Farmhouse 771

Chapter 771: Marry a Stepmother

Because when it came to the issues between his wives and concubines, he truly had nothing to say.

The eldest son, Jie, watched his father with a strained face, and only after quite a while did he let out a stifled grunt, bowed with hands clasped together, and said, "Your son dares not."

Magistrate Jie huffed angrily, "You even dare to spout words such as 'lead the charge and die before the soldiers'; what else is there that you wouldn't dare to do? You are clearly resentful towards me. You can resent me, but you must not joke with your lineage and your life. Just look at the state our house is in now, with no woman in charge, the inner courtyard is almost in chaos."

The eldest son, Jie, snorted coldly in his heart, thinking: Wasn't it a mess even when a woman was in charge?

He glanced at Jie's second son and, seeing his elder brother's extremely unfriendly gaze coming towards him, he hurriedly turned away.

Magistrate Jie followed the gaze of his eldest son to the second son and said, "You too, now that you're without a wife or concubine, there's no need to lead the charge and die before the soldiers. When will you marry a wife and bring her home?"

"Dad!" Jie's second son sighed, "Don't you know what I think? I will go to Jinxiu City tomorrow to see Xintong."

Magistrate Jie felt his head throb as he said, "Does she even want to be with you anymore? If she doesn't want to, you shouldn't bother her. Haven't you caused her enough misery?"

Jie's second son's face turned pale, those few years were the memories he least wanted to reminisce.

So he only kept his head down, incessantly scooping rice from his bowl.

The eldest son, Jie, with a glass of wine in hand, patted the second son on the shoulder, and sighed, "Zhonglin, what's in the past is past, you shouldn't feel too guilty; after all, Xintong is doing alright now."

"Yes, big brother," he said softly.

The eldest son, Jie, swallowed a cup of wine, turned to his father, suddenly pursed his lips, and said, "Dad, why not remarry and bring us a stepmother? You are only forty-eight this year, not yet fifty, still young. Who knows, you might still be able to give us a little brother or sister."

Magistrate Jie sprayed a mouthful of soup across the table, furious enough to flip it.

"You unfilial son, dare to jest with your old man when you're still a bachelor?"

...

Indeed, on the first day of the lunar new year, Jie's second son did come to Jinxiu City, standing outside the closed doors of Manxiu Building.

It was the new year, and Manxiu Building was on a seven-day holiday, following the rules set by Gu Youyou.

He stood under the eaves, removed the cloak hat from his head, then brushed the snow off his clothes and lightly knocked on the door.

After a few gentle taps, the door was opened from the inside, and a young woman poked her head out.

Upon seeing Jie's second son, the woman's brow furrowed and she said, "Second Young Master, why have you come again? Today is the first day of the new year; can't you let people have a peaceful holiday?"

Jie's second son, with a smile on his face, said, "Cuiya, your tongue has become even sharper. Please go and inform Xintong that I'm here to see her."

Cuiya didn’t have a good expression towards Jie’s second son, after being put in charge of managing the embroiderers purchased by Miss Du, her temperament had grown, striking a figure much like that of a housekeeper.

"Oh, you’ve really chosen a perfect time to come. In just a while, my young mistress will be returning to Beijing to visit our late master and Madam’s grave for the new year. Are you going to wait here? Or follow along?"

Jie’s second son suddenly froze, feeling somewhat bewildered.

In five years of marriage to Miss Du, he had never once visited the graves of Magistrate Du and Madam Du; instead, every year he accompanied the concubine to pay respects to his own mother and the concubine’s mother.

Chapter 772: Don’t You Feel Ashamed?

Reflecting on these years, he felt that he truly owed Du Xintong so much.

The second young master Jie stood still, his expression crestfallen.

Cuiya, mocking, laughed and said, "It seems that even you, second young master Jie, don’t know where old master and Madam’s graves are. When you had the status, you never visited, so on what grounds would you visit now? I think it’s better to forget it, lest it become a joke."

Having said that, she slammed the door shut, paying no mind to second young master Jie’s embarrassment.

Second young master Jie gave a wry smile, finding that this rejection was thoroughly deserved.

Thinking of this, he felt that Miss Du had every reason to resent and hate him.

This was all his own doing, no one else to blame.

Second young master Jie stood under the eaves, facing the cold wind. Not long after, the door opened again, and out came Miss Du and others.

The ladies were all wrapped in cloaks; their attire indeed suggested they were embarking on a long journey.

Second young master Jie let out a breath of white air and approached them with a smile.

"It’s been a long time since I’ve visited uncle Du and aunt Du, I... "

"Do you feel ashamed?" Miss Du interrupted him, speaking indifferently.

The words of second young master Jie stuck in his throat, the smile he had forced upon his face now frozen.

One by one, people came out of the house. A woman, wrapped tightly all over, was assisted out by two other women, one on each side. At a glance, she saw second young master Jie standing at the door, his lips slightly purple from the cold.

That one glance was like a cat seeing a fish, irrepressible; she shook off the two women supporting her and burst out shouting as she threw herself at second young master Jie.

"Husband, husband, you’ve come to see me again, husband..."

Miss Du furrowed her brows and scolded, "Take her to the carriage."

The two maids complied, picking up Du Wanqing from either side and dragging her toward the carriage.

Second young master Jie turned ghostly pale, whether from the fright of Du Wanqing’s behavior or from Miss Du’s earlier question, "Don’t you feel ashamed?"

Both these women had become what they are now because of him. They were the last bloodline of the Du Family; what face did he have to see lord Du and Madam Du?

He stood under the eaves, watching them all board the carriage and depart into the snowy distance, yet he dared not move a single step forward.

The servant felt sorry for his own young master and opened an umbrella to shield him from the snowflakes, saying, "Second young master, if you want to go, just go."

"Can I... Can I still go?"

The servant replied, "Just treat it as personally admitting your wrongs to lord Du and Madam Du, it's also second young master's sincere intention."

Second young master Jie paused, then turned to look at the servant and said, "Admit my wrongs?"

"Yes, second young master."

Yes, indeed, he really should admit his wrongs.

Finally, second young master Jie found a reason for himself to follow and hurriedly had someone drive his carriage after Miss Du's carriage.

The Du family's graveyard was somewhat desolate, for the Du family only had two young misses left, with no one else remaining.

Miss Du personally set up the sacrificial table with fruit and offerings.

She knelt in front of lord Du and Madam Du's graves, burning ceremonial paper while softly speaking something.

Second young master Jie watched from a distance, and after a moment, he resolutely stepped forward and knelt next to Miss Du.

Underneath Miss Du, who was kneeling, there was a thick cushion provided by the maid, whereas second young master Jie was kneeling directly on the snowy ground.

Miss Du looked at his knees with surprise, then raised her head to look at second young master Jie and said, "There's really no need for this. We've long settled our accounts."

Chapter 773: Waking Up Once

Jie, the Second Young Master, said, "I have settled matters with you, but I still owe Mr. Du and Madam Du. They entrusted their daughter to me, and I failed to treasure her, even causing her to suffer, which is one issue. The second is, after we got married, I never once paid my respects to our elders, making me unfilial. Even though we have no relation now, a debt owed remains a debt owed, and I hope my offering today is not too late."

Du Xintong sneered coldly but did not speak.

Late? Why isn't it considered too late? If regret and apologies were effective, the world would truly be turned upside down.

The burns on Du Wanqing's body, once frozen by the harsh cold, became painfully itchy and unbearable, and she was unwilling to step out of the carriage. After Du Xintong finished burning the paper offerings, she personally led people to pull Wanqing out.

"Du Xintong, what are you trying to do? I don't want to go out, my face feels awful, I don't want to go out."

"On the first day of the New Year, as a daughter you must offer ceremonial worship to your dad and mom. It's not up to you whether you go out or not, move."

A few robust maidservants dragged Du Wanqing out of the carriage, all the way to the graves of Mr. Du and Madam Du.

Jie, the Second Young Master, stiff in the knees from the cold, supported himself to stand up and looked in astonishment at Du Wanqing, who was rolling on the ground in a tantrum, unwilling to approach and worship at the graves of Mr. Du and Madam Du.

He only then realized how muddled he had been these years; Du Wanqing had never once come to worship Mr. Du and Madam Du, and from this alone, it was clear she was a person of cold nature.

Her own mother had passed away when she was only a few years old, yet she remembered her for a lifetime, whereas she had completely forgotten about Mr. Du and Madam Du, who had raised her.

It seemed that her annual worship of her biological mother was also because of him.

"My Lord, why have you also come?" Upon seeing the man standing beside the grave, Du Wanqing finally ceased her struggling.

Jie, the Second Young Master, glanced at Du Xintong and said, "I should have accompanied Xintong here, but I never did in all these years; now that I'm here, I hope to obtain the elders' forgiveness."

"You... forgive what?" Wanqing asked in utter surprise.

Jie, the Second Young Master, with a hint of anger on his face, said, "Forgive what? Don't you understand very well?"

Du Wanqing's eyes widened, and shaking her head in disbelief, she said, "No, impossible, you once said you do not acknowledge the marriage to Du Xintong, so you refused to pay respects to the Du family members who had arranged the marriage. But it was they who arranged it, are you confused?"

"Silence!" Jie, the Second Young Master's face turned pale as he took a deep, slightly trembling breath, and then stealthily glanced at Du Xintong, saying, "Yes, I was confused, but not now. Now I am unusually clear, realizing what kind of person you are, what kind of person she is. I only regret that I went to the Du Family and got to know you."

"My Lord!"

"Don’t! Don’t call me that," Jie, the Second Young Master interrupted her, saying, "You can call me Jie Zhonglin, or the Second Young Master, we’ve long had no connection, the only reason you’re still alive is because Xintong spoke up for you. And our Jie Family, by good fortune, owes her, owes the Du Family!"

"You..." Du Wanqing looked at Jie Zhonglin, then turned to look at Du Xintong. She suddenly realized the way Jie Zhonglin looked at Du Xintong was what she had schemed to acquire yet still lost.

She understood all too well what such a look meant.

He regretted it, regretted divorcing Du Xintong, and now the person in his heart was no longer her, Du Wanqing, but Du Xintong.

But why?

Chapter 774: Can We Talk in Private?

"You... So you came to Jinxiu City, actually for her?" Du Wanqing pointed at Miss Du and said.

Master Jie’s face turned pale, and he looked at Miss Du with a hint of unease.

"Xintong, I’ve realized my mistake, would you still give me a chance for forgiveness?"

Miss Du stood upright and didn’t look at him, only saying to Du Wanqing, "Do I still need to teach you what to do?"

As she spoke, Cuiya handed a lit incense stick to Du Wanqing’s hands.

Du Wanqing shook her head and retreated, her gaze, however, remained fixed on Master Jie.

And Master Jie continued to look at Miss Du, the three of them standing in strange postures on the snowy ground.

"Xintong, I know you hate me, and you won't forgive me. But that's okay, I can wait. You waited for me for five years; I can wait for you for another five. It's fine to answer me after your anger has faded!"

Miss Du finally couldn't avoid moving her gaze onto Master Jie. She sighed and said, "Perhaps we should step aside to talk, and clear things up properly."

Master Jie, both thrilled and anxious, followed behind Miss Du, walking towards a distant place.

In the snowfield, her footprints were left behind. He stepped into each one, overlapping his footprints with hers.

Du Wanqing stood there stunned; if not for the maidservant supporting her, she would have barely kept her balance.

Why should she step aside to talk? About what were they going to clear up?

Cuiya held the lit incense in her hand and rolled her eyes at Du Wanqing, saying, "What are you still dazed for? What else don't you understand? The man you've been pining for has long regretted it, regretted supporting you, the venomous woman, for so many years and causing my young lady to suffer so much.

Now he wants to make amends, but even that has to be okay with my young lady, right? Second Miss, you'd better offer incense to the Old Master quickly. If you won't even offer incense to the Old Master, you might as well not consider yourself part of the Du Family anymore."

"I don't, I don't believe it." Du Wanqing screamed like a lunatic, scratching her own face.

Cuiya felt immensely relieved and pulled out a cloth bag from her bosom, waving it at Du Wanqing, "Second Miss, I've always had something I wanted to show you, I wonder if you'd like to see it?"

"What is it?" At that moment, Du Wanqing was as if possessed.

"Just this!" Cuiya giggled, "With this, you'll understand why Master Jie doesn't want you, haha..."

Du Wanqing, seeing Cuiya raise her hand, suddenly lunged at her and snatched the cloth bag from her hands.

She frantically tried to open the bag, but the more anxious she was, the more trouble she had opening it, even dropping it to the ground in her haste.

Cuiya chuckled and picked up the cloth bag that fell into the snow, "Oh, I forgot, your arm's disabled, it's difficult to open with one arm. Let me help you!"

Miss Du and Master Jie had already moved away from the crowd, observing the surrounding blanket of white snow, she took a deep breath.

How good it would have been if her life remained as colorless and clear as the world around her, but alas, a life full of scars can never return to its origins.

Turning to face Master Jie, she met his gaze and sighed deeply, "You came to find me, and I understand your intentions. I treat you as a mere visitor, with neither hatred nor grievance, and I thought you understood. As things stand now, you don't owe me, and I don't owe you. To me, you are just like any other passerby in Jinxiu City. Since you don't understand, then let's make things clear today."

Chapter 775: I thank you for your ruthlessness back then, which made me who I am today.

Hearing Miss Du's words, the eager and pounding heart of the second son of the Jie Family finally began to calm down.

Despite knowing the result, hearing it from her still plunged him into an ice cavern.

He tugged at the stiff corners of his mouth, smiling as he said, "It's okay, I've said, I can wait. Wait until you're not angry anymore, then tell me."

Miss Du was startled for a moment, then sighed and said, "It seems you still don't understand."

"I... I understand, but..."

"No, there’s no ’but’ between us anymore," Miss Du said with a slight bow, performing a courtesy, "I thank you for your cruelty back then, which has made me who I am today."

She spoke evenly, without sorrow or joy, yet it stirred up a storm within the second son of the Jie Family.

A mix of shock and joy!

He thought she had always been indifferent to everything, but it turned out she only seemed to not care or hate. That statement, however, betrayed her.

She, too, held grudges.

Indeed, she had learned to rebel silently two years ago, pretending to not care about anything so no one could ever hurt her again.

"I didn’t know you were such a person, delicate on the outside but tough inside," the second son of the Jie Family said. "You have grievances in your heart, I understand that. I’ve said it, I will wait."

"No, you don’t understand, you never have," she replied.

"I didn’t know before, but now I do, Xintong, I..."

Miss Du, suppressing the frantic pain in her heart, interrupted him, "If you really understood, you would know that staying far away from me is for my benefit. You, and Du Wanqing, just your presence reminds me of a past I don’t wish to recall, frightening me to the point of waking from my dreams."

"Xintong!" The second son of the Jie Family was stunned, his face slightly bewildered, "You never used to speak so harshly!"

Miss Du scoffed, "That’s why you thought I was weak and easy to bully, becoming complacent. But don’t forget, I am no longer the Du Xintong of the Jie Family. In my heart, there’s no more of that abject love for you to trample upon."

"You..." Staggering backwards, the second son of the Jie Family stuttered, "I’m sorry!"

Miss Du took deep breaths of the cold air to calm herself down.

"I don’t need your apologies! Those past events aren’t a blank slate; they consumed my life. You, all of you, and me—we three have a chasm between us that can never be crossed. Du Wanqing is the blood of my Du Family, my father said on his deathbed that we were the only family under the heavens. I can scarcely forgive her in the slightest, let alone you. What are you to me? A past, a memory, the originator of painful wounds.

I overlook what you’ve done, for the sake of Mr. Jie and Qinyun, but if you insist on forcing me to reopen old wounds, and eradicate the last traces of stranger’s kindness, so be it. From now on, do not come to Jinxiu City looking for me. If you do, I won’t see you again..."

The second son of the Jie Family’s face turned ashen as he watched the figure, growing more distant across the pale snowfield, while his legs, as if rooted, lost the courage to follow.

So, she hated that much...

A palm-sized copper mirror was in Du Wanqing’s hands.

She wanted to lift her other hand to touch her disfigured face, but her numb hand couldn’t rise anymore.

This was the first time she had seen her face after being licked by the flames. She knew it wouldn’t be pretty, but she never imagined it would be more terrifying than a ghastly spirit.

Such a face, who could bear looking at it day and

Chapter 776: The End

"Ah..." A piercing scream that almost shattered everyone’s eardrums rang out through heaven and earth.

Du Wanqing dropped the bronze mirror in her hand, pushed away the two older women propping her up, and franticly tried to escape, dragging her injured leg.

With her body lacking support, how could she manage to walk in the snow? She fell to the ground after just a few steps.

The cold snow, like needles piercing her skin, caused her so much pain she nearly stopped breathing.

"This is not me, I don’t look like this! There are ghosts, don’t follow me..."

Du Wanqing must truly have been on the verge of madness.

She ripped off the gauze on her body and with her functioning hand, she scratched her face until it was bloody.

Hearing the scream, Miss Du hurried back and stood in front of Du Wanqing.

She looked down at Du Wanqing, her hands trembling slightly.

Seeing her in such a state, it seemed she had received enough retribution.

Miss Du looked toward the stunned maids and old women nearby and said coldly, "What are you standing there for? Hurry up and help her to her feet."

Everyone snapped out of it, rushed to help Du Wanqing off the ground, and used a new piece of gauze to rewrap her face.

Du Wanqing’s eyes, seemingly poisoned, glared at Miss Du as she breathed heavily and cried, accusing, "Don’t pretend to pity me; I don’t need your fake concern. It’s all your fault. My husband and I were so close, and if you hadn’t interfered, we wouldn’t have ended up like this. Are you satisfied now? He doesn’t want me anymore!"

Miss Du took a deep breath and quietly wiped away the tear that had slipped from the corner of her eye.

Standing before her parents’ graves, her heart ached as if it were tearing apart.

She thought that even if it was a mistake at the beginning, if she hadn’t persistently intervened, their wrongs might have turned right.

So, when it came down to it, she indeed was at fault.

"I indeed owe you an apology, but it’s all in the past now. Come with me to our parents’ graves and bow your head. Let’s forget about these years at the Jie Family, and I’ll take an oath before them with you, that from this moment on, you will still be my only family, and we two sisters will depend on each other for life."

"No, don’t you dare think I’ll let you have your way," Du Wanqing cried out loud, "I want to go back to the Jie Family. My husband said he wouldn’t mind my looks, I have to go back; I know I was wrong, he’ll surely forgive me. Sister, if you truly want to reconcile, help me, send me back to my husband’s side..."

Miss Du suddenly flinched, nearly losing her balance.

Even now, did she still think she could return to the Jie Family? Did she still harbor hopes for that man?

"Sister..."

"Don’t call me that!" Miss Du barked furiously, "Stolen goods can never be enjoyed for life. Don’t you understand? A man like him is so clear-cut in love and hate, he won’t leave any room for feelings. When

he loves you, he could give you everything, unconditionally accommodating you. But when the love is gone, it’s gone; he won’t give you any more chances. Just think about how he treated me at first!"

...

There was an abandoned thatched cottage on the back hill, and Gu Youyou, following Jin Zijin, only realized how familiar it looked when they got closer. On closer examination, wasn’t the cottage identical to the one they had once occupied on the north hill of Lotus Village?

She looked at Jin Zijin in astonishment, thinking to herself: Jin Zijin must have a peculiar fondness for thatched cottages.

No wonder after she set his thatched cottage ablaze, he built another one exactly alike.

"Don’t tell me that our Lotus Village’s cottage was inspired by this very one?"

Chapter 777: My Mother is Buried Here

"Indeed, just do it like this," he said indifferently, striding towards the thatched hut.

The hut was no different from the others; left uninhabited for years and without repairs, it had fallen into complete disrepair.

Jin Zijin rolled up his sleeves and cleared away the weeds in front of and behind the house, his movements swift as he began to tidy up the ruined yard.

Gu Youyou pouted in surprise and said, "You’re not thinking of fixing up this house for us to live in from now on, are you?"

She didn’t want that; she wanted to live in the big tile-roofed house in the Taoist Temple.

The mountain wind was strong, messing up Gu Youyou’s hair. Jin Zijin turned around, gathered the strands that were in her face, and placed them behind her, saying with a faint smile, "This house is

falling apart; it’s drafty from all sides. How could I let you live here? It’s just that it’s been a long time since I’ve been back, and I’m only cleaning up the weeds."

Gu Youyou was puzzled and asked, "Isn’t the courtyard where I live your house? Why did you build a thatched hut up here on the mountain?"

Jin Zijin straightened his posture and stood facing the wind at the edge. His gaze, as deep as ink, turned toward the extending mountains at the foot of the hill.

It turned out that this place was just like the thatched hut in Lotus Village; it seemed ordinary, but the view was surprisingly expansive.

The Taoist Temple halfway up the mountain, the stretch of mountains below the temple intermittently visible through the misty clouds, and the few paths leading up the mountain could all be seen winding their way below.

Choosing this location to build a thatched hut held a hidden meaning.

"Before I went with my master to the Taoist Temple, I lived here with my mother," he said.

Gu Youyou’s expression changed, and she took steps toward him to stand shoulder to shoulder with him in the cold wind.

"Your mother lived here with you alone in these mountains. Why didn’t she ever go back to Beijing?"

Jin Zijin shook his head and said, "I was very small at the time, and my memories of my mother are very vague." He smiled, stretching the corners of his mouth and said, "Look, she chose this spot with great care. There must be reasons she couldn’t go back to Beijing!"

Gu Youyou looked at his profile, his handsome nose bridge, took a deep breath, and latched onto his arm.

The two stood in the wind for a long time until Jin Zijin suddenly said, "Let’s go down the mountain. My mother’s tomb is at the foot of the mountain."

Gu Youyou looked at him in surprise. His mother, after all, had been posthumously honored as Empress. How could she be here instead of in the Imperial Mausoleum?

Without another word, Jin Zijin had already grabbed her hand, hoisted her onto his back, and began descending the mountain at great speed.

Though it didn’t look far to the bottom, it took nearly four hours to get there with Jin Zijin’s pace.

This was a flat grassy area. There was no sign of his mother’s tomb as mentioned, but a long, weed-covered pit.

Jin Zijin put Gu Youyou down and said, "This is it."

Gu Youyou looked at the pit, which stood out oddly in the flat grassland.

No gravestone, no earthen mound, instead there was a pit?

Jin Zijin said, "My mother was buried here before. Later, when they found out, they exhumed her and relocated her to the Imperial Mausoleum."

So that was it!

Even if the Crown Princess Consort were dead, how could she tolerate being buried anywhere but the Imperial Mausoleum?

Jin Zijin gazed intently into the pit, lost in thought, while Gu Youyou, unsure of how to comfort him, simply stood with him.

After a long while, his hoarse, suppressed voice came, "Soon I will be able to pay respects to you openly."

He turned his head, looking at Gu Youyou, and said, "For now, this is all I have, but later I will take you to see my mother."

"Okay," she said softly.

Leaning gently against his shoulder, she added, "If we avoid the guards at the Imperial Mausoleum, we could also sneak in."

After a moment of thought, Jin Zijin said lightly, "Let’s not go there for now, let’s go back first."

...

Chapter 778: Visiting the Place of Legend

Winter passed and spring arrived, and Gu Youyou’s life seemed to have undergone no significant changes, her daily schedule packed full.

She had businesses to run across various regions, and from time to time, she would see patients who sought her out by reputation, and every day, she still had to write stories for Tian Jizi.

Every month, account books from various places were delivered to her hands, and Jin Zijin would return to the mountain once a month, bringing with him the medicines Gu Youyou had prepared. He claimed, "Master is ill, no matter how busy, one mustn’t forget Master."

After seeing off Jin Zijin, she would immerse herself once again, delving deeply into the increasingly perfected laboratory.

"Useless!" A cold, elderly yet steady voice suddenly appeared behind her, giving Gu Youyou quite a fright.

With her keen senses, the number of people who could approach her silently were few.

She turned abruptly, only to see Tian Jizi standing behind her at some point.

At that moment, Tian Jizi’s eyes were clear, and his gentle gaze occasionally flashed a hint of sharpness. Gu Youyou knew this was a time when he was not confused.

Gu Youyou didn’t dare to be negligent, quickly getting up and respectfully saying, "Heavenly Master Senior."

"Mm!" Tian Jizi hummed in acknowledgment, glancing at the row of shelves behind Gu Youyou.

A bunch of colorful little bottles were placed there.

"Do you know about the legend of Sun Zhuzhao and Dark Moon Youying?"

Gu Youyou, lowering her gaze, said softly, "I have... heard of it."

"Oh? Heard of it?" Tian Jizi raised his eyebrows and said, "Let’s hear it."

Gu Youyou recounted in detail the story about the two Sacred Beasts, Sun Zhuzhao and Dark Moon Youying, that Jin Zijin had once told her.

After listening, Tian Jizi frowned deeply, his eyes turning a few degrees colder, and asked, "Was it Zijin who told you this?"

"Ah...?" Gu Youyou was startled, suddenly feeling like she had said something she shouldn’t have, extremely foolish of her.

The legend of this story was surely not known by everyone, and even among those who knew it, as the tale was passed on, it must have spawned numerous different versions. The version they told was certainly different from what the Dao Family had passed down.

What Jin Zijin had said was certainly specific to the Dao Family and particularly to the Tianzong lineage.

She had told Tian Jizi honestly when he asked.

How could she be so foolish?

Gu Youyou slapped her own mouth and said with a stiff neck, "Yes, he told me."

Tian Jizi snorted and said, "You don’t need to hide it from me. How could I not know what he does when he returns to the mountain? I raised him with my own hands. It’s alright; after all, he is originally from the secular world, and his heart is not with the Dao Sect anyway."

He looked at the array of bottles and jars in front of Gu Youyou and said, "Do you feel as though these medicines should be able to detoxify, but the effects when you take them are disappointing?"

Gu Youyou was taken aback and looked up at Tian Jizi.

He had bluntly revealed the truth? This was the very issue she had been unable to fathom, no matter how hard she tried. Could it be that he knew something?

"Please enlighten me, senior!"

Tian Jizi tugged at the corner of his mouth and said, "Considering you’ve been ’treating’ me, I can give you a hint."

"What hint?" Gu Youyou asked, somewhat excited.

"If you have the chance, go and have a look at that legendary place."

Gu Youyou: "..."

"Where exactly is that place?"

Tian Jizi, however, kept her in suspense, smiled mysteriously, turned around with his hands behind his back, and left.

Moving as lightly as drifting clouds, embodying the essence of Immortals, he disappeared in the blink of an eye, as if he had never been there in the first place.

Gu Youyou witnessed this astonishing scene that one would only expect to see on television, almost not believing her own eyes.

Chapter 779: Searcy’s Version

Was I just seeing things, or had this centenarian truly cultivated himself into a spirit?

In any case, this world is different; indeed, there are many things science cannot explain.

Searcy came in carrying a sealed basket and saw Gu Youyou staring blankly out the door.

"Youyou, what’s wrong?" she asked curiously.

Gu Youyou snapped back to reality, shook her head, and said, "No, nothing." She looked down at the basket in her hands and asked, "Did you bring the items?"

Searcy lifted the basket and said with a smile, "Every single one of these snakes was handpicked by me, the most venomous and deadly, enough for us to extract poison for a long time."

Gu Youyou smiled, cast aside her previous bafflement, and said, "Good, you’ve worked hard on this journey. Put them in the jar."

"Alright, oh, that prescription I asked you about last time—did you inquire about it?"

Gu Youyou thought of the pile of medicine dregs and said, "You should stop looking into that; I've already made inquiries."

"What happened?" Searcy pressed Gu Youyou eagerly.

Gu Youyou sighed and said, "The person who wrote that prescription died six or seven years ago."

"Six or seven years ago?" Searcy furrowed her brows and murmured to herself, "That can't be possible. The Ghost Doctor clan was exterminated twenty-eight years ago, and from what my mother told me, everyone died except for her. So who could it be, who else survived?"

Who was it? It was merely someone who, for their own gain, concocted a scheme to wipe out the Ghost Doctor clan and then kept the most notorious Ghost Doctor confined, making him develop a poison infused with Youying Grass.

But to tell a young girl the truth about this clan's extermination would accomplish nothing but add to her worries.

Gu Youyou considered it and ultimately decided not to speak of it.

At least, she should not tell her while Tian Jizi was overwhelmingly powerful.

"Perhaps there were some who slipped through the net. It's said that person was nicknamed the Ghost Doctor; do you know who it might be?"

"The Ghost Doctor?" Searcy gave a snort of laughter and muttered, "It turns out to be him. My mother mentioned him, but I didn't expect he'd also survived."

Gu Youyou said, "But now he's dead, too. You're the only surviving descendant of the Ghost Doctor clan. You'd better not ask about this anymore, and don't talk about it. Wouldn't want you to get silenced one day, because where would I find such a capable assistant then?"

Searcy rolled her eyes at Gu Youyou and ignored her.

Remembering Tian Jizi, Gu Youyou couldn’t focus on anything, often getting the dosage wrong while preparing medicines.

Searcy had to stop what she was doing and looked up at her, "If you make another mistake, stop for today. These herbs are precious, and no amount of silver can afford your waste."

Oh, to think she could say something like that, Gu Youyou saw Searcy in a new light.

Gu Youyou said, "I’ve been preoccupied with some thoughts."

"Let’s hear them," Searcy asked, quite casually.

"Have you ever heard the story of Sun Zhuzhao and Dark Moon Youying?" Gu Youyou asked, looking at her.

Searcy’s movements halted in surprise and she said, "Why are you suddenly asking about this?"

Gu Youyou said, "The things we’re researching seem to be related to it."

"Oh!" Searcy nodded in understanding, lightly.

Thinking for a moment, she then tilted her head and asked, "Which version do you want to hear? There’s one told among the people, and my mother told me another."

Gu Youyou’s eyebrows twitched; of course she wanted to hear the version her mother had told her. Could the folk tales even be reliable?

"Let’s hear your mother’s version."

Chapter 780: It’s Two Meteorites

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"My mother’s version goes... It is rumored that the Sun Zhuzhao and the Dark Moon Youying were a pair of mythical beasts, one male and one female, one yin and one yang. After their death, they left behind a pair of inner cores that contained the essence of their entire bodies. Later, one of these cores ended up in the hands of the Dao Sect, and the other in the possession of the Imperial Family’s Jin Family in Zhuzhao Country,"

It was still those two creatures’ inner cores, which, although sounding slightly different from what Jin Zijin had mentioned, were essentially the same thing. Gu Youyou felt somewhat disappointed.

Searcy then said, "Youyou, this is the legend, but my mother has another version."

"Oh? What else does she say?" Gu Youyou’s interest was piqued.

Searcy let out a cold sneer and said, "Hmph, people like us never believe in such ghostly nonsense. How could those two things possibly be the inner cores of beasts? They’re nothing more than a pair of stones from beyond the heavens."

Gu Youyou stumbled in shock.

Stones from beyond the heavens?

Could she be referring to meteorites?

That thing...

Gu Youyou instinctively reached for her belly. If Jin Zijin really had one of those inside of him, the idea of performing open-chest surgery on him crossed her mind yet again.

If she really couldn’t obtain the bug from Xuanzong, she might have to resort to this option as a last resort.

"What’s wrong? You look rather pale," Searcy asked curiously, staring at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou laughed bitterly and said, "Do you know where these two stubborn stones were dug up from?"

Searcy replied, "I heard they came from the East Sea region. There are more legends about the Sun Zhuzhao and the Dark Moon Youying over there."

Gu Youyou made a mental note to visit the place when she had the chance.

...

In Qi Mountain, Gu Youyou’s storybooks had become famous. Disciples of age who left to gain experience thought of a way to make a fortune using her storybooks.

They would hand-copy several books and send them to printing workshops outside to print more. They eventually took up the trade of selling storybooks.

Completely unbeknownst to Gu Youyou, her storybooks had become a popular pastime for the common folk during their leisure time. Not only that, but even the storytellers in the teahouses took her stories as a base to create new ones.

Someone who was particularly fond of her stories made inquiries and found out they were from Qi Mountain, so that person came, driven by their admiration, to see for themselves what kind of remarkable person could have so many interesting stories in their mind.

When this person finally met Gu Youyou, she was so surprised to see a young woman that she could hardly believe Qingyang, who was showing her the way, and said, "Is it really this young lady? You’re not fooling me, are you?"

Qingyang responded, "Oh, Sister Lun, you've come all the way up the mountain to find us, how could I possibly deceive you? You'll know as soon as you ask her yourself."

Gu Youyou looked bewildered at the woman who seemed not too old but still as lovely as a flower.

"Who is this sister?"

Lun Tong approached Gu Youyou, looked her up and down, and asked, "Did you really write it?"

"Write what?" Gu Youyou asked, puzzled.

She pulled out a book from her bosom and said, "This, did you really write this?"

Gu Youyou took the book handed to her with suspicion, flipped it open, and immediately understood.

She was completely unaware that the stories she had written for Tian Jizi had spread outside, and this fan's visit left her feeling perplexed.

Gu Youyou confirmed, "I did write this." She then turned her gaze to Qingyang, who was trying to look away, and said, "Aren't you going to explain this to me?"

"Well... hehe, about that..." Qingyang mumbled, scratching his head, "I don't really know, doctor Gu, but I will go ask the other disciples."