

## All Hail 21

### Chapter 21

#### Extremely Precious

Seeing that the young master was silent, Chang An turned to look at Uncle Sun, who had come over at some point. "Uncle Sun, we're living under someone else's roof now. It's better to be cautious. Please persuade the young master to stay away from Eldest Miss Yu."

Uncle Sun, who was in his sixties, had white hair and a beard. He was wearing a gray jacket and was sitting on a stool by the window, leisurely drinking tea. When he saw Chang An looking over, his drooping eyelids lifted. "How foolish."

Chang An was furious. He puffed his cheeks up indignantly.

Uncle Sun glanced at him. "You feel indignant? Why don't you think about it more carefully? Although the Yu family and the Zhou family are relatives, the late Old Madam Zhou had married into You Prefecture and had been distanced from the Yu family for many years. This familial connection only runs so deep. However, the real decision maker in the residence is Old Madam Yu, who treats Young Master differently only because of her close relationship with Old Madam Zhou in the past. Otherwise, with Young Master's situation, I'm afraid people merely think of him as a pitiful visiting relative."

Chang An understood what Uncle Sun meant and looked ashamed.

Young Master's legs were not good and his future was uncertain. Furthermore, he was just a relative from Youzhou. If not for Old Madam Yu, how could Young Master be living so freely in the Yu Residence?

Hence, being nice to Yu Youyao, whom Old Madam Yu doted on most, was also an act of respect and gratefulness toward Old Madam Yu.

Uncle Sun said thoughtfully, "The people from the main courtyard are not easy to get along with. When I entered the residence yesterday, I took a good look at Third Miss Yu from afar. I could tell at a glance that Third Miss Yu was born at full term. Although her body is a little weak, as long as she is well-nourished, she will be fine!"

When Chang An heard this, his eyes widened. "This, this, isn't this..."

Uncle Sun's medical skills were brilliant, so naturally, he wouldn't have deduced wrongly. But if Third Miss Yu was born at full term, wouldn't that mean... that Master Yu and Madam Yang had...

Chang An's face turned red, and he did not dare to think any further.

He had heard that Third Miss Yu was in poor health because of her premature birth. So, seeing how she always looked pale and frail, wasn't she just putting on an act?

In that case, were the rumors about Eldest Miss Yu still true?

Chang An was absolutely confused. With the painting in hand, he left the house in a daze.

Uncle Sun shook his head. "Silly boy."

Not long after, Yu Youyao received the painting from Chang An and opened it carefully. Immediately, her eyes opened wide.

The painting showed the garden that had been decorated by Yu Youyao, with vines on the walls, and there were all kinds of flowers in bloom. It was colorful and breathtaking.

In the courtyard, there was an old grape vine with long branches that extended endlessly. Between the green leaves, there were clusters of ruby grapes. It looked delightful. There were even stone tables and stone chairs under the grape trellis...

The red water lilies in the vat were in full bloom, and they were a bright, scorching red. There were pots of hanging orchids under the porch, and between the long green leaves hung flower stems, which bore rows of small flowers that looked fresh and elegant.

There was beautiful scenery in every corner. It was exactly as Yu Youyao had envisioned.

Zhou Linghuai's painting skills were excellent. His elegant brushwork revealed sophisticated techniques, and his brush moves were interesting. The light and dark colors complemented each other, creating a magnificent piece.

Even though Yu Youyao did not know anything about art, she could tell that her cousin had amazing painting skills.

She carefully rolled it back up, treating it like a precious piece of treasure. "Chun Xiao, get someone to frame it and hang it in my room later."

Chun Xiao nodded. There were several famous masterpieces in the young mistress' house, such as paintings of noble ladies on a spring tour at the palace or chasing butterflies. Each one of them was rare and valuable.

However, Yu Youyao had no interest in any of them. She only liked Young Master Zhou's work.

Chun Xiao glanced at the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha scriptures. Because it was rather long, Young Mistress had folded both ends and displayed her favorite section.

In no time, the news that Zhou Linghuai had given Yu Youyao a painting was spreading to Old Madam Yu.

Old Madam Yu fiddled with her prayer beads. "He's a sensible child indeed."

Nanny Liu smiled and agreed. "Young Master Zhou is a good one."

Old Madam Yu closed her eyes lightly. "I hope that he really understands how good Yaoyao is, and sincerely treats her well, so that from now on, Yao Yao will have an elder brother to rely on."

Nanny Liu was silent.

Although Young Master Zhou was just a cousin, there was no one else in the family. In the future, he would settle down in the Yu family's main house. Although they weren't closely related by blood, being from the same house would be a strong connection, as opposed to being from different houses.

In the blink of an eye, another two days had passed.

Yu Youyao woke up late, so she did not go to An Shou Hall to have breakfast with her grandmother.

Chun Xiao served some dessert and snacks. Yu Youyao had some and ordered someone to send some to The Green House as well. She then had Chun Xiao bring a pot of jasmine tea and they headed over to An Shou Hall together.

Old Madam Yu happened to be talking to a woman who was wearing a silver hairpin.

Yu Youyao glanced at her curiously, and saw that she was wearing a dark blue patterned jacket, her back was flat and straight, but her shoulders leaned forward slightly. Her appearance was flawlessly tidy, and she exuded an imposing aura that not even Nanny Liu had, making anyone around her feel nervous and on edge.

Yu Youyao did not dare to even breathe too loudly. She hurriedly retracted her gaze, not daring to glance around anymore. She even straightened her back a little, and looked like a student who had just been disciplined by a teacher.

Seeing this scene, Old Madam Yu couldn't help but laugh to herself. She waved Yu Youyao over. "Yao Yao, this is Auntie Xu. She was from the royal palace. Come and greet her."

Hearing that she had come from the palace, it was no wonder that she had such an impressive aura. Yu Youyao didn't dare to seem rude and quickly bent forward. "Hello, Auntie Xu."

"Young lady, you're too polite." Aunt Xu sized her up and immediately noticed her pair of phoenix eyes. It revealed an aura of nobility. Instantly, her heart thumped.

Since ancient times, that was always a statement of beauty for women.

She had been in the palace since she was young and was used to seeing nobles. Yu Youyao's eyes were long and phoenix-like. The ends of her eyes were slightly raised, and the corners of her eyes had a tinge of red. Her eyelashes were long, and she had inner eyelids. Her smiling eyes were filled with emotions, and her gaze seemed to convey them.

Such a pair of elegant and beautiful eyes. Auntie Xu was curious about the kind of great fortune they would bring in the future.

Old Madam Yu received the tea personally poured by her granddaughter, lowering her head to take a sip. The jasmine tea was fragrant and rejuvenating—just perfect for this time of the day.

The tea personally served by her granddaughter just tasted better than any other tea.

Putting down her teacup, Old Madam Yu got to the point. "Yao Yao, Auntie Xu will be your personal in-charge from now on. You have to learn the rules and ways from her."

"I understand, Grandmother." Yu Youyao pouted slightly and nodded reluctantly. Since Auntie Xu was already hired here, it seemed that her grandmother was determined to make her learn the ropes and she had no chance of refusing.

Old Madam Yu patted her hand gently and turned to Auntie Xu. "Yao Yao has been raised close by my side since she was young. I've spoiled her. I'll have to trouble you to help discipline her from now on."

Infuriated

“Don’t worry, Old Madam.” Auntie Xu understood what Old Madam Yu meant. She was asking that she be stricter with Yu Youyao, but also reminding her to care for Yu Youyao wholeheartedly at the same time.

Old Madam Yu was very satisfied with Auntie Xu. As expected of someone from the palace.

Yu Youyao turned to Auntie Xu. “Please guide me from now on.”

Auntie Xu immediately shook her head humbly. This young lady looked chubby and lovely. At such a young age, she already exuded an air of class and elegance, with her fresh and delicate appearance. She wasn’t spoiled or domineering as the rumors claimed. Nodding slightly now, she was feeling quite satisfied with her new young mistress.

But!

Auntie Xu frowned with a look of disapproval in her eyes. The young lady indeed exuded a spiritual aura, but her behavior and mannerisms were slack and undisciplined. Although she had the underlying aura of a fine young lady, her demeanor was also quite bearish.

Fortunately, the young lady was still young. It was not too late to shape her.

Old Madam Yu finally had one less concern to worry about. “Yao Yao, you are already old enough, so it’s not good for you to stay in the north courtyard all the time. Later, you may pack up your belongings with Auntie Xu. Tomorrow, you’ll move into the Jade courtyard, which is just beside the north courtyard.”

She had ordered for the Jade courtyard to be organized and prepared the moment Yao Yao had turned seven, so that she could move in when she was a little older.

Yu Youyao was stunned when she heard this. Her eyes widened and she looked at her grandmother blankly. It took her a while to react. Then, she hugged her grandmother’s arm and wheedled, “Grandma, I can’t bear to leave you. Can I move later in the future? Grandma? Okay? Grandma, promise me...”

Old Madam Yu couldn’t resist any longer and opened her mouth, about to give in and agree.

At this moment, it was Nanny Liu who spoke instead. “The Jade Courtyard and the An Shou Hall are near each other. It only takes a few steps and turns, so it’s convenient to visit. If you miss Old Madam, you can just come over often in the future.”

“Grandmother...” Yu Youyao puffed her cheeks up and looked at Old Madam Yu with puppy eyes, like a pug who was being abandoned. It was impossible to ignore.

After raising her for so many years, Old Madam Yu couldn’t bear to part with her either. She stroked her granddaughter’s head. “Yao Yao, when you first came to live with me, you were only this big.” She gestured with both hands, showing a size not much bigger than a rabbit. Then, she sighed softly. “You’ve grown so tall.”

She placed her palm on Yu Youyao’s head and gestured, her eyes suddenly welling up.

Yu Youyao's eyes turned red as she threw herself into her grandmother's arms and cried softly. "Grandmother, don't make me move away. I'll be good from now on. If you want me to learn to manage the household from Nanny Liu, I'll definitely learn well. And if you want me to learn discipline and rules from Auntie Xu, I'll also learn well and not disappoint you. But I won't move away. I don't want to move. I don't want to..."

Old Madam Yu held the little girl in her arms and dabbed the corners of her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Silly girl. Which proper young lady from a good family didn't move to a small courtyard and live by herself at seven years old? I couldn't bear to part with you, so I've kept you by my side for two extra years. But you're already a big girl. You should learn to live on your own."

"Grandmother, I-I can't bear to leave you. No..." Yu Youyao had been with her grandmother since she was young and had never left her grandmother's side. Now that she was asked to move out, she panicked and refused to let go of her grandmother's sleeve.

Old Madam Yu and Nanny Liu tried their best to persuade her. After an hour, their mouths were dry, but Yu Youyao had finally stopped crying and reluctantly agreed to move. With red eyes, she left the An Shou Hall.

After Yu Youyao left, Old Madam Yu couldn't help but cry, clutching her handkerchief. "My Yao Yao, she's never left my side since she was young..."

Nanny Liu felt really helpless, but it wasn't as if they were separated by life and death. "Eldest Miss is just moving to the house beside this. You can go over and visit her anytime when you miss her."

After a long time, she finally managed to comfort and calm Old Madam Yu down.

But the Old Madam was still unhappy. She lay on the bed and groused, continuously talking about her granddaughter as if she had been snatched away by someone else.

No wonder people said that children grew older while the elderly aged in reverse.

The Old Madam was precisely like that—she was an old child.

Meanwhile, Yu Youyao had led Auntie Xu back to the south wing and asked Chun Xiao to gather all the maidservants.

There were a total of nine people in the south wing, and Chun Xiao was the head maidservant in charge. Dong Mei often came over to help oversee everything as well, so there was no need for more maidservants.

There were two maidservants who were second-in-charge. One was called Xia Tao and the other was called Qiu Xing. They were in charge of Yu Youyao's room.

Then there were also four other young maidservants who were in charge of sweeping and cleaning. And two old maids who were efficient and experienced in household chores.

All of them were standing in a row with their heads lowered as Yu Youyao did the introduction. “This is Auntie Xu. She used to work in the palace. From now on, all the matters in this house will be handled by her. You must not show any disrespect.”

When everyone heard that she had come from the palace, their reactions were the same as Yu Youyao’s. They did not dare to even breathe aloud, and they merely stood rooted to the ground anxiously.

Auntie Xu took one glance and nodded to herself.

Although the people in Yu Youyao’s house looked a little untrained, at least they seemed to behave well. Yu Youyao was still young, so it was not a problem to teach her. If she were older, that might not be as possible, as she still needed some molding and cultivating.

“Eldest Miss, you’re too polite. Just call me Nanny.” Auntie Xu’s smile was very friendly, and she didn’t look like someone from the palace. Instead, she looked more like a nanny for a rich family.

Yu Youyao blinked and did as told, calling her Nanny.

So Auntie Xu became Nanny Xu, and she instructed the servants in the house to pack up. There were too many items in Yu Youyao’s house, so Old Madam Yu had asked Nanny Liu to bring some people from her house over to help them pack too.

This was a huge commotion in the north courtyard, so the news soon spread to everyone else in the residence.

Meanwhile, Yang Shuwan returned to the main courtyard with a stomach full of anger. Nanny Li brought over a cup of tea to calm her down. All of a sudden, Yang Shuwan was so angry that she grabbed the teacup and smashed it, causing the colorful peony teacup to shatter into pieces.

“Someone who’s from the palace makes a more impressive and qualified nanny. It’s not like our family doesn’t have enough money, so why didn’t she hire one more? Everything good goes only to Yu Youyao. Isn’t Jia Jia her biological granddaughter too?”

At the mention of this, an old grudge surfaced in her heart.

The Jade Courtyard used to be called the Water Pavilion. It was the best courtyard in the residence and was only slightly smaller than the main courtyard. As it was located at the back and not in the main area, it wasn’t convenient for the residence’s elders to live in.

At the end of last summer, when Jia Jia was preparing for her move, she had gone to the Old Madam as she wanted Jia Jia to move into the pavilion.

Old Madam had refused bluntly, “Water Pavilion is a distance away from the main courtyard. Jia Jia is not in good health, so she shouldn’t be too far away from her mother’s care. She should live in the courtyard that’s beside the main courtyard. Since it’s close by, it’ll be easier for you to take care of her.”

## Chapter 23

Eldest Daughter, without a Mother to Teach Her

Although this courtyard was not bad, it could not compare to the Water Pavilion, where the lotus pond reflected light beautifully. There was no way Yang Shuwan could let it go just like that. “Old Madam, the Water Pavilion is shady, with great water streams and the best scenery. It is the place with the best Feng Shui in the residence and also the most suitable place for healing. Since Jia Jia isn’t in good health, wouldn’t it be better for her to stay there?”

Old Madam Yu paused and looked up at her. “Do you remember how the Water Pavilion came about?”

Yang Shuwan’s face stiffened and her smile froze in place awkwardly.

Old Madam Yu said calmly, “Madam Xie was the one who paid for it.”

“But, it’s just that Jia Jia’s body isn’t good and her bones are weak...” Yang Shuwan tightened her grip on the handkerchief in her hands. Madam Xie had been dead for many years. Now that she was the head of household matters at the Yu Residence, why couldn’t Jia Jia stay in the Water Pavilion?

Madam Yang had failed to show any tact although everything had already been spelled out for her. Old Madam Yu frowned and said, “Jia Jia’s health isn’t good, so the Residence has always been taking care of her with the best medicine and has never let her down, but...”

When the word “but” was added, it made Yang Shuwan’s eyelids twitch.

As expected!

Twisting her prayer beads, Old Madam Yu went on to say, “Yao Yao is the eldest daughter of the first wife. No one in the residence can beat her.”

Yang Shuwan’s face fell.

She thought of the day she had married into the Yu Residence. Because it hadn’t been a hundred days since the passing of Madam Xie, the wedding wasn’t done properly. Everything was simple and basic. She wore a plain wedding dress and a small white flower on her head, entering the Yu Residence quietly.

In the evening, Yu Zongzheng entered the room and took off her veil. After drinking a cup of wine with her, he went off to his study. He could not consummate their marriage as it was still within the mourning period for his first wife.

The next morning, she had gone to pay her respects to Old Madam Yu. Nanny Liu sat on the first wife’s seat with Madam Xie’s memorial tablet in her arms. After serving tea to Old Madam Yu, she still had to kneel down and kowtow to the original first wife.

Madam Xie was the first wife, while she was only the second.

Therefore, she could not compare to Madam Xie.

And Yu Youyao, the daughter of Madam Xie, was the eldest legitimate daughter of the first wife.

Her daughter, Yu Jianjia, was also a legitimate daughter, but strictly speaking, she was still beneath Yu Youyao.

Early in the next morning, the Water Pavilion's name had been changed to "Jade Courtyard." The meaning of this move was obvious.

At the thought of this, the resentment in Yang Shuwan's heart exploded. "Yu Youyao, you little wretch, why don't you go and die?"

Beside her, Nanny Li was shocked. She rushed to the window and craned her neck to look out. When she saw that no one was in the courtyard, she heaved a sigh of relief. She then ducked in and closed the window tightly.

In the courtyard next door, Third Miss, Yu Jianjia, stood in front of a desk in plain white clothes. She gently rolled up her wide sleeves with one hand and held a pen in the other. On the pure white paper, there were neat rows of small, exquisite words that looked lively and graceful like dancers, or like beautiful women lined up on a stage, elegant and stylish.

She was practicing calligraphy on the third chapter of 'Analects of Women,' which she had just learned from her female teacher, about proper etiquette.

"All women should know the proper etiquette and rules. Arrange seating for female guests. Straighten your clothes and walk slowly. Keep your hands together and your volume low as you lead them in."

"When exchanging greetings, start from the top. Answer politely and speak softly. Prepare tea and serve it. Do not learn from others to be boastful."

"..."

Yu Jianjia's personal maidservant, Hui Xiang, was still full of indignation. "Why is Old Madam just so biased?"

Eldest Miss was arrogant, foolish and pigheaded.

By contrast, her Young Mistress was far more outstanding than Eldest Miss in terms of looks, talent, manners, and conduct.

She truly did not understand what Old Madam was thinking—choosing to cherish the fish's eyeball instead of the precious gemstone.

Yu Jianjia paused for a moment, then with a curl of her lips, she said with a smile, "Big Sister has never had a mother to teach her anything, so naturally, she's different from me."

Her gentle words meant no malice at all. After all, she was just telling the truth. Old Madam was especially biased towards Yu Youyao merely because she had lost her mother. Everyone knew this.

Hui Xiang rolled her eyes and added, "She didn't have a mother to educate her, so it's natural that she doesn't have a proper upbringing, right? No wonder Old Madam wanted to find a nanny from the palace to help teach her."

Hearing this, Yu Jianjia looked up at Hui Xiang with a meaningful smile on her lips. "Big Sister is not young anymore. She should indeed learn some of the rules. Most good families have conditions for marrying into their family, one of which is not to be without a mother to ensure proper upbringing. Grandmother's heart aches for her, so of course she has to make more plans for her."



It seemed to be a casual, innocent statement, but still, interpretation depended on the listener. Hearing that, Hui Xiang had a sudden understanding. “Doesn’t that refer to Eldest Miss? No wonder Old Madam has hired a nanny from the palace to help Eldest Miss. She must have been worried that Eldest Miss would not be thought worthy to get married into a good family in the future.”

Yu Jianjia frowned slightly and scolded softly, “Shut up! How can you say that!”

It took Hui Xiang a moment to realize that she’d spoken out of turn. She dropped to her knees and quickly said she wouldn’t dare to do it again.

Although Eldest Miss was young, she never hesitated in hitting the servants, so it was obvious that she was ruthless. If she had heard about this, the lightest punishment would probably be 30 strokes of the paddle.

Yu Jianjia seemed to be angry. She held the handkerchief and coughed lightly, and her face was also flushed. “My body is weaker than most. Since it’s usually hard on you being my servant, I often can’t bear to be too harsh on you, which has indulged you into developing a temper and a habit of gossiping in front of me. If Grandmother finds out that I’m not strict with those under me, she will scold me, and you won’t be able to avoid punishment either.”

Hearing this, Hui Xiang realized that she had almost implicated her Young Mistress, so she felt guilty and blamed herself. She raised her hand and slapped herself twice, producing loud slapping sounds. “It’s all my fault. Young Mistress, don’t be angry, it’s not good for your health.”

Yu Jianjia coughed again and said hoarsely, “What are you doing? I’m angry at you, but I didn’t ask you to hit yourself. I’m just worried that if you speak without thinking and follow in Zhi Zi’s footsteps, our many years of relationship as mistress and servant will have to come to an end.”

Hui Xiang’s eyes filled with tears as she remembered what had happened to Zhi Zi. “I know you’re always the kindest, Young Mistress.”

Yu Jianjia looked a little tired. “Get up. I’ll let it go this time, but it happens again, I won’t let you off easily.”

Hui Xiang hurriedly stood up and helped Yu Jianjia into the inner room, then poured her a cup of water.

As Yu Jianjia took a sip of water, she still looked a little concerned, so she added a last line, “It’s a good thing that Grandmother found a nanny from the palace for Big Sister. We’re all sisters of the same residence. I believe she won’t mind if Fourth Sister and I go to her courtyard and learn from her nanny either. In the future, you need to gossip less.”

Hui Xiang’s eyes twinkled. If there were things to learn, they could all learn together. As expected, Young Mistress was wiser.

After helping her Young Mistress lie down, Hui Xiang called a young maidservant into the room and whispered something into her ear.

The girl ran out of the room and went straight to the Clear Autumn Courtyard.

Chapter 24

Happy Moving

In the Clear Autumn Courtyard, the Fourth Miss, Yu Qingning, was also losing her temper. She complained that the Old Madam was biased, and she was jealous that Yu Youyao was favored. Her personal servant, Jin Ju, simply wasn't able to calm her down.

At this moment, a young maidservant lifted the curtain and entered the room. She poured a cup of tea for Yu Qingning. "Young Mistress, don't be angry. As long as you join, you can learn from the nanny too. As the eldest sister, if there's anything good, it's only right that she counts her sisters in."

Jin Ju was a little stunned. Yu Qingning's brain started turning and she couldn't help but praise, "You're pretty smart. What's your name?"

The maidservant was delighted. She quickly replied, "I'm Gui Zi."

"I happen to be lacking a second-in-charge maidservant. You'll do," Yu Qingning said with a smile.

Gui Zi was overjoyed. She fell to her knees with a loud thud and thanked her profusely.

...

In the capital, noble families liked to draw water into the garden. The Yu Residence was no exception, having had a lotus lake installed long ago. The lake was filled with lotus flowers and occupied a third of the space in the residence.

The Jade Courtyard was connected to the lotus lake, which was surrounded by a white stone bridge. The scenery was especially picturesque. Who in the residence wouldn't be envious?

However, regardless of whether it was due to seniority or the Old Madam's love for Eldest Miss, this courtyard now rightfully belonged to Yu Youyao, not to mention that the Jade Courtyard had been built with Madam Xie's money.

After spending an entire day packing yesterday, most of Yu Youyao's belongings had already been carried into the courtyard one after another, and she could slowly move some of the remaining less important items in the future.

Early in the morning, Nanny Xu gathered all the servants and old maids into the Jade Courtyard to arrange everything.

After Yu Youyao finished breakfast with Old Madam Yu, she helped her to the Jade Courtyard.

They walked along the corridor for a while and after a couple more turns, they arrived at the garden, where there was a stretch of light green bamboo. Although it was not an expensive plant, the green bamboo was thick and strong, and this was a beautiful area.

The Yu family was a scholarly family, so naturally, they had to plant some bamboo in order to showcase their literary taste and flair.

When she passed by a thick bamboo shoot, Yu Youyao saw a small hole in it. "Grandmother, in May, I'll come to this place every day to collect bamboo sap and use it to brew tea for you."

Bamboo was also known as the dew of the heavens and the earth, with spiritual energy absorbed from the sun and moon, and contained the elixir of wind, clouds, lightning, and thunder. It

nourished the mind and soul. Furthermore, the sap of the bamboo held the essence of it all. It was called “Heavenly Water” by the people, meaning that it was nurtured by nature.

Every May, Old Madam Yu would order some servants to drill holes and extract the sap from these bamboo.

The rouge-red bamboo sap was drained and poured into a white porcelain bowl. It was crystal and clear, with a touch of bamboo fragrance that was refreshing and mellow, while having a hint of sweetness.

Old Madam Yu smiled so widely that her wrinkles showed. “I’m more afraid that you’ll devour it yourself when I see how you’re staring at the bamboo.”

Yu Youyao blushed and pouted. “Grandmother, you’re teasing me again when I’m just being filial to you. I just want you to consume more bamboo sap and live a long, long life.”

At her old age, Old Madam Yu loved to hear such filial and auspicious words. Old Madam Yu beamed.

The Jade Courtyard was just beside this garden and through the Moon Gate.

When they got on the white stone arch bridge, the water under the bridge rippled lightly. There were scattered green duckweed and some withered lotus leaves. An exquisite two-story courtyard building was hidden among a stretch of unusually tall Chinese parasol trees. At this time of the year, its leaves had fallen and new leaves had yet to grow out, but the thousands of branches still exuded elegance and beauty.

Back then, Madam Xie had spent a large sum of money to repair the Water Pavilion, and had even expanded the Lotus Lake to get a stream of water into the courtyard. Last year, Old Madam Yu changed the Water Pavilion to be called the Jade Courtyard. She had also spent a lot of money to tidy and clean up the place. There was not a single place in the courtyard that wasn’t immaculate and beautiful.

After walking one round around the courtyard, Yu Youyao helped her grandmother into the building.

The small building was divided into separate areas for the mistress and the servants. There were two side courtyards each in the east and west areas. There was a small kitchen in the east and a storeroom in the west. The small two-story building to the south was Yu Youyao’s personal area. There were two sections on both sides, which had small rooms each. On the right was where the maidservants would be on duty, while on the left was the area that specialized in tea and soup.

The house was a little messy as Nanny Xu was still leading the maidservants in arranging the items around the place.

Nanny Liu and Dong Mei had also brought more people to help.

Yu Youyao was afraid that the servants busying about would crash into her grandmother, so she brought her grandmother out of the house. They sat down in an octagonal pavilion not far from the Bamboo garden, where it was windy but not too cold.

Just yesterday, this little girl had been sobbing and saying that she didn't want to move. But today, she was all smiles and looked excited.

Old Madam Yu was both relieved and sad. She sighed. "Yao Yao, you've really grown up."

Yu Youyao burrowed into her grandmother's arms and said cutely, "Even if I'm all grown up, I'll always be your granddaughter. You can't stop doting on me just because I've grown up."

These words made Old Madam Yu's heart sink. "After moving into this courtyard, there won't be as many helpers in your house. Let Nanny Xu choose a few capable ones from the residence later. In addition, you still lack a more experienced head maidservant, so Dong Mei will take over. She's slightly older than Chun Xiao and is a capable person."

Dong Mei was the maidservant she had prepared for Yao Yao in the first place, but hadn't passed her over yet because she had wanted Nanny Liu to provide more training for her first, so that she would be of more help to Yu Youyao in the future.

"Thank you, Grandmother." In the past few years, Dong Mei had been running to and fro between her and her grandmother's houses, so Yu Youyao was not surprised at all.

Yu Youyao had all sorts of items in her house, and they were expensive too. Even though Nanny Xu had seen much in her lifetime, she still couldn't help but click her tongue at it all. When she was cleaning up the house, she did an inventory check one by one and checked the list. Anything that was missing or damaged was checked one by one. Finally, she moved it into the courtyard and double-checked it with the list.

In the afternoon, the move was finally finished.

At night, Yu Youyao had a small celebration.

Using her own savings, she asked the main kitchen to prepare a few tables of sumptuous food, then sent them to the main courtyard and the second house. Even the concubines were sent a few exquisite dishes. The servants in her courtyard were also each paid two yuan, and were treated with a large table of dishes, so that they could bask in their Young Mistress's joy too.

Yu Youyao had even sent official invitations, asking her siblings to join her for a banquet.

Yu Jianjia, Yu Shansi, Yu Qingning, and Zhou Linghuai from the main house, along with Yu Shanyan, Yu Shanxin, and Yu Shuangbai from the second house, all came over bearing gifts.

A total of eleven of them were gathered together.

Without the presence of the elders, the young masters and young mistresses who had always followed the rules, now did not need to hold back. Yu Shanxin, who had an outgoing personality, suggested that they play the guessing game and the loser would be punished with a glass of wine. The fruit wine brewed with plums was weak and not intoxicating, so they could afford to drink a few more glasses. On a joyous day like this, the elders in the family wouldn't have restricted them either.

Unexpectedly, as soon as this suggestion was made, Yu Youyao clenched her fists and chased him around the house like a monkey. The house was filled with laughter and the atmosphere was very lively.

## Chapter 25

### Ignorant and Unlearned

In the end, Yu Shanxin stumbled and fell on his back while exclaiming loudly. Sprawled on the ground, he pleaded for mercy pitifully.

“Little Sis, I was wrong. Can’t you be magnanimous and spare me this once? I only suggested playing the guessing game because I wanted things to be lively to celebrate you moving out. How was I supposed to know that you’re bad at guessing!”

There were many different drinking games, but one of the easier ones to play was word-guessing.

It was also because he was being considerate for Yu Youyao, who was not good at studying, that he suggested playing this guessing game.

Who would have known that Yu Youyao wasn’t good at this game either.

What else could they do then?

There was nothing else to play!

Yu Youyao was embarrassed and stomped her foot. “Second Brother, have you seen anyone who’s bad at studying but good at guessing words? You only know how to bully me. I’m going to tell Grandmother.”

“No!” Yu Shanxin wailed. He scrambled to get up from the ground. Then, he went up close to Yu Youyao and apologized humbly in a low voice.

As Yu Shuangbai ate the osmanthus candy, she held her stomach and laughed. “Second Brother, to think that you’d have such a day too. Serves you right for teasing me all the time!”

The concubine’s daughters covered their mouths with their handkerchiefs and smiled too.

Yu Shanyan also laughed and shook his head helplessly.

His brother was just like a monkey, running and jumping about all day. He never behaved seriously and seldom read many books on his own. He was actually about the same as Yao Yao, so he didn’t know why his brother had such audacity to tease her.

He turned to look at Zhou Linghuai, who was beside him, and saw that he was reading a book in his hand. It was one of the Daoist scriptures, Guiguzi. The pages of the book were flipped from time to time, and there seemed to be an invisible bubble around him. It was as if he was isolated from the world; as if the commotion around him had nothing to do with him at all.

Zhou Linghuai sat in his wheelchair, looking a head shorter than everyone no matter the angle.

Yu Shanyan’s father had said that although Zhou Linghuai’s legs were weak, he was incredibly perceptive and talented, and his eyes were deep and mysterious. He was not an ordinary person. His father had also told him to get closer to Zhou Linghuai. Although a little unconvinced, he still did as he was told.

Previously, when he consulted Zhou Linghuai on some academic questions, he indeed had some unique insight that managed to hit the nail on the head.

However, Zhou Linghuai's personality was too aloof, and he had a sense of isolation from others. It was easy to initiate interaction with him, but it was a little difficult to actually befriend him.

Yu Shanyan was just about to turn around when he saw Zhou Linghuai look up with a faint smile in his eyes. His cold and quiet aura seemed to be tinged with the color of the outside world. All of a sudden, it was like the ice of winter had melted and revealed the breeze of spring.

Yu Shanyan was stunned for a moment. He followed his gaze and saw Yu Youyao waving her small fists, threatening Yu Shanxin with her teeth bared. He couldn't help but shake his head and laugh.

Even though they were cousins, those from this house were still a little different after all.

Yu Qingning smiled as her eyes wandered around the room, scanning every corner of it. In the end, they landed on the precious valuables on Yu Youyao's treasure shelves. She couldn't take her eyes off them. "Let's play pitch-pot. Big Sister is the best at it. I'm afraid no one in this residence can compete with her."

With that, she clutched her handkerchief and laughed, but didn't say just what was so funny.

Yu Jianjia's stuck her tongue out a little, and said a little snidely, "Big Sister is the protagonist today, so we'll play what Big Sister is best at."

After "handling" her second brother, Yu Youyao sat on a stool and Chun Xiao handed her a cup of tea. Yu Youyao reached out to take it and lowered her head to take a sip. When she heard this, she threw the teacup onto the small table. The bottom of the cup hit the table and its lid clanged a little, neither too loud nor too soft.

"In terms of studying and behaving gracefully, I'm not as good as Third Sis and Fourth Sis. The only thing I'm most confident in is pitch-pot. However, Eldest Brother, Second Brother, and Cousin are well-rounded in all aspects of the Six Arts. How would I dare to embarrass myself in front of them? Fourth Sis said that I'm the best at it, but she was just exaggerating."

Among the Six Arts of a Gentleman, one of the Arts was indeed "shooting". However, archery was completely different from playing with wooden arrows in their rooms.

Yu Qingning was clearly mocking her for being ignorant and unlearned, only knowing how to play and have fun. Yu Jianjia seemed innocent of that, but Yu Youyao did not buy it at all.

Yu Jianjia lowered her head and coughed lightly. Her face was pale, looking pitiable and heart-wrenching.

Yu Qingning wanted to say something, but the maidservant beside her quickly handed her a cup of tea. "Young Mistress, you must be thirsty. Here, have some tea."

The house fell silent for a moment.

At this moment, Yu Shanyan tried to smooth things over. "Okay, let's play pitch-pot then. It's a joyous occasion for Little Sis to be moving out to live independently. And it's rare for all of us to

gather together, so we should be harmonious and happy. There's no need to talk about academics and the arts."

Yu Qingning looked away unhappily. It was a fact that Yu Youyao was stupid and only cared about playing. Everyone in the residence knew this. She didn't say anything wrong.

Hmph, everyone in the second house was only focused on receiving benefits from Old Madam, so they only wanted to curry favor with Yu Youyao.

Yu Shanxin chimed in, "It's a pretty good idea to play pitch-pot. It's a popular game in the capital. How about this? Let's form teams of two with one boy and one girl in each team. You sisters can play against each other, and the losers will be punished with alcohol. But, it'll be the guys in the groups who will take the punishment."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

Yu Youyao glanced at her cousin's leg and quickly said, "Alcohol punishment isn't interesting. Why don't we stick notes instead? The losers will have notes stuck onto their faces."

Although the plum wine wasn't very strong, it was still wine. It was better for Cousin not to consume any alcohol.

Zhou Linghuai looked down at his legs and nodded.

The others had no objections either. Among them, Yu Shanxin was the only one who was most playful and lively. Big Brother was usually serious. If a note were to be stuck on his face, it would definitely be very interesting.

"I'll be in the same group as Cousin." Yu Youyao turned to look at Zhou Linghuai.

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "Okay!"

At his reply, the little girl beamed brightly.

So with that, Zhou Linghuai and Yu Youyao formed a team.

Yu Shanyan and Yu Shuangbai formed a team.

Yu Shanxin and Yu Qingning formed a team.

Yu Shansi and Yu Jianjia formed a team.

Then the other children of the concubines, Yu Shanli and Yu Lianyu, formed a team as well.

Yu Fangfei, the daughter of the second house's concubine, was six or seven years old. She was a little timid and did not know how to play this game, so she sat on a stool and ate some fruits. Hence, in total, they were divided into five groups.

The maidservants brought over a few flower pots and some little wooden arrows with exquisite workmanship.

Yu Youyao took the lead and threw an arrow straight into the pot. The room was filled with cheers. She turned around proudly and winked at Zhou Linghuai.

Zhou Linghuai's lips curled up, and his deep eyes revealed amusement.

After playing a few rounds, other than Zhou Linghuai, all the other brothers had notes pasted on their faces. Yu Shanxin had the most notes—there were more than ten on his face. Yu Shanli also had seven or eight pasted onto his face.

Yu Shanyan had the least, with one on his forehead and one on each side of his face. There were only three notes stuck onto his face. However, he usually looked serious and proper all the time, so now with these notes on his face, he looked quite comical.

Everyone burst out laughing.

## Chapter 26

### Killing Two Birds with One Stone

Taking advantage of the great atmosphere in the room, Yu Qingning's mind started turning again. "Big Sister, I heard that Grandmother has found a nanny from the palace to teach and guide you? I wonder if us sisters are lucky enough to benefit thanks to you, and learn from her too? The palace emphasizes on etiquette and manners. so learning from her can help us to gain a reputation of having had good training, which means that it will also bring praise and glory to the residence."

Yu Qingning thought that since her siblings were all present, even if Yu Youyao was unwilling, she probably wouldn't be able to refuse!

As the eldest daughter of the family, it was only right for her to help her sisters along.

If Yu Youyao did not agree, it would show that she was selfish and did not care about familial ties. If her father found out, she would most definitely be scolded.

The room became silent. Zhou Linghuai frowned slightly and gently closed his book.

Yu Lianyu and the other sisters also looked at Yu Youyao eagerly, waiting for her answer. The desire and anticipation in their eyes were clear as day.

If they, the daughters of concubines, could also be taught by a nanny from the palace, they could also build a better reputation and have a brighter future.

Yu Shuangbai shot a side glance at Yu Qingning, then reached for a piece of pie to eat.

Eldest Sis had lost her mother, while Grandmother was now old and also didn't have the energy to take care of her so meticulously, so a skilled nanny was hired to help guide and raise her well. Just why were the others trying to involve themselves in this?

She wondered what these people were making such a fuss for.

Yu Jianjia picked up the teacup beside her and lowered her head, drinking mouthful after mouthful. Her pale lips were slightly curled into a faint smile.

Yu Youyao was very taken aback. She was stunned for a long time before she reacted. "Why don't you ask Grandmother? If she agrees, then of course I'll have no objections too."

This answer was different from what Yu Qingning had expected. Her expression turned a little sour. "Eldest Sis, what are you saying? Isn't Nanny Xu someone from your house? As the mistress of your own house, can't you make the decision yourself? Or is it that you're unwilling, so you're deliberately using Grandmother as an excuse?"

What she said made sense too. Everyone turned to look at Yu Youyao.



Yu Youyao looked down. "Nanny Xu used to serve in the Empress Dowager's palace. She's a respectable person and has even received the Empress Dowager's grace to leave the palace to retire. Grandmother spent a lot of effort to invite her into our residence."

She had intentionally placed an emphasis on the word "invite."

With that said, everything was made clear to understand. The book that Zhou Linghuai had closed for a long while was gently opened again.

However, Yu Qingning was indignant. The more respectable Nanny Xu was, the more she wanted to learn from her. "Eldest Sis, as the eldest daughter of the first wife in the residence, you are naturally more respected and notable in general, but still, you should help to look out for your younger siblings too."

Yu Youyao's expression darkened, and she decided to be direct. "In this residence, Nanny Liu is no less than Nanny Xu. Why don't you find Nanny Liu to learn from instead?"

"How can that be the same?" Yu Qingning was indignant and raised her voice.

Nanny Liu was Old Madam Yu's most capable aide, and had an exceptional relationship with her grandmother. Even her father and mother had to respect her, so how could she simply approach her and ask for some lessons?

"How is it different?" Yu Youyao calmly asked in return.

"Nanny Xu, she..." Yu Qingning suddenly seemed to have a realization, and her expression froze.

In the end, although it was supposed to be a joyous celebration, it ended on such a bad note.

When Yu Qingning returned home, she threw a big tantrum once again.

When Concubine He received the news, she rushed over and asked Yu Qingning's personal maidservant about what had happened. Only then did she find out about what had happened at the little celebration dinner. Immediately, she understood that her daughter had been used, and she was furious.

"Don't you think you were being foolish? Nanny Xu came from the palace. Even Old Madam respects her, and even Nanny Liu isn't as qualified as her. How could you be so imprudent? Nanny Xu is someone who has received special grace and left the palace respectably. She's a meritorious servant. No one in the capital dares to belittle her, so where did you get such audacity?"

Yu Qingning's eyes widened. "I, I..." She'd merely felt that since Nanny Xu had left the palace, she had come to the Yu Residence as a servant too, so it was not that big a deal after all. She had thought that she just needed to be a little more respectful and give her a little more face than usual.

Concubine He looked utterly disappointed in her daughter. She spat hatefully, "What are you stammering about? The main courtyard is jealous that Yu Youyao has such an impressive and capable nanny, so they deliberately instigated you to stir up some trouble."

Yu Qingning looked completely puzzled. What did this have to do with the people from the main courtyard?

Seeing her expression of confusion, Concubine He poked her forehead a few times. "How did I give birth to a pig's brain like you? Nanny Xu was specially invited into the residence to care for Eldest Miss. If Eldest Miss agreed to let you join the classes, would Nanny Xu be happy with that? If they don't see eye to eye, will Nanny Xu still stay in the residence? Then, the people from the main courtyard would have successfully gotten rid of Nanny Xu and achieved their goal. On the other hand, you would have become enemies with Yu Youyao. If that happens, what can you still hope to gain from Old Madam?"

What a plan to kill two birds with one stone!

But she was also to blame. Madam Yang had been criticized by Old Madam Yu recently, and even lost half her authority as the household in-charge, so she had been feeling so smug and complacent that she had neglected her own daughter.

She did not expect those people from the main courtyard to have come up with such an opportunity to exploit.

The more Concubine He thought about it, the more alarmed she became. "You have to think about it. Your future marriage will have to go through Old Madam. If she doesn't like you, what hope do you have in this lifetime? As your mother, who else can I rely on in the future?"

When Yu Qingning heard this, she turned around and threw herself into Concubine He's arms. She cried aggrievedly, "Mother, I-I didn't think it through. I was just..."

She was just jealous of Yu Youyao.

Concubine He comforted Yu Qingning, as she had at least managed to open her eyes and see the situation clearly. She immediately ordered someone to tie up Gui Zi, the maidservant who had just been promoted to second in-charge, and bring her over for an interrogation.

However, Gui Zi was tight lipped and did not let them get any information out of her.

Concubine He's face turned red with anger. She instructed her maidservant to slap Gui Zi left and right until her face swelled. Then, she simply brought Gui Zi to the main courtyard and groused to Madam Yang while crying and making a scene.

She said that Yu Qingning was young and was still impressionable. Gui Zi had ulterior thoughts and had incited her young mistress. She stopped just short of saying that Gui Zi was an informant planted by the main courtyard.

Staring at Concubine He's tear-stained face, Yang Shuwan was so angry that she felt pain in her heart. She immediately got someone to fetch Gui Zi's papers and brought her out of the residence.

News of this matter quickly spread to Yu Youyao's house.

Chun Xiao frowned. "It's already so late at night, so why are they still creating such a fuss unnecessarily?"

Yu Youyao sat in front of the mirror and looked at her tender face in the mirror. Her lips curled up slightly. "How do you know that it's unnecessary?"

Chun Xiao was immediately stumped.

Yu Youyao stroked the space between her eyebrows. Only she could see the blood jade lotus flower appear. “Concubine He deliberately caused a commotion so that everyone in the residence would know that the reason Yu Qingning had provoked me today was because of Gui Zi. By punishing Guizi and teaching Yu Qingning a lesson, I wouldn’t be able to hold this against Yu Qingning any further. So, this matter will end here.”

## Chapter 27

### Nanny Xu, Not a Simple Person

Chun Xiao’s mind lit up, and she immediately came to an understanding.

“As for why Gui Zi had instigated Fourth Sister?” Yu Youyao’s lips curved, and there was a hint of delight in her voice.

Dong Mei lifted the incense burner and added some calming incense. Casually, she added, “Concubine He brought Gui Zi to the main courtyard.”

Old Madam had assigned her to Yu Youyao because she wanted her to provide good advice and prevent Yu Youyao from getting fooled or played by others.

Yu Youyao chuckled. Ever since she had the dream, she had been carefully observing everyone’s every move, and had come to a realization that there was nothing special about their little underhanded tactics.

Just then, Nanny Xu walked in with a copper basin.

Yu Youyao was wearing only her pink embroidered inner-wear. Her long black hair draped over her shoulders and she was sitting on the bed. “Nanny, if I had agreed to let Yu Qingning learn from you with me in the future, would you have been upset?”

Nanny Xu dipped her hand into the copper basin. When she heard this, she couldn’t help but pause. “Before entering the residence, Old Madam only told me to take care of you.”

The subtext was clearly understood.

She entered the Yu Residence to tend to Yu Youyao because she wanted to be treated respectfully and settle down in the Yu Residence. She had also asked around and found out that Old Madam Yu was an understanding and generous person, who rewarded and punished accordingly and clearly. The Yu Residence had formed two houses, and the main house had only a small number of people. It was a good family.

It was her duty to take care of Yu Youyao wholeheartedly, but if Yu Youyao brought along her sisters as well and she had to be ordered around by all of them, what would she be reduced to then?

In that case, wouldn’t she simply become a servant at their beck and call?

She had been serving the nobles in the palace for decades. It was not easy for her to obtain their grace and leave the palace in glory. She only wanted to find a place to stay and not to suffer.

Yu Youyao climbed into bed and cooed, “Everyone thinks that I’m young and only know how to eat and drink, so they try to scheme against me.”

Even if this were in the past and she were still ignorant about such scheming tactics, she also wouldn’t have agreed to Yu Qingning. She would never allow others to order her nanny around.

Nanny Xu looked at the little girl’s snow-white skin and saw that it was flawless. She couldn’t help but marvel secretly. “I’ve been in the palace since I was young and I’ve seen all kinds of smart people, but those who are always scheming and trying to outsmart others usually don’t have a good ending. People like you, who know how to be smart or oblivious at the right times, choosing to live comfortably without stirring trouble, are much better. The ancestors used to say that one shouldn’t take life too seriously. Precisely, those who think too much ultimately bring suffering upon themselves.”

She had only been with Yu Youyao for two days, but was already treated warmly and without any barriers between them. Yu Youyao treated her just as she treated Nanny Liu—like family. She appeared to be unfeeling and heartless, but she actually had her own considerations and understanding, and was a person with a good future ahead.

Yu Youyao pursed her lips. “The worst thing for a person is to tire themselves out, so It’s not good to think too much. That’s why people who are too arrogant or too smart often have weak bodies. They either cough and pant or have headaches and fever. Only when the heart is relaxed, blood can be circulated well and aid recuperation, which then helps to fight any illnesses.”

“Eldest Miss, you understand it well.” Nanny Xu’s smile widened. She took a bottle of golden flower dew and poured a few drops on her palm. Then, she slowly rubbed it evenly on Yu Youyao’s butterfly bones, with a unique method of massage.

Not long after, Yu Youyao felt her bones burning. She felt rather uncomfortable and pouted. “Nanny, you didn’t tell me that bone molding would hurt so much. No no, I don’t want to mold my bones anymore.”

Seeing that the little girl was sulking and groaning as she lay motionlessly on the bed, Nanny Xu said, “Eldest Miss, your bones haven’t developed fully, and they aren’t too tender either. It’s best to shape your bones at this age. Once the bones grow out, you will have a set of beautiful bones in the future. A slender neck, shapely shoulders, a straight back, a thin waist, and long, lean legs. It can also correct your hunched and crooked back.”

There were no girls who didn’t want to be beautiful. The moment she heard that bone molding could make her beautiful, Yu Youyao bit the pillow and whimpered, with her face scrunched up.

Having endured the pain of being stabbed in the heart in her dream, Yu Youyou felt that she could do this!

“After I finish shaping the bones, I’ll teach you a few more moves. In the future, practice those before you go to sleep. If you do that, not only will you have a good figure in the future, but it’ll also be good for your body.”

After bone molding, a woman's body would be delicate and soft. In the future, regardless of whether it was for serving her husband or for giving birth, it would be extremely beneficial. Others wouldn't be able to learn it even if they wanted to.

However, Yu Youyao was still young, so of course, Nanny Xu didn't elaborate much about such matters.

Yu Youyao cried and wailed, "Nanny, why don't I just focus on learning etiquette from you? Let's forget about this bone molding and body softening training!"

After molding her bones, she even had to sculpt her body too?

Wasn't it better to eat and drink happily every day? Why would she choose to suffer instead?

Nanny Xu said, "Madam asked me to take good care of you and raise you, so it's my duty. I'll definitely spare no effort in all things that are for your benefit."

Who wouldn't agree to anything that was for her own good? But Yu Youyao's face was full of both sorrow and anger. She cried, "Nanny, tell me, other than this, what else do I have to learn? So that I can be mentally prepared."

"That's a great mindset, Eldest Miss." Nanny Xu gave her an approving look, but Yu Youyao was lying on her stomach and could not see it. "You have to learn the basic etiquette, appearance, posture, and rules. You..."

"Wait." Yu Youyao's eyes widened in shock. For a moment, she didn't care to be polite and interrupted Nanny Xu. "There's a nanny in the Yu Residence who specializes in teaching the basic rules and etiquette to all the young mistresses in the residence. I've already learned all this when I was five. Why should I learn it again?"

Important families valued rules and upbringing, and the Yu Residence was no exception. No matter how much her grandmother doted on her, she had still been required to learn the basic rules.

However, Nanny Xu also had her own reasoning. "You grew up beside Old Madam Yu and are the eldest daughter of the first wife in the residence. You should be more outstanding than all the others in the residence in terms of how you carry yourself."

Nanny Xu was indeed someone from the palace. She had only interacted with Yu Youyao for a day, but already had a good grasp on her personality. She knew that this little girl looked unreasonable, but was actually an understanding person.

Even though Yu Youyao was used to being undisciplined, she could not help but clench her fists in determination when she heard this. "Nanny, you're right. If I lose to the other sisters in the family, wouldn't it tarnish Grandmother's reputation?"

Her grandmother doted on her, so she also wanted to make her grandmother proud.

Nanny Xu continued, "Apart from that, you have to be familiar with the most basic situations in the capital city. You don't have to be proficient in needlework, perfumery, brewing tea, and so on, but you have to know a little."

Yu Youyao felt uninterested and yawned.

But Nanny Xu continued on, "In two years, you'll have to start moving around the capital and interacting with the young mistresses of the various families. If you can't even recognize them and don't have a bearing on your connections, you'll not only lose face, but it'll be even worse if they feel offended. Moreover, when you interact with them, you'll have to engage in conversation and small talk. If you don't know anything, you won't be able to chime in and will only be standing around awkwardly. Then, wouldn't you feel embarrassed, and wouldn't that invite condescension?"

## Chapter 28

### Had She Sold Herself?

When Yu Youyao heard this, she was speechless.

Anything could be lost, but never one's dignity.

It did not take long for her, who was used to being slack and undisciplined, to be tricked by Nanny Xu into agreeing to learn a whole lot of things. This caused Chun Xiao and Dong Mei, who were watching by the side, to gaze at Nanny Xu with admiration in their eyes.

It was simply too amazing!

As expected of someone from the palace, using a soft cane to produce resounding effects.

Nanny Xu said, "I've already made arrangements for you. From tomorrow onwards, you'll get up at five in the morning every day and take etiquette classes for two hours. During the day, you'll learn how to cook, prepare incense, tea, medicine, and so on. From eight to nine, you'll have a bone molding session and you'll soften your body. Then, for two incense sticks of time, you'll soak in a medicinal bath that will nourish your body. At nine, you'll be right on time for a rest."

There were also some other miscellaneous skills to be learned, but were less crucial, so she could pick those up slowly. Yu Youyao was used to being lazy in the past, but she would be turning ten very soon, so time was rather tight for her to learn everything now.

She had a numbing headache. Nanny Xu's words floated around her ears, but only buzzed back and forth without entering.

She had absolutely no idea that she had already sold herself.

About ten minutes later, the bone molding session finally ended. Yu Youyao's entire body ached, and she lay motionlessly on the bed. Nanny Xu poured a cup of tea and fed Yu Youyao a few mouthfuls. Then, she pulled her up to learn more body sculpting exercises.

There were a total of twelve movements, each of which greatly mobilized the muscles and bones in the entire body.

Yu Youyao sprawled onto the bed. Nanny Xu held her ankle and pushed it forcefully towards her back, until the tip of her foot was against the curve just below the back of her head.

Yu Youyao's waist was about to crack. The entire courtyard could hear her howling and wailing pitifully.

"Eldest Miss, your body is flexible. It's only the first day and you could already get into the position. After enduring for a few days, it will no longer hurt much."

Nanny Xu knew the moment she laid hands on Yu Youyao, that the girl was born with a naturally flexible body, and that she was a rare potential talent.

Yu Youyao was in too much pain to speak.

After about ten minutes, she'd finally finished practicing the Flexible Body Technique. Her entire body was covered in sweat, and she lay on the bed like a lump of mud, not even wanting to move her fingers.

Nanny Xu had personally brewed some medicinal brew early in the morning. Dong Mei and Chun Xiao ordered someone to prepare a bath, and they immediately asked one of the old maids to carry Yu Youyao to the bathroom.

Yu Youyao quietly added a drop of Spirit Dew into the medicinal bath. After soaking in it for a while, the soreness in her body eased a little.

The next morning, she was sleeping soundly when Nanny Xu pulled her out of bed and covered her face with a cold handkerchief, startling her. "Nanny, it's still dark outside..."

Nanny Xu smiled. "You promised me yesterday that you would get up at dawn today, to learn etiquette from me."

When had she agreed? Why didn't she remember anything? Yu Youyao's eyes widened in shock as she turned to look at Dong Mei and Chun Xiao.

Dong Mei and Chun Xiao said in unison, "Young Mistress, you indeed agreed. We heard you."

She suspected that they were both in cahoots with Nanny Xu, but had no evidence. Yu Youyao looked like she was about to have a breakdown. "Is it too late for me to go back on my word now?"

Go back on her word? There was no way she could do that.

Nanny Xu decided to use a concrete example to show Yu Youyao that a promise weighed a thousand pounds. She asked Chun Xiao to pick out an intricate nine-layer outfit, then began to put it on her layer by layer. Next, she covered her whole body with many gold and silver jewelry accessories.

Yu Youyao gulped. "Wouldn't it be exhausting if I learned while wearing such clothes?"

Nanny Xu said, "The rules of learning etiquette are a little stricter and harsher. Wearing nine layers of clothings is just right for your age. When you're older, you'll have to wear twelve layers of clothes. It won't be too exhausting."

Twelve layers? Yu Youyao's eyes grew wide in shock. She had really learned something new today.

When they reached the embroidery pavilion on the second floor, Nanny Xu placed a book on her head. "Eldest Miss, show me how you walk."

Her body was still sore from last night's torture, so at this point in time, Yu Youyao only wanted to walk as steadily as she could, trying not to fall. She had no energy to take note of her walking posture at all.

When Nanny Xu saw this, her expression did not change. She merely walked a few steps forward herself.

As she walked, her waist moved and her hips swayed. She was graceful and beautiful. When she took each step, only the tips of her shoes could be seen under her skirt, making her look even more elegant and poised. The top of her skirt did not move, but the bottom swayed and rippled. Every step was a sight. Yu Youyao was simply stunned.

So, she began to take it seriously, but still fell countless times. Nanny Xu neither scolded her nor looked annoyed, but only asked her to do it again and again until she got it right.

Yu Youyao lay on the ground and cried, "Nanny, you lied. Learning this is so tiring, I could fall to death..."

After learning for about an hour, Yu Youyao could finally walk properly, and Nanny Xu revealed a long-lost smile. "You have quite a good foundation, so you'll be great after a few more days of practice and some additional guidance. However, when you walk, you must also remember to manage your facial expression, such as joy, laughter, anger, sorrow, in deep thought, and so on. You have to pay attention to all of them."

When it was time, Yu Youyao freshened up and carried her tea to the North Courtyard to greet her grandmother. She threw herself into her grandmother's arms and whined.

However, she didn't complain or say anything about not wanting to learn anymore.

After she dragged her feet and left the North Courtyard very reluctantly, Old Madam Yu finally couldn't help but twist her handkerchief and burst into laughter. "Yao Yao has always had a big ego. She once fell from a tree when she was younger. And when she saw that some people in the Residence had witnessed it, she buried her head in my arms and cried, not even wanting to show her face anymore. That's why I say that everyone has a weakness."

Nanny Liu also laughed. "But it depends too, and there's still more to discover about her temperament. I heard from Dong Mei that she has been learning humbly from Nanny Xu, since she heard that Nanny Xu was specially invited into the Residence by you."

Old Madam Yu's smile widened.

She had always wanted Yao Yao to learn more, but every time Yao Yao sulked, she couldn't bring herself to be strict, and it had allowed Yao Yao to develop a lazy personality.

Now that she had Nanny Xu, she was finally at ease.

Back at the Jade Courtyard, Nanny Xu brought out a book called 'Medical Classics' that was thicker than a brick, and handed it to Yu Youyao. "I'm skilled in medicinal cuisine, medicinal fragrance, medicinal tea, and other means of nourishment. If you want to master cooking, incense, tea, and medicine, you need to first have some knowledge of medicine. Once you become skilled in these, it'll be great because you can also take better care of your elders to show your filial piety."

Initially, she had thought that Yu Youyao would have no interest in these things. However, Nanny Xu quickly realized that Yu Youyao could remember a medicinal concept or theory after reading it just once or twice. As for the more difficult ones, it would take her only about three readings to be able to memorize it.



Moreover, she was extremely talented in pharmacology. She could draw inferences after learning just one pharmacological theory, and apply it in many other ways.

After two hours, Nanny Xu looked ambivalent.

Having interacted with Yu Youyao these past few days, she found that although Yu Youyao was pampered and weak at enduring hardship, she had a certain tenacity within her. No matter how loudly she yelled in pain or how miserably she sobbed when her bones were being shaped and molded, she still grit her teeth through it. No matter how hard or often she fell while learning the proper etiquette and manners, crying and declaring that she wanted to quit it all, she still managed to brush herself off and emerge standing tall.

## Chapter 29

### Precious Peace Temple

Yu Youyao was undisciplined and lazy, always thinking of playing and never wanting to work hard. However, as long as it concerned her grandmother, it seemed like she could even hold up a falling sky.

Gossip and rumors were spread outside that she was stupid and mischievous, and couldn't even be compared to the daughter of a concubine in the Residence. However, it was clear that Yu Youyao was actually very bright. Even obscure medicinal theories weren't too difficult for her.

In the evening, Yu Youyao ate dinner by herself and drank a cup of tea to help with her digestion, before resting for a short while. Then, once again, Nanny Xu took out a few books: 'Tea Scriptures', 'Heavenly Fragrance Records', and 'Finest Delicacies'.

Yu Youyao pouted and reluctantly put down the slice of cake she had just picked up, then followed along and learned obediently.

Actually, it wasn't that Yu Youyao was studious or eager to learn.

It was because Nanny Xu was too smart. Not only could she grasp Yu Youyao's personality, but she also had many skills and much knowledge that Yu Youyao just had to learn from her. Furthermore, she was excellent at teaching. The abstract and dry medicinal theories became clear and interesting after she explained them.

Most importantly, these weren't difficult for Yu Youyao to learn, and she understood them easily. Since she could pick up new skills and theories with ease, there wasn't any reason not to learn.

After all, she wasn't a fool!

And so, she spent her following days focused on learning, deeply immersed in her studies. Before she knew it, it was already February 7th.

After two hours of etiquette classes, Yu Youyao was drenched in sweat. She instructed Chun Xiao to help with her bath, then returned to her room.

Dong Mei brought a dark green dress with a light green outer jacket and passed them to Yu Youyao.

It was now February; the weather was cold yet warm. Those in the capital had long shed their winter jackets, and changed into spring clothes.

Yu Youyao thought that this outfit looked pretty good and had no objections.

However, Nanny Xu was not very satisfied with it, so she personally picked out another outfit—a lotus-colored pleated skirt, a light pink collared shirt, and a white embroidered cloak that reached her waist. It looked lovelier, while also providing more warmth than the outfit chosen by Dong Mei.

Nanny Xu helped Yu Youyao put on her clothes and took the opportunity to teach Dong Mei and Chun Xiao. “Although it is necessary to dress more appropriately when you go to the temple to pray, you’re still young and the elders in the family are all healthy, so you should dress simply but not dully. Also, the spring breeze in February is still piercing, so you have to be careful not to catch a cold, or you’ll feel the effects on your body when you’re old!”

Dong Mei and Chun Xiao showed their understanding by bowing their heads.

“Don’t learn from the main courtyard, the way they behave is just for show. It’s not principled behavior and it’s too shallow. Third Miss is smart, but why do you think she isn’t able to impress Old Madam?” Nanny Xu shot a look at Dong Mei and Chun Xiao as she combed Yu Youyao’s hair into two space buns, with a pink pearl chain on each side.

In the polished glass mirror, the little girl’s clothes looked simple but lovely.

After getting ready, a maidservant served breakfast.

Yu Youyao ate a little when Qing Xiu from Old Madam’s house came over. “The Residence’s carriage is waiting outside. Old Madam wants Eldest Miss to head to the flower gate at the front courtyard.”

Yu Youyao went along the corridor with Dong Mei and Chun Xiao, to the flower gate at the front courtyard.

Old Madam Yu was already waiting there, with Nanny Liu by her side.

Yu Jianjia tilted her head and spoke to Yang Shuwan, who was beside her. There was some redness around her eyes, and a tinge of red between her white lips. She was wearing a long, white robe with intricate patterns. There were red roses at the collar, adding a pop of color to her pure white outfit, making her look beautiful.

Perhaps because she was dressed too lightly, her thin body trembled slightly. Her tiny movements made her look even smaller and more delicate, rousing an urge to care for her.

Yu Youyao greeted both her grandmother and Yang Shuwan.

After learning etiquette and manners from Nanny Xu for a few days, it seemed like she was already getting the hang of it. Old Madam Yu nodded in satisfaction. “Yao Yao, you look wonderful dressed up.” She held Yu Youyao’s little hand as she spoke. When Old Madam Yu felt Yu Youyao’s warm palms, a smile appeared on her lips. “It’s good that you’re dressed warm enough for the cold.”

With that, she glanced at Yu Jianjia.

Of course, it was understandable for young ladies to want to look beautiful. However, Yu Jianjia was weak to begin with. If she wore such thin clothes and got sick from the cold, she would suffer. And it would cause additional trouble for the people in the Residence too.

That was not all. She was also wrapped in such dull clothes that just looking at it felt like bad luck. After all, Old Madam Yu wasn't dead nor at such an old age yet. Who was Yu Jianjia putting on such an act for?

This was exactly how Madam Yang had behaved when she first married into the family. Like mother, like daughter—this saying was really true.

After a long while, Fourth Miss Yu Qingning finally arrived.

Yu Qingning dressed up more than meticulously. She was wearing an outer garment with light-red pomegranate patterns and a skirt of the same color. There was a red ruby flower on each of her space buns, which made her eyes look even more charming. She looked undeniably immaculate from head to toe. Even her shoes with pomegranate designs that peeked out from under her dress looked quite exquisite.

Old Madam Yu took one look and turned away.

One looked too somber, as if someone from their family had passed. The other looked too ostentatious, forgetting that she was going to offer incense at the temple, not attending a banquet.

She was indeed raised by the concubine and wasn't presentable after all.

At this thought, Old Madam Yu couldn't help but look at Yaoyao with a smile in her eyes.

Yu Qingning went forward to greet Old Madam, Yu and lowered her head to address Yang Shuwan obediently, "Mother."

Yang Shuwan praised her lightly, "Qingning looks really beautiful today."

Getting to go out was rare, so she had put on all of her best clothes and jewelry. Feeling a little smug, she looked at Yu Qingning and Yu Youyao, and the corners of her mouth curled up without her realizing.

Outside, four large carriages were waiting.

Next, the Second Madam, Madam Yao, led Yu Shuangbai and a few other daughters of the concubines over to say their greetings too. Then, the group boarded the carriages one after another.

Old Madam Yu, Madam Yao, and Madam Yang shared one carriage, while the young mistresses were split into two carriages. In another carriage that followed behind were the remaining servants and old maids. Finally, the carriage wheels started rolling towards the Precious Peace Temple.

The interior of each carriage was very spacious. There were seats on three sides and they were covered with soft cushions. Seated on each side was a mistress with two of her maidservants, and there was more than enough space.

Smoke rose from the incense burner on the low ebony table. It was full of tea, fruits, and snacks.

Yu Youyao closed her eyes and leaned against the wall of the carriage to take a nap. Yu Jianjia covered her mouth with her handkerchief and coughed lightly from time to time. Her clear, fair face had a touch of abnormally bright red, making her look especially delicate and charming.

Seeing how lightly she was dressed, Yu Shuangbai asked her maidservant, Zhen Zhu, to pass her spare cloak to Yu Jianjia.

Yu Jianjia shook her head and said that she didn't feel cold.

And so, Yu Shuangbai did not insist further.

It was a rare outing, so Yu Qingning was very enthusiastic. "Why is Big Sister sleeping as soon as she gets into the car? In the past, she was the happiest when we got to go out."

Yu Shuangbai swallowed a mouthful of pastry and said in a low voice, "Keep your voice down. Big Sister has to get up at dawn every day to learn the rules. She must be sleepy."

At the mention of learning the rules, Yu Qingning shut her mouth resentfully. She turned her head away and lifted the carriage curtain. There were many carriages outside. Just like their family, they were all heading towards the Precious Peace Temple.

"Every time there's a Spring Festival, the amount of incense offerings at Precious Peace Temple always increases so much that less prominent families can't even get in."

Yu Jianjia agreed deeply and said softly, "Our family had long arranged a donation to Precious Peace Temple last month, booking a room and a vegetarian meal for today. We even asked for some special Bodhisattva incense ash. When we return, we can give it to the young men of the Yu Clan who are participating in this year's examination."

All of this was their usual practice.

## Chapter 30

### Great Fortune

The few of them made some small talk before continuing the rest of the journey wordlessly.

When they arrived at Precious Peace Temple, it was already ten o'clock.

The Precious Peace Temple looked grand and solemn. It was built in the era of the previous dynasty. There were countless incense offerings in the temple, and most of those entering and leaving the temple were the prominent families in the capital.

Old Madam Yu was helped down the carriage by Nanny Liu. She then led Madam Yao, Madam Yang, the young mistresses, and the servants into the temple.

The monk who greeted them had a string of prayer beads around his wrist. He stepped forward and welcomed them. "Dear guests, this way please."

The Precious Peace Temple had built many small courtyards, making it convenient for the ladies of various families to rest their feet. In the small courtyard where the Yu Residence ladies stayed in, there was a cluster of purple bamboo and a Bodhi tree that was neither too tall nor short. There were stone tables and chairs under the tree. Although it was rather simple, it was great because it was clean and quiet.

There were five rooms around the courtyard. Old Madam Yu slept alone in the main room in the north. There were two rooms each on the east and west sides. Those from the main house and second house each occupied one side. There were just enough rooms for them.

Old Madam Yu held Yu Youyao's hand. "Yao Yao shall be with me!"

Madam Yang and Madam Yao also brought Yu Jianjia and Yu Shuangbai along with them respectively.

Yu Qingning occupied one room alone, and she could not hide her smug expression. It was more convenient for the two concubine daughters of the second house to share one room after all.

After settling down, Old Madam Yu led the group to the Hall of Great Strength to offer incense. She paid for the incense oil and headed to the side hall to pay her respects to Manjusri Bodhisattva.

Yu Youyao saw a lot holder at the entrance of the treasure hall. Out of curiosity, she held the lot holder and shook it, causing one bamboo stick to fall to the ground with a thud. She bent down and picked it up. "A desire for success seems difficult and marriage preparation is consuming. Ultimately, it'll result in a missed arrow and a noble guiding another noble home. What does this mean?"

Old Madam Yu took the lot from her hand and looked at it. "It looks like a good lot. There are monks explaining the lots outside. Let's go over and we'll know."

Outside, they saw an old monk in a gray robe sitting on a futon. There was a small table in front of him with a few decoded lots on it.

Old Madam Yu handed the lot to the old monk.

The old monk took it and looked down at it. His gaze then landed on Yu Youyao. "This is a good lot. It references "The Legend of Jiang Wei", and is an extremely good lot."

Delighted, Old Madam Yu asked, "What does it say?"

The old monk closed his eyes. "Fortune and misfortune are intertwined, and one can lead to the other. This divination signifies a blessing in disguise. Pursuit of greater development will end well because of help from a benefactor."

"Thank you for the enlightenment." Old Madam Yu understood what he meant. This divination meant that Yao Yao was destined to get close to her benefactor, who would help her turn misfortune into fortune, and achieve success.

At this moment, Yang Shuwan came out with Yu Jianjia and Yu Qingning. She asked with a smile, "What lot did Yao Yao draw?"

Yu Youyao said, "A good one!"

Yang Shuwan's smile froze. She held the handkerchief and pressed it against the corner of her mouth. "Yao Yao has been a blessed child since she was young. By the way, when Jia Jia and Qingning saw her drawing a lot, they also picked theirs."

When distinguished families came to the temple to offer incense, they didn't often draw lots unless they had a specific divination to seek. However, Yu Youyao and the others were just children, so they were not so strict about it.

When she heard that Yu Youyao had picked a good lot, Yu Jianjia pursed her lips. She was about to hand hers over, but she drew her hand back. She couldn't help but look down at the stick again.

There was only a simple picture engraved on it, so she couldn't tell what it meant. She needed to ask for its explanation.

She gripped the stick tightly and hesitated.

Yu Qingning seemed especially excited. She looked at the lot in her hand and couldn't resist craning her neck to peek at Yu Jianjia's lot.

Yu Jianjia was annoyed and blocked her gaze. Yu Qingning pursed her lips. Seeing how Yu Jianjia just stood there and seemed to have no intention of seeking an explanation for her lot, she said with a smile, "Third Sis, why don't you ask about your divination? Could it be that you're worried that the lot you have drawn isn't as good as Big Sister's, so you don't plan to know about it?"

These words stabbed at Yu Jianjia's heart, making her furious. She covered his handkerchief and coughed twice. Just as she was about to speak—

Yu Qingning continued, "Since Third Sis isn't seeking her divination, I'll do it first."

Early this morning, a bird had landed on the pomegranate tree outside her room. It was chirping and making a din, annoying her. She was about to ask a servant girl to chase it away when her mother said that it was a good omen.

When she was shaking the lot holder earlier, she had recited the Heart Sutra in her heart. She was sure that she drew a good lot.

Yu Jianjia felt an itch in her throat, and she coughed for real this time. She couldn't be bothered to cover with her handkerchief and merely said hoarsely, "In that case, Fourth Sis, you can go first. I'll ask later."

Just as Yu Qingning was about to step forward, she noticed Yang Shuwan staring at her. Yu Qingning frowned and unwillingly said, "There's order in seniority. Third Sister should go first!"

There was hierarchy in seniority, and in status!

It was the principle that always applied no matter in the Residence or outside.

Yu Jianjia nodded. Feeling nervous and uneasy, she handed her lot to the old monk. "Please, Grandmaster."

The old monk looked at the simple picture on it. "This is a bad lot. It is the image of a swallow with mud in its mouth, braving the wind and rain to return to its hometown. Its body is being weighed down by the mud, despite constantly trying its hardest, even using all sorts of tricks, and all kinds of schemes, day and night, without resting."

Upon hearing that it was a bad lot, Yu Jianjia's pale lips could not help but tremble, and she looked delicate and heart-rending.

The old monk added, "If your mind is at peace, everything will go smoothly, but if you're not content, you will be restless at heart and body."

"Thank you, Grandmaster." Yu Jianjia thanked him and couldn't help but glance at Yu Youyao.

She was holding her grandmother's arm and talking to her in a low voice. She said something that made her grandmother smile widely. Neither of them were paying attention to Yu Jianjia at all.

Yu Jianjia couldn't help but cough several times.

"Oh no, Third Sis drew a terrible lot," Yu Qingning exclaimed. She appeared to be shocked, but her gloating expression could not be hidden.

Yang Shuwan almost couldn't stop herself from slapping Yu Qingning's face and beating her to a pulp.

She supported the faltering Yu Jianjia, holding her hand and comforting her softly.

At this moment, Yu Qingning's lot was also decoded.

She had also drawn a bad lot. The meaning of her divination was that retreating was easy, but advancing would be difficult. She could only hold on to the old, but not expect for more.

Yu Qingning's face was filled with disbelief. Her eyes widened as she stared at the old monk, unwilling to accept it. "Grandmaster, are you sure you didn't understand it wrongly? I clearly picked a great lot, so how did it become a bad one? Help me read it again..."

The old monk closed his eyes. "Amitabha!"

Yu Qingning was furious and wanted to continue speaking, but Yang Shuwan saw the opportunity and said sternly, "Qingning, how can you speak to the grandmaster like this? All the manners and rules you've learned in the Residence—have you fed them to the dogs?"