Farmhouse 551

Chapter 551: You Can Leave the Jie Family

Gu Youyou continued inserting needles, and before long, ten needles had been fully inserted into Miss Du's back.

After a moment's thought, she asked, "Then, have you fallen in love with the second young master?"

A woman as calm as water when speaking of their entire family, Gu Youyou thought, must either love too deeply and hurt too deeply, reaching an unfathomable depth and becoming numb, or she was merely fulfilling her parents' last wish on their deathbeds and didn't actually love the second young master, so she didn't care.

The courtyard was chilly, without a fire basin, and there was only a thin blanket.

Miss Du was now lying on the cold, hard bed, her back exposed.

The needle application took a long time, and she was already shivering and turning purple from the cold.

Gu Youyou hurriedly wrapped her body tightly with the only blanket they had, trying to cover her as much as possible.

By treating her this way, did they not want her to live anymore?

Gu Youyou couldn't help but sigh, thinking men could be so heartless when they chose to be.

Even if there was no love, after all, the two families were long-term acquaintances, and it was said that Miss Du had already lived in the Jie Residence for two years before their marriage.

Two years, even strangers would have developed some affection by then, wouldn't they? They wouldn't simply watch her freeze or fall ill and die.

And her sister, not born of the same mother, but of the same father... well, never mind about her sister, for in the struggles within the household, because of different mothers, they could seem more like enemies than actual enemies.

"Even if there was love in the past, it has long since vanished in his indifferent and resentful eyes."

Miss Du was silent for a long time, thinking for a long time, before finally giving Gu Youyou such an answer.

Gu Youyou was somewhat surprised, thinking she wouldn't answer the question.

The question she had asked was rather abrupt, and she regretted it after asking, but to her surprise, she got an answer.

This meant that Miss Du was once satisfied with this marriage, she fancied Second Young Master Jie and was determined to marry him. It wasn't just because of the marriage contract, but also because he was the man she liked.

What could one say about such a tragic relationship?

Seeing that it was about time, Gu Youyou removed the needles from her body and helped her get dressed again.

The pale back, frozen to a purple hue, was so frail the bones could be clearly seen. The life she led seemed hardly better than Gu Youyou's own in the old days.

Thinking this, Gu Youyou felt an additional measure of sympathy for her.

"If you truly can't continue to live in the Jie Residence, you could choose to divorce. Your parents' dying wish was for you to complete this marriage. You have married for several years and suffered for several years; leaving wouldn't be a betrayal of your parents' wishes."

"Divorce?" Miss Du seemed to have never considered such a thing, and upon hearing Gu Youyou bring it up, her eyes were filled with astonishment.

"Yes, divorce!" murmured Miss Du.

But with the Du Residence already reduced to an empty house, how would she fend for herself after the divorce?

Gu Youyou said, "Didn't you say your mother's family in Jinxiu City had skills and you could live on your own craft? It's better to use your skills to support yourself than to stay in this cold, desolate courtyard. To let them go is also to free yourself, isn't that good?"

Miss Du looked up at Gu Youyou with surprise, taking a long while to come back to reality from this woman's unconventional thinking.

What she said was something these unloved women in the inner quarters wouldn't even dare to think about.

But she made a lot of sense.

If it was destined that she would end her days in depression in this chilly courtyard, it was better to let go sooner.

No matter how difficult it would be to leave the Jie Family, no matter the amount of gossip and slander, it would be better than staying.

The Yu Family's embroidery was famous in Jinxiu City, and her mother had passed the technique to her before she died, instructing her to teach it to her own daughter in the future.

Chapter 552: Uncomfortable Together

But her situation at the Jie Residence wasn't simply a matter of being out of favor; he never touched her, so how could she have a daughter? These years, her life in the Jie Residence had been far from satisfactory, nearly letting herself go to waste.

Gu Youyou, watching Miss Du’s changing expressions, was about to speak again when she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Cousin, are you ready? We need to leave."

"Yes, it’s ready."

They had been wandering the garden for quite some time, and it was best not to alarm others, especially today.

Gu Youyou packed up her things and bid farewell to Miss Du, "I shall take my leave, Miss Du. Take good care of yourself. Life is meant to be lived for oneself, and nothing is more important than one’s own life. If others don’t allow you comfort, being meek all the time will only make you more uncomfortable. It’s better to find a way to make them uncomfortable as well."

Gu Youyou shivered and suddenly felt a bit dizzy.

Was she here to persuade Miss Du to leave that man and woman as soon as possible or to stay and fight them?

Gu Youyou’s original intention was for one of the three to step back, then perhaps the Jie Family’s inner courtyard would be at peace. Of the three, the other two were warmly entangled, clearly indicating Miss Du was the one who should step back. But what did her last comment mean? Did she want the Jie Family to be even more chaotic?

Alas! Perhaps she was indignant after hearing the story, putting herself in their shoes, she thought if such a thing happened to her, Gu Youyou certainly wouldn’t withdraw so easily.

If one is uncomfortable, let no one feel comfortable.

Before leaving, one must put an end to those who made her uncomfortable.

...

The door opened, letting sunlight into the cold, dark room.

"Cousin, are you ready?" Lin Qianqing hurriedly asked.

"Yes, I am," Gu Youyou replied.

She handed Cuiya, Miss Du's maid, a prescription, "When you can leave this courtyard tomorrow, take this prescription to Jisheng Hall to get medicine for your mistress. If you run into trouble, seek out the third-young-miss."

A sister shouldn't meddle in her brother's household affairs, but an occasional interference might not hurt.

Cuiya immediately knelt down with a thud, crying, "Thank you, Doctor Gu, if it hadn't been for meeting you by chance, my mistress...my mistress..."

"It's alright, get up now," Gu Youyou said. "I must trouble Miss Cuiya to help us find something to climb over the wall."

Cuiya was slightly startled as she remembered the gate had been locked.

The maid's face was full of sorrow as she couldn't stop wiping her tears.

"Then please wait here for Cuiya for a moment, Doctor Gu and Miss Lin," she said.

After Cuiya had left, Lin Qianqing said indignantly, "That Concubine Du is too bullying, and Second Brother Jie is really foolish. How could he treat his legitimate wife like this?"

Gu Youyou simply replied, "Second Young Master Jie never regarded Miss Du as his legitimate wife, little sister, you're thinking too much."

She didn't understand and, tilting her head, pondered and said puzzled, "How is that not the case? I even accompanied my mother here when they got married. It was a proper wedding with ceremonial bows to heaven and earth."

Gu Youyou held her forehead, how was she to explain to this fourteen-year-old maid that marriage was not as simple as just bowing to heaven and earth?

Cuiya brought over a ladder, which looked somewhat old. Lin Qianqing kicked it a few times and shook it, saying, "It'll do, quite sturdy."

Seeing her professional actions, she must be well-practiced in using it.

They moved the ladder to a lower part of the wall, Lin Qianqing walked over to it first, then turned back to Gu Youyou and said, "Cousin, I'll go up first and then pull you up."

"Okay, go ahead."

She climbed up so calmly and deftly, she likely had done this sort of thing quite often.

Chapter 553: A Chance Encounter with a Scumbag

Originally, I didn't want to climb the wall, but in the end, because the front gate had been locked by two old maids, I fulfilled Lin Qianqing's dream of climbing walls.

Looking up at the wall about two or three meters high, it was easy to climb up, but not so easy to come down.

That girl, Lin Qianqing, simply jumped down from the base of the wall, but for someone like Gu Youyou who had never climbed a wall before, the height was indeed intimidating, and it made her tremble with fear in her hands and feet.

Do we really have to do it this way? I can’t happily play anymore.

"Hey, hey, cousin, I’m too scared to jump."

"Seeing you like this, no wonder you can’t jump. Stop your legs from shaking, hey."

Dammit, I don’t want to shake, alright?

This is two meters high, two meters high, and I’m a frail young lady who almost kicked the bucket last night.

"How about you catch me?" Gu Youyou suggested, "You know, I’m not heavy."

Lin Qianqing couldn’t help but roll her eyes, greatly disappointed in Gu Youyou, "Cousin, you came from the village, how can you not even match me?"

"I’m a patient." Gu Youyou reminded her.

Oh right, she forgot that her cousin had been sick all this time and had never done any farm work.

"Fine, jump then, I’ll catch you," Lin Qianqing gritted her teeth and said.

She spread her arms wide, ready to face whatever comes.

At worst, she would just be flattened by her cousin, who wasn’t heavy since she was so skinny.

"Then make sure you catch me well, here I come."

Gu Youyou figured, since she already screwed up once, doing it one more time wouldn’t matter.

After preparing herself, she took a deep breath, aimed, and closed her eyes as she jumped.

Only to hear Lin Qianqing scream, and before Gu Youyou could think any further, she had already landed in the sturdy arms of someone else.

Uh, this doesn't feel right?

Gu Youyou quickly opened her eyes only to find herself in the arms of a strange man, not her cousin Lin Qianqing.

F*ck me, this is so awkward, Gu Youyou thought at that moment.

She had thought that only the four of them would know about today's ordeal and that a fifth person wouldn't find out, but as soon as she got over the wall, she was caught red-handed by the fifth person.

"Miss Lin, shouldn't you be in the front hall attending the ceremony? Why are you here? What's going on?"

"Jie... Jie Er-ge?" Lin Qianqing was extremely embarrassed, pulling Gu Youyou back as they retreated, laughing awkwardly, "We were wandering in the garden and got lost, so this is a misunderstanding."

Hearing Lin Qianqing's address, Gu Youyou realized this man was that scumbag, and she couldn't help but lift her head to seriously look at the man.

The man was lean and tall. Dressed in dark green clothes, his handsome face was as refined as jade.

What a classic beauty; no wonder Miss Du had once loved him so deeply.

Indeed, if there was no love, why would one care about a parent's dying wish if both parties were unwilling? They would have escaped early on.

"Lost? A misunderstanding?" Then how do you explain climbing walls?

Jie Er Young Master’s gaze moved back and forth between Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing, finally resting on Gu Youyou.

He recognized Miss Lin, but he didn’t recognize this young lady.

Since he was focusing on her, Gu Youyou had no choice but to brace herself and explain.

This man had a sharp gaze, and if she told an outright lie, he would certainly not believe it.

After a moment’s thought, she curtsied slightly, and said calmly, "Wandering in the garden is true, you can ask the third young lady. We indeed wandered into this yard inadvertently and couldn’t find our way back."

Gu Youyou looked behind at the neglected and dilapidated yard, and added, "Luckily, we saw a maid come out of this yard, so we approached her to ask for directions. But without saying a word, she knelt down before us and said her master had been ill for many days, and without a doctor, feared she might lose her life. She begged us to save her master."

Chapter 554: Wasting a Good Appearance

"Has the master inside been ill for many days?" Jie Erye slightly furrowed his brow as he looked toward the courtyard, his surprise giving way to a hint of disgust.

Lin Qianqing hurriedly said, "Jie Erge, didn’t you know that your sister-in-law has been sick?"

She’s been sick? What does that have to do with him? He turned his head away in disgust, too lazy even to glance at that courtyard.

"Cuiya said that the Du Family’s Concubine refuses to call for a doctor, fearing they might cause trouble outside. She even locked the door," Qianqing commented.

Gu Youyou looked at Lin Qianqing in astonishment. This girl was truly... Did she intend to stand up for the Miss of the Du Family out of spite?

But that all depended on the attitude of the man. If he wished for your death, no amount of pity would win his compassion; it would only increase his loathing.

To Lin Qianqing's words, Jie Erye responded with surprise, then anger flared. "What nonsense are you spouting? How could Aqing refuse to call a doctor for that woman? She is Aqing's elder sister. If it weren't for her insistence on keeping that woman, she would have already been thrown out by me a long time ago."

Having said this, both Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing were taken aback.

It turned out that Jie Erye had no idea that the Miss of the Du Family was sick, and he was completely unaware that the two Misses of the Du Family, because of him, had already become as hostile as water and fire, each intent on the other's demise. How blind must one be to look so confounded?

An idiot wrapped in stupidity, all wasted on a good-looking exterior. This was Gu Youyou's opinion of Jie Erye.

The corners of Gu Youyou's mouth twitched, and with downcast eyes, she said evenly, "Erye, I am a doctor from Jisheng Hall, as well as Miss Lin's elder cousin. I had a brief encounter with the Third Miss before, so I came to disturb your noble residence. Today, by chance, I met Cuiya, who was seeking medical attention outside. As a healer, I could not bear to watch the master of the courtyard fall ill and die in that room, so I took the liberty of diagnosing her sickness.

She has indeed been ill for many days, and her body is extremely debilitated. I have already given her maid the prescription. If you wish for her death, you need not bother. Seeing how destitute they were, I fear they might not afford the medicine I prescribed. If you want her to live, you can simply send someone to Jisheng Hall for the medicine.

As for us climbing over the wall to exit this courtyard, it is indeed because someone locked the door from the outside. Listening to the two old women who locked the door chatting, they did indeed lock it out of fear that the master inside would come out and cause trouble; locking it seemed safer. If you do not believe us, you can go to the main gate and see for yourself. I take my leave."

Gu Youyou made a lengthy statement, her speech calm and steady, articulating the entire situation clearly. They were merely guests of the Third Miss, outsiders to the affair; there was no need to favor any side.

Indeed, they had no reason to wrong anyone or to side with anyone.

Jie Erye finally showed some emotion and looked once more at the departing figures of Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing, then he moved towards the door to check the lock.

On the dilapidated red lacquered wooden door hung a lock chain as thick as a wrist, and a large brass lock as thick as a fist.

A single brass lock had turned the courtyard inside and outside into two separate worlds.

After getting married, she rarely went out anyway, so being confined to the courtyard made no real difference to her.

The last time she had an argument with Aqing, her father only scolded Aqing and did not reprimand her at all. Aqing cried in his presence for a while, which led him to order her confinement for a month.

All this was because she was the legitimate wife, while Aqing was the concubine. She was the legal heir, while Aqing was born from a lesser lineage. Hence, from childhood, Aqing was always the one punished for any wrongdoing.

He disliked seeing her abuse her status to bully Aqing, so he grew even more disgusted with her, always siding with Aqing. Gradually, protecting Aqing had become a habit.

Chapter 555: Tips

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Touching the copper lock, he hesitated for the first time.

"Should I unlock it? Or maybe not, it’s better if she doesn’t come out. Every time she leaves this courtyard, she is bound to cause trouble."

As for her illness, just have someone grab medicine for it.

...

When Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing returned, Xie Qinyun’s hairpinning ceremony had already finished, and the guests were eating at the banquet.

All were women, so there were no concerns, and laughter abounded.

Concubine Du occupied the hostess’s seat, chatting and laughing with several Madams, while Xie Qinyun sat at another table, looking around anxiously.

Apparently, she had been worried because the two of them had spent too long strolling in the garden and had not yet returned.

Lin Qianqing hurried over and said, "Don’t look anymore, we are here."

"Oh my, where have you guys been?" Xie Qinyun patted her chest in relief and said, "You must have gotten lost, right?"

Lin Qianqing exchanged a glance with Gu Youyou, both conveying mutual understanding, and then turned to Xie Qinyun with a smile, "Yes, your family’s garden is so big, we did get lost!"

"Oh, then you must have run into my second brother."

"Hm?" The two looked at Xie Qinyun in surprise, "How do you know?"

Xie Qinyun said, "Since you two hadn’t come out, I had my maid go look for you. After asking the other maids, it seems you wandered into my second brother’s rear residence! She swallowed hard and whispered, "In our house, my second brother’s rear residence is almost off-limits now. The outside maids usually don’t go there, and I rarely visit. For one, father forbade it, and for two, my second brother would be unhappy. And three, I don’t want to see his women, one is too arrogant, the other too pathetic; it’s upsetting. So I let my second brother go look for you!"

Hearing Xie Qinyun’s words, Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing both swallowed hard.

It turned out that Jie’s second young master had been looking for them. It was good they hadn’t... How well their lies coincided. Otherwise, it would have been really awkward and would have shamed the Lin Residence.

After the meal, when most of the guests had left, it was time for Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing to bid farewell.

Before leaving, Lin Qianqing pulled Xie Qinyun aside and said, "My cousin and I strolled to the vicinity of your second sister-in-law’s courtyard, and by chance, we met your second sister-in-law’s maid going out to seek a doctor. My cousin then treated her. She has been sick for a long time because she was grounded and hadn’t been able to take any medicine! But my cousin has already prescribed her medicine."

Having hinted sufficiently, it was up to Xie Qinyun to fan the flames, depending on Concubine Du’s luck.

In the carriage, Lin Qianqing asked, "Cousin, do you think it was okay what I told Xie Qinyun?"

"Yes, it was good," Gu Youyou said, "Her second brother... who knows, it’s quite a pity if Concubine Du dies in that courtyard. Seeing as Xie Qinyun doesn’t seem to like Concubine Du very much, she will probably make a fuss about the whole affair."

"Hmm, that makes sense," Lin Qianqing nodded.

Looking at Gu Youyou, she grew curious and asked, "Cousin, you don’t seem the type to meddle in others’ affairs, so why did you get involved with the Jie Family’s household matters?"

Gu Youyou thought to herself: When did this girl get so clever?

She replied seriously, "How can it be considered meddling? I am a doctor, and a doctor feels itchy to treat the sick. Oh, I'm telling you, but you wouldn't understand since you're not a doctor. Plus... the medicine is indeed quite expensive. 'A fool won't pick up money lying in front of him,' do you think I'm that fool?"

Chapter 556: Must Not Break Trust with Others

Lin Qianqing was so astonished that she opened her mouth wide; her cousin's defense was so remarkable that she couldn't find words to refute it.

"Alright, granted, your reasoning is sound, but let's see how you explain to grandmother about spending the night out and then following me to the Jie Family's residence first thing in the morning once we get back home."

Although Lin Qianqing said that Gu Youyou would be in trouble when she returned, she still voluntarily took the blame upon herself.

"Grandmother, it was I who asked my cousin to accompany me to the Jie Family," she said.

Both girls were kneeling in the room of Madam Lin, the Lin Family matriarch, who was seated next to the Jin Family's Madam Lin.

Gu Youyou understood why she took the blame upon herself; aside from the grandmother, Madam Lin from the Jin Family was also present.

As Qianqing's birth mother, Madam Lin wouldn't punish her daughter too harshly for her mistake, but it was different for Gu Youyou. Since arriving at the Lin Residence, the girl had gained the special favor of both the venerable Lin Xingyi and the old Madam Lin, yet she lacked the temperament of a refined lady that she appreciated, and was even a bad influence on her daughter. Two tigers cannot share one mountain, let alone when she was but a poor relative.

Next to the old lady, the head maid Lusun was massaging her legs. She glanced at Madam Lin and said indifferently to the two kneeling girls, "The floor is cold, and your health isn't well, so stand up. Lusun, bring a stool for the young miss and her cousin."

"Yes, old Madam!"

If uncle were here, it would be a tribunal.

Gu Youyou and Lin Qianqing sat upright on the round stools.

Observing the two girls, the old Madam Lin sighed deeply and said, "Since it's already done, let it be. Fortunately, Youyou isn't seriously ill, but be more careful in the future. It's better to recuperate at home when sick, rather than needlessly causing others to worry."

The old lady spoke plainly and then turned her gaze towards Madam Lin.

Madam Lin looked pale. Was the old lady implying that she should not pursue the matter further?

But how could that be acceptable? Even if Gu Youyou wasn't a young miss of the Lin Family, she was an orphan relying on them, and if she lost face, it reflected poorly on the Lin Family as well. Moreover, her own daughter had been growing closer to her lately, so naturally, she couldn't just let it go.

"Youyou, you spent the whole night away from home, a first among the young ladies of Beijing," she said.

Her implication was that Gu Youyou was the only woman bold enough to spend a night away from home.

Sitting up straight, Gu Youyou replied, "I had fallen ill from the afternoon and was unconscious until I woke up this morning, upon which I immediately returned to the Lin Residence."

The old lady seemed taken aback for a moment, then relaxed, before turning to watch Madam Lin as if anticipating a good show.

Madam Lin frowned, her face darkening.

"If you were unconscious and out of your senses, after waking up and coming home, you should not have gone out again. How did you end up causing trouble at the Jie Family's place?"

This time, Gu Youyou didn't speak; Lin Qianqing was the one carrying the burden for her.

"Mother, don't blame my cousin. I was the one who dragged her there," Qianqing said.

"You? You might be impulsive at times, but you should still know better. Knowing full well that your cousin was unwell, you still took her to the Jie Family."

Qianqing hung her head, saying, "There's a reason for that. My cousin had already agreed to go with me yesterday, and I had informed Qinyun in advance. If I then didn't go, wouldn't I be breaking my promise to Qinyun? Father always said that a gentleman's word is his bond, and his actions resolute. As the legitimate eldest daughter of the Lin Family, how could I break faith with someone?"

"You..." Madam Lin, shaking with anger, pointed at Lin Qianqing but didn't manage to utter a single word.

Chapter 557: Visit Miss Du

She thought, this stubborn girl was hell-bent on dragging herself into this mess. From a young age, she never ceased to defy her; she really inherited the Lin Family's stubborn nature. No matter how she was raised, she could never become a well-mannered lady of a grand household.

What was her behavior now? Loyalty?

Such loyalty and integrity, steadfast in her promises.

"Fine, fine, since you don't know what's important, and you've run around with your cousin's sick body. From now on, you will stay in your chamber and copy the 'Lessons for Women' a hundred times. Once you have copied 'Lessons for Women' a hundred times, then you may leave."

Gu Youyou turned to look at Lin Qianqing, thinking: With her personality, she would rather take a beating than copy that damn 'Lessons for Women'.

To her surprise, she accepted the task without a word of complaint.

"Yes, Mother!"

Gu Youyou's jaw dropped. A hundred times, ah, a hundred times, it was less painful than getting a beating. They used a brush to write, which was extremely slow. By the time she finished copying 'Lessons for Women' a hundred times, the flowers in the north would have withered away.

Lin Qianqing turned and saw Gu Youyou's worried expression and kept winking and making faces at her.

Gu Youyou realized, a hundred times, ah, a hundred times, it might not be as terrible as she thought.

She had been thinking about not going to the medical clinic in the next few days, pretending to be sick to stay home and copy 'Lessons for Women' with Lin Qianqing.

"Youyou, you should not go to the medical clinic these few days either. Just stay in the courtyard and recover properly. Whatever you need, have someone buy it for you."

Er, was she being grounded?

Fine, it was a good time to rest and to lay low for a few days.

"Yes, Aunt!"

Seeing that neither of them resisted, Madam Lin’s face finally looked a bit better. She turned to the old lady and said, "Mother, do you think my arrangements are suitable?"

The old lady nodded and said, "Alright, you all go down. I am tired too."

Her thoughts aligned with Gu Youyou’s; it was indeed time to keep a low profile and take it as a time to recover.

...

The guests at Jie Residence had all left, and the sun was setting in the west.

Xie Qinyun had rarely visited the troublesome back quarters of her second brother over the years, but because of Lin Qianqing’s words, she went there today.

Accompanied by two maids and four stout nursemaids, the entourage was grand.

Seeing the weathered red lacquered gate locked with a brass padlock, her eyes darkened.

"Locked? Why is it locked? Qianqing said she was ill; where could she go?"

Lin Qianqing did not tell her about the quarters being locked by Concubine Du. Seeing the locked door, she naturally assumed her servants were not there, and they had gone somewhere else.

"Miss, should we go ask Concubine Du?" one of the nursemaids whispered to Xie Qinyun.

"Ask Concubine Du?" Xie Qinyun was slightly surprised.

That nursemaid said, "Yes, have you forgotten that the back house of the second master has always been under Concubine Du’s rule?"

Indeed, Xie Qinyun clenched her fists in frustration.

This second sister-in-law was too inadequate, letting another take hold of the Jie Family's power with the excuse of her long-standing poor health. That concubine not only controlled the second brother's back quarters but also the entire power of the Jie Residence. Who else was there since her mother and senior sister-in-law had both passed away?

Because of this relative, her own coming-of-age ceremony had been terribly mishandled; people were whispering, saying the only daughter's coming-of-age ceremony of the Jie Family was being conducted by a concubine.

With no capable woman in the Jie Residence to manage affairs, how would the future marriage of the third young Miss Jie be handled? Could it be that a concubine would preside over it as well? Where would her dignity lie? It wouldn't be well received in her marital home either.

Moreover, as far as Xie Qinyun knew, she was likely to be granted a marriage by the Emperor this year, to one of the two princes.

Chapter 558: Living a Miserable Life

She had no mother, nor a proper sister-in-law to take charge. In the eyes of those people, lacking a mother meant a lack of nurturing; perhaps it was for that reason she, the legitimate daughter of a first-rank official, could only resign herself to being a prince's consort without a fight.

Just thinking about it made her angry.

"Smash the lock open for me," Xie Qinyun said furiously.

"Yes!" the old women responded and began to smash at the door.

The large copper lock was indestructible, but the door itself was in poor condition. After a few smashes, the already dilapidated red lacquered wooden doors started to wobble as if they were about to collapse. Seeing this, Xie Qinyun lifted the hem of her dress and kicked the door, which completely fell apart, pathetically crashing down to the ground.

The maids and old women were terrified. The third miss, lacking a mother’s discipline, was really uncontrollable—so fierce! How would she ever get married?

Alas, it was a pity that the madam died early, and the eldest young madam died early, and the second young madam was in such a state.

Once the door collapsed, people in the courtyard naturally heard the commotion and hurried out.

Seeing the furious third miss, Cuiya promptly knelt down with a "plop," trembling all over.

"Third... third miss, I don’t know where my young miss has offended you, you want to..." to kick down our courtyard door.

She didn’t dare to finish her sentence.

Seeing Cuiya, Xie Qinyun was equally surprised.

"You’re here? Then why did you lock the courtyard door?"

No sooner had she finished speaking than she realized something was wrong. If people were inside, how could they have locked the door themselves?

Immediately she asked in a deeper tone, "Who did it?" Who locked that courtyard door?

"It was... it was Concubine Du!" Although Cuiya was a maid brought out from the Du Residence, she had long ceased to refer to Concubine Du as the second young miss. Over the years, she always called her Concubine Du.

Her own young miss, whom she should have addressed as the second young madam, had never changed her address because the relationship between Miss Du and the second young master was not good, so she continued to call her young miss.

Miss Du herself did not consider herself a wife of the Jie Family, so she had never minded Cuiya's form of address.

Xie Qinyun looked at Cuiya with a steady gaze for a moment before asking, "Does my second brother know?"

Cuiya remained kneeling on the ground, head down, replying, "Cuiya doesn't know, the second young master forbade us from leaving the courtyard. Except for receiving the meal box at the door daily, Cuiya did not dare to leave this courtyard."

Hearing these words, Xie Qinyun's eyes darkened even further.

It had been two years since she last entered her second brother's rear residence, and quite some time since she had seen his principal wife.

In the past, she had helped her second sister-in-law to vent anger, but after Concubine Du's attempted suicide and the second sister-in-law's subsequent harsher punishment by her second brother, she had been less involved.

What mattered most was that she increasingly disliked her second sister-in-law's timid nature; if one were born weak, no matter how much others tried to help, they couldn't make bricks without straw.

She detested Concubine Du, and her feelings for her second sister-in-law weren't any better, so she simply chose to turn a blind eye.

Yet she had not expected that her second sister-in-law would end up living like this.

Seeing the overgrown weeds in the shabby courtyard bathed in the setting sun, she let out a wry smile.

That's right, her eldest brother was always away, and their father was always preoccupied with court. None of them cared for the matters of the rear residence.

As for herself, she had been at school in the previous years, and when she returned home from school, no one took charge, so she sought out the company of other young ladies to play. Only her second brother, who had always been at home, sided with Concubine Du, probably spending every day and night in her room—no one cared for her then.

Xie Qinyun took a deep breath and said to Cuiya, still kneeling on the ground, "I heard the second sister-in-law is ill, take me inside."

Cuiya quickly got up and led Xie Qinyun into the house.

During the day, Miss Du had been treated with acupuncture by Gu Youyou and had recovered somewhat, but she still lay weakly in bed, completely drained of strength.

Chapter 559: I Can’t Bear It

Seeing Xie Qinyun come, she struggled to get up.

"Third Miss, why have you come."

Xie Qinyun looked at the desolate room, shrouded in gloom after twilight, and was astonished to find not even a single oil lamp lit.

In the cold northern spring, homes like theirs typically had underfloor heating, yet the mistress of the Jie Family didn’t have such a luxury, not even a brazier to speak of.

Whether it was due to the sheer coldness of the room was uncertain, but Xie Qinyun shivered violently.

Miss Du saw this and sighed softly, "I have neither underfloor heating nor a stove here, please forgive me, Third Miss." Then, without looking at the surprised expression still on Xie Qinyun’s face, she turned to Cuiya and said, "Cuiya, light the lamp."

Cuiya responded with a ’yes’ and went to light the lamp by the table.

A tiny oil lamp, Cuiya carefully lit it and just as carefully adjusted the wick into the oil to make the flame smaller, to save oil.

Xie Qinyun was shocked again, pointing to the oil lamp and saying, "The flame is so small, what's the difference between having it lit and not."

Cuiya hurriedly explained, "Third Miss, if the oil runs out, I'll have to go beg the Concubine for more. Last time I asked the Concubine for oil..."

"Cuiya, stop." Before Cuiya could finish, she was interrupted by Miss Du.

"Miss..." Cuiya's voice was laced with grievance, and she bowed her head, forcibly holding back the rest of her words.

"What about last time?" Xie Qinyun latched on firmly to that point, determined not to rest until she got an answer.

Miss Du looked at the dimly lit oil lamp, her eyes filled with an emptiness of desolation. It had been five years, what was there left for her to be upset about? Just a lamp, a jar of oil, that's all.

"Third Miss, why make life hard for a maid? I know you mean well, wanting to stand up for me, but this isn't the first time you've helped me. You know very well how it turned out every time, let's just leave it be, I don't want to trouble you all any further."

Hearing these words, Xie Qinyun felt her head throb. It had been like this again, after all these years, she hadn't learned to fight back, it seemed she had become more submissive and resigned. Yet, under the dim light of the oil lamp, to see the current state of Miss Du, was indeed another shock for Xie Qinyun.

"How have you become so thin? You've been ill for just a few days, you..." Suddenly realizing something, she immediately closed her mouth.

Her heart swelled with indignation, like a tide about to burst forth. Why?

She gritted her teeth and said, "Is it that shameless woman who has been mistreating you? Ah, don't be too quick to thank me. I'm not doing this for you; I'm doing it for the honor of the Jie Residence. Although our residence lacks a lady to uphold its honor, we still can't let a concubine act so unbridled. If you can bear it, I certainly cannot."

Having said that, she no longer looked at Miss Du's drastically changed face and led the maids and servants away from the courtyard.

Cuiya collapsed onto the ground and watched the shaky door, saying, "Miss, what should we do now?"

Based on past experience, with Third Miss making such a scene, that Concubine was likely to complain to the Second Master again, and Miss might suffer for it.

Miss Du's eyes were numb, and with a bitter smile, she said, "Let's not sleep then, let's just wait."

He was going to say that she took Aqing's rightful place as his wife, causing her to be ridiculed and bullied.

...

Xie Qinyun was clever today, upon seeing her Second Brother, she didn't directly speak of how the Concubine bullied Miss Du, but instead mentioned how her coming-of-age ceremony was made a laughing stock by her.

And the target of her attack was not the Concubine, but the Second Master.

Chapter 560: Complaining

"Second Brother, our mother passed away early, Father and Eldest Brother are often too busy to be at home, and you, you raised Ayun personally. I know you dote on Ayun the most, but now Ayun is at the brink of death. Second Brother, do you even care?"

Today was the joyous occasion of Xie Qinyun's coming-of-age ceremony, and she came to the inner courtyard with her maids and nannies, bursting with indignation. Without a word of preamble, she

launched into this tirade, leaving Concubine Du and the Jie Family's Second Young Master baffled by her meaning.

Concubine Du, sensing which way the wind was blowing, quickly offered Xie Qinyun a seat personally, coaxing her with a gentle voice, "Third Miss, please sit down, don't be hasty, speak slowly."

Her suggestion wasn't wrong; standing was indeed tiring, while sitting was more comfortable.

Xie Qinyun took a seat without reservation.

"Out with it. What is this all about?" asked the Second Young Master with a stern expression.

Xie Qinyun replied, "Second Brother, today the Fo Family's Second Young Madam came with their fifth daughter, and at first, I was quite happy, but their words..." She touched her chest, saying, "It hurts right here, it's still aching."

"What did they say?" Second Young Master's eyes darkened as he started tapping on the table.

He could guess, if not fully know, what his personally raised sister harbored in her heart.

What could these women possibly gossip about when gathered together? It was nothing more than disdain for Aqing being a concubine, for the Jie Residence lacking people, and they even let a concubine preside over the Jie Family's only daughter's coming-of-age ceremony.

But could Aqing be blamed? If it weren't for that woman blocking the way, how would Aqing be a concubine?

Letting that woman come forward, representing the Jie Residence's dignity, was she worthy? Aside from tattling and crying, she knew nothing.

Seeing that the Second Young Master appeared to be angry, Xie Qinyun still bravely wept, saying, "They said I have no mother, no upbringing, and that the Jie Family lacks manners. They said that with a young

lady like me, even if I were the legitimate daughter of a first-rank official, I would not be fit to be a wife in the future, because I am not presentable and only suitable to be a concubine. They claimed I was raised by a concubine... Second Brother, I was raised by you!"

"Hmm, did you hear this with your own ears?" Sixth Young Master raised an eyebrow inquisitively.

Xie Qinyun felt somewhat guilty and shrank her neck, replying, "If I had heard it with my own ears, I would have ripped their mouths for sure. It was my maid who heard it."

After saying this, she glanced over at one of the maids behind her.

The gaze of the Second Young Master immediately shifted to the maid, who promptly knelt to the ground.

"The servant truly... truly heard Madam Chen say these words, and they also said... also said that our Jie Residence lacks people, and even the servants have no discipline, just like... like that concubine in charge!"

As she spoke thus, on the other side, Concubine Du had already started crying, covering her face with a handkerchief.

For reasons unknown, the sound of Concubine Du's weeping at this moment irritated the Second Young Master, who said, "Why are you crying? Haven't we heard such remarks before? I don't care about them, and you shouldn't either. We'll just live our lives behind closed doors. Can you really stop others from talking?"

Concubine Du said, "My Lord, although that may be true, my heart still aches when I hear such words! I am not distressed for myself, but for you, for the Jie Residence, and for the Third Miss. If it weren't for me, the Jie Family wouldn't be talked about like this, and the Third Miss wouldn't be laughed at. If the Third Miss's future husband's family treats her with contempt for such reasons, then I am truly unforgivable!"

Seeing her so reasonable, the Second Young Master's heart immediately softened.