddenly, a roll of greyish-white cotton thread and a fine, long needle appeared.

The Gu Family thought Gu Youyou needed to mend a tear in the old lady's clothes because they had noticed a rip, and no one said anything.

Only Gu Er, who was standing close by, saw her push the needle into the old lady's skin. He was so frightened that he immediately grabbed Gu Youyou, shouting, "What are you doing? Grandma is dead, and you're still sticking a needle into her? What are you thinking?"

What? Sticking a needle into the old lady? Wasn't she just sewing the old lady's clothes?

Everyone was greatly alarmed by Gu Er's voice.

"Youyou, what are you doing?" Gu Feng wasn't calm either, trembling as he rose from his chair.

At the same time, Jin Zijin looked at Gu Youyou with confusion.

Huang Xiangwen, who always thrived in chaos, led Sanya over. When she heard that Gu Youyou was sticking a needle into the old lady, she burst into tears and screamed, "Oh, the misfortune of our family! How could the Gu Family give birth to such a heartless daughter? Your grandma is dead, and you still want to stick needles in her? Are you trying to pin down her soul so she can't reincarnate?"

Facing this group of people who were so easily startled, Gu Youyou was lost for words.

But she could understand them, so she didn't get angry. Instead, she patiently explained, "I wasn't sticking needles into grandma. I just wanted her to leave with dignity."

With dignity?

One by one, the bewildered people looked at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou thought about it; she couldn't just say that Grandma's face looked too hideous, and she was doing her beautification routine.

Beautifying a corpse, such a taboo act, would scare and would be unacceptable to them.

So, after a moment of thought, she chose a more palatable explanation.

"Have you ever seen someone born with a large scar-like mark on their face? The kind where one half is black and the other white, that they're born with?"

The people from the Gu Family pondered for a while, and Gu Xiaoqing spoke timidly, "Sister, are you talking about those black birthmarks?"

"Yes, birthmarks, the kind on the face," Gu Youyou said.

It turns out they knew those were birthmarks.

They nodded, indicating they understood.

Meng Qiuju whispered, "There's a girl in my mother's village born with such a mark, half of her face black, half white. They say it's a Yin-Yang face, it's terrifying."

Gu Youyou chuckled internally. That was the right idea.

She asked, "Do you know how it's formed?"

How it's formed? The people from the Gu Family were confused.

"That kind of birthmark, do you know where it comes from?"

Birthmarks are something you're born with, what else?

They indicated they didn't understand.

Jin Zijin, however, had already cracked a faint smile, guessing what Gu Youyou was up to.

She was truly clever. Sometimes, a lie isn't necessarily harmful—there's a kind of falsehood known as a white lie.

Gu Youyou began to narrate the origin of birthmarks in her lively, clear voice. (She was making it up on the spot.)

"Skin and hair are inherited from our parents; they should not be injured, not discarded. So, if someone's face is disfigured in life, and they don't get it fixed before burial, the underworld emissaries, fearing the disfigured might scare others in their next life, will place a black cloth over their face before they reincarnate. That black cloth is what we call a birthmark."

The people of the Gu Family exhibited different expressions upon hearing her theory, but all were equally shocked and felt a chill at her explanation.

She turned her head, quite satisfied with their reactions, and decided to continue with her

Chapter 282: Cemented as a Little Ghost Girl

"It's not just about the face; those with severed hands and feet, missing mouths, and absent ears are the same. They died a horrific death and never managed to mend their bodies, so in their next life they will be born with a body riddled with defects.

I think, nobody here wants grandma to be reincarnated as the girl from third aunt's village, an outcast shunned by others for being a hideous freak."

No matter how much was said, the last sentence was the most crucial—they surely did not wish for that.

One by one they all shook their heads.

Jin Zijin smiled.

Gu Youyou felt it was almost enough, holding a needle, she also said, "That's why I want to repair grandma's face properly, so she can be beautiful in her next life."

Everyone still felt it was not right for Gu Youyou to use a needle in this way, but no one spoke up or dared to because of her last sentence.

Since Gu Feng remained unmoved, and because Gu Feng was most tender towards Gu Youyou, if he were to say, "Don't you want your old mother to have a good life in her next incarnation?" their sin would be enormous.

No one wanted to be the scapegoat, and nobody was foolish enough to assume that role.

In this eerie atmosphere, Gu Youyou meticulously stitched the Huang Family matriarch's torn half of the face back together, one stitch at a time.

Those with more courage craned their necks to see, and although the stitched-up face still looked frightening, it had to be admitted that it was much improved from before.

At the same time, they looked at Gu Youyou as if she was a monster.

My god, what kind of person is this? The term "ghostly girl" that's been used all these years hasn't been wrong. If she's not a ghostly girl, who else would have the courage to thread a needle and stitch on a corpse?

The women all felt an immense horror, afraid that from now on, every sight of needle and thread would remind them of Gu Youyou's actions today.

Too terrifying.

In the future, it would be better to keep a distance from this ghostly girl.

She even knows about matters of the Netherworld.

She also knows how humans are reincarnated.

This is a girl with heavy sinister energy; better not to provoke her and keep away in the future.

Under the peculiar gazes of the family, Gu Youyou followed the funeral procession and saw to the burial of the elder Huang.

The life of a person is so complex and yet so simple.

In just a few short decades, one can experience all the vicissitudes of the world, which is complex.

In just a few short decades, you come and go as you were, dust to dust, earth to earth, which is simple.

...

Gu Feng had been deeply saddened by the death of the elder Huang for a long time, and suddenly, he seemed to collapse.

Half a month ago he was still able to work the fields and hold authority over the family, but now he had completely given up.

All day long, he looked utterly dispirited.

Gu Feng had gotten old, beaten by age and shattered by blows, inevitably this day would come; the Gu Family sensed it—Gu Feng probably didn’t have much time left.

Ever since Gu Feng had become like this, Gu Youyou visited the Gu Family more often, each time taking his pulse and bringing medicine.

The Gu Family never looked at her unkindly again.

Firstly, because Gu Feng was ill and definitely needed a doctor. Gu Youyou was free of charge; if they offended her and she didn’t come, they would have to spend silver to call for another doctor.

They were not fools; they wouldn’t do something so stupid.

Secondly, they were intimidated by the skill Gu Youyou displayed in repairing the elder lady’s face. If she dared to do something as audacious as mending a dead person’s face, was there anything she wouldn’t dare to do?

Now, whenever they looked at Gu Youyou, there was always a sense that this ghostly girl was emanating sinister energy.

"Youyou, this medicine is really bitter," complained Gu Feng, frowning.

Although he was complaining, there was not the slightest hint of reproach in his voice, but instead, a relieved smile.

The Child Prodigy from the town, Doctor Zhou, who was highly respected by everyone, had said in his lifetime that Youyou was a child with extraordinary talent, which was why in such a short period of time she could treat people, behave politely, and knew how to write.

Chapter 283 My Family Has an Older Sister

It’s strange how the heavens would bestow her with so many trials and tribulations, but fortunately, everything is in the past now, and she will have a good life ahead.

Gu Youyou set down the medicine bowl and, as if by magic, pulled out some candy, saying, "I knew the medicine would be bitter, so I prepared this."

It was candy she had made herself, very simple, just sugar mixed with sweet osmanthus, then wrapped in wax paper.

There was the sweetness of the sugar and the fragrance of the sweet osmanthus.

Gu Feng looked at it and, surprised, laughed, "I'm not a child, why do I need to eat candy?"

Gu Youyou replied, "Just now, Grandpa complained how bitter the medicine was, but with a piece of candy, it won't taste bitter." Gu Youyou remembered when she was ill and had to take bitter medicine, Gu Feng secretly bought her candy.

Hearing Gu Youyou's words, Gu Feng burst into hearty laughter, but perhaps he laughed too hard, he began to cough again.

Gu Youyou quickly patted his back to help him catch his breath.

Seeing Sanya peeking from the door, Gu Feng gradually stopped laughing.

He beckoned Sanya to come closer, and after hesitating for a moment while looking at Gu Youyou, Sanya finally walked in with small, tentative steps.

Gu Feng stroked Sanya's head, then sighed, "What hardship haven't I endured in my life? How could this little bitterness be difficult for me? I won't eat the candy, give it to Sanya."

With that, he handed Gu Youyou's candy to Sanya.

Sanya licked her lips, obviously wanting to eat it, but after looking at Gu Youyou, she dared not take it.

Mom said this was Ghost Sister and told her to stay away from her; if it wasn't for Grandpa inviting her in, she wouldn't have dared to come. She saw the candy was from Ghost Sister to Grandpa, so she didn't dare to take it either.

Gu Youyou smiled at Sanya and said softly, "Sanya, if you want to eat, go ahead and eat. It's my oversight, I will bring you something tasty tomorrow."

Even if the child's aunt and uncle were not good people, it was not the child's fault. Such a young child is the most innocent and kindhearted.

Encouraged by Gu Youyou's words, Sanya's eyes lit up, and without any hesitation, she grabbed the candy from Gu Feng's hand.

Looking at the fearsome Ghost Sister, expectant eyes began to emerge.

Ghost Sister said she would bring me something tasty tomorrow.

Truth be told, she didn't understand why her older brothers called the elder sister Ghost Sister, nor what Ghost Sister meant, only knowing that her mother said to stay away from her.

If Ghost Sister often brought Sanya tasty treats, she decided to not listen to her mother, at least when her mother wasn't around, she didn't have to stay away from Ghost Sister.

Sanya picked up a small piece of the cut candy and put it into her mouth, it was so sweet and fragrant, and the aroma of sweet osmanthus filled her mouth, it was much tastier than the candies her grandmother kept hidden.

After finishing one piece, she smiled at Gu Youyou and sweetly said, "Ghost Sister is really nice!"

Gu Feng's face fell, and all signs of amusement vanished.

Gu Youyou had long grown accustomed to it—the names Ghost Sister and elder sister made no difference to her, hence she didn’t mind.

"Sanya, who told you to call her Ghost Sister?"

Gu Feng was somewhat angered.

Sanya’s big eyes looked up, seeming somewhat wronged.

Though young, she could tell her grandfather was angry.

However, Gu Youyou said, "It doesn’t matter, it’s just a name after all."

A child wouldn’t call someone by that name without reason; it was the adults who were like that. Could she possibly haggle with a child who didn’t understand anything? Besides, she truly didn’t mind.

"Sanya, go and play. Grandpa is ill, you can’t be noisy."

Hearing Gu Youyou’s words, Sanya hugged the remaining candy and dashed off on her small legs.

Gu Feng sighed deeply, about to say something, then opening his mouth but not speaking, he sighed again, and the words that finally came out were different from what he intended.

Chapter 284: Your Parents Died Mysteriously

"Youyou, I still need to thank you for your grandmother’s matter,"

"Huh? That’s what I should have done, Grandfather," Gu Youyou replied in surprise.

Gu Feng shook his head and said, "Actually, when you were little, your grandmother was quite fond of you. It’s just that some things happened afterward... anyway, don’t blame her."

When people are gone, so is their warmth; when a person dies, the light goes out—there's nothing to blame.

Gu Youyou said, "I don't."

She truly didn't. Having not spent much time with her grandmother, and not being the real Gu Youyou, she didn't care about those indifferent to her. Not caring meant not being too upset, and there was no room for blame.

"Your parents' death was strange. Although it rained heavily that day, the water wasn't deep, and your father could swim."

Gu Feng's sudden remark startled Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou's parents had died more than a decade ago, and she had only been here for just over a year. She knew they had died but hadn't paid attention to how.

But listening to Gu Feng's words... it seemed there was a story here.

"Grandfather, do you mean that my parents' death wasn't an accident, but could have been caused by someone?" Gu Youyou exclaimed in shock.

"We just find it strange, that's all," Gu Feng said coolly.

Gu Youyou thought for a moment, then nodded softly.

They were just ordinary farmers. Even if they knew there was something odd, what of it? Who would harm a farmer's family, when there wasn't even a suspect in sight?

Wait a minute...

Gu Youyou suddenly thought of something, her eyes widening.

But she heard Gu Feng continue, "Later, you fell ill, and the village started saying you were an ominous person. Your grandmother was superstitious, believing that your parents' death was caused by you, which is why she stopped liking you.

It's not that she didn't like you; she just loved your father too much, her most cherished eldest son."

To Gu Feng's subsequent words, Gu Youyou just nodded blankly, her mind preoccupied with other matters.

Their death was suspicious, and that same year, Gu Youyou fell ill. However, she wasn't truly sick; it was part of a grand scheme.

So... was her parents' death also part of a conspiracy?

This answer, perhaps only the State Preceptor at Xuanzong would know.

The State Preceptor—a grand title, nearly untouchable for commoners like them in their lifetime, yet could they have done such a thing in this small mountain village?

It's ridiculous. Grandmother's hatred was not misplaced—if it was indeed so, then her parents' death was really her fault.

But Gu Youyou knew she could not share any of this with Gu Feng. First, his health was in poor shape, unable to withstand further shocks. Second, even if she told him, it would be pointless. He was just an ordinary old farmer who would only worry, without any benefit.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Grandfather, I understand. It's all in the past now. I will take good care of myself in the future."

She had thought Gu Feng would only say words to comfort her, yet unexpectedly, his expression changed suddenly, his face twisted in pain and utterly unlike the kindly old man he usually was.

He lowered his voice, the words he uttered weighed down with exceptional heaviness.

"Youyou, if you have the chance, find out the cause of your parents' untimely deaths and avenge them!"

Gu Youyou jumped, as her ever-peaceable grandfather made such an expression, uttering such words.

"This person has caused our family to be broken and separated; our flesh and blood to suffer unspeakable crimes from a young age. If we cannot see him punished, I will not rest in peace even in death, nor will I have the face to meet your parents afterward," he said with a lowered voice, but his turbid eyes sparkled with clarity.

Chapter 285: Make a Move in Ten Days

Gu Youyou didn't know where Gu Feng's confidence came from,

believing that a young girl like her could accomplish such a feat,

but his eyes clearly conveyed his belief that she was definitely capable—

it was as if he had already envisaged Gu Youyou exacting revenge with her own hands.

And Gu Youyou?

Of course, she would go after those people, even if not to uncover the truth behind her parents' death,

even if just for her own sake, she would go after them.

Besides, even if she didn't seek them out, they would come looking for her, wouldn't they?

Gu Youyou seemed to be influenced by Gu Feng as well, her face filled with indignation.

"Grandfather, rest assured, Youyou will definitely uncover the truth behind my parents' deaths

and exterminate our enemies to appease my parents' spirits in heaven.

If Youyou cannot do it, then let her live a fate worse than death."

If she couldn't do it, she might indeed end up living a fate worse than death.

Drinking poison!

Gu Feng nodded with satisfaction and said, "Since Doctor Zhou has already said that Youyou is extraordinarily gifted,

then Youyou will surely accomplish this."

Gu Youyou: "..." The extraordinary gift was boasting on my own part, Grandfather!!

...

"Your family's old dame has already been buried, why haven't you made your move yet?"

In the hollow, the man in black with a conical hat had become angry.

Another person, dressed like a common farmer, said, "My father is ill, she is currently treating him. I cannot act at this time."

"When people age, they naturally fall ill. Once you seize her, I will give you enough silver to afford a better doctor to treat your father."

The farmer shook his head firmly, "No, if dad found out something happened to her, let alone finding a doctor, he would die of anger instantly. You don’t understand, ever since my elder brother and sister-in-law died, she has become the apple of my father’s eye. To target her now would be to take my father’s life! Big brother, give me more time, I will surely seize her for you."

But the man in black with a conical hat laughed darkly, "Now you suddenly care about your father. When you agreed to cooperate with us and ended up killing your elder brother and sister-in-law, why didn’t you think of today? Tell me, if he knew that you personally drowned your elder brother and sister-in-law, wouldn’t he die of rage on the spot?"

The farmer’s face filled with terror as he shouted, "You... what do you want to do?"

The man in black sneered, "What do I want to do? Haven’t you always been very clear about what I want?"

The farmer was so frightened that he could barely stand.

"I just want to complete the deal we made back then. You take the silver, we take the person."

"But now..."

"That’s your problem. If you had kept an eye on her, we would have taken her away without any trouble."

The farmer’s eyes flickered, "It’s been over a decade, such a long time. Things are bound to change, and you can’t blame me for that."

The man in black, however, asserted proudly, "Would we need to find someone to watch if we could do it ourselves? We could have found someone else, but since you took the job, you should have done it well. Since you couldn’t handle it, you shouldn’t have accepted it in the first place."

With that, the man in black's already grim expression darkened further, making the half of his face that was visible even more sinister, "I'll give you ten days. If you can't do it, I have ways of letting your father learn the truth about your elder brother and sister-in-law's deaths."

"You..." The farmer collapsed to the ground in fear, "No, you can't do this; it will kill my father!"

"That's not my concern!" The man in black laughed heartily as he strode away, vanishing into the dense forest in an instant.

After he departed, a black bag flew out from the woods, landing beside the farmer.

Chapter 286: Discussing the Boss? Fired

Meanwhile, the sounds of the black-clad figures grew fainter in the distance.

"To show our sincerity, here's some compensation for your troubles in advance!"

The farmer's eyes were dull, yet he quickly scooped up the bag from the ground.

Upon opening it, he saw three solid, large silver coins inside, each worth a hundred taels.

Three hundred taels!

The farmer's eyes nearly popped out of his head—an entire lifetime had passed without him ever having laid eyes on so much silver, nor on coins so large.

...

"Boss Gu, you're not going to work today either?" Yue Rujing had already changed into Jisheng Hall's shop assistant attire, ready to head out.

Gu Youyou was too busy to pay him any mind; she was fervently fanning the flames beneath the stove, atop which sat medicine bound for the Gu Family.

"Hey, Boss Gu!"

Thinking Gu Youyou hadn’t heard him, Yue Rujing moved in front of her and waved his hand before her eyes.

Gu Youyou struck his hand with her fan, used for stoking the fire, and said, "Can’t you see I’m busy?"

Yue Rujing obviously wasn’t hit; anticipating her move, he was ready for her.

He chuckled and said, "If a shop assistant skips work, wages get docked, and serious offenses lead to dismissal. You, as the boss, have been absent for several days now—shouldn’t your punishment be even stiffer?"

A twitch appeared at the corner of Gu Youyou’s mouth, that annoying Yue Rujing.

She threw down the fan, hands on hips, and said angrily, "I’m the boss; I make the rules. I come and go as I please—what are you going to do about it?"

Yue Rujing’s nose twisted with irritation at her unreasonable and overbearing behavior. "You’re exploiting your power! The officials can start fires, but the common people can’t even light a lamp!"

"Yes, that’s exactly right!" Gu Youyou declared, unabashed and confident.

"You’re illogical—it’s no wonder the ancients said that only women and scoundrels are difficult to nurture," Yue Rujing retorted with a cold laugh.

Ah, dare to discriminate against women? And you call me a scoundrel?

"That’s right, you’re the scoundrel who won’t fulfill a shop assistant’s duties and dares to criticize the boss. You’re fired!" Gu Youyou fumed with frustration.

The two in the courtyard were at daggers drawn, their quarreling had become a daily occurrence.

Just then, Jin Zijin came out of the house, feeling that arguing so early in the morning was simply improper. He coolly said to Yue Rujing, "Ajing, hurry to Jisheng Hall. With both of you gone, Doctor Qin is going to be overrun."

Yue Rujing, who took Jin Zijin's word above all others, clenched his teeth and huffed at Gu Youyou before striding out the door.

Jin Zijin shook his head with a light chuckle, then lowered his gaze back to Gu Youyou.

She was sitting on a small stool, watching the flames under the stove, where a ceramic tile pot was simmering—medicine that Gu Youyou had been preparing every day. Noting that the firewood beside her was running low, Jin Zijin turned back into the house, and after a short while, reappeared carrying a well-prepared stack of firewood.

Since the stove was small and couldn't use the large logs meant for a cooking range, he simply sat next to her and began chopping the prearranged wood into sizeable pieces for the stove.

Gu Youyou glanced sideways at him and cracked a slight smile.

Almost immediately, Jin Zijin's thoughts returned to the issue of Gu Youyou treating Yuancheng. It wasn't a sudden recollection; the matter had been on his mind constantly, and it made him very uncomfortable.

He had already questioned Qin Changlin about it. Qin Changlin was evasive at first, unwilling to speak, but under Jin Zijin's gentle probing, he eventually spilled the beans.

It turned out it really was about treating an illness, not the nonsensical talk of castrating him first and sending him to the palace to become a eunuch, as Yue Rujing had wildly surmised.

Unexpectedly, such an ailment was within her ability to cure, successfully transforming Yuancheng's predestined life as a eunuch into that of a real man.

Why does saying that sound so awkward? With this thought, Jin Zijin's expression suddenly darkened.

Chapter 287: Stranger Comes

He looked at Gu Youyou with a gaze that became tinged with inexplicable feelings.

In the eyes of a doctor, patients are not distinguished by gender. That's what they say, but is that really the case? If it were really indiscriminate, there wouldn't be such things as taking the pulse through a silk thread.

Especially since Youyou is a female doctor, even if she were to treat illnesses, there are certain diseases she simply shouldn't treat!

Her perspective is misguided, Yuancheng is still a child so that's fine, but what if her next patient is an adult male?

Jin Zijin felt a chill at the thought. Her perspective was dangerously wrong—it had to be corrected!

Seemingly sensing the scrutinizing gaze, Gu Youyou turned her head with traces of puzzlement.

"What you're doing is not right," she heard Jin Zijin say earnestly.

Mixed with a restrained anger.

Gu Youyou didn't understand his cryptic words; just a moment ago, she had argued with Yue Rujing about her prolonged absence from work, so she subconsciously thought he was referring to that matter.

Gu Youyou was always serious about her work. As the heir to the Gu Family, she never actually shirked her duties, so she felt quite embarrassed when Jin Zijin brought it up.

She said, "I'll try to be more careful."

Jin Zijin's lips curved into a faint smile. So, she also realized that it was wrong.

But this wasn't a matter of being careful or not. She simply couldn't do it—it was indecent.

"Ah...?" Now Gu Youyou was truly puzzled.

Did he mean that treating her grandfather was left to Qin Changlin, and doing it herself was indecent?

What the heck, isn't that a nonsensical reason? Pure lunacy.

Gu Youyou's face fell as she said, "With Qin Changlin's limited skills, how can I have peace of mind to let him handle it?"

She still wanted to do it herself? Jin Zijin's expression also turned sour.

"Don't underestimate him. The people chosen by Doctor Zhou are not bad. He's not skilled yet because he hasn't practiced medicine for long. Teach him well, and he'll be able to do a good job."

Gu Youyou felt that Jin Zijin was being overly meddlesome. Who believes that? Did it have anything to do with skill? She wanted to oversee her grandfather's care herself to be reassured.

She retorted indignantly, "I'll handle it. You naturally wouldn't worry about my grandfather—this is nonsensical!"

What? Grandfather?

Jin Zijin's mind whirled, and he realized they had been talking at cross purposes, not addressing the same issue at all.

Seeing Youyou’s flustered state, he couldn’t help but find it amusing, and said, "I was talking about Yuancheng."

...Yuancheng?

Gu Youyou now understood what he meant and felt a wave of embarrassment wash over her.

"You know?"

She was inquiring about the matter of treating Yuancheng.

Upon asking, she felt it was an unnecessary question since he had already brought up the topic, meaning he was aware.

She muttered vaguely, "That sort of trivial ailment, I certainly won’t intervene personally in the future. If Qin Changlin can treat it, then let him. If not, people would be embarrassed to ask me to treat it, right? Don’t worry."

She believed that, given the sensibilities of people in ancient times, there would hardly be many who would feel comfortable asking a woman to treat such ailments. Jin Zijin was worrying needlessly.

"Dong dong dong..." While they were chatting, a knocking on the firmly closed courtyard gate could be heard.

Gu Youyou’s first thought was that Yue Rujing had returned, perhaps having forgotten something.

However, Abao, who was playing on the side, suddenly pricked up its ears and stared alertly at the gate.

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin exchanged glances, their brows furrowing slightly.

It wasn’t Yue Rujing who had come back; it was a stranger.

Chapter 288 ’Friends Come from Afar

Gu Youyou was about to get up to open the door when Jin Zijin held her back.

His voice lowered, he said, "Don’t move, I’ll go."

"Thud thud thud..." The knocking on the door resumed.

Jin Zijin walked to the courtyard door in a few steps and through the door’s crack, he saw the person outside.

"It’s him!" he muttered under his breath.

He spoke so softly that Gu Youyou wasn’t supposed to hear, but she did and asked with surprise, "Who is it?"

Jin Zijin was taken aback and turned to look at Gu Youyou.

She heard him? He thought only he should have been able to hear what he said.

The continuous thudding at the door did not allow him to ponder any further, instead, he reached out and opened the door.

As the courtyard door swung open, the visitor revealed his true face.

It was a man dressed in dark robes, with no particular features except for his overly pale complexion.

Upon seeing Jin Zijin, the man grinned, displaying his bright red gums in a somewhat sinister manner.

"Brother Jin, Zhuo Qing comes to visit!"

Gu Youyou was startled, letting the firewood in her hands slip away.

That voice... wasn’t it the same person who had put a knife to her neck that night?

Gu Youyou was confident in her ears; she wasn’t mistaken, it was him.

The man Xuanzong sent to capture her was showing up at her doorstep in broad daylight. What was he planning?

Jin Zijin seemed not at all surprised, returning a calm smile, his gaze so steady it was as if he had anticipated this visit.

He stepped aside, greeted with a faint smile, and said, "Please come in!"

Gu Youyou found it hard to believe that Jin Zijin didn’t realize that the man calling himself Zhuo Qing was the same person who had almost stabbed him that night.

Yet he calmly let Zhuo Qing in, and that slight smile on his face brought a phrase to Gu Youyou’s mind: Isn’t it a delight to have friends come from afar!

Gu Youyou stood up, staring straight at them.

She was indeed eager to see what kind of game they were really playing.

Zhuo Qing entered the courtyard, and while he must have seen Gu Youyou, he didn’t look her way but instead beamed with joy as he greeted Jin Zijin with clasped hands, "Brother Jin, Zhuo Qing has always held you in high regard, but never had the chance to pay a visit. Happening to pass by Qingshui Town today, and hearing that you were here, I took the liberty to call. I hope I’m not being too presumptuous?"

"Passing by Qingshui Town," Gu Youyou scoffed at the serendipitous claim.

Abao positioned itself in front of Gu Youyou, its gaze fixed on the man ahead, full of vigilance. It had grown a lot and appeared quite intimidating in this stance.

But the visitor was no ordinary person, and just like he had ignored Gu Youyou, he also overlooked the not-so-ordinary 'dog'.

Jin Zijin burst into hearty laughter, clapping Zhuo Qing on the shoulder as if greeting an old friend, his face expressing rare joy, "How could it be presumptuous? I'm here on my master's orders looking for something in this town, and it has been several years now. I've missed seeing my fellow brothers, truly!"

"Ah!" Zhuo Qing suddenly exclaimed in surprise, "What a coincidence, Zhuo Qing is also here under the command of my master to search for something in Qingshui Town. I wonder if it's the same item that Brother Jin is seeking?"

"Oh? Has Uncle Master's task led Brother Zhuo to find what he seeks?"

Zhuo Qing shook his head with a smile, "I've just arrived, staying at Yuelai Inn in town, and have not had the chance to start searching. Brother Jin, you've been here for several years now, have you found what our Master asked you to look for?"

Jin Zijin's smile faded, his face clouded with worry, he shook his head and sighed, "That item is not so easily found. As I'm still standing here today, it's clear I've yet to find it."

Chapter 289: What a Coincidence, I'm Also Looking for Something

"Indeed, indeed!" Zhuo Qing laughed, "If Brother Jin had found it, he certainly wouldn't still be in this small town, he would have returned to the mountain long ago. But what exactly is the item Brother Jin is searching for? If you say it out loud, perhaps I could help look for it too."

Jin Zijin clasped his hands together, immediately smiled and said, "In that case, I won't be polite. The item I'm looking for...is naturally the treasure of the Dao Family—the Youying Pearl."

As soon as these words came out, the two who had been pretending to be cheerful couldn't keep it up anymore, and in the quiet courtyard, the air became stagnant, with only the sound of wood crackling in the small stove that was slowly boiling the medicine.

Gu Youyou and Abao, like every blade of grass and tree in the courtyard, continued to be ignored, while the two men faced each other; one with a smile on his face, the other as solemn as a silent night.

Zhuo Qing seemed taken aback that Jin Zijin would speak so bluntly about his search for the Youying Pearl, or perhaps it was so sudden that he didn't know how to respond.

Jin Zijin still had a smile on his lips, as if the Youying Pearl were just an ordinary bead, without a care in the world.

How could something that the Tianzong elder brother has spent years searching for be just an ordinary bead?

Abao turned its head to look at Gu Youyou, who gently stroked its forehead and made a shushing gesture to it.

If others treat us as invisible, then let's be quietly invisible.

But she was a bit curious, exactly which was more important: herself or the Dao Family's treasured Youying Pearl that they were talking about?

This is rather interesting, clearly, the man named Zhuo Qing came for her, but now there is talk of something else. Perhaps for him, the Youying Pearl is more important.

"Hahaha... Brother Jin really knows how to joke." Zhuo Qing suddenly burst into laughter, shattering the calm; but it was not a good sign, for with the loss of calm, Gu Youyou sensed an air of tension and confrontation.

This was not good news for her; she had rented the house and paid a year's rent. If they were to start fighting due to a disagreement, she would be the unfortunate one.

"How could it be a joke," Jin Zijin reined in his smile and said flatly, "Apart from the Youying Pearl, what could be worth six years of my time?"

Zhuo Qing also straightened his face, indeed, apart from the Youying Pearl, what else could be worth Jin Zijin's six years? This was not funny at all, but apart from laughing, he really didn't know what else to do.

No wonder Jin Zijin had disappeared for several years. No wonder nobody knew where he had gone. So, it was for the Youying Pearl.

But... "The Youying Pearl has been missing for many years, Brother Jin; I'm afraid it won't be easy to find!"

"Naturally, it's not easy to find," Jin Zijin did not deny it.

"And you? Are you also here for the Youying Pearl?" Jin Zijin asked again.

"Of course not," Zhuo Qing replied, then sighed heavily, with a look of relief on his face and said, "Thank goodness it's not. Otherwise, I could have just gone back to confess my failure to Master. The item Brother Jin is looking for, even if found, I, Zhuo Qing, couldn't take it away. That would surely require our elder brother or Master himself to step in."

Jin Zijin's mouth curled slightly as he said, "Since this is the case, then we should each look for what we came for, without meddling with each other. Your visit today is considered a notification to me, so please feel free to proceed!"

"No!" Zhuo Qing immediately waved his hands and looked towards Gu Youyou, who had been treated as invisible by him until now.

Gu Youyou sneered, she knew it was coming.

Jin Zijin looked at Zhuo Qing with interest.

"Brother Jin, the item that Master asked Zhuo Qing to find has already been located. As long as Brother Jin gives face to our Master, Zhuo Qing can leave today."

Chapter 290 Assertive Protection

Oh, so withholding it means disrespecting your master’s face?

Jin Zijin took a few steps forward, and his tall figure immediately blocked Zhuo Qing’s view of Gu Youyou.

He still maintained a faint smile and said, "May I know what my uncle-master desires?"

Zhuo Qing paused for a moment, showing some displeasure at Jin Zijin’s obstruction, and said, "Why does Brother Jin ask when you already know everything? You’re well aware of what my master seeks. The things Tianzong does not believe in, we in Xuanzong have always held unwavering faith in. Once we accomplish this deed, it will benefit not just Xuanzong but the entire Dao Family. Brother Jin, I hope you don’t make this difficult for us."

"When have I ever made things difficult for you?" Jin Zijin asked.

Zhuo Qing glanced behind Jin Zijin and said, "Youying Grass is of incomparable value, and a Four Pillars Pure Yin female is one in ten thousand. It seems Tianzong does believe to some extent after all. Is Brother Jin planning to reap the benefits without any effort?"

What does that mean?

Gu Youyou’s heart skipped a beat as she looked at Jin Zijin’s back.

Jin Zijin had said that the people of Xuanzong needed to raise a few pure Yin men and women to complete a ritual, hoping to ascend to heaven in broad daylight.

Gu Youyou had said it was a daydream, and Jin Zijin had agreed with her.

But Zhuo Qing implied that if Xuanzong could do it, so could Tianzong; it was just that those from Tianzong did not believe or deign to do it.

So what if they did believe?

His comment about reaping the benefits without any effort was clearly hinting at that.

The hand Jin Zijin was holding tightened. He slightly turned his head to glance, then looked back at Zhuo Qing.

His eyes finally lacked knowledge and instead showed a hint of anger.

The atmosphere became somewhat tense, and suddenly Jin Zijin turned around. To Gu Youyou's surprise, he swiftly took her hand and gently pulled her into his arms, warning with a sneer, "I'm afraid you won't be able to take this Four Pillars Pure Yin female away with you. She belongs to me."

Zhuo Qing's face turned exceptionally furious and said, "We've put in ten years of hard work, you..."

Before he could finish, Jin Zijin cut in, "Are you questioning me here? My wife has suffered for ten years at your hands, and I've been waiting to settle the score with you."

"You..." Zhuo Qing was taken aback, not expecting the legendary Senior Brother of Tianzong to be so unreasonable, "She was the person we set our sights on first."

How could he so brazenly turn the tables?

"So what? She is my wife now, and that is a fact."

"You're being unreasonable."

Jin Zijin sneered, "By your logic, handing over my wife to you would be reasonable?"

"That's not what I'm saying." What kind of man can't even protect his own wife? But the truth is not so. He was obviously doing this on purpose. Out of all the women in the world, why did he have to choose a

Four Pillars Pure Yin female, and one that they had carefully cultivated for ten years as a medicinal vessel?

Zhuo Qing said angrily, "You are being completely unreasonable!"

Jin Zijin held Gu Youyou even tighter, his stance very clear.

"There are plenty of women in the world, Brother Jin. Are you really willing to make an enemy of us over her?"

A joke!

Jin Zijin's eyes, sharp as an eagle's, shot toward Zhuo Qing, and he said, "I wasn't aware that Tianzong and Xuanzong had yet to become enemies?"

Feeling his gaze, Zhuo Qing's body suddenly shrank back.

It was said that Jin Zijin's temperament was usually gentle, and he rarely fixed people with such a harsh gaze. But when he looked at someone like that, it meant that he was truly angry.

And that person would become a thorn in his side.

He was not the disciple who received favoritism from the master, so naturally, he did not dare to become a thorn in Jin Zijin's eye.