Farmhouse 541

Chapter 541: Raising Snakes, Insects, Rats, and Ants

"Three hours and more?" Yue Rujing was astonished and quickly looked towards the back hall before asking, "Haven't they come out yet?"

"No, they haven't." Lin Qianqing bit her lip, her face full of worry.

"Could something be wrong with my cousin? Should we go in and check?"

"No, we cannot go to see." Yue Rujing decisively refused.

He glanced outside, noting that it was getting late, and it was not proper for Lin Qianqing, a young lady, to remain there.

He said, "I'll take you back first. Don't worry about your cousin for now, she is weak and getting treatment is crucial. Just explain it to your family like this. It's all right for her to stay here for the night!"

Lin Qianqing felt that this might not be appropriate, but Yue Rujing was right, saving a life was more urgent than any concerns of propriety.

She nodded and replied, "All right then, I'll go back first."

It was necessary for one of them to return first to offer an explanation.

Outside Sanqing Temple, the butler had been waiting. Upon seeing Lin Qianqing come out, he hurriedly approached.

Seeing that one had emerged and another had not, the butler anxiously asked, "What about Miss Cousin?"

Yue Rujing hurried to provide an explanation on her behalf: "Your Miss Cousin suffered an attack of her illness. It’s quite strange, as if she was struck by witchery. My senior brother is performing a ritual to remove evil spirits."

Struck by witchery?

Lin Qianqing looked at Yue Rujing, who was calmly spouting nonsense without changing his expression.

Her grandmother might believe that her cousin had an old ailment flare-up, but witchery? That was something her grandmother never believed in, so she’d be surprised if that excuse was accepted.

She didn’t know if her grandmother would believe it or not, but it seemed the butler did, as he bowed and expressed his gratitude: "Thank you, Princely Heir Yue. We will leave our Miss Cousin in your care."

What a joke, as if Gu Youyou, who was brought there by the butler himself, had anything he didn’t know about?

Yue Rujing breathed a sigh of relief, thankful it was the butler who had come since he was a wise man who would likely be able to smooth things over.

...

It was not until daybreak that Gu Youyou slowly regained consciousness.

She moved slightly, and Jin Zijin sensed it.

"How are you feeling now?" he asked.

Gu Youyou rubbed her forehead and said, "Feels like I’ve regressed to before my ’liberation,’ completely weak."

This physical state was as if she had indeed regressed to the time before her ’liberation’; she hadn’t expected the poison to be so potent.

Fortunately, they had already drained the venom from the fangs of the snake, otherwise her life would have been in serious jeopardy.

Gu Youyou took out a small medicine bottle from her clothing pocket and consumed two medicine pills she found inside.

She had made these herself, after much effort.

With this remedy, she would recover quickly and not have to lie in bed all day like before her ’liberation.’

Seeing her gradually getting better, Jin Zijin finally let out a breath of relief.

"Ajing told me before that you’ve been keeping some snakes, insects, mice, and ants, but I didn’t pay much mind to it. I never imagined the snake you raised would be an Ice Snake."

Gu Youyou looked at Jin Zijin, realizing something was off with his seemingly casual demeanor; he was clearly angered by her dangerous actions, so she thought to smooth things over.

"Not at all," Gu Youyou said with a nonchalant smile, "I’ve kept a few snakes and quite a few mice, but I have not kept insects or ants. The weather is cold now, and these creatures are hard to raise. I’m planning to raise some centipedes and the like when it warms up a bit more."

"Are you raising these creatures to formulate antidotes?"

The weather had long since been not that cold, and the room, with its floor heating, was very warm.

Gu Youyou sat up and said to Jin Zijin seriously, "Yes, to work on antidotes. I’ve just begun to see some progress, and I won’t give up no matter what you say."

Since the conversation had reached this point, she treated it seriously.

Chapter 542:: Are You Giving Ajing Drugs?

"But this Ice Snake that you're keeping..." Jin Zijin was somewhat agitated, but seeing her pale face, his voice suddenly stopped. In the end, he sighed and said, "Fine, keep it if you must, but tell me how did Ajing get bitten by the snake?"

As far as he knew, although the snake's venom was potent, it generally wouldn't bite humans actively and had a rather mild temperament. And it was unlikely that Ajing would go out of his way to provoke this poisonous snake, so how did he get bitten?

"About that..." Gu Youyou felt very guilty for Yue Rujing being bitten by the snake.

But the bite had happened, and the person had been saved; she owed an explanation.

"I asked him to help me extract snake venom, and then, accidentally... That's what happened." Gu Youyou, feeling guilty, spoke softer and softer, until her voice was almost inaudible. Jin Zijin was speechless upon hearing this explanation.

Everyone in the north knew about the great toxicity of the Ice Snake.

Since the snake was mild-mannered and didn't bite people willingly, there weren't many deaths caused by this snake's venom.

But who would be foolish enough to deliberately provoke such a highly venomous Ice Snake? And even to extract its venom?

"Is it absolutely necessary to extract it?" Jin Zijin asked, holding back his anger.

"Yes," Gu Youyou nodded and said, "The medicine I take contains this snake's venom. To develop an antidote, I must have it."

"Alright!" Jin Zijin took a deep breath and said, "Ajing is afraid of snakes; don’t ask him to help you in the future, ask me."

"Hm?" Gu Youyou looked up.

"From now on, I’ll take care of the Ice Snake. I’ll raise it for you, I’ll extract the venom for you."

"No," Gu Youyou shook her head and said, "It’s too dangerous, I’ll do it myself."

"It’s not dangerous when you do it?"

"That’s not it. I know first aid, so if I get poisoned, I can administer the antidote myself. But if you get bitten by accident and I’m not around... The poison from this kind of snake acts quickly, there won’t be enough time to save you!"

"You have a way?" Jin Zijin thought of Yue Rujing, who was alive and well after being bitten, "Then why did you only save Ajing and almost died from the poison yourself?"

Gu Youyou said, "Unfortunately, I had only made one dose of the antidote, and I used it on Yue Rujing."

"You... You used the one dose on him and neglected your own safety?" Jin Zijin was very agitated, even gripping her shoulders with considerable force.

She really knew how to sacrifice herself for others, even if that person was Ajing.

Of course, if he were faced with the same choice, he would also find it agonizing.

Gu Youyou’s shoulder ached from his grip as she helplessly explained, "It was an accident, don’t get worked up. It wasn’t supposed to be this dangerous, just cleaning the wound and applying my medicine would have been fine. But the unlucky Yue Rujing, he was bitten right over his heart, and he didn’t cooperate while I was cleaning it, kept fussing with his clothes and pushing me, causing the venom to spread too fast. The bite was too close to his heart, and... hey, hey, what are you doing?"

Gu Youyou never expected her professional explanation not only failed to calm Jin Zijin down but actually angered him more.

The infuriated Jin Zijin pushed her back onto the bed, biting her annoying red lips until he gradually calmed down.

He was well aware that she was a doctor and that what she did was to treat and save people.

But why didn’t other doctors act like her, performing such surgery? Sucking poison for Ajing?

It was unacceptable for her to do this for anyone, Ajing included.

Which part of her behavior bore even the slightest trace of a woman’s modesty?

How could he have fallen for a woman who spent her days engaged in such troublesome acts, which were enough to break one’s heart.

Chapter 543: Together We Change

Release her, and seeing her gasping for air with a face full of panic, her voice chokes as she tried to speak, "It was to save a life, I’m a doctor, I would do the same for anyone. You really don’t have to..."

Jin Zijin glared at her fiercely, his voice low with anger, "In the future, you are not to treat male patients."

"That won’t do, I can’t discriminate based on gender." Gu Youyou shrank her neck but decisively refused.

"So you want to be like those women in the inner court? Like your aunt?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you want me to confine you, to find a bunch of people to watch over you, preventing you from going out?"

I'll be damned...

Gu Youyou bristled, "Don't you dare say that's going to be my life from now on, I'm not joking."

"So you have to behave."

"Behave my ass!" Gu Youyou erupted with rage, swearing coarsely. "Anyone who dares to imprison me will get poisoned by me, you included."

Gu Youyou was not an ordinary woman, Jin Zijin knew that. He said these things only to scare her, not to actually treat her as such.

Seeing Gu Youyou's reaction, it was clear she wasn't easily intimidated. He watched her face, not able to help a rueful smile.

"You're really ruthless." Alright, he conceded. "You can practice medicine, but you can't... you should understand what I mean. You need to avoid suspicion. There are more people than just you in the clinic, call on someone else when necessary."

Gu Youyou was silent for a moment, actually knowing Jin Zijin had a point.

She herself found it hard to change some habits formed in the modern world, let alone the thoughts of an ancient man like Jin Zijin.

For him to give in a bit, that was already very progressive.

"Fine, I agree."

If the two of them were to live together in the future, one couldn’t always insist the other change in the way one wished; one couldn’t always expect the other to accommodate. Rather, they should learn mutual tolerance.

Only by both contributing and making progress together, could their relationship grow stronger.

This was advice from an elder to a close friend caught in marital disputes, a piece of wisdom she always remembered.

...

Today, Gu Youyou was not in her best condition, but remembering the task Jin Zijin had entrusted to her, she persisted and went with Lin Qianqing to attend the hairpin ceremony of the Left Principal Minister’s young Miss.

In the carriage, Lin Qianqing was both excited and worried, "Cousin, are you really ok? If it really won’t work, let’s not go. I won’t go either."

"How could that be, didn’t you say Miss Jie is a good friend of yours?"

"Yes!" Lin Qianqing started to get tangled up again, her hands wringing her handkerchief, "I told you about it yesterday too. Because of the matter with her family’s concubine second sister-in-law, many legitimate daughters of families don’t want to go. Her hairpin ceremony is such an important event, yet it might not go well. Qinyun and I had always had a good relationship, and if even I don’t go, she..."

"That’s just right." Gu Youyou patted her hand, "If you consider someone a friend, you should naturally help them out in their time of need."

"But you..."

"I’m fine, I’ve taken my medicine."

Seeing Gu Youyou so insistent, Lin Qianqing could only nod, figuring they would just go early and return early.

The hairpin ceremony for the girls of the household was a big event, but the guests were all Madams and young misses, aside from male elders of the own clan, men from other families did not attend the girls' hairpin ceremonies.

Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing alighted from the carriage at the entrance of Officer Jie's residence, handed over the invitations, and were led into the courtyard by maids.

Upon entering the back garden, they were met by a richly dressed young matron coming forward to greet them.

Chapter 544: To the Jie Family

The woman wasn't very old, perhaps in her twenties, and she was fairly good-looking except that her makeup was too heavily applied, which made her rather unpleasant to look at.

"Miss Lin has arrived, I see. Ayun has been waiting for you, please come in quickly."

Lin Qianqing just gave her a faint glance and didn't speak to her. She proudly walked past her, pulling Gu Youyou along by the hand.

The maid leading them seemed at a loss in this awkward situation, timidly performing a curtsey to the lady before hurrying to catch up with Lin Qianqing and Gu Youyou.

The smile on that woman's face visibly stiffened, but as Gu Youyou turned her head, she saw the woman's eyes blaze with such indignation it was almost frightening.

More ladies and Madams were arriving outside, and in a flash, she had resumed her earlier smiling demeanor and went out to greet them.

"Madam Chen, Miss Chen, please come in."

Surprise showed on the faces of the Madam and Miss, "Concubine Du, it’s you again? Where is your young Madam?"

Concubine Du’s expression showed embarrassment upon hearing the word ’again,’ but she still tried her best to maintain the dignified poise of a Madam while explaining to them.

Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing had already passed through the long corridor and arrived at Miss Jie’s courtyard. Naturally, they could no longer hear what was said.

So, this was the favored concubine, no wonder Lin Qianqing had such little regard for her.

From just one exchange, it was clear that this woman was no simpleton, but she didn’t seem smart either—rather foolish. It’s a mystery how she managed to bewitch Jie Family’s second young master so completely. Apparently, this was the domestic problem in the Jie Residence that Jin Zijin had mentioned.

This was also the most vexing issue for the Jie Family. If they could solve the problem of his second son’s domestic affairs and have him owe a favor, the Jie Family’s upstanding figure, firm in his principles, might just tilt his internal balance a bit more in favor of Jin Zijin, this unexpectedly emerging Prince.

There are many ways to curry favor with someone. The most effective means are usually gold, silver, and power, but some people are not moved by these things.

Jin Zijin had said that the Jie Family had held a solid foundation in court for many years and were deeply trusted by successive Emperors. What secured their foundation was exactly their unswerving integrity; the Jie Family never involved themselves in disputes over the throne, remaining loyal only to the Emperor.

So to win them over, it was not necessary to have them openly declare support for anyone, but rather to make them owe a personal favor.

When necessary, their word could be worth more than a thousand troops.

Xie Qinyun’s courtyard was large, and several Madams and Misses had already arrived by the time they got there.

Her mother passed away early, and in order to curry favor with the head of the Jie Family, various Madams had gone to great lengths to give face. For her birthday and other occasions, they would have their families send presents and frequently invite her to their homes to socialize with their daughters.

Because she didn’t have a mother to oversee her, she could often leave the residence and was a bit wilder than other young ladies, which was why she and Lin Qianqing had become good friends.

"Qianqing has arrived, ah, and Doctor Gu!" Qinyun was more surprised to see Gu Youyou than Lin Qianqing.

"Miss Jie, I came even without your invitation, fearing it might be too abrupt."

"Not at all," Xie Qinyun hurriedly replied. "I couldn’t be happier, I just thought you were too busy and wouldn’t come. Your arrival is an unexpected delight."

Gu Youyou’s visit to the Jie Residence was so sudden. She hadn’t brought a gift, but luckily Lin Qianqing was clever enough to have prepared one on her behalf.

Lin Qianqing joyfully accepted it and had the maids take it away.

Shortly after that, Madam Chen and Miss Chen, who had arrived just moments after them, also joined. Qinyun whispered, "You two go and have fun for a while, I’ll be back in a moment."

Chapter 545: Grudges of the Jie Family

She had to go and receive Madam Chen and Miss Chen.

"It’s no trouble, no trouble, who are we if not family? I’ll take my cousin to stroll through your garden; you go ahead and attend to your duties."

"Alright, just don’t blame me for neglecting you."

Lin Qianqing tugged at Gu Youyou’s sleeve, whispering, "See, having a mother is indeed better."

"Hmm, how so?"

"Alas! This is Qinyun’s courtyard, and she doesn’t allow that Du Concubine to enter, so it’s all up to her to receive the guests. The Du Concubine still shamelessly acts like she’s the lady of the house outside, but anyone who knows the pickles of her family situation wouldn’t pay her any attention."

Xie Qinyun was the only young lady of the Jie Family; her courtyard was exquisite and beautiful, especially that apricot forest.

In this season, most apricot flowers were just budding, with only a few early bloomers unfurling their petals amidst the morning dew, each looking so delicate and enticing.

Gu Youyou, mindful of the business at hand, had no interest in appreciating the garden or the blossoms, and merely asked, "What does Lord Jie think then? I’ve heard that Lord Jie’s family is strict about being monogamous, the Jie Family’s second son taking a concubine is a first."

"Yes, well, how to put it, Lord Xie is a stubborn man, and so is Qinyun’s second brother. They were at an impasse over this issue."

"How so?"

Gu Youyou, with intent, slinked towards a less populated area of the courtyard. Seeing no one around, Lin Qianqing had no qualms about spilling all the juicy gossip she had been holding inside.

From Lin Qianqing’s account, Gu Youyou learned that the second young master of the Jie Family’s wife and concubine were sisters, differentiated by birth status. The legitimate wife was none other than the Du Concubine’s own elder sister, who was the second young master’s official wife.

She herself was born to a concubine.

As for the Du Family, they had long been close friends with the Jie Family. Strangely enough, both families had been short on male heirs, and with the Du Family line ending with two daughters and no sons born to any of the women of the Du Residence, it was thus extinguished upon the successive deaths of Madam Du and Lord Du.

Because the two families had been close friends for generations, the eldest Miss Du was betrothed early on to the Jie Family's second son. With Lord Xie's character, he wouldn't have treated his friend's two daughters unfairly after their passing, so he took the two Miss Dus into his own residence early on, intending for them to marry his son once his own daughter turned of age.

This should have been a happy arrangement, but the trouble was that the second young master of the Jie Family had his eyes not on the eldest Miss Du, but on the second. Lord Xie, a high-ranking official of the court, couldn't possibly allow his legitimate son to marry a woman born to a concubine as his official wife, especially since the initial agreement with the Du Family was for the eldest, not the second daughter.

The eldest daughter had already lived in the Jie Family's home for two years as the second son's fiancée. If they broke off the engagement with the eldest, she would have no prospects for another marriage.

Someone like her, without the support of a natal family, would struggle to find a good match, even as a legitimate daughter. The second daughter was different; she was born of a concubine, and with no one left in her natal family, sticking with her sister and relying on her sister's marital family to find a good match was understandable. Lord Jie, weighing all interests, couldn't comply with his second son's request.

The conflict hence unfolded. The second son quarreled with Lord Jie for a long time and, seeing that Lord Jie wouldn't relent, he finally decided to marry both sisters.

Of course, according to Lin Qianqing, the pragmatic solution was proposed by the Du Concubine because Lord Jie, wishing to resolve the nuisance she posed, had already sought a marriage for her elsewhere.

The Jie Family did not take concubines, and to break this familial rule, the second son and the Du Concubine took their actions before reporting them, creating a fait accompli.

Boiling with anger, Lord Jie enforced the family rules and thrashed the second son half to death.

In the end, he couldn't subdue him, and seeing the pitiable state of the second Miss Du, orphaned and alone, he relented.

Chapter 546: Meeting the Young Lady

The situation did not end just because the second son married the two young ladies from the Du Family; the marital life of the three was quite discordant. The second son favored his concubine over his wife, consistently causing trouble for Miss Du, and he had never once entered the legitimate wife's chambers.

The fact that his beloved became a concubine instead of a wife, he blamed all on Miss Du. The more outsiders looked down upon the second Miss Du, the more sarcastically they treated her, the more resentment he harbored against Miss Du.

That's the way it was; after hearing this, Gu Youyou felt that the situation was indeed difficult to comment on.

If Mr. Jie's second young master and the concubine from the Du Family were truly in love, then the creator of this tragedy was indeed Elder Mr. Jie, and no blame could be placed on the others.

It's just pitiable for Miss Du.

A sheltered young lady without parents, she had no say in her own marriage matters.

Therefore, dealing with the domestic strife in the Jie Family's backyard was indeed troublesome.

"I want to meet the second young matriarch."

Gu Youyou had met the concubine from the Du Family, and to tell the truth, this woman really wasn't all that. She just didn't know what Miss Du was like as a person.

"Cousin, why do you suddenly want to meet her?" Asked Lin Qianqing, who was very curious as she was speaking enthusiastically.

"Have you met the second young matriarch?" Gu Youyou countered.

Lin Qianqing thought for a moment and then nodded gently, "Yes, I have seen her from a distance once, but I haven't spoken to her."

...What's the difference between that and not having met her at all?

"Then don't you want to meet her? She too is a protagonist of this love triangle," Gu Youyou said, slowly tempting Lin Qianqing.

There was no choice; Gu Youyou had to meet the Jie Family's second young matriarch, and if she didn't bring Lin Qianqing along, she would have had to think of a way to send her away. Weighing her options, Gu Youyou felt it was much easier to bring her along than to send her away.

And if they went together, should someone see them, it would be somewhat better to have her as cover.

After all, there was a difference between the cousin and her, the legitimate Miss of the Lin Residence.

Uh...forgive her for this way of ensnaring her cousin.

"A love triangle?" Lin Qianqing became somewhat excited by Gu Youyou's words.

She was curious; her life had few pleasures to begin with. Ever since Gu Youyou arrived, she felt as though she had lived in vain for all her teenage years.

How did her cousin know so many strange things? The stories she told were ones Lin Qianqing had never heard before.

Her little ideas, each one felt novel to her.

"Would that be inappropriate? I've heard that the second sister-in-law is currently grounded."

Xie Qinyun's elder brother she called brother, and his wife she called sister-in-law, so Lin Qianqing just followed suit and called her sister-in-law.

Gu Youyou said, "She is grounded, but we are not. If she can't leave her yard, then we can just go to find her, right?"

"That's true," Lin Qianqing considered and then said.

Seeing that she had agreed, Gu Youyou then smiled, "So you know how to meet the second young matriarch, right?"

Lin Qianqing pondered with her head down for a moment and said, "I have some idea; I've been there once with Qinyun years ago, but I'm not certain if I can find it. The Jie Residence is very large."

"Knowing a bit is good enough, lead the way. And if we get caught by someone, we can just say we got lost."

What a great idea!

...

Lin Qianqing's memory was rather astonishing; it's rare for one to navigate so accurately through such an ancient garden after only one visit.

In front of them was an isolated courtyard, with a vermilion door that looked somewhat dilapidated.

The Madam of the Jie Residence had died early, as had the wife of the elder Mr. Jie; moreover, he had not remarried, making the wife of the second young master the only mistress of the estate. Yet

unexpectedly, her courtyard was so neglected, a far cry from the courtyard of Miss Qinyun, not just a little but by a wide margin.

Chapter 547: Enter Through the Main Gate or Climb the Wall

This is the sorrow of ancient women, no matter what status you hold, even if you are the lawful wife, if you lose the favor of a man, this is the kind of fate you end up with.

Lin Qianqing sighed, "I heard that Mr. Jie defended her several times, and Qinyun sometimes couldn't bear it and also spoke up for her, but in the end, they are outsiders to the marriage and it's not good to get involved too much."

Gu Youyou could understand, if Mr. Jie truly despised his lawful wife that much, then the more people who helped her, the more it would provoke his displeasure.

It's a pity that the cost of a divorce for women in this era was far too great.

Gu Youyou raised her hand to knock on the door, but Lin Qianqing stopped her.

"Why don't we just climb over the wall and go in, to avoid the trouble?" Seeing Lin Qianqing like this, one could guess she probably did this often; it must not have been easy for her as a young lady.

Gu Youyou thought it over carefully, knocking would require an explanation, and whether they could enter was another matter altogether.

But climbing over the wall wasn't necessarily any better; Gu Youyou had never done such a thing in her life.

She estimated the height of the courtyard wall, about two to three meters; not to mention whether she could climb over it, if she did, how would she explain herself?

Ah, it came about so suddenly, she hadn't thought through her excuses, what a trouble.

"Let’s not climb over the wall; let’s just go in directly." Either way, they would have to explain themselves, so it ultimately had nothing to do with whether they climbed the wall or not.

This was just Lin Qianqing’s habitual way of thinking.

Gu Youyou raised her hand to knock on the door, and before she could even knock, the door opened by itself from the inside.

The person who came out was a maiden, and from her dress, it was clear that she was a maid from the household.

Seeing two finely dressed young ladies outside the door, she was obviously extremely surprised.

But then she seemed to think of something and became relieved.

"You two ladies must be here to attend the Hairpin Ceremony of the third young miss, but you’ve gone the wrong way," she said, pointing in the direction they had come from, "The third young miss’s courtyard is over there."

"We..." Lin Qianqing was about to say something, but Gu Youyou pulled her back.

Giving her a reassuring look, Gu Youyou stepped forward and said to the maid, "Indeed, we are here to participate in the Hairpin Ceremony of your estate’s third young miss, but as it is still early, the third young miss allowed us to look around the garden of the estate, not wanting to disturb the... master of this place."

Gu Youyou surveyed the secluded courtyard and asked, "May I know who resides in this courtyard? Today seems so festive, yet I do not see them heading to the front hall?"

Thinking that these two misses from outside the estate were unaware of the situation, the other party didn’t overthink and said, "This is where our second lady resides. The second lady has been unwell recently and is not convenient for her to leave her chamber."

"The second lady unwell?" Gu Youyou raised her eyebrows, blooming with joy, there was a way in!

"Since I'm here, it must be fate. I happen to be a doctor; may I enter to examine the second lady?"

"You're a doctor?" At Gu Youyou's words, the maid looked at her with a face full of surprise.

Hearing all this, Lin Qianqing also started to smile.

She thought to herself: Cousin is indeed amazing; now we have a legitimate reason to go in.

"Yes, my cousin is a doctor, Doctor Gu of Jisheng Hall. She was even awarded the Divine Doctor's Signboard by the current Emperor, the best female doctor in Beijing. Her rule is to not see patients unless it is a matter of life and death; ordinary people can't request my cousin for medical attention. Your second lady is quite fortunate."

The maid looked at Gu Youyou, then at Lin Qianqing, blinked her eyes, and as if she had recognized Lin Qianqing, exclaimed, "Are you Miss Lin?"

"Yes, that's me. How do you recognize me?" Lin Qianqing's eyes brightened.

Chapter 548: The Desolate Courtyard

The maid said, "Miss Lin once came to visit the Jie Residence to play with our third young mistress, I've seen her."

"Oh," Lin Qianqing nodded and said, "So, about the illness of your second young mistress..."

It was true that the second young mistress was ill, and the maid at this moment had come out to seek Concubine's permission to invite a doctor to treat the young mistress.

To ask the concubine for a doctor when a legitimate master had fallen ill, the thought made the maid bitterly sad.

She had grown up beside the eldest miss from a young age, serving not just as a maid but as close as sisters, yet she hadn’t expected the legitimate younger sister of the eldest miss to be so heartless.

Thinking of all the suffering they as maid and mistress had endured, she couldn’t help but sob quietly.

Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing exchanged a glance, a hint of shock on their faces.

"What’s wrong? Why the tears all of a sudden?" Lin Qianqing asked.

The maid suddenly knelt down, her voice breaking with sobs, "Miss Lin, Miss Gu, please save our young mistress, she’s been ill for many days already, and has been confined by the second young master..."

Gu Youyou had sharp ears and heard footsteps approaching, she quickly told the maid, "If your young mistress has been ill for many days already, then you should hurry inside."

Gu Youyou wanted to listen to her grievances, knowing that the more she heard, the better she could help by making an accurate judgment, but this wasn’t the right moment, in case the person approaching spoiled the situation.

"Right, right, as Doctor Gu said, please come into the garden, you two young ladies." The maid was quite clever, well aware that these matters should not be discussed at the main gate.

After inviting Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing into the courtyard, the maid quickly closed the gate.

From the other end of the path, two matrons emerged. Seeing the shabby red lacquered door tightly shut, they went up and locked it.

Gu Youyou frowned at the noise from outside the door, and the maid standing by the door had her face turned pale as paper.

Soon after, a matron’s voice came through the door, "Our Madam has already instructed, today is a splendid day for the third young mistress’s coming-of-age ceremony, and in fear that your socially

unacceptable appearance would cause trouble, we had to make due with this. Once today passes peacefully, I'll come myself to unlock this for you."

The other matron spat, "Why bother unlocking it? The second young master said to confine her for a month, and it's only been a few days, right? Since she can't leave this courtyard anyway, isn't it more worry-free to keep it locked?"

"That's true! But our Madam is kind-hearted and mentioned coming to unlock it tomorrow."

The two matrons mocked the legitimate madam of the courtyard with their words and laughter as they walked away.

The maid standing by the door was pale, biting her lip tightly while her body trembled slightly.

Shaken by what she heard, Lin Qianqing gritted her teeth and said, "This is too much bullying, call her a Madam? What Madam is that woman? She's nothing but a concubine, and to bully the legitimate wife like this, even I, a mere bystander, cannot stand it."

Gu Youyou kept silent for a moment before saying, "Let's go in and see the second young mistress first."

Because the Jie Residence was understaffed, even an abandoned wife's courtyard was not small.

Yet the courtyard was neglected, desolate and quiet.

The garden was overgrown with weeds, the ground littered with rotten branches and leaves.

It was spring, and the thick layer of decayed foliage was from the previous year, a clear sign of the desolation of the courtyard.

Indeed, there was a big problem in the Jie Family's inner house.

"Doesn’t Master Jie do anything about it?"

Lin Qianqing explained quietly, "Haven’t I told you, cousin? He has intervened a few times, but as a eunuch, he cannot always meddle in his son’s domestic affairs. The Jie Family has traditionally adhered to monogamy, never having had such troubles. Master Jie rules with an iron fist in the court, but he’s at his wits’ end with the household matters and can’t manage them."

Chapter 549: Meeting Miss Du

Gu Youyou was speechless for a moment, then followed the maid into the inner chamber.

Behind the thick, plain curtains, a young woman’s violent coughing could be heard.

The maid hurriedly lifted her skirt and ran up to kneel before the woman’s bed, crying out, "Miss, we are saved, I have found a doctor for you."

"Doctor?" The woman lifted her head and saw Gu Youyou had already walked in. "Who are they? Is this the doctor you spoke of? Cuiya, don’t tease me."

"Miss, Cuiya isn’t teasing you. This truly is a doctor, Doctor Gu from Jisheng Hall, the only female doctor in Beijing. Look, this is Miss Lin, Doctor Gu is Miss Lin’s cousin."

The woman brushed aside the messy hair on her forehead and finally saw Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing clearly.

Lin Qianqing, she recognized. Back then, before marrying the second young master, she had been the young miss of the Du Family and had the chance to meet Lin Qianqing once.

It had been so long, though. Lin Qianqing was only a few years old at that time, and she looked somewhat different now, so she did not recognize her right away.

"Miss Lin?"

Lin Qianqing stepped forward and said, "Sister Du, it’s me. Do you still remember me?"

Similarly, Lin Qianqing had seen Sister Du from the Du Family from a distance once, but the difference between that image and what she saw now was too great.

Back then, Sister Du of the Du Family was very charming. She had asked Xie Qinyun about her, "Who's that elder sister? She's really pretty." Xie Qinyun jokingly said that she was her elder sister.

But who didn't know that Miss Xie Qinyun from the Jie Family was the only young miss in the Jie Family, without any elder sisters?

Later, Sister Du became the legitimate wife of the second young master of the Jie Family, and since then, she had never seen her again.

It had been five or six years now, yet unexpectedly, when she saw her again, she was in such a state.

Looking at the present Sister Du...

The woman on the bed had become almost skin and bones, with deep-set eyes and pale skin.

Even so, one could tell that her features were more exquisite than ordinary people's, at least much prettier than the concubine of the Du Family she had seen before. Looking at the calculating expression in the concubine's brows, it was clear she was a deeply shrewd woman.

Gu Youyou couldn't understand how such a beauty could be discarded and lose to that heavily made-up woman, seeing the scheming in the concubine's eyes, she knew she was a woman with a calculating heart.

While Lin Qianqing was randomly dredging up a non-existent past with the second young lady, Gu Youyou had taken out a set of silver needles she carried with her.

"The second young lady has been ill for a long time, she might need to use needles if she wants to recover quickly."

Seeing Lin Qianqing talking endlessly, Gu Youyou had no choice but to interrupt and remind her.

Don’t forget the second young lady is still sick.

"Right, right, let’s tend to the illness first," Lin Qianqing said with an awkward smile. "I hit it off with my sister-in-law at first sight and talked a bit too much. Sister-in-law, I hope you don’t find me too noisy."

Sister Du shook her head gently and said, "Other than Cuiya, it has been a long time since anyone has spoken so much to me. I don’t mind."

Gu Youyou took Sister Du’s pulse, examined her tongue, and inquired about the duration of her illness. With a clear idea in mind, she then stood up.

"Miss Cuiya, please help your mistress undress. I need to use needles on her."

With the doors all locked, she feared she couldn’t go out for medicine now; it was only possible to use needles first. As for the medication, they would have it sent over later by Xie Qinyun after returning.

"Yes! Thank you, Doctor Gu," Cuiya quickly responded.

After arranging the needles, Gu Youyou sat by the bedside and said to Cuiya and Lin Qianqing behind her, "You two go out first, it might take some time."

They left the room and closed the door. Sister Du, weakly, said, "Thank you for your troubles, Doctor Gu."

Chapter 550: Explaining the Reasons

Gu Youyou smiled gently, "I was just strolling through the garden with my cousin when we happened upon this place and saw your maid seeking a doctor. It must be fate."

As she spoke, she gently inserted a long needle into Miss Du’s back.

Miss Du let out a muffled grunt, biting her lip tightly.

Gu Youyou chatted idly with her to distract her attention.

"I heard that you are the legitimate second young madam of this residence, so why are you living in such a place?"

Gu Youyou's direct question might have been offensive, but perhaps because her voice was gentle and pleasant and her expression was focused on administering the acupuncture, it did not provoke any resentment from Miss Du.

"For a woman not favored by her husband, her status does not matter. Whether the main wife or a concubine, it's all the same."

Miss Du's voice was light and weak due to her illness, almost as if she was murmuring to herself. If Gu Youyou's hearing wasn't sharp, she might not have caught her words clearly.

Gu Youyou picked up another needle and said to her, "This acupoint might be a bit painful, can you bear it? If not, put something in your mouth to bite on."

Miss Du nodded gently and said, "Please proceed with the needle, Doctor Gu."

She had almost become numb to the physical pain; what she really wanted was to experience a pain so unbearable that it would prove she was still alive.

Gu Youyou continued to administer needles while softly conversing with her.

"Since you knew he didn't like you, why did you marry him in the first place? This situation makes it difficult for all three of you."

"Yes, it’s hard for all three of us." They hate her. He hates that she’s made the woman he loves a concubine, subject to disdain. She occupies the position of the rightful wife, so he wishes she were dead.

Her sister hates her for stealing her man. The affection they once shared as sisters was cast aside as she pushed her to the most remote part of the Jie Residence, still not content and constantly finding ways to torment her.

A single marriage contract had twisted the lives of three people, something she never wanted either.

Gu Youyou was in the midst of inserting needles, and Miss Du should have been in pain, but suddenly, she furrowed her brow, smiled faintly, and said, "My relation with him was arranged by my parents while they were alive. Before my father died, he didn’t say much, just told me to fulfill my mother’s last wish by finding Mr. Jie. Only then did I realize it was my mother who had arranged this marriage for me."

Perhaps the needle really did hurt, for Miss Du suddenly stopped speaking. Gu Youyou saw her hands, which were placed on either side of her body, suddenly tighten, and after a moment, relax.

Gu Youyou asked casually, "Your mother? I heard that the Jie and Du families are age-old friends; how come it was your mother who arranged it?"

Miss Du gave a bitter smile, "My mother and Madam Jie were both from Jinxiu City. Jinxiu City is known for its embroidery and brocade weaving, and many of the high officials and rich families there are descendants of the major embroidery and weaving houses. My maternal family, the Yu Family, focused on embroidery, while Madam Jie’s maternal family, the Jin Family, focused on weaving. They have been in business with each other for a long time, and are both venerable families."

"Thus, my mother and Madam Jie were best friends even before they married. It was Madam Jie who arranged my parents’ marriage. Later... they arranged my engagement to the second son."

Her demeanor was unchanged as she recounted the past, but when it came to the last sentence, her voice slowly deepened.

She didn’t elaborate on how the engagement had been settled, merely stating that it had been.

Gu Youyou inquired, "Then why didn’t your mother arrange for you to marry the eldest son instead of the second son?"

"The eldest son was too much older than me. The second son and I are of similar age."

From beginning to end, she referred to her husband as the second son, Mr. Jie as Lord Jie, and the second son’s mother as Madam Jie. It seemed she had never truly considered herself the wife of Jie’s second young master.