

## All Hail 131

Chapter 131 - 131 Zhou Yonghe

“There’s no lack of food in the spring. The crops in the fields are growing well. Even if we increase our harvest by 15%, we won’t starve. In the next season, they’ll return to their original state. In the past few years, the scenery has been good, and they could afford to increase the rent by 50 copper coins per mu. I heard that not long ago, the rent of every mu in the capital increased to 70 copper coins. The farmland in the Weining Marquis Residence which is neighboring Zhengzhuang has increased to 100 copper coins, and the harvest every season has also increased by 25%.”

This time, everyone stopped complaining about the Yu Residence and began to sympathize with the situation in Zhengzhuang.

A farmer’s logic was shallow. With comparison, it was easier to be satisfied.

It was indeed because Zhou Yongchang was too much of a bastard, and also because they were too greedy. Instead of tending to the crops well, the main family deliberately planted the crops on the farm badly in order to not receive an increase in rent.

Elder Zhuang continued, “The steward of Zhengzhuang, which is next door, is from the Weining Marquis Residence. He acts like a tyrant in Zhengzhuang all day long, bullying both men and women. I heard that a few young ladies in Zhengzhuang have already been harmed by that steward. One of them even jumped into the river. Of the 100 copper coins rent in Zhengzhuang every mu, 20 copper coins went into his pocket. The additional 25% of the harvest was left to him. Although Zhou Yongchang committed a crime, the steward was still chosen from our Zhouzhuang. This is also a good thing.”

No one in the central room said anything bad about the Yu Residence anymore. Everyone remembered that the Yu Residence had been very kind to the villagers in the past. During the disaster years, the rent and harvest had been reduced. Even if the rent was increased during the bountiful years, it would still be less than other families.

It was said that the Old Madam of the Yu Residence worshiped Buddha. Eldest Miss had also grown up in front of Old Madam Yu. She was as kind as Old Madam Yu.

Old Master Zhuang continued, “Although this is Yongchang’s fault, since the residence has already dealt with him and let him make up for his mistake, you don’t have to be too harsh on him in the future. Otherwise, if the residence finds out, they’ll think that we have a grudge against the residence, and venting our anger on him.”

Eldest Miss Yu had dealt with Yongchang and even arranged a job for him. She was indeed benevolent.

Everyone nodded.

Old Master Zhuang pondered for a moment. “Eldest Miss is in charge of the residence now. Then, let Yonghe be the new manager of Little Zhouzhuang. Does anyone have any objections?”

At the mention of Zhou Yonghe, everyone felt sad. At the same time, they recalled what had happened ten years ago and couldn't help but look regretful.

Therefore, that night, Zhou Yonghe took over and became the new manager of Little Zhouzhuang.

Before dawn this morning, Little Zhouzhuang had already packed the vegetables into a large carriage and asked Zhou Yonghe to send them into the Yu Residence.

Zhou Yongniu went with him.

Zhou Yongniu took the initiative to tell them about the terrible thing he had done. The Yu Residence gave Zhou Yongniu five taels of silver, which made Zhou Yongniu and his family overjoyed.

As for Zhou Yongtian and the others, Zhou Yonghe did not bring them along. Instead, he chose three other honest men to enter the residence.

Zhou Yonghe stood at the back door of the Yu Residence and thought of a time many years ago when the weather was cold. Back then, he had stubbornly knelt at the entrance of the Yu Residence, completely ignoring the doorman's rejection and the pointed fingers of passers-by. His body had also frozen. Later, an old servant had brought him into the residence from the back door and he met the mistress of the Yu Residence, the noble First Madam Xie!

He still remembered that at that time, Eldest Madam Xie was wearing a bright red phoenix-patterned peony jacket with a fox collar. She was sitting on a chair generously. "The tenant of Zhouzhuang has done his best. You have some ties with the Yu Residence, so tell me if you have any grievances."

Back then, he was young and rash, so he had rashly begged the Yu Residence.

Later on, he realized that it was all thanks to the kind-hearted Eldest Madam Xie that he had encountered. If it had been anyone else, even if he had frozen to death outside the residence, no one would have cared about him. If they had been any more ruthless, they would have beaten him up and his future life at home would have been miserable.

Just as Zhou Yonghe was lost in thought, an old woman in a blue cloth jacket walked forward. "Eldest Miss has instructed Steward Zhou to wait in the Windfall Courtyard."

Zhou Yonghe turned around and instructed Zhou Yongniu and the others, "Just wait here. Don't offend the people in the residence. Don't panic if anything happens, and don't be anxious. We'll talk when I return."

Zhou Yongniu took the lead and agreed. Only then did Zhou Yonghe follow the old woman to the Windfall Courtyard.

At this moment, Xia Tao was also telling Yu Youyao about Zhouzhuang's new manager. "Zhou Yonghe has been good at studying since he was young. At the age of 13, he was already a student. Zhou Yongchang's father is also a strong person. He gritted his teeth and used all his assets to send him to the school in the capital. He asked Zhou Yonghe to study with the High Scholar, and he asked for 50 taels of silver a year."

Yu Youyao listened carefully and could tell what was going on. The new manager had studied well and was on the way to becoming an official. Zhouzhuang had indeed put in a lot of effort to choose such a capable person.

However, she was a little surprised. “Zhou Yonghe’s father is willing to spend so much money to send Zhou Yonghe to the school in the capital. It’s obvious that he’s not an ordinary person. Why is he here to manage the residence?”

Xia Tao said, “This matter is quite complicated. When I was young, I heard someone mention Zhou Yonghe and I heard a lot.”

“Oh?” Yu Youyao’s interest was piqued.

Xia Tao continued, “Zhou Yonghe’s father has the skills to repair houses. When he’s not busy with farm work, he’ll go to the noble families in the capital to work. When he meets a generous main family, he can also receive some silver. His family has also rented a lot of farmland and the harvest is not bad. After many years, he has also saved some money. He’ll tighten his belt and live well for a year or two. When Zhou Yonghe passes the county examination, his life will be better.”

Yu Youyao understood.

At that time, Zhou Yonghe was already a student. He would be able to become a scholar after another examination.

If she did well and got first place, he could even be an “endowed student” and receive monetary support from the government. He could also be a guarantor of the county examination. It would be extremely glorious in the countryside.

Even if he did not get first place, Zhouzhuang would still be the place with his relatives. If he had a promising future, the entire Zhouzhuang would have to continue earning money and stay hard working, so that Zhou Yonghe could continue studying for the imperial examination.

Xia Tao sighed slowly. “The incident happened ten years ago. Coincidentally, during Zhou Yonghe’s examination, Zhou Yonghe’s father entered the capital in the middle of the winter to look for work. He wanted to earn more money and brought along an envoy for Zhou Yonghe’s examination. In the end, he fell from the roof and died on the spot.”

Hearing this, Yu Youyao couldn’t help but sigh. “The world is really unpredictable.”

“That’s not all.” Xia Tao sighed. “Zhou Yonghe felt that his father’s death was strange, so he spent money to hire a coroner. He realized that Zhou Yonghe’s father had lost a leg and fell to his death on the roof.”

Yu Youyao’s breathing tightened. In the past, she had also heard of some wealthy families bullying men and women, and treating human lives like grass. She couldn’t help but feel sympathetic.

Chapter 132 - 132 Indeed A Smart Person

“Zhou Yonghe was a filial son. He couldn’t care less about the school examination and went to that family to argue. That family beat Zhou Yonghe up and broke his face, leaving a long scar. As a result, Zhou Yonghe couldn’t continue with the examination.”

Yu Youyao's hand couldn't help but tighten. The Great Zhou Dynasty indicated that those with severe illnesses, broken faces, and incomplete bodies couldn't enter the government. It was obvious how vicious that family was.

She couldn't help but think of her cousin, and her mouth tightened. "What happened then?"

Xia Tao said, "How could Zhou Yonghe be convinced? In the middle of the winter, he found his way to the Yu Residence and knelt in front of the door to seek justice. At that time, the head of the Yu Residence was still your mother, Eldest Madam Xie. After knowing what had happened to Zhou Yonghe's family, Eldest Madam Xie felt deep sympathy for him, so she stepped forward and sent money to the government, asking them to investigate. The government found out that the family had deliberately killed someone. Not only did they pay a sum of money to Zhou Yonghe's family, but they were also detained and sent to jail to seek justice for Zhou Yonghe's family."

However, she did not expect that Zhouzhuang's new steward would have some affinity with her mother. Yu Youyao was a little surprised.

Indeed, the older the wiser.

Seeing that Yu Youyao did not say anything, Xia Tao continued, "When Eldest Madam Xie passed away back then, Zhou Yonghe's family was dressed in mourning clothes. They followed the people from the Yu Residence from afar and paid respect to Eldest Madam Xie by walking a few kilometers."

Yu Youyao nodded. "Go and meet this Steward Zhou!"

Zhou Yonghe was 24 years old. He was wearing a gray cloth that had been washed until it was white, making him look tall and thin. He looked decent, but there was a long scar on the left side of his face, from the corner of his eye to the side of his nose. It was a little shocking at first glance, but after so many years, the scar had faded a lot, and it was actually not that scary.

Zhou Yonghe stood up calmly and bowed to Yu Youyao. "Greetings, Eldest Miss."

It was the etiquette of a scholar!

The Great Zhou Dynasty cared about official titles, so it was obvious that officials did not kneel. Zhou Yonghe was a child, so there was naturally no reason for him to kneel to her. Yu Youyao nodded. "Manager Zhou, please sit!"

Zhou Yonghe thanked her, lifted his clothes slightly, and sat back down calmly.

The young lady was sitting at the head of the table in an apricot dress. Her young face had grown a little, and she looked vaguely beautiful. She looked very much like Eldest Madam Xie back then. However, compared to Eldest Madam Xie's dignified and beautiful appearance, the young lady in front of her looked a little more elegant and noble.

He was stunned. Then, he remembered that back then, First Madam Xie had stepped in and dealt with the government. The government had investigated the truth and returned justice to the family.

He went up to the Yu Residence to thank First Madam for her kindness. He was so intimidated by First Madam Xie's aura that he did not dare to look up. He could only catch a glimpse of First

Madam Xie's apricot-red clothes. There was a piece of pink and white apricot flower embroidered on the corner of her dress which looked beautiful.

She said, "I heard that your studies are excellent. You're already a scholar at such a young age?"

At that time, the scar on his face was very terrifying, like a centipede lying diagonally across his face. He was furious and gritted his teeth. "I originally planned to participate in the academy examination in February, and become a scholar."

Eldest Madam Xie's tone revealed a hint of pity. "Although the imperial examination is the best way out, it's not the only way out. You're smart and you have more principles than others. You're already better than most people in this world. It's not advisable to give up on yourself. In this world, it's difficult to know if things are good or bad. How can you know if it's a blessing in disguise?"

Before he left, he stood under the magnolia tree in the Windfall Courtyard. At that time, there were many magnolias, and the flowers were blooming like lotuses. Thinking of Eldest Madam Xie's character, he felt that she was as noble as this magnolia.

A maidservant came forward. "First Madam asked me to give you this bottle of top-grade Jade Face Ointment. She wants you to go back and apply it. Although it can't remove the scars on your face, it can at least reduce them a little."

Ten years later, when the magnolia flowers bloomed again, he came to the Windfall Courtyard of the Yu Residence, but everything was different.

At this moment, he still hadn't understood First Madam Xie's words. "It's hard to tell whether it's a blessing or a curse in this world. Who knows if it's a blessing in disguise?"

However, it was only later, after he had left the capital with the Eldest Miss of the Yu family for many years and returned to the capital that he finally understood that Eldest Madam Xie's heartfelt words were meant for her daughter, Yu Youyao.

It was this young girl who had brought him all the way to the capital.

Zhouzhuang had chosen Zhou Yonghe to be in charge to express its goodwill to her. She was in charge of the household, but her subordinates were all old hands in the residence. Naturally, there was no problem with these people doing things, but it would not be easy to order them around. With Zhou Yonghe, she would not have no one to use in the future.

In that case, there was no doubt about Zhou Yonghe's ability.

Yu Youyao did not waste any time. She asked Chun Xiao to pass a stack of papers to Zhou Yonghe. "Steward Zhou, not only do you have a relationship with my mother, but it's also fate between you and me. In the afternoon, all the stewards in the manor will enter the residence. At that time, I'll mention this matter, so I'll have to trouble you to discuss a rule with the other stewards and establish a new contract. It'll be implemented outside the residence these few days."

Zhou Yonghe did not say much. On the white paper, although the rows of small words were a little childish, they were still natural. They were hard and soft, and were actually written by a half-grown child. It was really unbelievable.

After reading the entire proposal, Zhou Yonghe felt deep veneration for her. “Eldest Miss, you’re very ambitious. You don’t stick to a single place. You’re using centralized and decentralized methods to gain power.” As he spoke, he had already stood up from his chair and walked up to Yu Youyao. He bowed respectfully. “I am willing to serve Eldest Miss.”

Zhou Yonghe was indeed a smart person!

Zhouzhuang’s steward had always been very respected in the Yu Residence. Among the stewards, he had a rare reputation. With Zhou Yonghe taking the lead, this matter became much easier.

At this moment, Old Madam Yu also found out that a new steward of Little Zhouzhuang had entered the residence. She said to Nanny Liu, “Old Master Zhuang of Zhouzhuang is old and wise. I’m relieved that Yao Yao has such a person by her side.”

As she spoke, a maidservant came over to inform her, “Eldest Miss has brought Steward Zhou over to greet Old Madam.”

Old Madam Yu smiled and quickly said, “Please come in.”

On the first day that Steward Zhou took office, he had to pay a visit to Old Madam Song and the mistress of the household. However, Madam Yang was sick, so it wasn’t appropriate for them to disturb her. Yu Youyao led him into An Shou Hall and brought along the medicinal tea that she had promised to give to Old Madam Song.

Zhou Yonghe greeted Old Madam Yu respectfully, exuding a scholarly aura.

Old Madam Yu sized up Zhou Yonghe carefully and nodded in satisfaction. “In the future, you’ll have to work hard with Eldest Miss. Although my granddaughter is a little young, she’s just like her mother. She’s kind-hearted.”

Zhou Yonghe was a smart person, so he understood immediately. Old Madam Yu had asked him to only follow Eldest Miss in the future and be ordered around by her. “Old Madam, don’t worry.”

Chapter 133 - 133 A Hungry Camel Is Still Bigger Than a Horse

Old Madam Yu was even more satisfied. She asked Nanny Liu to bring over a piece of paper for Zhou Yonghe to sign. She then took out the seal of the Yu Residence and solemnly stamped it.

This way, Zhou Yonghe’s title of steward was legitimized.

Old Madam Yu ordered someone to bring out a set of Four Treasures of the Study and reward it to Zhou Yonghe. Zhou Yonghe thanked her gratefully and returned to the Windfall Courtyard.

The room fell silent.

Old Madam Yu leaned against the couch and looked at the two boxes of medicinal tea on the table with an unreadable expression. “The Zhenguo Marquis Residence is a meritorious family that has followed Emperor Gaozu. It was also extremely illustrious in the past. Just by looking at the words ‘Zhenguo’ bestowed by Emperor Gaozu, it’s not difficult to tell that the Marquis Residence used to be glorious.”

Nanny Liu lowered her head and stood at the side, not daring to interrupt casually. However, she couldn’t help but glance at the two boxes of medicinal tea on the table.

Old Madam Yu did not expect her to speak. She continued, “The current emperor is obsessed with Taoism and doesn’t care about the state affairs. The empress’s health is poor. Imperial Concubine Lu has been in charge of the harem for many years. Her maiden family, the Weining Marquis Residence, is very powerful. Although the Zhenguo Marquis Residence has fallen, a starving camel is still bigger than a horse. In three years, the talented Song Mingzhao will appear out of nowhere, and the Zhenguo Marquis Residence will be incomparable.”

Three years ago, Di Ren had invaded the Northern Region and guarded King You of Youzhou. Due to his failure, he had lost three cities in a row at the border of Youzhou. Di Ren had killed people and looted in the Northern Region, causing countless casualties and shocking the court.

It was the Marquis of Weining who had put on his armor and led his troops to help out. That was how he had driven away the Northern Barbarians and recaptured the three cities of Youzhou.

After that, the You King was accused of treason.

On the other hand, the Weining Marquis Residence used the excuse of driving away the Northern Barbarians and the Anbei border situation to shine like a sun.

Old Madam Yu lowered her eyes. As Yu Miaofu had married into the You Prefecture, even though the Yu family and the You Prefecture were far apart, they were still in contact. The information that her spies had obtained was that when the Marquis of Weining was helping the north, the You King had already taken two cities in a row and killed countless Di people. The Di people already had the intention to retreat...

It was also after the incident in Youzhou that the court was in turmoil. Although it was peaceful now, it wouldn’t be peaceful for long.

The eldest son was the censor. If anything happened, he would definitely have to take the lead.

The second son was a cabinet aide. While the civil officials were not as distinguished as the military officials, their families were blessed with outstanding contributions, so they could take on the responsibility if anything happened.

She should also arrange a proper way out for Yao Yao.

There were some things that should not be delayed, and it was time to make plans now.

Nanny Liu lowered her head again and stared at the tip of her shoe.

Old Madam Yu looked up at the medicinal tea on the table. “Send this medicinal tea to Old Madam Song at the Zhenguo Marquis Residence. Tell her that Yao Yao made it herself.”

Old Madam Zhengou had specially written to say that her cough had recovered a little, and she had even praised Yao Yao in her letter. It was obvious that she really liked Yao Yao.

Nanny Liu heaved a sigh of relief. “I’ll do it now.”

Old Madam Yu pinched the prayer beads one by one, thinking to herself that when the Zhenguo Marquis Residence had beaten up their great-grandfather, they had already taken root in the capital. All these years, who knew how many emperors had changed? Who knew how many rounds these meritorious nobles had changed? The Zhenguo Marquis Residence was still very stable.

The Yu Residence and the Zhenguo Marquis Residence were only separated by an alley. It only took an hour to arrive by carriage.

As soon as Bai Kui arrived at the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, he asked a decent old maid to politely lead him into Old Madam Song's He He Hall.

Old Madam Song was wearing a brownish-gold dark-patterned jacket. She leaned against the couch and coughed a few times.

Nanny Zhang, who was serving her, calmly opened the blue and white porcelain box on the small table. She picked a spoonful of yellow and white pear paste and dissolved it into the water, then handed it to Old Madam Song.

After drinking the pear paste, Old Madam Song's expression softened a little. Only then did she look at Bai Kui.

Bai Kui bowed and said, "Old Madam asked me to meet you. Eldest Miss has learned how to brew medicinal tea from her Nanny to nourish one's body. A few days ago, she made some for Old Madam. After drinking it for a while, Old Madam felt much better, so she felt that this medicinal tea was effective. She asked Eldest Miss to make more and gave you two boxes."

With that, she handed over the exquisite boxes.

Nanny Zhang quickly went forward to accept them.

Old Madam Song's smile deepened as she turned to look at Nanny Zhang. "Listen, this old thing didn't come specially to give me a gift, but to show off in front of me."

Nanny Zhang had a round face and smiled very kindly. "Old Madam Yu is lucky to have such a smart and sensible granddaughter by her side. You should also bask in her glory."

When Old Madam Song heard this, her smile deepened. "Yes, yes, you're right. It's all thanks to Yao Yao's prescription that my old illness has improved a little. Quick, open it and take a look. What good things did Yao Yao give me this time?"

Bai Kui stood at the side with his head lowered. As he listened to Old Madam Song praise Eldest Miss, a smile appeared on his lips.

Nanny Zhang stepped forward with a blue and white porcelain tea box.

Old Madam Song smelled the faint medicinal fragrance. "Just this smell makes me feel comfortable. Make a cup for me to taste carefully."

How could Nanny Zhang say no? She quickly took some medicinal tea and placed it in a cup. When the hot tea was brewed, the fragrance of the medicinal tea immediately filled the room.

At this moment, Song Mingzhao, the heir of the Marquis of Zhenguo, strode into the house to greet his grandmother.

Bai Kui lowered his head a little more.

Old Madam Song couldn't be bothered to drink her tea. "Why are you here?"



“I was planning to go out, so I came over to tell Grandmother.” As Song Mingzhao spoke, he smelled a faint medicinal fragrance that seemed a little different from what he had usually drunk. He glanced at the tea on the table.

Old Madam Song didn’t notice this and only asked, “Where are you going?”

A man’s ambition was to travel the world. It wasn’t a bad idea to take advantage of his youth to go out for a walk and broaden his horizons. Ming Zhao had been practicing martial arts since he was young, and he had guards accompanying him, so his safety wasn’t a problem.

Song Mingzhao paused. “The Northern Territory.”

Old Madam Song suddenly looked up and saw the vague expression on his face. He was just short of saying that he was going to Youzhou. “Yin Huaixi is already dead. Are you still brooding over the rumors that spread from Youzhou back then?”

More than three years ago, Mr. Xian Yun had traveled to Youzhou and set up an unprecedentedly precious chess game in Youzhou to meet friends. When they learned of this news, all the scholars in the world rushed to Youzhou. Mr. Xian Yun’s front porch was also filled with people waiting.

This game had been playing in Youzhou for more than ten days, but no one had cracked it.

In the end, it was cracked by a mysterious young man who came anonymously. There were rumors that Mr. Xian Yun wanted to take this young man as his disciple, but for some reason, it was left unsettled.

There were rumors that this mysterious young man was the heir of the You King, Yin Huaixi.

It was probably not groundless.

Later on, when Mr. Xian Yun accepted Ming Zhao as his disciple, it was inevitable that people would compare them.

Chapter 134 - 134 Planning

“I have to make a trip there to know what kind of person that place can raise.” Smelling the fragrance of the tea, Song Mingzhao suddenly felt thirsty. Seeing that the tea had not been touched, he couldn’t help but bring it over.

After taking a sip, he immediately felt the fragrance of the tea enter his mind. It was fresh and refreshing. There was a hint of bitterness in his mouth, but it made his cheeks feel relaxed. He actually liked it very much. “Grandmother, is this tea different from usual?”

Old Madam Song was a little surprised. “Your Grandmother Yu sent it over just now. She said that it’s a medicinal tea that Eldest Miss Yu learned from a nanny in the palace. She’s the only one who made it. There’s no such thing outside. I just made a cup here and didn’t have time to drink it, so I asked you to drink it.”

Nanny Zhang made another cup and handed it to Old Madam Song.

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Old Madam Song didn’t care that it was hot. She blew on it a few times and took a small sip. Then, she looked surprised. “This taste...” She paused and her eyes lit up. “I remember that I’ve tasted it a

few times in the Empress Dowager's palace in the past. It's a rare good thing. Eldest Miss Yu, you're really considerate." As she spoke, she looked at a box of medicinal tea that had yet to be touched. "If you like it, take a box and drink it."

Song Mingzhao suddenly recalled the little girl who had sat beside Old Madam Yu at the Precious Peace Temple that day. She had been dressed in pink and white, looking delicate and lovely. He couldn't remember what she looked like at all, but he remembered that she had a pair of clear eyes. When she looked at you, her eyes seemed to glow, giving him a strange sense of familiarity...

Song Mingzhao pulled back from his distant thoughts and shook his head. "Since Eldest Miss Yu gave it to Grandmother, I..."

Old Madam Song smiled. "Why are you being so polite to Grandmother? That old thing from the Yu family and I have been together for so many years. Are you still worried about me not having enough medicinal tea?"

Song Mingzhao did not decline anymore. After saying a few words to his grandmother, he left the He He Hall with Yao Cha.

Old Madam Song glanced at Bai Kui and happily asked Nanny Zhang to prepare a gift in return. "Help me thank Yao Yao later and ask her to come to the Zhenguo Marquis Residence to play when she's free."

Bai Kui received the gift and left respectfully.

Seeing that Bai Kui had left, Old Madam Song said to Nanny Zhang, "I heard that Eldest Madam Yang is sick. The eldest branch of the Yu Residence is now under the household manager Yao Yao?"

Nanny Zhang nodded. "That's what everyone says. I don't think it's wrong."

Old Madam Song sighed. "Yao Yao is only ten years old. She's only a child, but she already knows how to manage the household. She's really amazing!"

However, she did not doubt at all if a child could manage the family well.

Not to mention anything else, just from the time they had met at the Precious Peace Temple, the little girl's words and actions were very appropriate.

Old Madam Song's maidservant, Wei Zi, led Bai Kui out of the residence. On the way, they bumped into Madam He, who was about to go to Old Madam Zhenguo's house.

Madam He had a full moon face, willowy eyebrows, and phoenix eyes. She was a blessed person. "Wei Zi, this is?"

Wei Zi hurriedly bowed. "It's Sister Bai Kui from the Yu Residence. She was ordered to send some things to Old Madam."

Bai Kui also bowed. "Greetings, First Madam!"

Madam He smiled, but there was a hint of shrewdness in her eyes. "Send my regards to Old Madam Yu."

Bai Kui nodded repeatedly.

Seeing that Wei Zi had left with Bai Kui, Madam He pinched her handkerchief and pressed it against the corner of her mouth. “Why did the Yu Residence suddenly come knocking on our door to deliver something to Old Madam for no reason?”

Mother Wang, who was beside her, said, “I heard that the last time at the Precious Peace Temple, Old Madam met Old Madam Yu and the two of them spoke together. Later on, Eldest Miss Yu gave Old Madam a prescription for the pear paste, saying that it was a good thing from the palace and could help with her cough. After Old Madam took it for a while, her cough indeed eased a little, so she interacted more with the Yu Residence.”

Madam He’s eyes flickered. “What a coincidence. When I went to Jinxiu Manor today, I heard Manager Sun mention the Eldest Miss of the Yu Residence and praise her. He said that Eldest Miss Yu is already able to share Grandmother and Mother’s burdens at such a young age. She has the demeanor of a head of the household, and it’s rare for her to be kind and compassionate...”

Mother Wang did not dare to speak.

Madam He chuckled. “Let’s go to Old Madam’s house.”

When Bai Kui returned to the residence, he reported to Old Madam Yu, “Old Madam Song was very happy and praised Eldest Miss a lot. Even Young Master Song liked Eldest Miss’s medicinal tea. Old Madam Song gave him a box on the spot, and he didn’t refuse.”

Old Madam Yu’s gaze darkened, but she did not say anything.

Then, he looked at the gift that Old Madam Song had given Yao Yao. It was a red jade lock. It was as red as a bloodstone, and it was carved with peony patterns. There were yellow, white, and red jade beads at the bottom of the lock. On the back of the lock was carved the words “Riches and Honor”. It was very expensive.

The elders were also particular about giving gifts. The more expensive the gift, the better.

When giving gifts to a junior that they liked, they had to give them something that they could wear to show their closeness. Among them, jade was the best, and the most popular color was red.

Jewelry was a little ordinary. For example, longevity locks, wealth locks, and so on were mostly given to the descendants by the elders. They had different meanings like “giving blessing” and “preventing blessings from leaving”.

The key was that this was a precious red jade lock. The meaning behind it was huge.

Red meant auspiciousness, and jade meant fulfillment. As for the lock...

Old Madam Song’s gift was obviously too big, but Old Madam Yu was very satisfied.

In this way, her plan was half successful.

She had to watch this carefully!

Old Madam Yu waved her hand. “Send it to Yao Yao.”

Bai Kui took the gift and went to the Jade Courtyard.

Yu Youyao was a little surprised to receive a gift from Old Madam Song. “Isn’t this too expensive, Grandmother...”

Bai Kui smiled and said, “Old Madam saw it, so she asked me to send it over to Eldest Miss. Old Madam Song likes the medicinal tea you made very much. She even said that the prescription for the medicinal pear paste you gave her previously was good, and it even alleviated her cough.”

She did not mention Song Mingzhao at all.

Yu Youyao pursed her lips before accepting the gift.

After Bai Kui left, Yu Youyao asked Chun Xiao to put away the red jade wealth lock properly. She looked at Mo Lan in front of her in a daze.

Today, her grandmother had asked her to deliver medicinal tea to Old Madam Song from the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, so she treated it as an ordinary interaction between relatives.

However, Old Madam Song had also sent over a valuable lock, which made her feel a little uneasy.

In her nightmare, she had married Song Mingzhao and was locked up in a small courtyard. She had used medicine to create a medicinal catalyst. In the end, she had exhausted all her energy and lost her value. Then, her heart had been peeled off and she had died a terrible death.

Even though it was just a dream, she could still feel the excruciating pain when the needle was inserted and her heart was dug out. She could feel the despair of not being able to live or die.

When she woke up, she kept reminding herself that it was only a dream. It didn’t mean anything.

However, the nightmare was too real. When she woke up from it, she was unknowingly affected by the dream. It was as if she had lived for many more years.

## Chapter 135 - 135 Wishful Life

She had changed so much in just two months. Nanny Xu’s upbringing was one thing, but wasn’t this also the reason?

It was just a dream. In this lifetime, she had made up her mind to stay far away from Song Mingzhao, so she did not want to be too close to the Zhenguo Marquis Residence.

However, the relationship between the Yu Residence and the Zhenguo Marquis Residence was very important. The marriage between the two families was a situation of mutual benefits. It involved the conflict of the royal court, and the factions were not something that a young lady like her could control.

Therefore, she could not avoid the Zhenguo Marquis Residence.

In addition, there was no way to avoid the personal relationship between Grandmother and Grandmother Song.

Suddenly, someone knocked on her forehead. Yu Youyao covered her forehead in pain. She looked up and saw that her cousin had arrived.

Her cousin’s gaze was dark and oppressive. Yu Youyao panicked for a moment. She blinked and called out softly, “Cousin!”

Her voice was so soft that it made Zhou Linghuai’s heart tremble. “Why are you in a daze?”

After school, Zhou Linghuai came to the Jade Courtyard as usual, but what greeted him was not the little girl's cheerful voice calling him "Cousin".

He pushed the wheelchair into the study quietly and saw the little girl sitting by the window. Her bright eyes seemed to be covered with a layer of ashes. They were empty and filled with pain and despair. Even her young face was pale, revealing a sense of panic and helplessness that did not match her age.

He almost thought he was mistaken.

In his eyes, Yu Youyao was a carefree little girl.

Her eyes would glow like the sparkling stars in the sky. Even in the endless night, they could decorate the night and dazzle the stars.

Her smile was clean and bright, like sunlight. It was warm and could melt the cold and ice of winter.

She had a strong and vigorous vitality that could even reignite the dead.

However, he saw the despair of falling into the mud and shattering into pieces in such a young lady.

Zhou Linghuai's breathing slowed down as he gently rubbed the top of the little girl's head. "What were you thinking about just now?"

"N-nothing." Yu Youyao pursed her lips and lowered her head. She twirled the long and narrow leaves of the ink orchid with her fingertips and was silent for a moment. Then, she looked up at her cousin and smiled. "Cousin, I've just read the Four Systems of Mourning and Spring and Autumn. There are many things I don't understand."

Nightmares were different from reality.

At least, there was no cousin in the nightmare.

With her cousin around, she definitely wouldn't be as miserable as she had been in her dream.

Besides, she was only ten years old now. It was too early to talk about marriage.

Old Madam of Zhenguo had always been very close to her. Perhaps it was because the medicine she had given her previously had eased her cough, so she had given her an expensive gift.

Why should she worry unnecessarily?!

The last time Song Mingzhao was at the Precious Peace Temple and had come to greet her grandmother and Grandmother Song, she had deliberately observed Yu Jianjia.

Although Yu Jianjia was careful to hide it, she was still attracted to Song Mingzhao like in the nightmare. She could plan for the future just based on this.

In the nightmare, her grandmother had arranged a marriage for her, and she had accepted it passively.

In this world, she was unwilling to be involved with Song Mingzhao, so she naturally wouldn't accept it passively. Since things hadn't reached that stage, there was no need to be too conflicted.

No matter what, her cousin would definitely help her.

After figuring this out, Yu Youyao smiled. "Cousin, I've memorized everything I don't understand. I'm just waiting for you to come so I can ask for guidance."

The little girl's voice was cheerful and sweet as she happily went to get a stack of paper from the desk.

It was as if the helplessness and despair from before was just his imagination. Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but clench his fists tightly.

However, since the young lady did not want to tell him, he naturally would not press her.

After handing her notes to her cousin, Yu Youyao poured a cup of hot tea and handed it to him politely. "Cousin, have some tea to moisten your throat first."

Zhou Linghuai's expression softened. He took the tea from the young lady's hands and took a sip. He placed the teacup on the table and read Yu Youyao's notes while explaining the mistakes.

One spoke while the other listened. Unknowingly, it was lunchtime.

"Cousin, let's go eat." The little girl's voice was cheerful as she walked behind her cousin and carefully pushed the wheelchair.

Zhou Linghuai spun his wheelchair with both hands and cooperated with her. His gaze fell on the green stone floor. At some point, a thick dark green carpet had been laid out. The threshold at the door had also been changed to a low ramp like in the Green House. The eight tables had been changed to round tables. Some fragile ornaments had also been changed.

In the courtyard, the annoying flowers and trees had been shoveled one by one, and the narrow curved path had been changed to a patterned and slippery limestone surface...

For a moment, he realized that the small courtyard that belonged to the little girl was filled with his traces.

Zhou Linghuai felt a lump in his throat.

When they entered the side hall, Nanny Xu had already asked someone to set up a meal. There were five dishes and a soup, all of which were Zhou Linghuai and Yu Youyao's favorites. The color, fragrance, and smell of food whetted their appetite.

Unknowingly, everyone in the Jade Courtyard could even grasp his taste very accurately.

Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but turn to look at the little girl.

The little girl's eyes were always filled with joy. Her eyes were bright like stars decorating the night sky, and her smile was pure and bright.

Just like the day she entered the residence, the little girl had recited the Medicine Master's Scripture: "The body is like glass, clear inside and out, pure and flawless."

Zhou Linghuai suddenly thought of the little girl he had seen previously. Her eyes were empty and filled with despair. Her bright face was filled with despair.

Zhou Linghuai's smile faded bit by bit, and he suddenly closed his eyes.

“Cousin?” The little girl’s soft voice sounded in his ear.

Zhou Linghuai suddenly opened his eyes and saw the little girl squatting in front of him. She was looking at him worriedly and asking, “Cousin, you suddenly look so bad. Are you feeling unwell?”

Zhou Linghuai’s eyes were deep and unfathomable as he stared fixedly at the little girl—

His heart was satisfied—

He hoped that he could protect her from the wind and rain with his flesh and blood, protect her clothes from dust, protect her from frost, and protect her for a lifetime.

He wanted to protect her body which was like glass, clear inside and out, pure and flawless.

Seeing that her cousin was silent and staring at her without blinking, Yu Youyao’s heart skipped a beat. Previously, in the Precious Peace Temple, she had accidentally stopped her cousin in his tracks, and he had looked at her with such an unfathomable gaze.

Feeling a little uneasy, Yu Youyao called out softly, “C-cousin, what’s wrong?”

Zhou Linghuai’s tightly pursed lips relaxed and his expression faded. “I’m fine. I just suddenly thought of something else.”

Seeing that her cousin had returned to his usual self, Yu Youyao smiled. “Cousin, you looked so scary just now. Don’t scare me like this again.”

Chapter 136 - 136 Treat You Well Forever

Those eyes were filled with arrogance. When they stared at her, she did not even dare to breathe loudly.

“Cousin.” Zhou Linghuai called out to her with a smile. His calm voice was filled with grace. “I won’t hurt you.” He rubbed the little girl’s soft head gently, and even his heart softened. “Never.”

Yu Youyao squatted in front of her cousin, her eyes sparkling. The smile on her lips widened bit by bit, becoming pure and happy. “Cousin, I’ll treat you well for the rest of my life.”

For life!

Zhou Linghuai gently chewed on these words. When he thought of his legs, a crazy desire suddenly surged in his heart. He smiled and said, “Eat first.”

Yu Youyao nodded happily and reached out to get the soup bowl.

There were wontons floating on the bright yellow soup. The faint medicinal fragrance was not bitter, but it was very delicious. In the soup, there were three milky-white and semi-transparent sea cucumbers. They looked, smelled, and tasted good.

Yu Youyao liked seafood so much that even her eyes lit up. “Ah, it’s white sea cucumber. Grandfather sent it over years ago. There were more than ten of them in total. I’ve never been able to bear to eat them.”

Zhou Linghuai’s expression changed on the spot.

Yu Youyao did not notice her cousin's expression. She happily took a bowl and scooped a bowl of soup for him. She even specially scooped out a white sea cucumber. "Cousin, the meat of the sea cucumber is soft and tender. It tastes delicious. Try it."

Sea cucumbers were expensive seafood, and white sea cucumber was even rarer. There was a saying that goes "it takes ten thousand years for a rabbit's fur to turn from black to white." The Medicine Scripture recorded that it was warm and nourishing."

Just as Zhou Linghuai was about to refuse, he saw the little girl looking at him expectantly, and his throat tightened.

Seeing that her cousin was sitting there without moving, Yu Youyao urged, "Sea cucumbers are nutritious and warm. They're best for you to eat. In the future, you have to eat more sea cucumbers. I still have many Black Sea Cucumbers and Red Sea Cucumbers that my maternal grandfather sent over. Although they're not as rare as White Sea Cucumbers, their effects are not bad. Get Chang An to bring some back later."

The veins on Zhou Linghuai's forehead twitched uncontrollably.

Eating strange things like sea cucumbers required a lot of courage.

Of course, he wasn't prejudiced against sea cucumbers.

The seafood in the south had always been in high demand in the capital. Sea cucumbers, which grew in the deep sea, were known as one of the eight treasures of the sea because it was not easy to fish them out. They were as famous as bird's nest, abalone, and shark fins. They were often the last dish in the hall.

Seeing that her cousin was staring at the sea cucumber without moving, Yu Youyao thought that he did not know how to start eating.

The entire white sea cucumber had actually been cut into small pieces, but the outer skin was connected, so it looked like a whole piece. Yu Youyao picked up a piece of sea cucumber and brought it to her cousin's lips. "Cousin, try it."

Now, he couldn't refuse even if he wanted to.

Zhou Linghuai held the armrest of the wheelchair with one hand. The veins on the back of his hand were obvious, and the joints of his fingers were green and white. He moved his lips, but under the little girl's bright eyes, he still forced his mouth open.

The little girl smiled and sent the sea cucumber into his mouth naturally. Zhou Linghuai suddenly felt that the originally unbearable sea cucumber tasted soft and delicious after entering his mouth. There was a faint fragrance of dark lotus flowers and a hint of medicinal fragrance. It was actually very delicious.

Yu Youyao asked expectantly, "Isn't the sea cucumber delicious?"

Zhou Linghuai hesitated for a moment before nodding. "It's indeed delicious."



“Then, Cousin, eat more.” Yu Youyao smiled happily, and a hint of slyness flashed across her bright eyes. As her gaze was too bright, Zhou Linghuai did not notice it.

Nanny Xu said that sea cucumbers were a dish for longevity. The Empress Dowager in the palace had to eat three sea cucumbers a day. Sea cucumbers were also indispensable in the emperor’s imperial meals.

The medicinal cuisine made by sea cucumbers was better than ginseng. Cousin’s body was weak and could not eat too much nourishing food. He could not eat too much medicine like ginseng, but he could eat sea cucumbers every day.

Yes, from now on, she will cook a sea cucumber dish for her cousin every afternoon.

Seeing that his young master was being jinxed by Cousin Yu and was even eating the sea cucumber that he had always hated, Chang An’s eyes widened in shock and disbelief.

Suddenly, he calmed down.

No matter how ridiculous it was for Young Master to be with his cousin, he would not find it strange in the future.

After dinner, Yu Youyao returned to the study to practice her calligraphy. It had only been a few days since she had used the bamboo brush that Ms. Ye had given her, but her cousin had already sent her the seven-purple and three-sheep jade brush.

The jade tube was smooth and had been used for many years. The tip of the brush was a little soft. She was not used to it in the first two days. It was her cousin who held her hand and helped her to write her name stroke by stroke, over and over again.

After getting used to it, she felt that the words written with the Seven Purple and Three Sheep brush were sharp and tactful. They were indeed more suitable for her.

Yu Youyao pursed her lips and chuckled. She put down her brush and turned around to see that her cousin had rolled up his wide sleeves, revealing a rather thin wrist. However, she saw that his wrist was blessed with spiritual luck and his bones were strong. The ink in his brush was fresh and smooth, and it was thick and suitable.

This was the first time Yu Youyao had seen her cousin paint. Her eyes lit up and she quickly leaned over to take a look.

When she saw what her cousin had drawn, Yu Youyao’s fair face turned red. She quickly covered her face with her hands, not daring to face anyone.

As Zhou Linghuai spoke, a “Bamboo Orchid Painting” appeared on the paper. He put down his pen and turned to look at Yu Youyao, who was covering her face and not daring to look at him. “Cousin, what do you think of this painting?”

Yu Youyao covered her face and nodded vigorously. “Cousin, your painting skills are superb, so naturally, it’s excellent.”

Just now, she had only taken a few glances, but she already felt that the brush was exquisite and the ink was clear. On the other hand, the ink was beautiful and smooth, drawing a cold and deep scene with a careless stroke.

Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "Cousin, aren't you going to take a closer look?"

She thought that he couldn't tell that she was deliberately pretending not to know that he didn't eat sea cucumbers and was trying to tease him.

Yu Youyao was so ashamed that she quickly shook her head. "No, no, Cousin. You use ink like a god..."

Her cousin was trying to remind her that he had yet to give her the fan that he had promised.

How could she dare to look at it anymore!

Yu Youyao looked dejected. She had learned double-sided embroidery, and previously, she had been praised by her grandmother and Nanny Liu. Even though she felt a little embarrassed, she couldn't help but feel a little smug. Learning double-sided embroidery from Nanny Xu had been fun, but after practicing for a few days, her enthusiasm was reduced, and she no longer paid much attention to needlework.

Nanny Xu would even remind her in the next few days.

As time passed, Nanny Xu no longer forced her to practice needlework.

If not for her cousin's reminder, she would have almost forgotten that she had exchanged the fan for the cursive script not long ago.

Now, that cursive script was hanging on the wall of her study.

However, she had forgotten about the fan.

"Little liar!" Seeing her covering her face in embarrassment, Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but laugh.

#### Chapter 137 - 137 Cousin, I Can't Provoke You

Yu Youyao pouted and argued, "I'm embroidering on the fan. It's my first time embroidering two completely different patterns. It's not easy, so it will naturally take longer. I didn't say that I wouldn't send it."

Actually, it wasn't the first time.

The last time she had given it to her grandmother, there had been a swastika on one side and the Chinese character of longevity on the other. However, the words were also simpler than the pattern.

Zhou Linghuai picked up his teacup and took a sip. "You can slowly embroider the fan. There's no hurry for me to use it. Just treat it as a thank-you gift for the sea cucumber medicinal cuisine that Cousin has specially prepared for me."

Yu Youyao puffed up her cheeks. She finally understood. Her cousin had drawn the Bamboo Orchid Painting on purpose.

She really couldn't afford to offend him.

After taking a little “revenge” on this girl, Zhou Linghuai smiled and raised his pen to write in the upper left corner. “In the 24th year of the Jian Yuan era, I gave my cousin, Yu Youyao, a gift.”

After saying this, he took out the Longevity Mountain Stone seal from his sleeve and stamped it.

After the mud dried, Yu Youyao brought over a scroll.

Zhou Linghuai carefully stuck the scroll at both ends of the painting and fixed it in place. Then, he handed it to Yu Youyao. “Keep it!”

Yu Youyao took it happily. “Thank you, Cousin.”

With that, she eagerly unfolded the scroll and looked at it carefully. She praised the painting from head to toe and looked up with admiration. “Cousin, you’re really impressive.”

No matter how many times she said this, it made him feel happy.

Zhou Linghuai’s smile deepened. “Cousin, do you want to learn some zither, chess, calligraphy, and painting from me? It doesn’t matter how you learn it. It’s inevitable that the sisters of big families talk about style and elegance when they gather together. You have to learn some artistic skills at least.”

The little girl’s handwriting had already become well-practiced, and he did not need to come to the Jade Courtyard every day. She had gradually caught up with the homework she had left behind. With Ms. Ye’s careful guidance, he did not need to guide her every day.

When Yu Youyao first heard this, she rejected it in her heart. However, when her cousin said that it didn’t matter how she learned it, she was a little tempted. When her cousin finished speaking, she looked conflicted. “Then, I’ll learn a little.” She gestured with two fingers to show how much she was willing. Then, she emphasized, “Just a little, no more. I have to go to school in the morning and manage the household. I’ll be busy learning from Nanny Xu every day!”

Zhou Linghuai found it funny. “It won’t tire you out.”

As he had to come to the Jade Courtyard every day to teach the little girl her studies and calligraphy, it was inconvenient for him to go up and down the steps. Yu Youyao moved the small study to the side room on the south side of the first floor and changed it into a large study. It faced a tall green tree in the courtyard. The tree trunk was without joints and rose straight up, looking imposing. By March, the tree leaves had begun to grow. Although there was no green, it already looked elegant.

Listening to the little girl’s cheerful and pleasant voice, Zhou Linghuai thought of the records of the Classic of Poetry. “The phoenix cries, and it rises from the other side of the high mountain. The parasol tree is born, and it rises in the morning.

Hark! The phoenix sings.

Zhou Linghuai suddenly said, “The tree outside the window looks quite old.”

Yu Youyao also looked at the huge tree outside the window. “I don’t know how old this tree is. I heard from Grandmother that this was transplanted by my mother back then. It seems to be hundreds of years old.”

Zhou Linghuai looked at it carefully again. This old tree was definitely more than a few hundred years old. "I'll use this tree to make a seven-stringed zither for you. What do you think?"

Yu Youyao's eyes widened in shock, and her face was filled with excitement. "Cousin, you want to make a zither for me personally? That's great. I heard from Chang An that you know how to play the zither. I didn't expect that one day, I would be able to play a zither that you personally made. If you want to give it to me, I'll definitely learn it well."

Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "Just tell me what you want. Are you afraid that I won't make it for you? But don't be happy too early. It's not easy to make a zither, and it takes a lot of time." Especially a good zither. It will be even harder to make.

"It's okay. Cousin, take your time." Yu Youyao squatted in front of her cousin, her face filled with joy and anticipation. Did her cousin mean that no matter what she wanted, he would make it for her?

Her cousin was so kind.

"Okay!" Zhou Linghuai looked at the little girl. From the corner of his eye, he could see the delicate vines silently climbing up the window sill and into the room. Among the green leaves, there was a flower that was as red as fire. It was at its prime, shy and beautiful.

After her cousin went to school, Yu Youyao ran to the tree and circled it. Everyone in the courtyard could hear her cheerful and pleasant laughter.

At 2pm, all the stewards of the manor arrived.

The stewards went to An Shou Hall to visit Old Madam Yu to show their respect.

Yu Youyao accompanied her grandmother to meet them.

These stewards were all old people in the residence. They were all slightly older, and most of them were in their forties or fifties. One of them was a shopkeeper in his thirties who was wearing blue silk. He was especially eye-catching.

Yu Youyao took a few more glances.

This person was rich looking, smiling, and had a kind expression.

Old Madam Yu noticed her gaze and pointed at the shopkeeper. "This is Wang Dongquan from Baoxing Rice Shop. Shopkeeper Wang has some affinity with you and is a capable person."

Yu Youyao's eyebrows moved slightly. Food was the most important thing for the people. In all the major shops, rice shops had a more respectable status.

When Wang Dongquan heard this, he smiled and continued, "Back then, I was a shop assistant at Baoxing Rice Shop. When First Madam Xie was patrolling the shop, she saw that I was doing well, so she mentioned being the Second Manager and learned some skills from the First Manager. A few years ago, he was old and couldn't take it anymore, so I took on his job."

Yu Youyao's smile deepened. "The rice shop is an important business in the residence. I'll have to trouble you in the future."

However, it was her mother who had an affinity with Wang Dongquan.

Her mother had been kind to Wang Dongquan, and her grandmother had mentioned this on the spot. Anyone who knew how to be kind should know to surrender to their young master.

If Wang Dongquan did not know what was good for him, he would not be placed in an important position in the residence.

He had no choice.

There was Zhou Yonghe in the manor and Wang Dongquan in the shop. They were all important managers of the manor. Compared to them, the other managers were inferior.

The gazes of the other stewards in the hall flickered. They had also guessed Old Madam Yu's intentions and put away their little schemes.

Old Madam was scheming. Wang Dongquan's move had been planned long ago. He was paving the way for his granddaughter.

They were all loyal servants of the residence. Even if they looked down on a half-grown child like Yu Youyao, they couldn't get in the Old Madam's way.

With Old Madam Yu's help, Yu Youyao mentioned the new rules of the residence. Although the stewards were shocked, they did not refute Yu Youyao on the spot.

Yu Youyao did not care what they thought. Her voice was gentle as she said, "Go to Windfall Courtyard to rest and discuss it carefully."

#### Chapter 138 - 138 Selling Hearts

With that, she asked the maidservant to lead them to Windfall Courtyard.

Two hours later, Yu Youyao went to Windfall Courtyard. Zhou Yonghe brought over a piece of paper with the agreement signed by the stewards.

Yu Youyao was a little surprised. "They all agreed? No objections at all?"

Zhou Yonghe explained, "A few stewards are afraid of taking responsibility and risk, so they're naturally unwilling to agree. There are also a few stewards who are very hesitant."

Yu Youyao looked at him. "Did you convince them?"

Zhou Yonghe had just taken office today. The other stewards might not even be convinced by him!

Zhou Yonghe shook his head. "It wasn't me who convinced them, but the benefits. I've calculated the total accounts of Little Zhouzhuang for the past two years. If we follow Eldest Miss's new rules, I figured out how much the stewards can get for their monthly dividends and quarterly dividends? In this way, some of the stewards who manage the manor well will naturally agree with both hands. Some of the stewards who don't manage it well won't dare to show their faces even if they don't want to. Eldest Miss mentioned this matter in An Shou Hall, and Old Madam tacitly agreed. However, she couldn't do anything about it."

Yu Youyao smiled. "That saves me a lot of talking."

Zhou Yonghe had said everything that she had said. It seemed that Zhou Yonghe was indeed a talent and could be put in an important position.

Yu Youyao turned around and said, "In that case, you and Manager Wang should carefully think about a suitable contract. Later, get the stewards to sign and stamp their fingerprints on it to settle this matter!"

When Zhou Yonghe heard this, his eyebrows twitched slightly. "Eldest Miss, don't worry."

Eldest Miss was a child, but she was very thorough.

Logically speaking, the stewards in the manor were all old people. After everyone agreed to the new rules and signed the agreement, they could be instructed to carry them out.

However, Eldest Miss wanted to specially establish a contract. This was to prevent the new rules from not being implemented well in the future. If the manor was not managed well and suffered losses, there would be a reason to deal with it properly.

After Zhou Yonghe left, Yu Youyao instructed Dong Mei to send over the gifts she had prepared for the stewards.

Among them, Wang Dongquan's pair of jade bottles was the most expensive item. Zhou Yongquan's was a good-looking Duanxi inkstone. It was elegant and simple, which was also very rare.

The other stewards had all received good antiques and jade artifacts. She was very generous.

After receiving Eldest Miss's gift, the stewards were all overjoyed. Who didn't know that Eldest Miss's maternal family was the Xie Residence in Quanzhou? Outside the residence, they often heard that Eldest Miss was generous. Even if they didn't see the gift on the spot, they could guess that it must be very good.

Now, it seemed that although Eldest Miss was young, she was a magnanimous person.

Putting everything else aside, they would at least be able to obtain some benefits. As for the rest, they would just have to wait and see.

Zhou Yonghe and Wang Dongquan would handle the rest, so Yu Youyao didn't have to worry. She returned to the Jade Courtyard and took out the fan that had been mostly embroidered previously.

However, while she was relieved, someone else wasn't.

When she found out that Yu Youyao had seen the managers of the manor, Yang Shuwan was so angry that her head hurt. Nanny Li was also frightened and quickly went to brew some medicine.

Yang Shuwan leaned against the pillow and took the medicine from Nanny Li. She looked at the black medicine and frowned. However, when she thought about how she could only snatch back the right to manage the household from Yu Youyao after she had completely recovered, she gritted her teeth and raised her head to gulp down most of the medicine.

After downing a bowl of bitter medicine, Yang Shuwan's abdomen twitched uncomfortably. She hurriedly covered her mouth with a handkerchief and almost vomited on the spot.

Nanny Li hurriedly brought over a plate of candied plums. "Madam, quickly eat a candied plum."

Yang Shuwan felt a little better after eating a candied plum. "Are the stewards still in the residence?"

Nanny Li said, "Eldest Miss prepared gifts for them and sent them out of the residence." Seeing Madam's gloomy face, she hesitated for a moment before saying, "I'm afraid it's not a small gift."

Yang Shuwan tightened her grip on the blanket and gritted her teeth. "Did you find out what they said in the Windfall Courtyard?"

Nanny Li shook her head. "Eldest Miss arranged all the maidservants in the Windfall Courtyard. I didn't hear anything."

Yang Shuwan felt another headache coming on. "This is really outrageous. It's only the first day of officially managing the household, and they're already thinking of ways to guard against me. How hateful!"

She had been in charge of the household for many years, and many people in the residence were her people. However, she couldn't even find out any news. It could be seen that the Yu Residence had really changed.

Nanny Li was worried that she would get angry again, so she quickly added, "Even if Eldest Miss meets the stewards alone, it's mostly on the surface. I'm afraid it won't be easy for Eldest Miss to win their hearts with this."

Hearing this, Yang Shuwan felt a little better. She sneered. "The stewards in the manor are all old hands in the residence. Although they're loyal to the residence, they've all made their own plans. How can small favors bribe them? Yu Youyao is too naive."

Nanny Li hurriedly instructed, "Madam, don't think too much. You've been in charge of the household for seven to eight years and have interacted with these stewards for many years. Eldest Miss has only just taken over the household and is also a child. The stewards are only willing to acknowledge her because of Old Madam's authority. When you've recovered, won't you have the final say in this family?"

Yang Shuwan's expression relaxed. "You're right. Yu Youyao is young, but she's still filial to me. In the end, she still has to listen to me."

Seeing that Madam had calmed down, Nanny Li heaved a sigh of relief.

Yang Shuwan leaned against the pillow and calmed herself down. She felt that her headache had subsided a little. "I've taken the medicine a few times this time, but the effect is not bad. I think I'll be fine after resting for a few days."

Nanny Li did not dare to say that the medicine she had taken was prescribed by Young Miss's husband.

In the blink of an eye, it was mid-March.

Only then did Yang Shuwan, who was recuperating in peace, hear that a new rule had been set in the residence. Not only did the stewards in the manor agree, but they also signed a new contract with the residence. She immediately fell back in anger. She had just recovered from some of her illnesses, but there were signs of them relapsing.

Nanny Li did not dare to delay and quickly asked someone to invite Doctor Ding into the residence.

She did not dare to say that this was a doctor that Yu Youyao had hired previously. She only said that Third Miss had asked around and knew that Doctor Ding was very good at treating headaches and fevers, so she had specially hired him.

After taking Yang Shuwan's pulse, Doctor Ding prescribed a new prescription.

When Nanny Liu saw this, she realized that many of the medicinal herbs had to be used in greater amounts. Madam's illness had worsened again.

Before leaving, Doctor Ding said solemnly, "First Madam, it's best for you to recuperate quietly. Don't be rash. Otherwise, it'll be a waste of medicine."

Nanny Liu was worried. She wrapped up a generous reward and politely sent Doctor Ding out of the residence.

### Chapter 139 - 139 Clear Day to Cut Down the Paulownia Tree

Yang Shuwan was so angry that her head hurt and her heart ached. Even after taking the medicine, she did not feel any better. "Yu Youyao is really good. Once the new rules were set, the sky in the residence has changed. The servants followed the rules set by Yu Youyao and listened to her. Even if I recover and manage the house again, in the future, nothing outside the residence can surpass Yu Youyao. How is it even relevant to me anymore?"

At this point, she suddenly raised her voice and said angrily, "Old Madam is letting her do whatever she wants. Why don't you think about it? If the stewards have more power, wouldn't they be bullying their masters? Why would they still care about their masters?"

Loyalty was secondary. As long as there were benefits, who would go against money?

Yu Youyao's actions seemed bold, but she was firmly in control of the hearts of the people. As long as the hearts of the people were in control and the interests were pursued, it was the greater picture. However, her mother did not understand.

Yu Jianjia pursed her lips and comforted her again. In the end, she gave Nanny Li a look.

Nanny Li understood and quickly leaned forward. "Madam, you have to think carefully. No matter how capable Eldest Miss is as a household manager, she will still get married in the future. Why are you angry with her?"

Hearing this, Yang Shuwan finally calmed down.

Two days later, Manager Sun from the Jinxiu Manor sent more clothes over. Yu Youyao checked them one by one. After confirming that there were no mistakes, she gave Manager Sun a reward and sent her out of the residence.

Then, she ordered someone to send the finished clothes to everyone.

Yu Jianjia also saw the "lanshan" that had caused trouble.

After the Jinxiu Manor had changed it, a pair of matching lapels had been added to the round collar. They were placed horizontally above the ankle bones, and there was a lotus leaf at the bottom. It looked both outstanding and eye-catching, but it did not make people associate it with a lanshan.

Yu Jianjia took a casual look and instructed Hui Xiang, "Put the clothes at the bottom of the box."



She had no intention of wearing it again.

Hui Xiang didn't dare say more.

Ever since she was taught a lesson by Eldest Miss last time, Third Miss told her to return to the courtyard to manage the clothes and accessories in her room. Her personal maidservant had also been changed to Ai Ye.

Recalling that she had yet to wear the plain brocade dress that Yu Youyao had given her, Yu Jianjia added, "I'll wear the clothes that Big Sister gave me today."

The incident with the lanshan had given her a reputation for not knowing the severity of ceremonial matters to her father. Although her grandmother had not said anything, the next day, Ms. Ye had told her about the Eight rows, which was like a fishbone stuck in her throat.

She did not want to wear this plain dress.

However, it wouldn't make sense if she didn't wear it to show her sisterly affection.

Yu Wanwan looked out of the window. The maidservants who used to be lazy were now sweeping the floor. With Yu Youyao's new rules, even the servants were doing their best.

Yu Jianjia's face turned pale again.

Initially, she had thought that even with her grandmother's support and Nanny Xu's guidance, it would be difficult for Yu Youyao, who was only a child, to convince the masses. There would definitely be trouble in the residence.

Unexpectedly, in just a few days, Yu Youyao had managed the house in an orderly manner without any mistakes.

Her father had also been living a peaceful life these past few days. Compared to her mother, he looked at Yu Youyao in a new light and often praised her for having the demeanor of her grandmother.

The sky in the Yu Residence had completely changed!

Yu Jianjia's throat itched, and she couldn't help but cover it with her handkerchief and cough violently.

When Hui Xiang heard the cough, she quickly poured some hot tea. "Young Miss, why are you suddenly coughing so badly? Ever since you took Imperial Physician Hu's medicine, you haven't coughed so badly in a long time. I'll go brew some medicine for you."

As Yu You coughed, she also panicked.

Many things had happened at home, so she couldn't recuperate in peace. It was probably because of this that her health was affected, and all of this was caused by Yu Youyao.

After working hard for a few days, Yu Youyao's household management plan was on the right track. With Nanny Liu's help, she finally had time to embroider the fan.

After Nanny Xu took a look, she smiled and praised, "Skill isn't the most important thing when it comes to elegant things like bamboo orchids. The most important thing is the charm. I've already

seen it for myself when I first learned the double-sided embroidery, but it's still better than many people who have only learned it for three to five years."

Yu Youyao had wisdom and intelligence, and her lazy and delicate personality could not be changed. However, she was pure and young, and she always did her best.

"It's because Cousin's drawing is good. I can't embroider too badly." Yu Youyao was very happy.

She had spent a lot of time and effort on this fan, but her embroidery had improved a lot compared to the sachet she had given her cousin previously.

At the very least, the stitches were smoother, and it didn't look too shabby.

As the two of them were talking, Xia Tao ran over smartly. "Young Miss, Young Master is here. He's in the courtyard."

Yu Youyao was delighted to hear this. She picked up her skirt and ran out. "I'll go find Cousin."

Looking at her cheerful back view, Nanny Xu shook her head. No matter how good she was at etiquette, she had completely forgotten about it when she was happy.

When Yu Youyao ran into the courtyard, she saw her cousin sitting near the tree and looking up. "Cousin, the sun is bright outside. Why aren't you coming in?"

Zhou Ling tilted his head. "The sun is shining brightly today. It's suitable for cutting it down."

Yu Youyao's eyes lit up. "There's a suitable time to cut down trees?"

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "It needs to be sunny. The wood on the Paulownia Tree that faces the sun is called Sun Paulownia. It's an extremely rare piece of zither material, especially the Sun Paulownia that's seven to eight hundred years old. It contains the essence of heaven and earth and can absorb the light of the sun and moon. It's even rarer."

Qing Wu could grow for a thousand years, but it was afraid of quails. Very few could live for so long.

Therefore, it was easy to obtain Paulownia wood, but difficult to find zither materials.

Yu Youyao looked up. The old tree was straight and shiny. "Which Paulownia tree branch do you plan to cut?"

The leaves of the Paulownia tree began to bud clearly, and in March, they began to grow. In April, the flowers bloomed, and in June, they bore fruit...

Next month, they would be able to see trees full of green leaves that looked like umbrellas covering the sky. They were majestic and grand. During summer and autumn, branches were intertwined to block the heat.

Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "Of course it's the supreme sun wood at the top of the tree."

At this moment, the tree leaves had all fallen. When new leaves grew, the ancient trees would be huge and reached into the sky, taking in the light of the sun. There was no better Paulownia tree.

Since he wanted to give her a zither, he naturally wanted to give her the best.

Even if the Yu Residence did not have this special wood, he would still have to think of a way to get it from elsewhere.

He turned to look at Chang An. "Go get it!"

Yu Youyao's eyes widened as she looked at the top of the tree, feeling a little troubled. "It's so high. How are we going to get it? There aren't any wooden ladders in the residence that are so tall..."

Before she could finish speaking, Chang An suddenly jumped onto the tree and climbed up like an agile monkey. In a short while, he had already reached the top of the tree.

Yu Youyao was shocked and turned around. "Cousin, Chang An climbed so high. Is he really fine?" If he fell...

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "Chang An practiced martial arts at the age of five. He's agile and will be fine."

#### Chapter 140 - 140 Cousin Was Angry

She really did not expect that even the childish Chang An was a hidden expert. She wondered how many secrets her cousin was hiding. Thinking back to when she had accidentally discovered her cousin's tracks at the Precious Peace Temple and asked someone to cut off a strand of his hair, Yu Youyao quickly shook her head, not daring to think further.

Chang An was holding a firewood knife and cutting the tree, making a loud clang. The tall tree also began to shake violently.

The commotion was too big, and the entire Yu Residence was alarmed. Soon, many people gathered near the Jade Courtyard and pointed at the towering tree.

Even Old Madam Yu had heard about it and asked Nanny Liu to help her into the courtyard. "How did this girl cause trouble for the tree?"

When Nanny Liu heard this, she smiled. "How could that be? I've already asked around just now. Young Master wants to teach Eldest Miss zither skills. He wants to cut off the wood from the top of the Paulownia Tree and give a zither to Eldest Miss. The tree in our residence is growing well. Not only is it old, but it's also planted in the sun. Young Master said that there's no better piece of zither material."

Old Madam Yu also laughed. "Oh, it's not easy to make a zither. It takes time and effort to make it. It takes at least a year and a half to make a good zither. I didn't expect the child to know how to do it. He's really thoughtful."

Nanny Liu said, "Isn't that so? I was also shocked when I heard that."

The more Old Madam Yu spoke, the happier she became. "It's good to learn the zither. Although daughters must have virtue, they should also learn some elegant things to show their talent."

Yu Youyao was worried that after the old tree branch was broken, it would fall from above and hit someone, so she asked the people in the courtyard to stay away and pushed her cousin to the bottom of the corridor.

"Cousin, can we make a zither after cutting down the tree branch?" Yu Youyao asked curiously.

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "It's not that easy." Seeing that the little girl was looking at him with sparkling eyes, as if she was very interested, he explained, "The wood that has just been cut is wet wood. You have to weigh it first before making it dry and turning it into zither material. It takes seven to ten days to make good zither material."

Yu Youyao was puzzled. "Why do you need to weigh the wood?"

Zhou Linghuai explained, "The process of making tungsten wood is also very particular. It needs to be heated with charcoal near a wall. The weight of the wood is heavy. If it's two kilograms, it won't decrease as much as when it's cut off. If it's dry, it will look like it has the color of smoke. This would be the best..."

Yu Youyao was filled with questions. She pursed her lips. "This is too difficult. How can the dry wood after being carved be as heavy as the wet wood that has just been cut?"

No wonder, since ancient times, although there were many zithers, there were very few famous ones.

Even Zhou Linghuai was speechless. There was too much knowledge involved, and he did not know how to explain it for a moment.

Seeing that her cousin was in a difficult position, Yu Youyao felt that it wasn't easy to make a zither. "Cousin, it turns out that making a zither is so troublesome. Just the process of making it is so complicated, and it takes a lot of time and effort. It's better if you don't make it for me. I have a zither in my house that Mother left behind. I heard that it's a famous zither that was passed down from the previous dynasty. It's excellent to learn it with you."

Hearing this, Zhou Linghuai suddenly pursed his lips and did not speak.

Yu Youyao felt her scalp tingle. Her cousin usually looked calm and indifferent, but after spending some time together, she could roughly sense some subtle changes in his emotions.

Cousin was angry!

Just as she was about to explain, she heard her cousin say coldly, "Cousin, do you think that the zither I am making is inferior to a famous one?"

Yu Youyao's scalp went numb again, and she quickly explained, "How could that be? I just feel that it's too troublesome and tiring to make a zither. I'm worried that I'll tire you out and burden your health, making you suffer. Cousin's health is more important than a zither." As she spoke, she narrowed her eyes and stole a glance at his expression. Seeing that his expression had softened, she hurriedly squatted in front of him and raised her head. "Cousin, don't misunderstand me. I like everything you give me."

Zhou Linghuai shook his head and laughed. How could he still be angry? "Making the zither is a slow and detailed job. It looks troublesome, but it's not something that can be done in a day or two. It's fine to do it slowly."

Even after he made the base, he still had to paint, draw, carve, and ponder. There were more than ten procedures, and each one took a lot of time.

Zhou Linghuai planned to make a rarer instrument, and he was even more particular about it. Just the layers of zither alone would take at least a year and a half. If there was a mistake in any of the procedures, it would be all over.

Naturally, he wanted the best for the little girl.

He didn't intend to do it right away.

Yu Youyao felt relieved. "Cousin, take your time. I'm not in a hurry."

With that, she thought of the fan she had embroidered previously.

After knowing that her cousin was here, she casually stuffed it into her sleeve, preparing to give it to him. In the end, when she heard that her cousin wanted to make a zither for her, she was so happy that she forgot about it.

At this moment, she quickly took out the fan from her sleeve and looked at her cousin ingratiatingly. "Cousin, I've already embroidered the fan that I promised you previously. Quick, take a look. Has my embroidery skills improved a lot?"

Zhou Linghuai's eyes widened as he received the fan.

On one side, the black bamboo was sparse, and its appearance was quiet and pleasant. On the other side, there was an ink orchid. Its leaves were wide like bamboo, but they were long and strong, like an azure dragon going out to sea. There were lotus petals that were dense and orderly.

The little girl's embroidery skills had improved greatly. Compared to the sachet at his waist, the stitches were already flat and tight, and her skills were still a little shallow. However, her embroidery looked charming, and it did not conceal its beauty.

Zhou Linghuai's throat tightened slightly. "In a short period of time, Cousin's embroidery skills have improved a lot. It must have taken you a lot of time and effort to embroider this fan." Stroking the embroidery on the fan, he lowered his eyes. "I didn't spend much effort on that cursive script previously, but it's even more difficult for you to embroider a fan. I've taken advantage of you."

Yu Youyao was very happy. "I said early on that I wanted to give it to you, but it took so long. In the end, it's my fault. Don't you want to give me the zither too? How can a fan compare to the trouble of a zither? You still have to go to the Jade Courtyard every day to teach me calligraphy and guide me in my studies. In terms of taking advantage of someone, I'm the one taking advantage of you."

Zhou Linghuai's expression paused for a moment, but his smile did not fade. "Then, I'll use the excess wood after the planning to make a fan structure."

Yu Youyao nodded. "Cousin, you're really amazing. You even know how to make a fan."

No matter how many times he heard this, it still made him happy. Zhou Linghuai gently rubbed the top of the little girl's head. "Go to the study. I'll teach you how to play the zither."