

# All Hail 41

## Chapter 41: Sowing Discord

Yu Jianjia bit her lip and looked a little put on the spot. "It's nothing serious. It's just that when we were at class today, Ms. Ye was a little unhappy that Eldest Sister hadn't come to class for a long time. When Mother found out, she was worried about Eldest Sister's studies, but she couldn't say anything because Grandmother dotes on Eldest Sister. Father, don't be angry."

Yu Zongzheng's expression turned very ugly. Since a few days ago, he had already instructed Yu Youyao to attend her classes at the residence. He did not expect her to completely ignore his words.

Yang Shuwan glanced at his expression and covered the corner of her mouth with her handkerchief. She said worriedly, "Master, during the previous trip to the Precious Peace Temple to offer incense, I happened to hear some rumors about Yao Yao. I'm very worried."

Yu Zongzheng's expression darkened again. "What kind of rumors?"

Yang Shuwan hesitated for a moment before saying, "They were saying that Yao Yao is interfering in the matters of the residence at such a young age, and beating the servants of the family. They also said that she's really arrogant and disrespectful. I shouldn't be telling you about such awful rumors, lest you misunderstand and think that I'm stirring up trouble. However, this concerns the reputation of Yao Yao and the Yu Residence, so I wasn't sure what I should do."

Yu Zongzheng's face turned green.

He had also heard about Yu Youyao beating and selling the servants. However, he'd assumed that it was just gossip by the servants, so he had not paid much attention to it.

But now, hearing Madam Yang mention it, he suddenly understood.

This kind of matter should have been reported to the matriarch of the household and dealt with by Madam Yang. That was the proper way of handling the matter, and Yu Youyao wouldn't have the reputation of being an arrogant and tyrannical brat at such a young age.

Seeing that his expression was amiss, Madam Yang panicked a little and quickly explained, "I didn't mean anything else. Although Yao Yao wasn't raised by me personally, she's Master's eldest daughter. Naturally, I treat her as my own. Seeing that she has neglected her studies and has a bad reputation outside, I'm just concerned for her."

She looked like a loving mother who was worried about her stepdaughter and always thinking for the Yu Residence.

How could Yu Zongzheng not be angry? He slammed his palm on the table, producing a loud sound. The teacup on the table also made a piercing clang. "This unfilial daughter is getting more and more out of hand just because her grandmother dotes on her. The Yu family has been well-educated for generations. If a child of the Yu family doesn't study hard and doesn't know how to write, wouldn't that be inviting others to mock our family?"

Yu Jianjia was startled and quickly tried to calm him. "Father, don't be angry. Eldest Sister has been learning the rules from Nanny Xu recently. Perhaps she doesn't have time to attend the classes, and she didn't miss them on purpose."

Yu Zongzheng was furious. "Just because she's learning from the nanny, she doesn't attend her classes to study? Who in this residence hasn't learned the rules from a nanny? Why should she be any different from the others?" He suddenly clenched his fists on the table, and his tone became even angrier. "As the eldest daughter of the first wife in the residence, she should be studying harder, carrying out the responsibilities as the Eldest Miss, and setting an example for her sisters. However, she's not behaving like a proper young mistress at all."

Yu Jianjia was frightened by his anger. She bit her lower lip and lowered her head. On the other hand, Yang Shuwan advised gently, "Be careful not to get too angry. Yao Yao is still young. Just teach her slowly in the future."

"Girls should be sensible by the age of seven. She's already nine years old and has long passed the age to be young and ignorant." Yu Zongzheng raised his voice and said angrily, "Jia Jia was already much more sensible at six or seven years old than Yao Yao is now!"

Yang Shuwan did not know how to calm him down anymore. For a moment, she was just dazed in silence.

The atmosphere in the room was thick and heavy.

Yu Jianjia poured a cup of tea and handed it to Yu Zongzheng. She said gently, "Father, Mother did not want to talk to you about this precisely because she did not want to upset you."

Yu Zongzheng received the teacup and gulped the tea down. The cup of hot tea calmed him down a little, but his expression was still dark. Clearly, he was still angry.

Yu Jianjia said slowly, "Ms. Ye is a female teacher hired by Father, and she's a renowned, talented woman in the capital. She teaches seriously and is very principled. Eldest Sister often couldn't sit still during classes in the past, but Ms. Ye was always very tolerant. Please persuade Eldest Sister to apologize to Ms. Ye. She will definitely forgive her. Don't hurt your father-daughter relationship because of this small matter. Otherwise, Mother and I will be put in a difficult position."

Her voice was soft and pleasant, and her words made sense. However, the more Yu Zongzheng listened, the angrier he became, and his expression looked even worse.

So, there was definitely no problem with Ms. Ye's character and abilities. Even Jia Jia was very satisfied with her. What was there for Yu Youyao to be dissatisfied with? Such that she actually dared to disrespect her teacher, by disregarding the rules during class. It was simply outrageous!

Yu Zongzheng suddenly stood up from his chair and walked out with a dark expression.

Yang Shuwan quickly stepped forward to stop him. "Master, please calm down. Yao Yao is still a child. Don't scare her. Besides, Old Madam has always doted on Yao Yao. You can't anger her."

These words undoubtedly added fuel to the fire. The veins on Yu Zongzheng's forehead throbbed. He waved the curtain aside and strode out of the inner room.

Yu Jianjia watched as her father left angrily, her face filled with fear. “Mother, why is Father so angry? Did he misunderstand Eldest Sister? Let’s quickly persuade Father to come back, or he’ll scold her again...”

With that, she rushed out.

Knowing that her daughter was a kind person, Yang Shuwan quickly pulled her back. “Jia Jia, don’t worry. Your father is usually strict but kind to your sisters. He’s just worried that your big sister will neglect her studies. He won’t really scold her.”

After much persuasion, Yu Jianjia finally felt more at ease.

After two days of grueling practice, Yu Youyao’s bamboo embroidery had become quite decent.

The green bamboo on the small sachet were tall and straight, while the branches on the bamboo joints were horizontal and slanted, embellished with three different patterns. Although the workmanship looked a little coarse, it was still considered decent.

Dong Mei held it in her hand and looked at it carefully. “Eldest Miss, you’ve embroidered so well. When I first learned embroidery, it took me an entire month to make something decent.”

She had been learning embroidery since she was young, but her hands and eyes were not as agile as the Young Mistress. Nanny Xu had taught Young Mistress how to embroider on both sides, so she and Chun Xiao had also learned along, but they hadn’t even grasped the needlework technique.

Nanny Xu had said that double-sided embroidery was not like the other embroidery techniques, and not everyone could learn it. Only people like Yu Youyao, who had naturally softer bones, could master this double-sided embroidery skill.

Upon hearing what Dong Mei said, Yu Youyao looked reproachful and complained, “Since embroidery’s so difficult, why did you and Chun Xiao try to persuade me before? You allowed Nanny Xu to fool me and you watched me suffer. My fingers have not felt okay ever since I’ve started learning embroidery. It’s simply too painful. I’ve never suffered like this since birth.”

Dong Mei covered her mouth and chuckled. “We felt that you actually really wanted to learn, but just couldn’t bear the hardship. How could we dare to stop you?”

If it weren’t for the fact that she really wanted to learn, no one else would have been able to persuade her to do it.

However, she had never been in such pain since she was young. Her fingers were full of bleeding wounds. She’d cried and said that it hurt, shouting that she didn’t want to learn anymore. Still, she was quickly pacified after some words of comfort by Nanny Xu.

Of course, it didn’t seem like she truly didn’t want to learn.

#### Chapter 42: A Tight Slap

Yu Youyao glared at her. “Who said that I really wanted to learn? I’m just learning to make a sachet for Cousin. Didn’t Nanny Xu say that only something embroidered personally shows sincerity?”

Dong Mei couldn’t stop laughing.

Yu Youyao puffed up her cheeks. “Also, who in the residence doesn’t know that I’m learning embroidery from Nanny Xu? Yet Yu Qingning deliberately embroidered a head scarf herself and

went to give it to Grandmother. Why didn't she do that in the past? Why did she have to do it at this time? It's not even time for any celebration, like the new year, or her birthday. What was she trying to do?"

Dong Mei had laughed until her face felt tired.

Ever since she was young, Fourth Miss had been learning needlework from Concubine He. Therefore, her needlework was also the best among her sisters. Master often praised her, and she often showed off in front of Eldest Miss.

Yu Youyao felt embarrassed and added, "Besides, Nanny Xu insisted on teaching me. How could I reject her good intentions?"

Over the past few days, Nanny Xu had been nagging her every day, saying that girls had to establish themselves, establish a family, and establish their own worlds. Having the right etiquette and knowing the rules were means and skills to interact with outsiders, but mastering these abilities was for the sake of establishing a family. One could only make something of themselves and their lives if they had abilities.

Adult Yao Yao's fate in her dream often reminded her that although her grandmother could protect her in the meantime, she still had to learn some real skills to protect herself.

Therefore, when Nanny Xu had tricked her into learning a bunch of things, she still tried her best to change herself and learn seriously, although she often complained that she was exhausted.

Dong Mei looked enlightened. No wonder Old Madam liked Eldest Miss so much, and even Nanny Xu, who had just arrived, treated her differently. Young Mistress was pure and kind, and she always remembered the good of those around her.

Yu Youyao suddenly wailed, "Now that I've started learning needlework, it's endless. After I embroider a sachet for Cousin, I also have to make one for Grandmother. Since I have to show my filial piety to my elders, I'll also have to sew something for Father and Madam Yang, plus Second Uncle and Second Aunt too, since they also treat me very well. It's too much for me. It's really too difficult. If I had known earlier, I wouldn't have started learning in the first place."

Dong Mei had just finally stopped laughing, but now she wanted to chuckle again, so she quickly changed the topic. "Young Mistress, since the sachet is ready, I'll send it to Young Master now."

Yu Youyao shook her head. "I'll pass it to Cousin myself later. I've been busy learning from Nanny Xu recently, so I haven't seen him in a long time."

Dong Mei nodded and left the room.

At this moment, Chun Xiao rushed in. "Young Mistress, Master is here..."

"Father is here?" Yu Youyao was stunned for a moment, but she quickly brightened up. She had been in the Jade Courtyard for so long, but this was the first time her father had come over.

Her father must have known that she was learning from Nanny Xu, so he had specially come to visit her.

Seeing the happy expression on Young Mistress's face, Chun Xiao hesitated for a moment, feeling a little sorry. "Young Mistress, Master looks... he looks..."

"Where's Father? Is he in the hall? Let's hurry over. Father is busy with work. We can't make him wait too long." Yu Youyao was too excited, so before Chun Xiao could finish speaking, she interrupted her, lifted the curtain, and ran out quickly.

"Young Mistress!" Chun Xiao hurriedly chased after her.

Yu Youyao rushed to the reception pavilion and saw Yu Zongzheng standing in the hall with his hands behind his back. She called out excitedly, "Father—" But before she could say the word "dear," a tight slap landed on her face.

With a crisp, clear sound, Yu Youyao's head was now tilted to the side. She instinctively placed her hand over her slapped cheek and stood there dumbfounded.

The living room was so quiet that even a pin drop could be heard. Chun Xiao, who had rushed over after Yu Youyao, covered her mouth in horror.

After this slap, Yu Zongzheng was still unappeased. He questioned angrily, "Let me ask you, why didn't you go to class today? Previously, your grandmother went easy on you for having just recovered from a serious illness, so I didn't say anything. But after so long, you still haven't taken the initiative to start attending your classes at home again?"

"I..." Yu Youyao stood dazed and rooted to the ground. Her cheek was numb from the slap; she didn't feel anything. In fact, she had yet to even fully realize that she had been slapped.

"Kneel!" Yu Zongzheng shouted angrily.

His roar terrified Yu Youyao. Finally, she felt as if her cheeks had been splashed with spicy chili oil. It was stinging and painful. She held back the tears in her eyes and the bitterness at the tip of her nose as she slowly raised her head.

Looking at the shockingly red mark on her face, Yu Zongzheng suddenly realized how hard he had slapped her in his anger. A tinge of guilt flashed across his heart, but it was quickly replaced by righteous indignation.

"You awful creature, just because your grandmother indulges you, you're arrogant and willful at home. At such a young age, you're already so vicious, beating and selling the servants. You've even skipped your classes, showed disrespect to your teachers and disobeyed their rules. You're simply an absolute disgrace. Kneel down right now."

Yu Youyao's head hung low, and she said nothing.

In the past, she did not understand why her father treated her third and fourth sisters so dearly, but was always so harsh on her. Every time she was scolded by her father, she would always feel very sad.

Today's slap had taught her that her father just didn't like her. There was no reason for it.

In her dream, she had been locked up in a side courtyard by Song Mingzhao and had become Yu Jianjia's medicine-human, suffering all kinds of torture. Her father must have known about it and even approved of it, which was why he hadn't checked on her and instead allowed Song Mingzhao to torture her to death. Otherwise, no matter how bold the Marquis of Zhen's Residence was, they wouldn't have done that.

"It seems that my slap was too light. It didn't wake you up." Seeing that Yu Youyao was standing there like a wooden block with no intention of kneeling down, Yu Zongzheng was even more incensed. He raised his arm and was about to swing it down again...

Just as the slap was about to land on Yu Youyao's face...

Old Madam Yu walked in hurriedly with Nanny Liu's help. When she saw this scene, she was so angry that her heart hurt. "Stop!"

Yu Zongzheng's raised arm immediately froze in midair.

The shocking red handprint on Yu Youyao's face made Old Madam Yu's heart ache terribly. She couldn't care less about scolding Yu Zongzheng, but instead quickly pulled her granddaughter into her arms.

"What a sin. How can a father be so heartless? How can he hit his children so mercilessly? Those who don't know better would think that my Yao Yao has done something heinous. Poor Yao Yao, your face is swollen. Does it hurt?"

Fortunately, Chun Xiao was smart. Seeing that the Master had come to the Jade Courtyard in a rage, she had sent a young maidservant to look for Old Madam Yu. Otherwise, Yao Yao would have suffered a lot more until the news traveled to her.

These words made Yu Zongzheng's face turn as black as charcoal. Just as he was about to speak—

Yu Youyao seemed to have suddenly regained her senses. She threw herself into her grandmother's arms and wailed, "Grandmother, Grandmother, why did Father hit me? Yao Yao has been very obedient recently..."

Ps: Little Cousin was already changing herself due to the influence of her nightmare, but in her heart, it was still just a dream. However, after this chapter, her thinking would transform and mature completely.

## Chapter 43: Shut Up

Seeing her cry like this, Old Madam Yu's heart ached. She wiped her tears away. "Aiyo, Yao Yao, don't cry, or you'll hurt your eyes..."

Yu Youyao was sobbing so hard that she was having the hiccups. Her small body was also trembling. "Grandmother, Father hit me. I'm afraid..."

“Grandmother is here. I won’t get anyone to hit you again. Don’t be afraid...” Old Madam Yu’s heart felt shattered. She pinched her handkerchief to wipe Yao Yao’s tears gently, afraid that it would hurt due to the swelling on her face.

After crying for a long time, Yu Zongzheng’s face darkened with impatience. “Mother, you’ve spoiled her too much. That’s why she’s become so disrespectful and arrogant now...”

Upon hearing this, Yu Youyao’s tears flowed even more aggressively.

Old Madam Yu’s heart ached again. She turned to look at Chun Xiao. “Help Yao Yao back into the house to apply some medicine.”

As the sky gradually darkened, Yang Shuwan glanced at the time and asked the maidservants to set the table. Plates of dishes were placed on it, filling the entire table.

Yang Shuwan then asked Mu Jin to call Yu Shansi over.

Not long after, Mu Jin returned alone. “Fourth Young Master was hit in the palm by the teacher during class, so he was throwing a tantrum. He broke a lot of things, and the Nanny is coaxing him, so he’ll come over later.”

Yang Shuwan was a little annoyed and said angrily, “What’s wrong with this teacher that Master hired? Yesterday, he punished Shansi to stand for the whole class, and today, he slapped him on the palm? Shansi’s still a child. How can he be so strict with him? Does he not want to work in the Yu Residence anymore?”

Mu Jin lowered her head, not daring to say anything else.

Yu Jianjia disagreed a little. “Mother, Fourth Brother is Father’s only legitimate son. How can a teacher specially hired for him not be good? Don’t say such things in front of Father. If he hears it, he will definitely think that Fourth Brother is as lazy and unruly as Eldest Sister. He will be unhappy.”

Fourth Brother had been spoiled rotten since he was young. He spent all his time chasing chickens and dogs. At such a young age, he had already learned how to behave like a good-for-nothing, and was disliked by everyone.

She had tried to persuade her mother on many occasions, but her mother doted on him and refused to listen.

When Yang Shuwan thought of Yu Zongzheng’s anger earlier, the corners of her lips curled up slightly. “I’m not that stupid. I spent money to let the nanny’s son, Mo Cai, go to school with your fourth brother, not because I really wanted him to help supervise your fourth brother’s studies. Every time your father came over, I would ask him to take a look at your brother’s assignments, which were actually all done beforehand by Mo Cai. Your father always has endless praises for your fourth brother.”

Yu Jianjia frowned. “He isn’t young anymore. Don’t pamper him too much. Your little tricks may be discovered by Father at any time. I don’t know how angry he will be...”

Yang Shuwan waved her hand dismissively. “I know, I know. Your fourth brother is still young, he’ll be sensible when he’s older. When the time comes, he’ll know how to work hard on his own.

Besides, I know how to handle your father. If he finds out, we'll just act oblivious and blame the nanny's family. He'll definitely believe it."

Upon hearing this, Yu Jianjia lowered her head, not knowing what to say.

Yang Shuwan changed the topic and frowned. "Why isn't your father back yet?"

Yu Jianjia was also a little worried. "Father was so angry. I wonder if he scolded Eldest Sister. If Grandmother is alerted about this, it'll definitely upset her again. I should have persuaded Father to come back just now..."

At the mention of Old Madam, Yang Shuwan felt a little uneasy. "If Old Madam hears of this, wouldn't that mean..."

Yu Jianjia bit her lip and comforted her. "Mother, even though things have come to this, you're a kind mother to Eldest Sister, and Father knows that very well. Even if Grandmother wants to blame someone, Father will bear all the responsibility and won't let you suffer. It's just that... poor Eldest Sister."

Yang Shuwan squeezed her handkerchief and smiled. "That's true. The angrier Old Madam is, the more upset your father will be with her, and the more displeased he will be with Yu Youyao. That way, he will side with us more."

Yu Jianjia looked at her mother and hung her head, feeling unsure.

The more Yang Shuwan spoke, the more smug she became, even getting a little carried away. "All these years, Old Madam's health has been deteriorating year by year. How many more years can she protect Yu Youyao? Once she's gone, the Yu Residence will be under our control, and Yu Youyao will be at our mercy. When this girl is married off, she'll still need the family's support to gain respect in her husband's family. Sigh, Old Madam just doesn't understand. If she really meant well for Yu Youyao, she shouldn't have gone against us in every way."

The word "married" had touched a certain nerve in Yu Jianjia. She couldn't help thinking about the heir of the Marquis of Zhen whom she had seen at the Precious Peace Temple—Song Mingzhao!

In that instant, her heart felt like a little deer running amok, beating wildly and all over the place.

However, at the thought of Old Madam Song's bare wrist and the suet jade bracelet that Yu Youyao was wearing clearly being a few sizes bigger, she felt a surge of indignation and worry.

On the other hand, Yang Shuwan chuckled smugly while thinking of the countless gifts that Old Madam Yu had prepared and the large sum of dowry that Madam Xie had left for Yu Youyao.

"Master is unhappy with Old Madam as she always protects Yu Youyao. Sooner or later, she will push her own son away completely."

After Chun Xiao left with Yu Youyao, only Old Madam Yu and Yu Zongzheng were left in the hall, with Nanny Liu standing guard outside.

Old Madam Yu wiped her tears with her handkerchief and said in a hoarse voice, "You came from the main courtyard, right?"

Yu Zongzheng felt as if he had just stepped on a dog's tail, and he almost jumped up on the spot.

"Mother, what are you saying? As a father, was I wrong to teach my own daughter a lesson? Madam



Yang was being a caring mother and was just worried that Yao Yao would neglect her studies. If it weren't for the fact that Yao Yao was too much of a disappointment, would I have to hit her?"

Old Madam Yu had lived for such a long time, so how could she not know about the tactics of the backyard?

Her eldest son had some ability of discernment when he was working in the official court, but it was a pity that he became a muddle-headed worm who was at the mercy of a woman when he was at home.

The more Yu Zongzheng spoke, the more self-righteous he sounded. "Mother, tell me, who among Jia Jia, Qingning, and Shuangbai from the second house is like Yao Yao, who doesn't study hard and only neglects her studies? At such a young age, she's so spoiled and domineering. All she knows is how to punish and sell her servants. She doesn't even follow the rules in class or respect her teachers."

Old Madam Yu furrowed her brows when she heard this. "You've been reading books of sages since you were young. There's a saying of the sages that goes, 'it is wrong for a father to only feed but not teach his child.' Even if Yao Yao made a mistake, it's your fault as her father for always being cold and indifferent towards her."

Yu Zongzheng felt disgruntled and was about to retort...

Old Madam Yu suddenly raised her voice. "Search your conscience and tell me honestly, have you ever cared about Yao Yao since she was young? Have you ever taught her sincerely? Yet now, you're beating and scolding her just because you're her father. Don't you feel ashamed at all?"

After being scolded so harshly, Yu Zongzheng was at a loss for words. "I was a little rash today, but I only did it for Yao Yao..."

Chapter 44: Madam Xie's Death

"Shut up," Old Madam Yu stared at him with a dark look. "You resent me for making the decision to arrange your marriage with the Xie Residence in Quanzhou back then. You look down on Xie Roujia for her family's merchant background, and you even dislike her daughter. That's why you don't dote on Yao Yao at all. You find every opportunity to teach her a lesson. Do you think I don't know that?"

She had not planned to say these words.

However, her eldest son was becoming more and more outrageous over the years. Now that he has started to hit Yao Yao, there would be a second time, a third time, or even countless times.

She had to thoroughly rid him of his self-righteousness today. Otherwise, how could Yao Yao have any good days ahead in the future?

Yu Zongzheng's body trembled violently, and he instinctively denied, "Mother, you've misunderstood me. I respect you, and I feel indebted to you for teaching me well. I've never resented you at all..."

“You respect me, but you’ve transferred your resentment towards me to Roujia and Yao Yao.” Old Madam Yu looked at him with disappointment, and her tone became colder. “Let me ask you, after Roujia married into the Yu family, did she ever let you down?”

No! Yu Zongzheng’s mouth twitched, but he couldn’t say anything against his conscience.

Ever since Xie Roujia had joined the family, she had been filial to Old Madam Yu and managed the household well. She was amazing at everything, but even so, he did not like her for being too shrewd and capable.

Old Madam Yu understood what he was thinking. “The Yu family’s business had fallen, and it was difficult for the family to hold a high position. It was fortunate that you and your second brother achieved middle ranks in the examination and became officials, although it was tough for the both of you too. It was precisely because of this that I’d arranged for you to form a marriage with the Xie family of Quanzhou.”

Then why was it that he had married a woman from a merchant family, but his second brother had married a scholarly woman? Yu Zongzheng lowered his head and clenched his fists tightly. He said in a low voice, “Mother, I understand your good intentions.”

“What do you understand?” Old Madam Yu raised her voice and said resentfully, “Although the Xie Residence in Quanzhou is a merchant family, they have a lot of connections. How is Roujia not worthy of you? That dog, Yang Shiguang, isn’t even worthy of carrying shoes for the Xie Residence. Is the daughter of his concubine worthy of you? Is she worth it for you to abandon your morals, dignity, and future, to do such an embarrassing thing?”

At the mention of his past, a surge of anger rushed to his head, causing Yu Zongzheng’s face to turn red, though he didn’t know if he was feeling embarrassed or angry. “I was indeed in the wrong back then, but no matter what, Madam Yang has given birth to my children and raised them all these years. That should be appreciated. You...”

Even after saying so much, he still hadn’t come to his senses. Old Madam Yu was furious. “What about Roujia? If it weren’t for her money and connections, would you and your second brother be where you are today? She even lost her life because of you. Why do you only insist on thinking of her badly? Why don’t you treat Yao Yao well?”

Yu Zongzheng wanted to say that Yang Shuwan was from a scholarly family, had a gentle personality, and was an outstanding talent. Madam Xie reeked of copper, so how could she compare to Yang Shuwan?

Old Madam Yu sneered. “Roujia contributed a great deal to our Yu family. Your second brother still remembers his gratitude towards her and treats Yao Yao very well. Everything that Shuangbai has, Yao Yao gets too. Madam Yao is also very close to Yao Yao. But you, as her father, have you ever treated Yao Yao as your own daughter? Those who don’t know might even think that Yao Yao is actually your brother’s biological daughter.”

Yu Zongzheng did not want to talk about Xie Roujia anymore. He could not help but feel frustrated. "Mother, Madam Xie has been dead for many years. Why are you saying this?"

Old Madam Yu scoffed. "You're unwilling to mention Rou Jia because you feel guilty, right? Why did she give birth prematurely back then? Why did she die early? Do you think you can hide it from an old woman like me? All these years, I've helped you cover up your dirty deed. Have you forgotten what you've done to her?"

A bloody scene suddenly flashed through his mind. Yu Zongzheng's body turned cold as he looked at Old Madam Yu in horror. "Mother..."

Old Madam Yu said sternly, "Back then, when you were fooling around with Yang Shuwan, Roujia had noticed it and you had a big fight with her, accidentally pushing her to the ground and causing her to lose a lot of blood. You had no regard for your relationship as husband and wife and even abandoned her to fend for her own life, choosing to escape without informing anyone in the residence. If it weren't for the fact that Roujia's maidservant had sensed something amiss and quickly called for a doctor, it would have cost two lives. It was also because of this that Rou Jia passed away not long after giving birth to Yao Yao. You were the one who caused her death, yet now you even slap Yao Yao. Aren't you afraid that she would crawl out of the netherworld to take your life?"

It was also because she had to cover up this despicable incident that she had sent everyone who was from Xie Roujia's courtyard to the village, not even keeping Yao Yao by her side.

Everyone thought that Madam Xie's fall was just an accident, and Madam Xie herself had not said anything about it. Yu Zongzheng thought that no one else knew about this besides him and Madam Xie.

Every time he recalled the scene of her lying in a pool of blood with her eyes wide open, a strong sense of fear and panic overwhelmed him.

All these years, he had tried his best to avoid thinking about Xie Roujia's death, even ignoring his eldest daughter, Yu Youyao. He did not expect that his mother had already known the truth.

Yu Zongzheng took a few steps back. He had the urge to turn around and escape. However, he braced himself and denied, "Mother, you can't accuse me wrongly. Everyone in the residence knows that Madam Xie fell on her own. What has that got to do with me? I was handling official business in the study at the time. I only found out after..."

Old Madam Yu didn't argue with him. She only said, "You don't like it that I treat Yao Yao well, but what you don't know is that I treat Yao Yao well not only because she's Roujia's daughter and my eldest granddaughter. I'm also doing this as atonement for your sin."

Actually, what she didn't say was!

The Yu Residence was a family of scholars. If the descendants of the Yu family wanted to take the paths of scholars, then the money, connections, and avenues needed would all depend on the Xie Residence.

The connection between the Yu family and the Xie family in Quanzhou was all tied to Yao Yao. If Yao Yao wasn't treated well in the Yu family, the Xie family in Quanzhou probably wouldn't let the matter rest either.

She had planned and devised strategies meticulously in the past, but all relationships were built through interaction and time together. Now, she sincerely hoped for the best for her granddaughter.

The word "atonement" was ear-splitting, causing Yu Zongzheng's mind to go blank, and it even became difficult for him to breathe.

Seeing that he was still being stubborn, there was no point in saying anything else. Old Madam Yu raised her voice and called out to Nanny Liu.

Nanny Liu, who was in the outer room, heard the call and quickly entered the house. However, her head was lowered even more than usual, and she didn't dare to make a single sound.

Glancing at her eldest son, whose face was a deep red, Old Madam Yu instructed Nanny Liu, "Call Nanny Xu over to let Master know what Yao Yao has been up to recently."

She had used the incident from back then to shock him, but in order to prevent him from taking his anger out on Yao Yao, she had to let him know that Yao Yao wasn't as arrogant and useless as he thought.

Nanny Liu bowed her head, turned around, and quickly left the hall.

Chapter 45: Does Your Face Hurt?

At this moment, Nanny Xu was making medicinal cuisine in the small kitchen. Yao Yao was about to turn ten and she was growing. She had to eat more to nourish her body and improve her health, so that she would look better in the future too.

Dong Mei rushed over. "Nanny, Master just slapped Young Mistress. She must be feeling terrible. As soon as she returned to her room, she chased Chun Xiao and me out of the room without even applying any medicine. Quick, go take a look!"

Nanny Xu's heart skipped a beat. She quickly said, "Watch the fire on the stove. I'll go take a look."

She had already been in the residence for a period of time, and she knew that Master Yu Zongzheng was biased towards the mother and daughter pair from the main courtyard. He did not like his eldest daughter, Yu Youyao, and often reprimanded and criticized her.

But, wasn't slapping her a little too much?

Yao Yao was still a child. How could she endure it?

Nanny Xu was very worried, so she couldn't help but quicken her pace.

She had entered the palace since she was young and had endured a long time before she could leave the palace. She was old and had no intention of getting married again, nor did she have any relatives by her side.

After entering the Yu Residence and spending time with Yu Youyao, she had developed affection for the girl.

There were three large rooms on the second floor. On the left was the embroidery room. Usually, Yu Youyao did all her learning there. On the right was a room with boxes of things that girls needed, such as clothes, accessories, spices, and so on. In the middle was Yu Youyao's room. The three rooms were all connected.

Chun Xiao wasn't around, and neither were there any maidservants on duty outside. Nanny Xu frowned and knocked on the inner room door. "Yao Yao?"

There was no response from inside. Nanny Xu pressed her ear against the door and vaguely heard faint footsteps in the room, along with quite a lot of rustling sounds. She felt rather worried. "Young Mistress, I'm coming in."

Without waiting for Yu Youyao to reply, Nanny Xu pushed open the door and quickly walked into the room. She saw Yu Youyao lying on the bed with the blanket over her. Her small body was curled up into a ball, and the embroidered shoes at the side of her bed were strewn about. It looked like she had been in a hurry to lie down in bed, trying to hide something.

Nanny Xu was a little suspicious. She sat on the edge of the bed. "Yao Yao, are you sad?"

Yu Youyao whimpered softly, her little body trembling under the covers like a helpless cub.

Nanny Xu felt very upset.

What a silly girl!

Usually, when she cried, her wails were loud as thunder, but she never troubled anyone. However, now that she felt truly and deeply sad, she only knew how to hide under her covers and whimper, not even daring to let others hear her.

"Even a mother who's a beggar is more reliable than a father who's an official." A child without a mother could only endure in silence, even when suffering a great grievance.

"I used to work in the palace, so I've seen all kinds of ways to compete for favor. There are many ways to get your father's attention and affection. I guarantee that even the people from the main courtyard won't be able to compete with you." In her eyes, the tactics of Yang Shuwan and her daughter were simply amateurish at best.

Yu Youyao's body stiffened.

In the past, every time her father scolded her, she would always hold the child Buddha jade pendant on her chest in her palm and wonder if her father would have married Yang Shuwan if her mother had not died. If Yu Jianjia didn't exist, would her father have doted on her more?

Nanny Xu tugged at the blanket that Yu Youyao had covered her face with. When Yu Youyao did not resist, Nanny Xu heaved a sigh of relief and pulled harder to remove the blanket.

Yu Youyao bit her lip and cried silently. Her fair face was stained with tears, and her face was shockingly red. There was also some dried blood at the corner of her mouth. If one did not look

closely, they would not be able to tell how hard Yu Zongzheng had slapped her. He had used almost 70% to 80% of the strength of an adult man.

Nanny Xu gasped and pulled Yu Youyao up into her arms without any words.

The sadness that Yu Youyao had been suppressing for a long time suddenly exploded. She crawled into Nanny's arms and cried, "Nanny, I miss my mother. My mother, she, she, Father..."

There seemed to be something stuck in her throat, and she couldn't say it out no matter how much she tried.

Nanny Xu was relieved that she was crying aloud now, and stroked her trembling back repeatedly.

After wailing loudly for a while, Yu Youyao gradually stopped. She was probably still very upset, but she lowered her head and sobbed softly, saying, "It's not worth it."

A person who was neither fit to be a husband nor a father wasn't worth her effort and sincerity. If he didn't like her, so be it. She didn't care anymore.

She still had her grandmother, Nanny Liu, Nanny Xu, and her cousin.

There was also her maternal grandfather's family. Although they were far apart, they always remembered her during the holidays. Each time they sent a gift, it was always a meticulously chosen one.

Nanny Xu looked at her in surprise. She looked at the little girl's bright black eyes, which were now red from crying, but looked crystal clear and calm, as if all of the dust of the world had been washed away.

With just one glance, she understood that the little girl had grown up. However, the price of this growth was too cruel. Nanny Xu gently stroked her cheek and asked, "Does it hurt?"

Yu Youyao nodded, then shook her head. "It doesn't hurt anymore."

Nanny Xu smiled. Her eyes were a little moist as she gently caressed the top of her head. "Silly child, your face is swollen. How can it not hurt?"

Her face hurt, but her heart had hurt even more!

Yu Youyao blinked and said nothing. Her eyes were red and puffy, and she looked pitiful, but at the same time exuded a delicate charm.

Nanny Xu rebuked, "You have to change your habit of covering your face. Otherwise, you'll get sick from holding it in. Sit down obediently. I'll get you a glass of water."

After crying for such a long while, Yu Youyao was indeed a little thirsty, so she nodded.

Nanny Xu poured a cup of water and handed it to Yu Youyao, who held the teacup and sipped slowly. "Nanny, I want to learn from you. I want to learn the abilities needed to develop a family, establish myself, and build a good life."

Nanny Xu had no relatives, so she had entered the palace as a palace maid, becoming a favored person in the Empress Dowager's palace. She had also received grace and was released from the palace before she was forty.

The palace servants who came out of the palace looked impressive, but there weren't many who were truly capable.

Other palace servants had to wait to be picked by a family, while Nanny Xu was able to pick one that she was satisfied with. With her own capability, she had gained the favor of Old Madam Yu, and the respect of everyone in the Yu Residence. In just a few days, she had established herself in the Yu family. No one in the family dared to order her around like a servant, and they all greeted her politely.

Nanny Xu stroked Yu Youyao's head and said gently, "Although women are restricted in many ways, there are still thousands of paths in this world. It depends on which one you want to take. As long as you learn everything I've taught you, you can always carve your own path and work hard to live a life you want. This is what it means to establish a family and a place for yourself in the world."

Yu Youyao nodded thoughtfully.

Nanny Xu felt gratified, and she called out to Chun Xiao.

Chun Xiao had warned the servants in the courtyard to prevent them from gossiping. At this moment, she was waiting outside. When she heard Nanny Xu calling her, she quickly walked into the house with a copper basin.

#### Chapter 46: Trouble from the Inside

Nanny Xu dipped the handkerchief into the water and scooped it up. Then, she sat on the edge of the bed and carefully cleaned Yu Youyao's face.

After crying for so long, her face was so tensed up that it felt a little uncomfortable. It also hurt from the slap. Yu Youyao stiffened her body and let Nanny Xu wipe her face, who then took a boiled egg and rolled it on her face for a while before applying a layer of medicine.

At this very moment, Nanny Liu came in and saw Yu Youyao sitting on the couch, with her face so red and swollen that it was a little scary. Fortunately, she had applied some medicine and seemed to have calmed down. Nanny Liu finally heaved a sigh of relief. "Eldest Miss, you've suffered an injustice."

Yu Youyao nodded her head. "Don't worry, Nanny. I'm fine."

Her endearing behavior made Nanny Liu's heart ache more. She patted her head and turned to Nanny Xu. "Old Madam wants you to go over."

Nanny Xu and Nanny Liu arrived at the hall and bowed evenly, showing neither deference nor arrogance.

Yu Zongzheng knew that Nanny Xu used to be from the palace, and was a favored person when she was under the Empress Dowager, so he had to show her some respect.

Nanny Xu said, "Eldest Miss wakes up at dawn every day to learn etiquette. In the mornings, she learns pharmacology and needlework. In the afternoons, she learns about preparing meals, tea, incense, medicine, and so on."

“How is that possible?!” Yu Zongzheng did not believe it. This eldest daughter of his was very stupid. In the past, she had been reprimanded by many of the female teachers hired for her. Everyone in the residence knew this.

Nanny Xu understood what he was thinking and felt rather displeased, but she smiled and said, “Eldest Miss is talented and smart, but a little lazy. Once she’s serious, she learns everything quickly.”

Yu Youyao was talented and smart? Yu Zongzheng eyed Nanny Xu suspiciously, feeling that she and his mother were working together to fool him.

Nanny Xu took out a piece of brocade, which had the green bamboo patterns that Yu Youyao had embroidered. “It has only been a few days since she has started learning needlework from me, but she’s already able to use the double-sided embroidery technique.”

Yu Zongzheng took it over and looked at it. There was a bamboo stick, a branch, and three bamboo leaves embroidered on it. Although the pattern was simple and the workmanship wasn’t refined, it was indeed double-sided embroidery.

He had heard that this technique had already become a lost skill among the commoners, as it was too difficult for most people to learn.

Yet Yu Youyao had learned it in just a few days?

Was that possible?

Immediately, Old Madam Yu grabbed the brocade from Yu Zongzheng’s hands and studied it carefully. Finally, a smile appeared on her face. “Yao Yao has really managed to learn embroidery. Initially, I thought that she wouldn’t be able to take the hardship, and would give up after a little obstacle. But it seems that I’ve underestimated her. Look, she embroidered this so well...”

Nanny Liu leaned over to take a look. “The jasmine tea and sandalwood in your house were all made by Eldest Miss. She might not be good in her academics, but she’s better than everyone else in other aspects. Soon, you’ll be able to wear the head scarf embroidered by her.”

These words were clearly meant for Yu Zongzheng to hear. Meanwhile, he was still in a daze. He suspected that someone else had embroidered this to fool him.

However, he couldn’t bring himself to say it aloud.

Aunt Xu had come from the palace, and had very strict rules. Since his mother had invited her into the residence, it meant that she was really here to teach and guide Yao Yao.

Hence, her words being filled with affection and fondness for Yao Yao meant that although Yao Yao was slower academically, she was indeed extraordinary in these other skills.

Girls didn’t need to take the imperial examination, so it was better to learn practical skills and better etiquette to help establish themselves.

It seemed that his eldest daughter was indeed not as useless as he’d thought.

In that case, he had really wronged her with that slap earlier.



Although Yu Zongzheng didn't like her, nor did he know much about the internal affairs of the household, and was a little lacking in personal virtue, he had been an official for many years and had a righteous temperament. When he realized that he had hit Yu Youyao wrongly, he couldn't help but feel a little guilty.

"By the way, you said that Yao Yao was arrogant and overbearing for selling the servants?" Old Madam Yu asked coldly as she passed the brocade back to Nanny Xu.

Now that he had been taught a lesson, Yu Zongzheng's anger had completely subsided and he behaved humbly, not daring to start anything again. "Because of this matter, there were some bad rumors circulating outside, so I..."

Nanny Liu served a cup of tea.

After talking for a while, Old Madam Yu felt a little thirsty. She took the tea from Nanny Liu and lowered her head to take a sip. "What rumors? Why haven't I heard about it? Did you find out about it yourself?"

Yu Zongzheng felt ashamed. "At all?"

As the Imperial Censor of the Court of Investigations, it was his job to make accurate judgments, and it was also his duty. If something was just hearsay without any evidence, it wouldn't be acceptable, even if it was just a family matter.

Old Madam Yu continued, asking, "What did Madam Yang tell you?"

Yu Zongzheng was at a loss for words. Although he knew that Madam Yang did not mean for this to happen, he couldn't help but blame her a little in his heart.

Old Madam Yu put down her teacup heavily. "I'm afraid you don't know the truth. Just a day after Linghuai moved into the residence, Yao Yao heard two old maids gossiping in the side courtyard, and they had called Linghuai a mere crippled guest. Yao Yao was furious and ordered someone to tie them up. Was she wrong?"

When Yu Zongzheng heard this, his eyes widened and he instantly flew into a rage. "Such wicked servants—they were punished too lightly!"

Recently, because he had taken in his nephew from Youzhou, many people in the court praised him for his benevolence, which also made him more concerned for Zhou Linghuai.

Old Madam Yu continued, "I was the first to rush over, and I dealt with those two old maids. Madam Yang only arrived late after everything was handled. That was already her oversight. If there were any mistakes in this matter, it was only because Madam Yang wasn't strict in managing the household. Why did you make it sound like Yao Yao was the one being arrogant and overbearing?"

He was speechless for a moment. Madam Yang had only talked about the matter briefly, probably because she didn't want to bother him with the trivial matters at home. And he hadn't asked further either. He had already felt that Yu Youyao was overly spoiled and unreasonable, so he was influenced by his own prejudice and misunderstood the situation.

Old Madam Yu had already made it so clear to him that he had been fooled by Madam Yang, yet he still hadn't come to the realization. It was evident that Madam Yang really had a place in his heart, and he really thought of her as a gem.

Hence, Old Madam Yu did not beat around the bush anymore. "Madam Yang is in charge of the household. How did something that happened behind our closed doors end up being spread outside as rumors? It's obvious that Madam Yang was negligent, yet instead of managing the household better, she chose to chatter about such trivial matters to you. Doesn't she feel ashamed?"

Even though he felt that Madam Yang was a good person, he did also feel that she was in the wrong. However, she was ultimately still his respected wife, so he couldn't help but defend her. "Madam Yang was just worried about Yao Yao because she's a caring mother. It's not that serious..."

Old Madam Yu said sternly, "You're an official of the court. There are court documents piled up in your study, and you even have to discuss court affairs with your aides from time to time. If the household isn't managed strictly, wouldn't it mean that anything you say at home could be leaked and spread outside? Trouble often arises from within the home. Do you still think that this is a small matter?"

Upon hearing this, Yu Zongzheng's expression froze. How many officials in the past dynasties had been left with destroyed families due to internal troubles within their residences?

His mother was right.

Madam Yang was indeed the one in the wrong regarding this issue.

He looked ashamed. "Mother, Yao Yao wasn't at fault. I was the one who had misunderstood and wrongfully hit her."

Chapter 47: Mustn't Suffer for Nothing

As long as anything had to do with his future prospects, he was able to think clearly and properly. Old Madam Yu sneered. "I've seen clearly now that you and Yao Yao aren't fated to be father and daughter, so I won't force it upon you anymore. In the future, you no longer have to interfere in Yao Yao's matters. Whether Yao Yao is doing well or not, I'll be the one to be concerned for her, as her grandmother. Since you don't have the heart of a loving father nor the sense of duty to teach her, you might as well stay out of it completely."

Yu Zongzheng was horrified. "Mother!"

Old Madam Yu rubbed her forehead, looking exhausted. "Alright, go back to where you came from. Don't come here, to Jade Courtyard anymore. I can't even take it anymore, so just imagine how Yao Yao must feel."

As she spoke, Old Madam Yu couldn't help but cough a few times, her face turning as pale as a sheet.

Looking at his mother's dejected and weary face, how could Yu Zongzheng not understand that he had really angered his mother badly today? He felt awful and worried. "Mother, I was wrong..."

"Just remember what I said." With that, Old Madam Yu stood up and let Nanny Liu help her into the inner room. She planned to go upstairs to see Yao Yao.

After crying for a long time, Yu Youyao was tired and hungry. Nanny Xu brought over some light appetizing food and a bowl of medicinal cuisine. Just as she was eating, her grandmother came in.

Yu Youyao stopped eating and threw herself into her grandmother's arms, calling out softly, "Grandmother."

Seeing that she still had the appetite to eat, Old Madam Yu felt both relieved and heartbroken. "Come, sit down and eat."

"Grandmother, have you eaten?" Earlier, her father had arrived at the Jade Courtyard just in time for dinner. Since her grandmother had rushed over, Yu Youyao wondered if she had eaten.

Old Madam Yu smiled widely. "Yes, yes. I'm old, so I usually eat early dinners. Otherwise, it won't be easy to digest the food at night."

Yu Youyao was relieved and continued to eat. Not long after, she finished the entire bowl. Yu Youyao set her chopsticks down, and Chun Xiao asked the maidservant to clear the table.

The grandmother and granddaughter pair sat together and chatted. Yu Youyao did not mention anything about being slapped. She only said, "Grandmother, can you tell me more about my mother?"

It had been a long time since Yao Yao had asked about her biological mother, so Old Madam Yu was a little taken aback when she suddenly asked this time. However, since Madam Xie was a good person, and they had a good relationship after she had married into the family, Old Madam Yu was happy to tell Yao Yao all about it.

After a while, Nanny Xu brought over a bowl of calming soup. Yu Youyao looked at the bowl of black soup and frowned. She didn't want to drink it. "Grandmother, I'm fine. I don't want the bitter medicine."

Yao Yao was still a child after all, and this was the first time her father had hit her so hard, so she must have been startled badly, and it was better for her to take the medicine. Old Madam Yu shook her head. "That won't do."

With that, she took the bowl of medicine from Nanny Xu and personally fed it to Yu Youyao.

Pinching her little nose, Yu Youyao finished the medicine. It was so bitter that her tongue twisted into a knot. Nanny Xu fed her a piece of jujube cake and the bitterness in her mouth cleared a little.

Seeing how lovely Yao Yao was behaving, Old Madam Yu felt a pang of heartache for her.

This little girl had been beaten and wronged, yet she wasn't whining, complaining, or crying even while her grandmother was accompanying her by her side. This made Old Madam Yu's heart wrench even more for her.

Old Madam Yu stroked her soft hair. "What happened today was your father's fault. I've already reprimanded him, and he won't do anything to you again. Yao Yao, your father doesn't know anything about how the household is managed, nor does he know much about the things that happen in this household. This allowed him to be fooled and misled by Madam Yang and her daughter. Don't blame him."

Yu Youyao nodded. "Grandmother, Father is busy with court affairs all day long, yet he still worries about me neglecting my studies. That's why... I don't blame Father. You shouldn't be angry either, as it'll hurt your health."

Her head drooped slowly, and her voice was a little sad.

Old Madam Yu's eyes welled up. She hurriedly pinched her handkerchief and pressed it against her eyes. "Look at you. Usually, you're like a mischievous monkey. If anyone dares to bully you, you won't stop until you've created mayhem for them. But why is it that whenever you're in the presence of your father, you become so tame and obedient? When your father hits you or reprimands you, why do you just stand there and accept it? Don't you know how to run away, or cry, or throw a fit?"

Yu Youyao hugged her grandmother. "Father always says that I'm naughty and spoiled. If I don't accept his criticism obediently, he'll scold me for being disrespectful and unfilial. Wouldn't that be exactly what Madam Yang wants? I won't fall for it. I'm his daughter after all, so he'll just scold me a little and vent his anger, then everything will be over."

When Old Madam Yu heard this, she was both angry and amused. At the same time, her heart hurt. She poked her daughter's forehead with her finger. "You think so well with your little head, but didn't you still get slapped?"

Yu Youyao lowered her head and said nothing.

Old Madam Yu felt even worse. The young girl clearly knew everything. She knew that her father didn't like her, so she was always worried that she would anger him, and she endured everything silently in front of her father, never daring to resist.

There was a moment of silence in the room. Yu Youyao looked up and hugged her grandmother's arm. "Grandmother, can you promise me something?"

Old Madam Yu eyed her and asked, "What is it?"

Yu Youyao shrank back. "Promise you won't scold me when I tell you?"

Old Madam Yu wanted to give her little head a knock. "If you don't tell me now, I will really start scolding you."

Yu Youyao did not dare to delay any further and quickly said, "Grandmother, today, Father kept saying that I don't abide by the rules. After some serious reflection, I feel that it's because I had learned from a bad example. Mother has been in the family for nine years but doesn't follow any rules seriously. Grandmother, shouldn't you set rules for Mother and let her be a role model in the family, so that I can learn from her?"

When Old Madam Yu heard this, she was instantly astounded. She scolded jokingly, "You sly little thing, to think that you could come up with such an idea. It seems like I really shouldn't have taunted you just now."

Seeing that her grandmother wasn't really angry, Yu Youyao became bolder. "I'm not the kind of person who will allow myself to be bullied for nothing."

Once again, Old Madam Yu was both angry and amused. "It's easy for you to say, but I'll have to become the bad guy for you."

"Grandmother, I know you dote on me." Yu Youyao threw herself into her grandmother's arms and wheedled.

Old Madam Yu smiled. She also felt that Yao Yao's idea was not bad.

All these years, Madam Yang had indeed become more and more outrageous.

Old Madam Yu felt that she should also learn from her old friend at the Marquis of Zhen's Residence, and put on the airs of a mother-in-law. She should establish some strict rules so that her daughter-in-law could learn who's boss. Otherwise, she would continue to cause trouble and strife at home.

Usually, in prominent families, when the evil mothers-in-law wanted to torment their daughters-in-law, they would set strict rules and standards. The men in the family would feel that it was only right for their wives to be filial to their mothers-in-law, so they often wouldn't raise any concerns about it.

After being reprimanded, Yu Zongzheng left the Jade Courtyard dejectedly and was about to head to the main courtyard.

However, when he thought about the way his mother had given him such a scolding, he couldn't help but feel vexed. After all, although it wasn't entirely Madam Yang's fault in this issue, she was the one who had started it.

Moreover, after careful thought, she was indeed in the wrong in this matter.

#### Chapter 48: Loss Without Gain

Yu Zongzheng stopped in his tracks while Zhao Da followed behind him. "Master, are you returning to the main courtyard..."

"No, I'd better go to the study instead. I still have some official matters to attend to." Yu Zongzheng turned around, planning to return to the front courtyard, when for some reason, he thought of Concubine He and her wonderful service in bed. With a stomach full of frustration and anger, he instantly decided where he wanted to go. "I'll go to the Clear Autumn Courtyard."

Zhao Da did not dare to say anything about it.

Yu Zongzheng was burning with rage inside. After taking a few steps, he stopped and frowned. "Go to the main courtyard and send a message. Tell Madam Yang that Yao Yao will be taken care of by my mother from now on. Tell her to keep her eyes off the Jade Courtyard and to focus her energy on managing the household instead. She should not allow the matters of the residence to be leaked and spread outside, lest it bring trouble and cause harm for the family."

On the other hand, Yang Shuwan was still waiting for Yu Zongzheng. Seeing that it was already dark and the food on the table had turned cold, she was about to send Mu Jin to the Xiaoxiang

Forest to check on it when she heard Mu Jin's voice. "Madam, Master has ordered Zhao Da to deliver a message."

Upon hearing this, Yang Shuwan's right eyelid twitched and she quickly went out to the outer room. When Zhao Da saw her, he bowed respectfully.

Yang Shuwan said politely, "Why isn't Master here yet? Could it be that he still has some unfinished work, so he has sent you here to inform us?"

This kind of thing had happened often too.

Zhao Da lowered his head. "Master won't be coming to the main courtyard today. He said that there's no need to wait for him, and he wants Madam, Third Miss, and Fourth Young Master to go ahead and have dinner without him."

He wasn't coming anymore?! Madam Yang tightened her grip on the handkerchief in her hand. She had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Yu Jianjia's brows furrowed slightly.

There was something very wrong with Zhao Da's reply. Her mother had asked him if her father had official matters to attend to at the last minute, but he had avoided the crux of the question, and only said that her father wouldn't be coming over after all.

No matter how many concubines there were in the family, it was proper practice for the master of the family to stay in the main courtyard on certain special dates, and every even date, for at least five days a month. That was the honor of being the first wife in a distinguished family.

Her father had always respected the rules and treated her mother well. All these years, other than being busy with work, he had never broken these rules.

But if her father was attending to official work matters, why didn't Zhao Da mention it?

Suddenly, a possible reason floated to mind. Yu Jianjia was so shocked that she was almost breathless. She covered her mouth with her handkerchief and coughed a few times.

Since Master did not come to the main courtyard, he must be busy with work in the study, so Yang Shuwan was in shock for only a moment but quickly regained her composure and reacted. "It's already so late, and Master hasn't had dinner yet. I'll prepare a few of his favorite dishes to be sent to the study later."

"Madam, you don't have to trouble yourself." Zhao Da stopped her and immediately changed the topic. "Master has passed a message for me to relay to you."

Yang Shuwan eagerly asked, "What is it?"

Zhao Da continued, "Master said that from now on, Eldest Miss will be taken care of by Old Madam. He wants you to be less concerned about the Jade Courtyard and instead, place more energy on managing the household, ensuring that matters of the residence do not get spread to outsiders, so as to avoid causing trouble for the family."

Hearing this, Yang Shuwan felt her head spin and she almost fell to the ground. Her mouth trembled as she said, “M-Master really said that?”

Yu Jianjia bit her lip as her thin, frail body also swayed.

Her father had probably failed to teach Yu Youyao a lesson and gotten scolded by her grandmother instead. He must be feeling upset with the two of them, and he did not come to the main courtyard because he was angry with them. By asking Zhao Da to pass on the message, he was clearly trying to express his displeasure and rebuke them.

How could this have happened?

She and her mother were sure that they knew what he was like very well, which was why they had dared to say those words in front of him. They were also confident that even if exposed by her grandmother, her father would not listen to her and would only side with them.

Zhao Da did not dare to say too much. “I’ll take my leave first.”

After returning into the house, Yang Shuwan dismissed the servants. Seeing that most of the dishes on the table were Yu Zongzheng’s favorites, she was so angry that she flipped the table over.

“Clang,” “Bang,” “Clang,” Dishes, plates, bowls, cups, and other items were shattered on the ground, and the leftovers were spilled all over in a mess.

Yu Jianjia jumped in shock. She quickly rushed forward and pulled Yang Shuwan back to prevent her from smashing more items. “Mother, calm down. Father hasn’t come here to the main courtyard, but he obviously isn’t the study either...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Yang Shuwan had already understood what she meant. Immediately, her face contorted in anger, and she ordered Mu Jin to find out more.

After a while, Mu Jin returned. “Master has gone to the Clear Autumn Courtyard. Concubine He used some of her own money to ask the kitchen to prepare a few more light dishes.”

When Yang Shuwan heard this, she felt dizzy and a little panicked. She gritted her teeth and said, “That hussy, what a good move. All these years, this is the first time your father has humiliated me like that. On the day he was supposed to spend with me, he went to his concubine’s room instead. It’s evident that this time, your father is really furious at us.”

Yu Jianjia felt uneasy and said, “Mother, once certain rules are broken, there will be a second, third, or even countless times...”

Hearing this, Yang Shuwan gradually calmed down and quickly started thinking of a solution.

Upon seeing Yu Zongzheng arrive at the Clear Autumn Courtyard, Concubine He was overjoyed.

All these years, this was the first time that Master had come to her room during Madam Yang’s day. This was enough to show that her status in Master’s heart was already close to that of his official wife, Yang Shuwan.

As long as she worked hard and gave birth to a son for him as soon as possible, Madam Yang would not dare to do anything to her in the future.

Concubine He had dressed up meticulously and was wearing a sheer shirt. She leaned into Yu Zongzheng's arms and called out sweetly, "Master, you've been busy recently and haven't visited me in a long time. I've missed you so much that I had even lost my appetite to eat anything. Touch my waist and see if I've lost weight again."

Master favored delicate and slender women. Usually, when they were in bed, his large hands would wrap around her small waist.

As she spoke, Concubine He held Yu Zongzheng's hand and placed it on her waist. During this period of time, she had cut down on her meals, and had indeed lost a lot of weight on her waist.

"You little temptress, without even asking me to eat something when I entered the house, but making me please you on an empty stomach." As soon as Yu Zongzheng touched Concubine He's slender waist, his body immediately heated up. He grabbed her waist tightly and pushed her onto the table to lie down. Then, he began to undress.

There was a burning fire in his heart, and his body could keep it in no longer. He couldn't wait to release it.

Concubine He was smart and knew these things well. Every time Master came over, she would dismiss all the servants in the courtyard in advance. The two of them were also very bold when it came to fooling around. Concubine He even secretly made a few exciting items that livened things up, and any man would love it.

The two of them were on the table having fun when Nanny Li's voice suddenly came from outside. "Master, Third Miss has suddenly fainted. Quick, go over and take a look."

Nanny Li was Madam Yang's most capable subordinate, so no one in the Clear Autumn Courtyard had dared to stop her.

#### Chapter 49: Ruse of Self-Injury

Yu Zongzheng's pent-up energy instantly dissipated. He stood by the table with a dark expression and as he looked at the seductive Concubine He in front of him, he grew increasingly infuriated.

"Master..." Concubine He's body trembled slightly as she sat on the edge of the table. She was propped up on her arms, and her body was leaning back, looking relatively calm.

However, in her heart, she hated Madam Yang for being so cunning. She was also angry at the maidservants in the courtyard for being incompetent, not being able to stop Nanny Li and allowing her to barge into the courtyard.

Nanny Li probably had no idea of what was going on in the room, and hadn't expected that as soon as the Eldest Master entered Concubine He's room, he had not even bothered to eat and had already taken off his clothes and started doing it with Concubine He instead.

Seeing that the Master did not answer, Nanny Li raised her voice and urged, "Master, due to her previous fall, Third Miss has damaged her core vitality. In February, she has already been sick a few



times. This time, it seems to be a little serious. Madam is also panicking, so she has asked me to come over and call Master over to help make a decision.”

Master usually fell for this most often.

As long as he was in the residence, no matter how busy he was, the moment he heard that Third Miss was not feeling well, he would visit to take a look.

The devilish fire was still burning in him, and his body struggled to hold it in. For a moment, his eyes flashed green, and it was clear that he still had unsatisfied desires.

However, he also truly doted on Yu Jianjia. When he heard that Yu Jianjia was seriously ill, he couldn't possibly still care about his own pleasure. He hurriedly pulled up his pants and adjusted his clothes. Then, he said to Concubine He, “Jianjia is sick. I'll go visit her and come back to you tomorrow.”

Concubine He nodded reluctantly. “Third Miss's health is more important. Master, quickly go take a look. I'll be waiting for you to come visit me when you're free.”

Hearing her soft and gentle voice, Yu Zongzheng felt a little bad. While still having Concubine He's soft and svelte waist in his mind, he lifted the curtain and left.

When he arrived at the courtyard, he saw that Yu Jianjia was unconscious. The blood in her face had drained completely, and she looked as pale as a sheet of paper.

Worried about her daughter, Yang Shuwan was clutching onto her handkerchief and sitting on the edge of the bed, crying her heart out. She exuded the aura of a young lady, and she looked delicate and pitiful.

Most of Yu Zongzheng's unhappiness dissipated. “How's Jia Jia?”

He thought to herself that Madam Yang was gentle and demure, and had been in charge of the household for many years, without making any major mistakes. Perhaps the servants took advantage of her kindness, hence leaking information about matters within the residence to outsiders. She couldn't exactly be blamed for that.

Moreover, Madam Yang treated him sincerely. Back then, she had given herself to him and suffered a lot.

Yang Shuwan cried and said in a sad voice, “Hui Xiang hasn't returned yet. Mu Jin is brewing medicine. It's the medicine that Jia Jia usually takes, but I'm not even sure if it really helps.”

Yu Zongzheng's face dropped, and he sat on the chair without saying anything for a long time.

There was a long period of silence in the room.

Yang Shuwan seemed to be unable to stand his cold treatment. Her face was pale and her eyes were filled with tears. “Master, are you resenting me for being meddlesome? I hadn't wanted to vex you with such trivial matters, but you insisted that we tell you. Jia Jia only said a little more because her heart ached for me, her mother. I didn't expect it to end up making the both of us, mother and daughter, the enemies of everyone?”

With that, the tears that had been welling up in her eyes for a long time streamed down.

Seeing how pitifully she was crying, Yu Zongzheng's remaining anger dissipated a little more, but his expression still did not look too good.

Yang Shuwan's voice sounded miserable, and she sobbed as she said, "Yao Yao is Master's eldest daughter. If word gets out that I don't care about her, then I, as her stepmother, will become known as a bad person. I'm merely a housewife, so at most, I'll just become the subject of some gossip. But if I implicate Master and the Yu family's reputation, I'll become a sinner in this residence. Everyone says that it's tricky to be a stepmother, but I thought that Master would understand my difficulties..."

Every word and sentence showed consideration for the Yu family, for him, and none for herself at all. This made Yu Zongzheng recall the sincere words that Madam Yang had said after he had mistakenly dragged her into bed thinking that she was a maidservant back then. Instantly, the little bit of anger that was left in his heart disappeared completely.

At the time, Madam Yang had almost died because of him.

At this moment, the unconscious Yu Jianjia slowly woke up. When she saw her father, her face was pale as she said weakly, "Father, don't be angry with Mother. I shouldn't have talked about Eldest Sister in front of you and caused a misunderstanding. Father, if you want to be angry, blame me instead, I... When I recover, I'll apologize to Eldest Sister and won't let her suffer unfairly. I..." As she spoke, she coughed violently a few times, but before she could finish her words, she fainted again.

Yang Shuwan rushed to the bed and called out to Yu Jianjia frantically.

When Yu Zongzheng saw that his daughter had fainted again, he no longer cared about being angry. He quickly called Zhao Da over, took his own official badge, and sent someone to invite Imperial Physician Hu.

The house of the main courtyard was in chaos.

Meanwhile, Old Madam Yu was sitting on the edge of Yu Youyao's bed and talking to her when she heard Nanny Liu report that Third Miss had fainted and seemed to be seriously ill. Madam Yang instructed Nanny Li to invite Eldest Master over from Concubine He's house, then he in turn sent someone to get Imperial Physician Hu.

The main courtyard's tricks could only trick a fool like Yu Zongzheng. Did they think that everyone was stupid?

Old Madam Yu scoffed coldly. "Let them do as they please!"

Seeing her grandmother's weary expression, Yu Youyao's heart ached. "Grandmother, I'm fine now. Don't worry about me anymore. You should hurry back to the North Courtyard to rest."

Old Madam Yu did not insist on staying either. She asked Nanny Liu to help her up, but just as she was about to leave, the chaos in the main courtyard had spread to the Jade Courtyard.

Yu Zongzheng and Yang Shuwan had brought Imperial Physician Hu, who was carrying a medicine case, to the Jade Courtyard.

Old Madam Yu frowned.

Seeing that the Old Madam did not look too happy, Yu Zongzheng also felt a little awkward. He hurriedly said, "Mother, Jia Jia is seriously ill. I sent someone to get Imperial Physician Hu to come and treat her, but this child, Jia Jia, was so pure and filial, that after seeing Imperial Physician Hu, the first thing she asked was if he had checked Grandmother's pulse yet and refused to let Imperial Physician Hu treat her first. When I heard that Mother was still here at Jade Courtyard, I brought Imperial Physician Hu over first."

Old Madam Yu's expression was frighteningly somber. "Is taking my pulse more important than helping my granddaughter, who's seriously ill and waiting to be treated?"

She shouldn't have said this in front of outsiders, but Madam Yang and her daughter were too much—now they were even using her for their schemes. She was already so old, with one foot in the grave, so she refused to help them manipulate her eldest son, and she might as well make that loud and clear.

Yu Zongzheng was stunned. Clearly, he had not expected this.

Yang Shuwan held the handkerchief in her hand. Perhaps because she had cried previously, her face was pale and she looked even worse than a terminally ill patient. "Jia Jia has always been filial. She said that Imperial Physician Hu's medical skills are brilliant, and it's rare for him to make a visit to our residence today. It's only right that Grandmother consults him first."

Chapter 50: Backfired

Old Madam Yu laughed incredulously. "If Yu Jianjia's illness worsens because of the time I took for my consultation, wouldn't I, her grandmother, become a bad person? Yu Zongzheng, have you become resentful towards me because I'd scolded you earlier, so you're trying to frame me as revenge?"

When Yu Zongzheng realized this, he was so embarrassed that he wanted to crawl into a hole in the ground. "Mother, I didn't mean that. I wasn't thinking carefully."

He glanced at Madam Yang and frowned.

Earlier, he hadn't agreed with this either. He had only asked Imperial Physician Hu to visit his mother first because Madam Yang was worried about Old Madam Yu's health and had strongly persuaded him. He had thought that Madam Yang was being a filial daughter-in-law, but who would have realized that she was actually being thoughtless?

At the thought of this, the many bad thoughts within his heart suddenly gained momentum again.

Everything had gone wrong today. Because of Yang Shuwan, he had been taught a lesson by his mother. Even some of his shameful pasts had been dug clean.

At this moment, he had once again angered his mother completely because of Madam Yang.

After reprimanding Yu Zongzheng, Old Madam Yu looked at Yang Shuwan. "Yu Jianjia is just a young child who doesn't know any better. The Eldest Master is busy with the imperial court and doesn't have time for the internal affairs of the family. You're the mistress of the Yu Residence, yet you behave like a child too, not knowing how to weigh the severity of the matter. Look at what your family has become under your management."

Yang Shuwan's expression stiffened at the scolding. She tightened her grip on her handkerchief. "Mother, don't be angry. Jia Jia suddenly became seriously ill, and I was momentarily flustered. I thought that Imperial Physician Hu would be able to treat her with peace of mind if he helped you first."

She had wanted to use this chance to put on a show of "filial piety" together with Jia Jia, so that they could allay Yu Zongzheng's suspicion and dissatisfaction towards her. However, she did not expect Old Madam Yu to ruin it.

This time, her plan had really backfired.

Old Madam Yu sneered. "Jia Jia came out of your stomach. It's a piece of flesh that came from your body. As a loving mother, you know better than anyone else whether she's doing well or not. You don't seem too worried, and you're not caring about your own child. Instead, you came over to be a filial daughter-in-law in front of me. It's obvious that Yu Jianjia is fine."

These words had completely exposed the thoughts of Madam Yang and her daughter. Despite how stupid Yu Zongzheng was, he finally realized what was going on.

In the past, whenever Jia Jia had a headache or fever, Yang Shuwan would always be the most nervous. Today, however, she was uncharacteristically focused on his mother's health.

Yu Zongzheng's face turned ashen, but he could not flare up in front of Imperial Physician Hu and Old Madam.

Yang Shuwan gritted her teeth in hatred.

She had originally thought that this old woman would appreciate Jia Jia's filial piety, but she didn't expect her to be so hard-hearted. To think that not only had she not fallen for the plan, she also did not care about Jia Jia, her own granddaughter, even saying all this while repeatedly using her full name, "Yu Jianjia," in front of Imperial Physician Hu.

Old Madam Yu ignored them and quickly asked Imperial Physician Hu to sit down. She also ordered someone to make some good tea. The two of them chatted for a while before he started to take her pulse.

Imperial Physician Hu was usually in and out of the Inner Palace, as well as the various residences of the capital. What had he not seen before? Even some shady dealings hadn't escaped his notice, so the Yu family's petty schemes within their residence actually meant nothing much to him.

It was also because of this that Old Madam Yu had embarrassed Madam Yang by exposing her fake filial piety scheme on the spot.

After a while, Imperial Physician Hu finished taking her pulse and said, "Old Madam is generally healthy. It's just that she's getting on in years, so she needs to take care of herself and not fret too much. She needs to rest and relax for good blood flow."

After that, he also gave some dietary advice, and was finally done with checking her health.

Before Imperial Physician Hu could get up, Yang Shuwan rushed forward to lead him back to the main courtyard to treat Yu Jianjia, in order to show that she was anxious.

Unfortunately, she hadn't been in a hurry earlier, so being anxious now just seemed like a deliberate act.

Yu Zongzheng had been working in the court for many years, but he had never suspected Madam Yang in the past, and had naturally felt that she was wonderful in every way. However, he was now filled with rage and dissatisfaction with Madam Yang, so of course he could see through her little act.

He glared coldly at Yang Shuwan and was about to leave when his gaze inadvertently landed on Yu Youyao, who was sitting beside Old Madam Yu.

Suddenly, he realized that his eldest daughter had lost a lot of weight. Her once round appearance had become slim, and her chubby face had become palm-sized.

It was as if she had become a different person.

If she hadn't indeed been learning from Nanny Xu and suffering some hardship, how could she have lost so much weight in just a month?

Yu Zongzheng stopped in his tracks and saw that the left side of his eldest daughter's face was swollen. Although she had applied a layer of medicine, it was still a shocking sight.

The remaining doubts that he'd still had about Yu Youyao completely vanished.

Perhaps noticing his gaze, her small body shrank behind her grandmother timidly. Her face was pale and frightened, and she looked nothing like an arrogant brat.

If he hadn't listened to Madam Yang and misunderstood Yao Yao, he wouldn't have been so angry at her.

It was rare for Yu Zongzheng to feel guilty towards his daughter. "Yao Yao, is your face feeling better now? It was my fault today, I shouldn't have hit you."

Yu Youyao looked at her father in shock. Her eyes were red, and she almost cried on the spot. "No, no, it's my fault. I haven't been going to class for a long time. My younger sisters are all learning from the female teachers at home. As the eldest sister, I shouldn't get to be exempted. I should go to class like everyone else."

She was like a frightened rabbit. Her weak voice was filled with uneasiness and panic. There were tears in her eyes, but she held them back, not daring to cry in front of him. Yu Zongzheng recalled that Yu Youyao didn't shed a single tear when he had slapped her. She only cried when his mother came over.

Yu Zongzheng felt a little upset and began to reflect on himself. Had he been too harsh on his eldest daughter?

Seeing that he wasn't saying anything, Yu Youyao felt a little anxious. She quickly raised her head and glanced at him carefully. At this moment, a crystal tear fell onto the back of her hand. As if afraid that someone would see it, she hurriedly lowered her head and wiped it with her sleeve.

This scene happened to be witnessed by Yu Zongzheng. "Yao Yao, don't cry. I know that you've been learning from Nanny Xu recently, and it takes a lot of your time every day. You don't have time to attend the classes at home. Nanny Xu has strict rules, so you should just focus on learning

from her. You'll be able to learn a lot from her too, so you don't have to go for class at home anymore."

Nanny Xu used to work in the palace, so what was there that she wouldn't know?

It was also a good thing that Yao Yao could follow her and learn well.

Yao Yao was indeed not suited for academic studies, so there was nothing he could do about that.

In the past, he had misunderstood her. Every time Jia Jia was praised by her teacher, Madam Yang would inevitably worry about his eldest daughter's studies in front of him. This had caused him to be mistaken, thinking that Yao Yao was lazy or incompetent, so he naturally had a bad impression and thought that she was hopeless.