Farmhouse 431

Chapter 431: The Letter Is Gone

Having listened to the story, Gu Youyou could only come to this conclusion: This man is utterly insane.

"To throw people stricken with the epidemic into the army, weakening our own forces and then letting the enemy take advantage of it, he's capable of such an act. Isn't this treason? Zijin, he's committing treasonous acts, and the Emperor doesn't care?"

"It's not that he doesn't care, but rather..." Jin Zijin suddenly let out a wry smile and said in a low voice, "Maybe he's just a foolish ruler."

Gu Youyou: "..."

She felt it was normal for someone like her, a woman who had traveled through time, to call the Emperor a fool, but hearing such words from Jin Zijin, with his firmly entrenched feudal thinking, was rather shocking.

Well, he was indeed a foolish ruler.

"Knowing that the State Preceptor harbors malicious intentions, the Emperor just lets him have his way?" Gu Youyou asked with a worried expression.

With such an Emperor and such a State Preceptor, Zhuzhao Country might well end up in ruins.

Jin Zijin was taken aback, then rubbed her head and chuckled, "You are smart but still don't understand the relationship between the State Preceptor and the Imperial Court. There could be a thousand and one bizarre reasons to take a signboard... But no matter how absurd those reasons are, as long as they're not too excessive, the Emperor will grant them."

Gu Youyou chuckled dryly; she obviously didn't understand. This odd Taoist, this peculiar Imperial Court.

"So, he’s lost this move but seems to have posed us a new problem in the process. By making me the target of everyone in the medical profession in Lingnan City, does he intend to force us to leave Lingnan?"

"Smart," he said, smiling, "That makes you want to give up running Jisheng Hall, doesn’t it?"

"Ah...?" Gu Youyou looked at him in surprise, then snorted, "How can that be? Hmph, I think he miscalculated again, vastly underestimating Grandmother’s strengths. Even if all those good-for-nothing fighters in Lingnan banded together, they wouldn’t pose any threat to me."

Competition among hospitals was common, pushing into the market, sidelining other rival hospitals, or being sidelined by them. She was all too familiar with this.

This was her forte.

"You’re that confident?"

"I’m gifted, Divine Doctor!"

...

The gift Qin Changlin sent to Gu Youyou was a box of exquisitely packaged lotus seeds.

Considering the season, these were indeed the first batch of lotus seeds to be harvested from Lotus Village.

The lotus seeds were plump, large, and beautiful, presented in a delicate little bamboo basket and sealed with a handkerchief, which had a lotus embroidered on it, hence the fancy gift box.

She couldn’t help but smile. Qin Changlin was thoughtful, often sending her some local specialties.

She wondered if she should send some specialties from Lingnan to Qin Changlin in return.

And to Grandfather as well.

Ah, last time she gathered quite a few snow lotuses, she could make them into medicinal pills and send some over.

Gu Youyou put the basket aside but felt something was amiss.

When Banxia had brought it to her she had opened it and seen an envelope. Later, when she went out to collect the golden signboard, she had forgotten all about it.

Where was the letter?

"Banxia, have you seen the letter in my parcel?"

Banxia, wearing an apron, poked half her body out from the backyard and said, "What letter? Oh, the parcel from Qingshui Town? I don't know, I never opened it."

Gu Youyou believed Banxia when she said she hadn't opened it. Could she have seen it wrong?

That seemed impossible; she wasn't someone with failing sight but was actually quite perceptive.

She looked up towards the upstairs floor, holding the lotus seeds and clambering up the stairs.

"Zijin, have you seen the letter that Qin Changlin sent me?"

Chapter 432: Hiding Private Money

With that question, she was certain there was a letter. In Jisheng Hall, there were only three of them. If Banxia didn't take it, then it must have been Jin Zijin.

But Jin Zijin was clearly not a petty person. She couldn’t figure out why he would take her letter.

Every time Qin Changlin sent something, it was always the goods without a letter. Finally, there was a letter, and how could this narrow-minded man take it?

Jin Zijin looked over and, seeing Gu Youyou’s resolute gaze tinged with a hint of anger, he could only reach into his sleeve and take out a straw-yellow envelope.

That was it, Gu Youyou’s eyes lit up.

"Hate that, so petty, it was written to me, yet you read it first," she complained.

She snatched it over, opened it to look and where was there a letter? Just a silver note for three hundred taels.

Damn it.

"Just this? What is Qin Changlin’s intention?"

Jin Zijin’s face was unusually flushed as he explained, "This should be the dividend of Jisheng Hall in Qingshui Town for the past few months."

Gu Youyou: "..." Disappointed.

"Then why did you take my silver note? I thought we were robbed."

Jin Zijin looked embarrassed and even a bit red-faced.

"You’re saving up private money?" she exclaimed in surprise.

Jin Zijin’s face turned even uglier, guilt-ridden, yet he stubbornly kept silent.

It really felt a bit like a husband caught hiding private savings by his wife.

Damn it!

Gu Youyou rolled her eyes, too weakened to complain.

She had just made a casual remark, as her sharp tongue was habitual, but she hadn’t expected to make him lose face like this.

Gu Youyou had thought that the Taoists in Zhuzhao Country were quite wealthy, but it seemed Jin Zijin had even resorted to stealing silver to save for his private stash.

Her expression softened a bit and she quietly asked, "Are you facing some troubles lately?" Why didn’t he ask Yue Rujing for help?

However, Jin Zijin looked at her with a grievance and said faintly, "I am guilty."

Gu Youyou: "..."

"I have deceived you."

"Hmm...?"

"This house wasn’t bought years ago, but a few months ago."

"Ah...?"

"And the silver was borrowed from Ajing."

Uh...

"The military pay for these few months was all used to repay him, and it’s still not enough..."

"Pfft..."

Gu Youyou couldn’t take it anymore and laughed out loud, quite rudely.

After a while of laughing, she put on a serious face, half jesting and half earnest, "Give it up, do you think I’m really that stupid? Sometimes I see you struggle to lie, and since it’s harmless, I can’t be bothered to call you out on it."

Jin Zijin’s expression shifted slightly.

Gu Youyou said, "Alright, alright, I won’t ask why you hid my things. Anyway, I know you meant well for me, I trust you. To think you were petty over a letter from my male confidant," and she stuffed the three hundred taels back into his hand, adding, "Three hundred taels, roughly the dividend from Jisheng Hall for these months, you calculated quite accurately. But don’t forget, I already told Qin Changlin in my last reply not to send me silver, because if he did, I would send it back. He knows my temperament well and wouldn’t send it again."

Jin Zijin’s gaze was complex as he looked at her.

After a moment of contemplation, he stuffed the three hundred taels back into Gu Youyou’s hand and said, "This is my military pay for the last few months."

Gu Youyou smiled and went downstairs.

Averting his gaze, Gu Youyou’s expression suddenly turned grave.

Ha, Jin Zijin, you really think I’m a fool to be cajoled.

She put on her coat and went out the door, heading straight to Yue Rujing.

The typhoid epidemic had worn everyone down. Gu Youyou knew that Yue Rujing hadn’t gone to the barracks either.

Chapter 433: Booming Business

This was her first time actively seeking out the Marquis Residence, and she was looking for none other than their prized Princely Heir.

"Doctor Gu, you’re looking for the Young Master, please wait a moment,"

The messenger hurried off; it seems having a reputation really does have its benefits,

Although she had become the object of hatred among her rivals, her medical skills were beyond doubt, and everyone’s affection for her was undeniable, wasn’t it? If it were before, none of these fellows would have moved so swiftly.

Yue Rujing came out quickly, looking rather anxious.

"Oh, Divine Doctor Gu has arrived. What brings you here today? I thought Jisheng Hall would have had its threshold worn down by visitors."

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "It’s precisely because I’m afraid of the threshold being worn down that I haven’t opened up at all. Sigh, I came to ask for your help; I’m short-handed over at my place."

Yue Rujing looked at her in surprise and asked, "So you want me to help recruit a few doctors for you?"

Gu Youyou said, "Let’s not bother recruiting any doctors. If someone was willing to come work as a doctor at Jisheng Hall, they would immediately become a thorn in the side of those at Lingnan Medical Pavilion. You know our situation; we don’t even know how much longer we can stay in Lingnan, so let’s not drag others down. What I mean is, I want you to come; I trust you if you do."

"Me coming?" He seemed a bit surprised and looked at Gu Youyou with a somewhat strange expression before mumbling, "This is... rather sudden, I'll have to think about it."

Gu Youyou did not feel there was anything improper and only smiled, "Alright, once you've thought it over, just come directly to my medical pavilion."

Little did she know, she would have to discuss this with Jin Zijin.

The doors of Jisheng Hall were opened, and the signboard was hung below the second-floor window. The moment the doors opened, she saw a dense crowd of people.

"Doctor Gu, please take a look at my shoulder. It's been hurting for many years, and no place has been able to cure it. Do you have a solution?"

"Doctor Gu, I often have pains in my chest, and it's always untreated; can you take a look at it for me?"

"Doctor Gu!"

"Doctor Gu..."

If it weren't for Banxia blocking, she would have been skinned alive by the crowd.

To prevent a stampede, she had no choice but to raise her voice, "Don't push, form a line. Anyone who doesn't queue up will not be treated at all."

"Ah? Form a line?" The crowd looked bewildered.

Banxia pointed to the queuing area that Gu Youyou had instructed her to mark out the day before, "Only patients who stand in these squares will be treated; anyone outside won't count."

Then Gu Youyou added, "I'll see you after you've all lined up, no rush, I'll wait for you."

Upon hearing this, everyone froze for an instant, but soon after, they orderly stood in the squares they had marked out to queue up for treatment.

Gu Youyou flashed a toothy smile and whispered, "That’s more like it."

As night fell, there were still plenty of patients left to see. Gu Youyou took out the number cards she had prepared earlier and had Banxia distribute them to the people in line.

The crowd was confused and asked, "Doctor Gu, what does this mean?"

One card per person?

Banxia explained, "That’s it for today. Tomorrow, those of you with cards can come in the order listed on the card for treatment."

Everyone then understood and expressed their acceptance.

"There are so many people, and Doctor Gu is just one person; we can’t let Doctor Gu get exhausted."

"Right, we can’t let Doctor Gu get tired; okay, let’s disperse now."

After closing the door, Banxia said to Gu Youyou with delight, "We’re packed full, while the other medical pavilions are empty."

After washing up, Gu Youyou laughed and said, "But we’re almost dead from exhaustion. Hmm, fortunately, the doctors I’ve hired will start working tomorrow."

Chapter 434: The Newly Hired Doctor

Banxia faltered, "A new doctor has come?"

"Yes, aren’t you tired?"

Tired indeed, but hearing that a new doctor had arrived, Banxia was still somewhat displeased.

Gu Youyou saw this and understood very well in her heart.

To her, someone who was there to snatch away her rice bowl had come, how could she be happy about it?

Silly girl.

Today, when they opened the doors, there was no bustle outside, everyone was standing orderly, but all eyes were fixated on the person standing in the front, their hearts already filled with both joy and fear.

If not for the two knife-wielding guards looking fearsome behind him, surely many women would’ve found it difficult to resist throwing themselves at him.

This was the Princely Heir, unparalleled in handsomeness, as if a celestial being from the moon itself.

Oh my, was the Princely Heir also ill? Was the Princely Heir seeking treatment from Doctor Gu as well?

No one knew, they only saw him walk inside, and with a wave of his hand toward the two guards, they transformed into Jisheng Hall’s door gods, standing on either side.

Gu Youyou knew he would come and said, "Have you already discussed it with your senior brother?"

Yue Rujing’s expression stiffened slightly, and he gave a dry laugh, "Doctor Gu is truly farsighted and astute."

"Have you decided?"

"I've made up my mind, in your words... I'll invest and become half a boss."

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "That's exactly what I was thinking, I was planning to order a batch of advanced equipment to set up a processing factory for medicinal herbs, but I'm short of silver."

Yue Rujing looked back and said, "There are quite a few people, let's start the consultation first, we can talk afterward."

"Sure thing, Doctor Yue, this way please!"

Banxia had already arranged a consultation table for him.

Both doctors had taken their seats while the patients and Banxia were so astonished they couldn't speak.

"What does this mean?"

"It's pretty clear now, isn't it? The Princely Heir didn't come to be a patient, he is the doctor."

"So the Princely Heir is a doctor too?"

"This... I'm absolutely flattered to be treated by the Princely Heir, but does he... know how to treat patients?"

Gu Youyou glanced at Yue Rujing and said with a smile to everyone, "We were taught by the same master, my junior brother."

The entire room erupted into an uproar.

"So it turns out, Doctor Gu is the Princely Heir’s senior sister."

"The Princely Heir has been traveling abroad for years; he went out to study medical skills."

"Ah, it must be fine then, Doctor Gu is so remarkable, her junior brother surely won’t be far behind."

"Right, right, let’s get in line!"

Banxia stood there, stunned.

Oh my, so the Princely Heir and Sister Youyou were from the same sect.

With one more person seeing patients, they managed to finish before the sun went down.

Thankfully, even in ancient times, the population density in the cities was not high and the overall population wasn’t that great, so there were not many people sick enough to need consultation.

The most important thing, though, was that both Gu Youyou and Yue Rujing were quite efficient.

Today, Jin Zijin knew that Yue Rujing was coming, so he also came back early.

After work, they sat together discussing the plans for expansion.

The proposal by Gu Youyou to add some kind of medicinal herb processing plant baffled them, and Yue Rujing asked, "Do you mean to process the medicinal herbs directly into medicines suited for various diseases, is that appropriate?"

"Why wouldn’t it be appropriate, Banxia, bring the samples we’ve made for them to see."

"Okay, Sister Youyou!"

Banxia swiftly brought out a large box, all of which they had concocted in the backyard.

Gu Youyou took out a paper packet and said, "Here, take a look. If a patient is diagnosed with a cold caused by wind-chill, then they take this. I've written everything on it, including different dosages for children and adults. If it's a cough, add this, and likewise, how to take it is written here."

Gu Youyou then took out another packet.

Yue Rujing looked at Gu Youyou skeptically, then opened it to look inside.

Chapter 435: She Doesn't Have Much Time Left

Inside were small granules of powdered medicine—they all exuded the scent of herbs, familiar scents at that.

He eyed them for a long time before sighing, "Using this method is indeed a lot more convenient, and it seems to use less medicine too."

"Indeed, it reduces waste."

Jin Zijin also took a look, his medical knowledge not extensive, knowing only the basics. After examining, he said, "It's good, but it might be difficult to determine the correct dosage for patients with complex conditions."

Gu Youyou smiled, then produced some small paper packets and said, "I have taken that into consideration, so these small packets are not mixed; they contain the powdered form of a single herb. Not all medicines are suitable for grinding into powder, so we will continue to prescribe the formulas we're currently using."

They stared at it for a while, then nodded to each other.

Jin Zijin said, "According to you, a lot of medicines could be processed into elixir pills. Youyou could prepare the prescriptions for common ailments, and I could refine those medicines into elixir pills."

Gu Youyou, whose modern family ran quite a few pharmaceutical factories, had never actually owned an alchemy furnace, and she hadn’t expected Jin Zijin to have this skill.

Yue Rujing laughed heartily, a face brimming with pride: "My senior brother’s medical skills may not be the best, but he’s really good at alchemy and drawing talismans; leaving it to him is definitely the right choice."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Believing in his ability to make elixir pills she did, but what was this about drawing talismans?

Seeing the newly established revolutionary camaraderie was not yet solid, and since her comrades were brimming with confidence, she couldn’t bear to say anything discouraging, and so, reluctantly, she nodded in agreement.

Having discussed things thoroughly, Yue Rujing, in a very lavish manner, said, "I’ll take care of the silver. Gu, you determine what kind of people and tools are needed, and I’ll have someone find them and make them."

Gu Youyou grinned and replied, "That’s exactly what I was thinking. But for now, you’ll need to find a suitable place; my backyard simply won’t do."

"No problem, I’ll buy the house."

Gu Youyou cheerfully handed over her meticulously drawn blueprints to Yue Rujing.

...

She ostentatiously recruited Yue Rujing into the fold and announced their status as fellow disciples, directly silencing those other medical establishments that were trying to edge out Jisheng Hall and had already begun to set traps for it secretly.

Who would dare provoke someone associated with the Marquis Residence if they wanted to survive in Lingnan?

Gu Youyou had not originally planned to do so; with her own abilities, she had been more than capable of dealing with the other longstanding medical establishments. However, Jin Zijin's act of stealing letters reminded her that she was short on time and needed not to get entangled with inconsequential people. She aimed to properly establish Jisheng Hall before she left Lingnan, so that when she eventually went to Beijing, she would have some leverage.

Two-thirds of the workers Gu Youyou hired were women, to which Yue Rujing reacted with bewilderment, "Why hire so many women? Grinding medicine requires strength; wouldn't it be better to hire some robust men? They could also serve as guards in case of theft."

Gu Youyou shot him a look and said, "You seem to understand efficient use, but women tend to be more meticulous. They're not for grinding medicine; they're for packaging it. Are the small medicine scales I ordered ready? If they're about ready, we can start training them."

"Training?" Yue Rujing frowned, "You mean 'starting work'?"

"Yes."

"Your head is full of strange terms."

With Yue Rujing's backing, setting things up was done with considerable efficiency.

In less than three months, everything was ready, except for the training Gu Youyou needed to provide.

The house was located in a large estate behind Gu Youyou's residence, whose owner had moved out long ago. Initially, when they went to see it, it seemed like a sizable property, but it was desolate due to being uninhabited for a long time.

Chapter 436: Bought a person

This does not matter, as she intended to build a factory, and it needed to be demolished and rebuilt anyway.

Under the coercion and enticement of Yue Rujing, the neighboring household sold her an alleyway. By breaking through the alley, they could directly access the factory from the rear courtyard of Jisheng Hall, which was extremely convenient.

Passing through the alley, Gu Youyou saw the completed factory for the first time. It was just as she had envisioned, clean and tidy.

The equipment for grinding medicine had also been installed. It was an assembly-line operation, with the other end of the conveyor belt designated for packaging.

People in ancient times were always particular about the distinction between men and women. To meet their standards of propriety, integrity, and morality, she initially divided a single workspace into two, separated by a wall in the middle of the conveyer belt.

It was possible to stretch a hand through a hole in the wall for a handshake.

Of course, this was impossible in feudal society.

"Manager Gu, how do you feel?" Yue Rujing asked, proudly seeking credit.

Gu Youyou did not skimp on her praise and gave a thumbs-up, "Very efficient, not bad."

"Oh, receiving praise from Manager Gu is not easy, even if it’s just a ’not bad’." Although these words sounded somewhat sour, the smile on Yue Rujing’s face was very genuine.

He clapped his hands, and over thirty men and women, heads bowed, followed an old matron out.

"Doctor Gu, Young Master, everyone is here!" The old matron bowed cheerfully.

Gu Youyou chuckled softly, "You even found an old matron to manage them?"

Yue Rujing replied in surprise, "Of course not, she’s a human trafficker."

"Ah...?" Gu Youyou hated human traffickers. She reluctantly returned the old matron’s greeting and pulled Yue Rujing to the corner.

"Didn’t I tell you to find some honest, diligent, and trustworthy workers? We just pay them wages. Why did you buy these people directly?"

As a modern person, especially one who almost fell victim to human traffickers, she did not approve of this practice.

Yue Rujing rolled his eyes, "I know what you mean. What was it you said last time? Mercy heart?"

Gu Youyou pushed him and said lightly, "You’re the one with a mercy heart, I just don’t like the buying and selling of people. Don’t you know I almost got sold when I was in Lotus Village?"

"What you don’t like are human traffickers, not them. And it’s too late for regrets; I paid silver for them."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Yue Rujing sighed and, resting his arm on Gu Youyou’s shoulder, spoke earnestly, "I can’t figure out what goes on in your head. It’s obvious that buying them is more cost-effective. Look at these people, the good ones cost thirty or forty taels each, the less desirable just ten taels. It’s certainly more economical than your... Banxia. I heard you’re paying her five taels a month. How are we supposed to make silver if you do business like that?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

"And you wanted to find some honest, diligent, and trustworthy workers. I'm telling you, today you're paying five taels, tomorrow someone offers six and they're gone. With our... technology, didn't you say it was unique? What if they leave and take your technology with them? Everyone will then be able to produce medicine our way, and we'll have competition.

But it's different with those we've purchased. Their Servitude Contracts are in our hands; the monk can run, but the temple can't escape. If you think they are pitiable, just treat them a bit better. I promise you, they will be better off here than if they were sold to a large household to become servants. You don't understand the woes of pickling work in big households, but trust me, I'm not wrong."

Chapter 437: Knocking

Gu Youyou turned her head to look at those people, the human trafficker standing in front of them even stretched her neck to look this way. When she noticed Gu Youyou looking over, she quickly drew back and shifted her gaze elsewhere.

As for those purchased by Yue Rujing, they stood there meekly, heads bowed, and even without seeing their faces, one could still feel each of those resigned and desperate hearts.

They were at most in their twenties, and the youngest around ten, or even younger if Gu Youyou hadn't instructed to exclude the very young.

Gu Youyou closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and said, "Alright, you're right, by using them, we save them, and it's also to our advantage. Since it's a mutually beneficial trade, why not do it?"

Yue Rujing smiled and said, "That's more like it!"

Walking forward, Yue Rujing tossed a silver tael to the human trafficker, who broke into a broad smile, thanked them profusely, and before leaving, even mentioned that if they were satisfied, they should give her more business.

Gazing at this group of 'purchased people,' Gu Youyou didn't know what to say for a moment.

But it was Yue Rujing who was more familiar with the business, seeing Gu Youyou remained silent for a long time, she had to raise her voice and command, "All of you, lift your heads and let Doctor Gu have a good look."

At her words, they all lifted their heads together and called out ’Doctor Gu,’ which surprised Gu Youyou.

At the same time, she felt their obedience was heart-wrenchingly endearing.

This must have been something Yue Rujing had the human trafficker train them to do in advance.

"Now, from left to right, each of you report your name."

They obediently reported their names.

Yue Rujing then said, "Those who can read and write, step forward."

So, a man and a woman stepped out.

Gu Youyou looked somewhat surprised at the woman, who appeared to be fifteen or sixteen years old with delicate features and a pure face—beauty in a simple style.

It was known that girls from both wealthy and modest households were not allowed to learn to read and write, whereas it was possible for male attendants alongside young masters.

It was rare for men who could read and write to be sold, and even rarer for women, which stirred Gu Youyou’s curiosity about her past.

Gu Youyou first asked the man, "Why do you know how to read?"

The man answered respectfully, "Doctor Gu, I was previously a servant to the young master of the Yin Family in Shunchang Prefecture, but after the young master drowned, I was... sold off."

Although he spoke calmly and simply, it wasn’t hard to imagine what must have transpired.

The drowning of the young master, and as the attendant to the young master, he was lucky that the Yin Family hadn't beaten him to death.

"And you?" Gu Youyou then asked the woman.

The woman slightly lifted her head and bent her knees a bit, her behavior proper and modest, evidently someone brought up in a well-educated household.

She said, "In response to Doctor Gu, my family was once well-off and my parents hired a female scholar to teach me reading and painting. But after our family fell into hard times, I had no choice but to sell myself into servitude."

It turned out she had once been a young lady of a rich family.

Likewise, she spoke very calmly, as simply as if having an everyday conversation, but the sadness within was known only to her.

After some brief questioning, Gu Youyou took them on a tour of this special compound, simultaneously applying both soft and hard approaches.

"You don't need to see yourselves as servants or slaves; what I've bought are not servants or slaves, but medicine attendants. So, you don't need to feel inferior. I'll dispense silver taels to you like any regular household would to its maids and servants, and once you've saved enough to buy your freedom, you can also look to this... Doctor Yue to redeem yourselves."

Chapter 438: Doctor Zhou's Senior Disciple

Hearing that there was an opportunity for redemption, their eyes alight with life.

No one is born a slave. How could they not long for freedom?

Yue Rujing blinked hard at Gu Youyou, who gave a faint smile and turned a deaf ear.

Knowing Youyou’s temperament, she had no choice but to drop the matter.

...

The factory started operating, and in the blink of an eye, October arrived.

"It’s been a year already," Youyou murmured softly, standing at the window.

The letters sent to Qingshui Town had disappeared like stones into the sea, without any reply whatsoever.

A large pharmacy in Yangguan City wanted to purchase some medicines from her, and she might just take this chance...

Footsteps echoed from below; before long, Banxia appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Sister Youyou, Doctor Cao from Yangguan City has arrived."

This was the buyer of the medicine.

"Alright, I know," she responded.

After changing into a suitable and dignified outfit, Youyou descended the stairs.

The medicinal herb factory of Jisheng Hall produced a great amount, more than they could use, so other town pharmacies would buy some, intrigued by the novelty, and Youyou was willing to sell.

Yet, it was the first time someone from a city like Yangguan had come to make such a large purchase of herbs.

Youyou walked into the hall, which was part of a courtyard bought later, an antique parlor dedicated to receiving guests.

There were personnel Yue Rujing had brought from the Marquis Residence, said to be quite professional—a butler and a chief maid who were presently attending to the guests.

They had their own way of interacting; Youyou learned to integrate rather than insisting on her own rules.

When the butler saw her arriving, he immediately stood up, stepped back, and said, "Doctor Cao, this is our Doctor Gu."

The other party was evidently surprised for a moment because Youyou appeared simply as a young girl, really... too young.

"Doctor Gu!" the other party saluted with clasped hands.

Youyou inclined her knees slightly in return.

The visitors from Yangguan included two people; one, a middle-aged man with a beard, was indeed that Doctor Cao.

The other seemed to be his attendant.

After exchanging courteous greetings, the attendant and the staff of the house retreated, leaving only Youyou with Cao Tianyou in the hall.

They didn’t dive straight into the main topic; rather, Doctor Cao asked some unrelated questions.

"I’ve heard that Doctor Gu is the favored disciple of the renowned Doctor Zhou from Qingshui Town?"

Youyou was slightly startled, then chuckled, "I’m grateful for my teacher’s kindness; it is because of him that Youyou bears the name of a healer. How does Doctor Cao recognize my mentor?"

Cao Tianyou paused, set aside the formalities, lifted the tea, and took a sip before speaking, "Who in Qingshui Town doesn’t know of Doctor Zhou’s name? As a fellow doctor, I have naturally heard of him."

Youyou looked at him but suddenly laughed, "My mentor’s reputation in Qingshui town is indeed good, but Yangguan City is a large place. Though Youyou has never been there, I’ve heard that there are many skilled doctors in the medical halls there, and Doctor Cao is among the most outstanding. It’s a surprise that you would know of a doctor from a small town like Qingshui."

"Doctor Gu is too modest. Although Qingshui Town is small, Doctor Zhou’s reputation has never been limited; do not underestimate Doctor Zhou," he replied.

Youyou smiled faintly, her demeanor serene, "Youyou has never underestimated Doctor Zhou, nor would I dare to underestimate my senior brother!"

She lifted her head, still smiling as her gaze fell upon Cao Tianyou, who wore a look of shock.

"How... how did you know? Ah, I did not expect... that Teacher Zhou would still mention me. However, I, Cao, was long ago expelled by Doctor Zhou from his mentorship, so you should not address me as your senior brother," he stated.

Chapter 439: The Letter to Him

Gu Youyou slightly lowered her eyes and said, "Master never mentioned Doctor Cao, but I know that our eldest senior brother who was expelled by Master has the surname Cao. Coincidentally, he went to Yangguan City to open a clinic, so... I took a chance and it turned out to be that very Doctor Cao."

"You..." Cao Tianyou seemed stunned for a moment. This woman... testing guests like this, it’s a good thing it was him, but what if it hadn’t been?

But moments later, he burst into laughter, looked at Gu Youyou for a long time, and then added, "Master’s discernment has become even sharper."

Gu Youyou curled her lips, remaining silent.

Actually, Doctor Zhou had never seen her, and of course, she would not tell him that.

This was a disciple that Master wanted to protect, apparently valuing him very much. Gu Youyou didn’t delve too much into those topics that shouldn’t be mentioned and got straight to the point.

"Doctor Cao, I heard you plan to purchase a large quantity of goods?"

Cao Tianyou said, "I have seen the cough suppressant and anti-diarrheal packs you offer, but I am not very familiar with your products. However, I trust the name ’Jisheng Hall,’ so this time I have come indeed to learn more about the remedies. I wonder if Jisheng Hall could provide a long-term supply?"

He trusted the name Jisheng Hall despite not understanding the products; he must actually trust Doctor Zhou.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Since you haven’t seen them, let’s take a look together. I hope my customers purchase after understanding the medicines."

"Oh, of course, that’s good."

"Please, Doctor Cao!"

The factory operations were proceeding in an orderly fashion, and Gu Youyou took Doctor Cao on a tour, casually handing him some finished medicine packs to inspect.

When she turned around, she found that Doctor Cao seemed more interested in those peculiar instruments.

Everyone has a sense of curiosity, and Gu Youyou didn’t rush him, standing aside waiting as he looked.

Such items had never been seen by outsiders, and even Jin Zijin had been surprised when he first saw them for quite a while.

It took a good while before he finished inspecting them, touching his beard and nodding in approval, "These instruments are wonderfully ingenious, fantastic indeed. And by grinding the herbs into powder, the usage can be greatly reduced, no wonder your prices can be so low."

Gu Youyou didn't deny it, smiled, and said, "Yes, less waste when grinding into powder. Doctor Cao, are you satisfied?"

"Haha, very satisfied, it seems my trip was not in vain!"

This deal directly consumed half of this month's stock, and thereafter they would need to deliver goods to Yangguan City every two months, the quantity nearly equalling the entire consumption of Cao Tianyou's clinic.

Cao Tianyou sat in the carriage holding the contract and a thick stack of 'usage instructions,' staring blankly for a while and murmuring softly, "To terminate the supply, one must notify the seller one month in advance, otherwise it is invalid."

Beneath it was the prominent seal of Jisheng Hall.

"Master has taken in an unusual disciple," he said. "But she is a good junior sister, and Jisheng Hall is set to thrive under her."

Suddenly, he remembered something, took out a letter, and held it in his hand.

This was the letter Gu Youyou gave him when he was leaving, sealed with wax, instructing him to open it only once he returned to Yangguan City.

What does she mean by this? Could it be related to Master?

...

Perhaps because Yue Rujing came to help her, Jin Zijin seemed exceptionally busy, sometimes not returning until midnight.

The business was getting better and better, and everything was on the right track, but on this night, Gu Youyou didn’t know how many cups of strong tea she drank.

Her hands and feet were ice cold, yet she sat upright beside the desk.

In the silence of the night, the sound of horseshoes approached, growing closer and closer, he was finally returning.

Gu Youyou gripped the teacup tightly, waiting for those footsteps to ascend the stairs.

Chapter 440: She Knows that Grandpa is Dead

Footsteps halted beside the dark staircase, and after a moment, a rich voice emanated from the darkness.

"Why are you still awake? And without lighting a candle."

The person beside the desk paused briefly, then let out a cold huff and said, "My heart is blind, what use is there in lighting a candle?"

Jin Zijin’s footsteps stopped, and he stared straight into the darkness where the voice came from.

Tonight, there was no moon or stars, just pitch black.

After his eyes adjusted to the extreme darkness, he could barely make out a dark shadow in front of him.

He couldn’t see her expression, but her chilling words had already made everything clear.

He frowned, and after a moment, as if having lifted a huge stone off his chest, he sighed in relief.

Jin Zijin stepped forward again, sitting steadily in the chair opposite her.

Gu Youyou looked down at the teacup in her hand, which she actually couldn’t see at all, just a clump of darkness. Nevertheless, she didn’t feel like lifting her head to look at the man across from her.

"Do you know?" he asked.

At his words, Gu Youyou merely gave a bitter smile and tugged at the corner of her mouth.

Yes, she knew.

The letter she sent to Cao Tianyou was to ask him to help her inquire about the Gu Family in Lotus Village, Qingshui Town, and to send it to her along with the goods list.

She was the first one to see the goods list; no one would suspect her.

With a bitter smile, she said, "Actually, Qin Changlin wrote to me every time, didn’t he? And you helped me write back!"

Jin Zijin didn’t respond, his silence served as an acknowledgment.

"I know why you kept it from me, I don’t hate you, but..."

She suddenly lifted her head, staring straight at Jin Zijin.

Similarly, in the pitch darkness, she couldn’t see him at all—just a darker shadow.

Gu Youyou’s face showed a look of pain, her hand clutching the teacup trembling slightly.

"A child wants to support, yet the parent is gone." She resented herself deeply.

Tears flowed from her eyes unknowingly, her heart aching more and more, she said, "If I had known that grandfather would just pass away like that, I would have taken him with us no matter what. How dangerous could it be around us? Even if he couldn’t have stayed alive, at least I would have been there to watch him take his last breath. That’s a proper farewell, far better than letting those beasts anger him to death."

The big tears dropped onto the floor, making a dripping sound in the silent night.

Jin Zijin’s heart tightened, he lifted his hand wanting to pull her into his arms, but stopped midway, and then let it fall back.

"I shouldn’t have kept it from you." he said.

Gu Youyou shook her head, replying, "You are not wrong. I know at this point, what you did was the best option. Grandfather’s greatest wish was for me to be well; if he were alive, this would also be his wish. So I don’t blame you, the only one at fault is me."

The sound of her unable to restrain her sobs was particularly harsh in the quiet night. Jin Zijin understood clearly, Gu Youyou kept saying she didn’t blame him but only herself, in fact, by blaming herself, she made him feel even worse.

In the end, she did blame him, punishing him in this way.

He would have preferred it if she just yelled at him outright, if she hit and kicked him, scratched and clawed—a far better alternative than her blaming only herself now.

"Youyou, don’t be like this."

He didn’t know how to comfort people. After thinking for a long time, he could only utter these few words.

Gu Youyou closed her eyes and lifted her head, trying to slow the flow of tears.

"I don’t want to be like this either. So tell me, what should I do? I always thought grandfather was living well because as long as he was alive, I could even bear not exposing the filthy deeds of those lowlifes at the Gu Family. Do you think I’ve never talked about returning to Qingshui Town? It’s because I didn’t want to face those people, because I wasn’t yet in a position to do anything to them."