Farmhouse 571

Chapter 571: Recalling Past Events

By the time she finished squandering the modest fortune left to her by the Yu Family and Du Family, let’s see where she could go to cry.

"Oh, that’s right!" Jie Residence’s second young master suddenly remembered something and asked the Du concubine, "You should have learned the full embroidery from the Yu Family, right? Your concubine mother passed away when you were very young. Before Madam Du passed away, she was the one who took care of you. You learned embroidery when Du Xintong was learning it, didn’t you?"

"Me?" The Du concubine’s gaze shifted away, and she continued washing Jie’s second young master’s feet with her head lowered, saying, "I learned a bit, but I’m too stupid, always not as good as elder sister, and eventually I stopped learning."

Jie’s second young master was silent for a moment, then snorted and said, "That was her own mother; naturally, she learned better than you. Aqing, it isn’t that you’re too stupid, but rather that Madam Du didn’t teach you seriously."

He took out a crudely made little tiger sachet embroidered in the full style from his waist. The embroidery work was awkward and really left much to be desired.

He was only six when his mother died, crying inconsolably. With no women in the Jie Residence to take care of him, Madam Du brought him to stay at the Du Residence for two days.

During those two days at the Du Residence, he kept himself locked in his room, refusing to see anyone. It was Aqing who coaxed him out with that little tiger.

From then on, he remembered the little girl holding the little tiger.

"It could only be Aqing’s craftsmanship that could make this tiger look like this. It may be ugly, but it’s particularly endearing. Hmm, it seems Madam Du wasn’t wrong to call you clumsy, otherwise, how could the renowned embroidery of Zhuzhao turn out like this?"

His eyes remained fixed on the terribly embroidered little tiger, but he didn’t notice that the woman washing his feet had turned deathly pale.

After a long while without a response from the Du concubine, he put away the little tiger and looked down to ask, "Why aren’t you speaking?"

The Du concubine took a deep breath, steadying her emotions before raising her head to answer, "My lord brings up this little tiger again, are you making fun of Aqing for being clumsy?"

Jie’s second young master laughed heartily and said, "How could I? I’m praising your embroidery skills."

Reminiscing about the past, his laughter didn’t last long and a moment later, Jie’s second young master became melancholic again.

"That year, we both lost our mothers. You were left with only a little tiger, and I was left with only a little tiger too. By the way, I haven’t seen yours for a long time. Where did you put it?"

"Me?" The Du concubine lowered her head and said, "That was a plaything from when I was young. I’ve grown up and stopped playing with such things a long time ago, so naturally, I’ve put it away. If my lord wishes to see it, I can fetch it for you."

Seeing that she was upset, Jie’s second young master quickly waved his hand and said, "No need, don’t take it to heart; it’s my fault for bringing up sad memories."

...

Gu Youyou was grounded, and so was Lin Qianqing.

It wasn’t too bad for her; other than not being allowed out, they didn’t make things difficult for her. She just didn’t know how Lin Qianqing was coping. She wondered if she really was copying the female precepts.

Gu Youyou pulled Xiang Chun over and said, "Take this pot of beef stew to the young miss and tell her I stewed it myself."

Xiang Chun was placed with her by her maternal grandmother. Although she served by her side, she was ultimately a person of the Lin Residence's old Madam, and those from the uncle's side who might want to intercept her would need to weigh their actions.

Xiang Chun lifted the lid off the earthen pot and a strong spicy aroma immediately rushed out, causing her to cough violently.

She said, "What is this stewed with? If the young miss eats this, what if it makes her sick? Don't let her fall ill because of it."

Chapter 572: Copy the Women's Ring

Gu Youyou glanced at the earthenware pot simmering with just a few chilies with annoyance, unable to stand their needless fussing, and resignedly said, "What I've made here is a medicinal stew, tailored to warm young mistress's chilly constitution."

Oh, no wonder it smelled so bad.

The caring cousin was a Divine Doctor, and just yesterday Madam Fo had been punished on her behalf. As a serving maid, she understood the cousin's methods very well.

She nodded enthusiastically and said, "Alright, I will take this to Madam Fo right away. I'll make sure to convey your caring intentions. No matter how bad it tastes, I'm sure she will be touched enough to eat it."

Gu Youyou held her forehead in her hand.

How is it bad? It's super delicious, okay?

As a medicinal ingredient, these few chilies certainly came at a premium price.

Watching Xiang Chun walk away with the earthen pot, Gu Youyou then lifted a different pot off another stove.

This pot was for her own consumption and contained even more chilies.

She loved spicy food; just the sight of this bright red pot was a delight.

"Hold on, adding another herb will make it even tastier," she murmured.

Gu Youyou placed the pot back on the stove and went inside to find the herb.

Meanwhile, Xiang Chun had already delivered the red chili beef soup to Lin Qianqing.

The rumor was that Madam Fo had to copy the Women's Precepts one hundred times as her punishment. She probably wouldn't finish copying them even by the beginning of summer.

Such a pity!

At least she had the caring cousin's comforting beef stew.

"Stop right there!" Two old maids were guarding Lin Qianqing's courtyard, idly cracking melon seeds as they sat. They jumped to their feet to stop anyone attempting to enter.

Xiang Chun cleared her throat, stood tall, and declared, "The elder Madam has instructed me to bring this pot of meat soup for Madam Fo to nourish her body. Will you try to stop me as well?"

It must be said that the old lady was right to have sent the clever Xiang Chun to serve Gu Youyou. Another maid might have had the smarts, but perhaps would not have the same commanding presence.

"Certainly not, Miss Xiang Chun, please come in," they relented.

Nobody dared obstruct the elder Madam’s messenger, and after all, it was just food being delivered.

One of the maids curiously asked after Xiang Chun had gone inside, "Wasn’t Miss Xiang Chun sent by the elder Madam to serve the caring cousin? How come she returned?"

"What do you care? She said it was food from the elder Madam," the other replied.

The maid nodded and suggested, "Right, right, let’s continue discussing the affairs of the Fo Family. Crack some melon seeds..."

When Xiang Chun entered, she saw two maids hanging sheets of paper with Lin Qianqing’s writing on ropes in the courtyard, while Lin Qianqing herself was sitting at a table with her sleeves rolled up, writing at an incredible speed.

My goodness!

Xiang Chun was stunned.

She couldn’t write, but she had seen writing before, and never so quickly done.

Next to Madam Fo’s table wasn’t a normal inkstone, but rather a small bucket containing half a bucket of ink.

Was Madam Fo actually using a bucket to copy the Women’s Precepts?

Glancing at the sheets drying on the ropes, although she was illiterate herself, she had never seen such continuous lines where one couldn’t even distinguish individual characters.

Madam Fo’s handwriting was truly even more indecipherable than the caring cousin’s.

"Xiang Chun? What are you doing here?" Lin Qianqing asked, pausing her frantic work to glance at Xiang Chun, though her hand movements never ceased.

Her voice roused the stunned Xiang Chun back to the present.

Xiang Chun shook herself awake and presented the pot, saying, "The caring cousin asked me to bring this over, claiming it would help dispel your coldness."

"What is it?" Lin Qianqing sneered briefly at the earthen pot without halting her brush strokes.

In that brief exchange, she finished two more sheets of paper.

Chapter 573: You are a Concubine Too

The maid beside her tried to comfort her, "The Second Young Master is being so proactive for your sake, Madam. Once she recovers from her illness, she will leave the Jie Residence. This is her chance to get new medicine."

"I’m afraid she’ll change her mind," said Concubine Du.

The maid responded, "If she dares to deceive the Second Young Master, would he let her off easily?"

While they were talking, another maid came to report that the gatekeeper had announced the arrival of Madam Ru, consort to Prince Five, who was waiting in the parlor.

Concubine Du stood up in shock and said, "What? Madam Ru?"

The common folk had two extremely different stories about who Madam Ru was.

One said that she feared death and betrayed her husband and son, then threw herself into Prince Five’s arms to continue enjoying wealth and splendor.

Another commended her for sacrificing her own family for the greater good, seeing her as a hero who helped quell a rebellion.

In any case, public opinion about her was mixed.

But that wasn't important. What mattered was her high reputation, which even surpassed that of Prince Five's principal wife. Now she was coming to their door, seeking out that contemptible woman, which was very troubling.

The maid by Concubine Du's side said indignantly, "Who knows when that vile woman got involved with Madam Ru? Now that Madam Ru wants to see her, what are we to do? Besides, the Second Young Master has just left."

A vicious look flashed in Concubine Du's eyes as she smiled and said, "I heard she's too ill to leave her room. We can use that as an excuse to keep her from going. After all, the prescription was issued by Doctor Gu."

"Yes, Madam!" The maid laughed along.

In the parlor, Madam Ru had been waiting for quite some time before a splendidly dressed woman finally approached gracefully.

Having heard of the affairs of the Jie Residence, Madam Ru knew at first glance that this was not the disfavored mistress, the Second Young Mistress, but most likely that Concubine Du.

With this thought, her face immediately fell.

"Concubine Du, is your lady, the Second Young Mistress, here?"

Madam Ru was naturally uncompromising. If it weren't for mending relations symbolized by the ribbon, she would not have casually entered the officials' rear houses in Beijing.

She was well aware of those idle rumors about herself.

Concubine Du was slightly taken aback, not knowing how Madam Ru recognized her so quickly. She hurriedly performed a deep bow and replied in a low voice, "Madam Ru, my sister has been seriously ill recently and is bedridden now. She finds it difficult even to get out of bed and I'm afraid she won't be able to see you. Please forgive us."

"Ill?" Madam Ru turned her head slightly, her finely arched brows raising slightly.

If she had not made inquiries about the Jie family's Second Young Mistress in advance, she might have actually believed her.

It was said that the Second Young Mistress was not favored and that the Second Young Master of the Jie family treated her like an enemy. Concubine Du reigned supreme within and without the Jie Residence; now it seemed to be true.

Madam Ru did not ask Concubine Du to rise, who had no choice but to remain half-squatting, maintaining the gesture of her bow, cautiously observing Madam Ru's reaction.

Madam Ru sipped her tea, then let her gaze fall upon the cup in her hand.

The teacup was indeed of the finest quality, but the tea itself was inferior.

Well, what could one expect? A legitimate daughter from a concubine, what taste could she have?

Seeing the disdain in Madam Ru's eyes, Concubine Du felt as if a thorn had pricked her heart.

Was she unaccustomed to such gazes? Just because her mother was a concubine, because she was illegitimately born, and because she herself was now a concubine, no one held her in high regard.

Even if her husband esteemed her, no one else did.

Being looked down upon by other legitimate daughters and madams was one thing, but this Madam Ru... Whether she was a coward or a hero, no matter whether she had been the primary wife or just a consort to Prince Three, her current status was that of a concubine.

A consort to Prince Five, was she not just another concubine?

Chapter 574: Going to Invite Miss Du

Why should she look down on concubines as well? Does she still think she’s the formal wife of Prince from those years?

Madam Ru looked down on Concubine Du with high-and-mighty disdain. Having seen all sorts of people in her years, she glanced at Concubine Du and almost entirely guessed the thoughts in her heart.

In her mind, she couldn’t help but think lesser of the Jie Family’s second son.

Regardless of his legitimate wife’s character, just by looking at the concubine he doted on till she nearly touched the heavens, it was evident he was blind both in eyes and heart.

This kind of behavior, even among maids, is that of a lowly sort. If a maid inside the chambers had such a personality, it would surely lead to trouble.

Of course, there is the saying, "In the lover’s eyes, every Xi Shi." So who can say for certain.

Madam Ru gently put down her teacup, slowly turned her head toward Concubine Du, but still did not let her get up, and spoke indifferently, "Since your secondary young mistress is ill, it is all the more reason for this madam to visit her. Concubine Du, lead the way!"

Ah...?

Concubine Du’s eyes widened in shock; she simply couldn’t fathom when that woman had any interaction with someone like Madam Ru. From the look of it, Madam Ru insisted on seeing her now.

What should she do?

Concubine Du bit her lip hard, her legs trembling, whether from squatting for too long or from sheer fright.

She didn’t know how ill that despicable person really was; it would be fine if she couldn’t leave bed, but what if Madam Ru saw her strolling in the courtyard? How would she explain that to Madam Ru?

"What’s the matter, Concubine Du? Can’t decide on your own, or don’t you want to?" Seeing Concubine Du lost in thought and silent for a moment, Madam Ru had to ask.

She had palpable anger in her tone. Even Sir Jie, when in the mansion, couldn’t treat her like this. This concubine, truly spoiled by favor, had grown so audacious.

"Madam!" Concubine Du hurriedly bowed her body, her voice trembling, "I truly can’t decide on this matter... I need to ask my sister first. Given Madam Ru is here, I should be leading you to see my sister, but she has a temper... My sister is ill, and she doesn’t want to see anyone. I’m really worried about her health, afraid that she will get angry."

Concubine Du was used to throwing the blame on Miss Du, and her words now, full of apparent sincerity, didn’t reveal the slightest falsehood.

Madam Ru furrowed her brows, wondering: Could it be that the Jie Family’s secondary young mistress really was as arrogant and dismissive as the rumors suggested?

The nursemaid beside Madam Ru grumbled unhappily, "The women of your Jie Family, one harder to deal with than the next, actually making my lady wait? You all..."

"Nursemaid Zhang!" Madam Ru interrupted the nursemaid’s complaints, saying, "We are guests, let’s not be impolite."

After speaking, she turned her head to Concubine Du and said, "Then go ask."

Concubine Du, as if pardoned, hurriedly said, "Yes, I take my leave."

Concubine Du left the floral hall, wiping the cold sweat from her forehead.

Her maid quickly stepped forward to offer a handkerchief.

Seeing the handkerchief, Concubine Du felt mocked again and immediately started scolding the maid.

"Are you also laughing at me? Mocking me for not being able to handle the big scene, so scared by a Madam Ru?"

The maid was wronged to death, she really had just handed out a handkerchief innocently, and cried out, "Madam, this servant is innocent, how could this servant dare think like that?"

Concubine Du, in her fit of rage, couldn't listen. She kicked out at the maid, cursing, "Don't think I don't know, you all laugh at me behind my back. Treacherous to the core, get out..."

...

Chapter 575: She Walked Out of the Deserted Courtyard

Miss Du was indeed seriously ill, but yesterday Gu Youyou had given her an acupuncture treatment, and her condition had slightly improved.

Today, she must take her medicine, otherwise her illness would worsen again.

Sitting in the courtyard and basking in the sun, Miss Du said to Cuiya, "Cuiya, if the second young master hasn't brought back the medicine by noon, go and find the third young lady."

After a night of thought, she had come to a clear realization; she couldn't just die like this.

Had it been in the past, she might not have cared for her health, willing to let the sickness take over, to die and thereby end it all. But now, she didn't want to die, and a fear of death had taken hold in her.

What would become of the Yu Family’s embroidery business if she were to die?

As for Cuiya, seeing a glimpse of the will to survive in her young mistress, she was naturally overjoyed and quickly replied, "Yes, Cuiya will go out now and check, maybe the second young master has already brought back miss’s medicine."

This maid was a woman of action; she went immediately, only to return not long after.

Behind her was the furious Concubine Du.

Since she had kept to this neglected courtyard, it had been a long time since Concubine Du had come to trouble her.

Therefore, Miss Du was quite surprised to see her suddenly.

Oh, that’s right, the second young master had visited last night, and whenever the second young master came to trouble her, the next day she would come to flaunt. She had only been thinking about starting a new life and had almost forgotten this pattern.

"If you have something to say, say it quickly. Anyway, I won’t be staying here for long."

The second young master of the Jie Residence must have told her about the divorce they discussed last night, to make her happy, he would certainly have mentioned it.

Her agreeing to the divorce was, to the other woman, a matter of great joy.

Strangely, this time Concubine Du didn’t utter any insults or boast, but spoke firmly, "Can you leave this courtyard? If you can, go to the flower hall, someone is looking for you."

Miss Du didn’t look at her, but knew she must have spoken through gritted teeth.

She remembered clearly and understood the promise the second young master had made to her in the past.

When he spoke, aside from providing her with the status of a legitimate wife, she would get nothing, including the honor that came with being the Madame of the younger branch of the Jie Residence.

Therefore, they had exhausted every method to confine her within the inner quarters, never allowing her to meet visitors in the status of a Madame.

But what about today? Was it because of what she said last night?

Miss Du, with a look of surprise, went to the flower hall in the main courtyard with the support of Cuiya.

The second young master’s legitimate wife had arrived, dressed in plain clothes, her hair simply tied up with a jade hairpin, and in addition to her thin figure, the illness brought a paleness to her face, making her whole appearance elegant and peaceful.

Such a delicate beauty, a gentle figure swaying like a willow in the breeze, had lost to the brash, heavily powdered woman just before.

Madam must think it was the independent taste of the second branch member, otherwise, it was truly incomprehensible.

"Madam!" Miss Du bowed slightly as a greeting.

Madam hastily asked her to rise, saying, "I heard the second young mistress was ill, I hope I’m not intruding."

Not just Concubine Du was baffled by Madam seeking out Miss Du but also Miss Du herself.

She reflected upon her own past and realized she had never had any interactions with Madam, nor had their older generations; why was she seeking her out?

Madam quickly addressed Miss Du’s confusion.

She produced a sash and said, "I’ve come to the second young mistress mainly because of this."

Chapter 576: Complaining Again

Having said that, Madam Ru handed the collar ribbon to Maid Zhang by her side and asked her to take it to Miss Du for inspection.

Miss Du took the ribbon and exclaimed, "Embroidery from the Jin Family, and full embroidery from the Yu Family?"

"Exactly!" Madam Ru said, "I heard that the second young madam of the Jie Family is the sole heir of the Yu Family’s full embroidery. This collar ribbon means a lot to me, so I had no choice but to swallow my pride and come to you, in hopes that the second young madam could help me mend it."

The Yu Family’s full embroidery was also the old trade Miss Du intended to resume; naturally, she wouldn’t refuse.

And given Madam Ru’s status and her humble approach, she couldn’t afford to refuse.

Miss Du said, "It is my good fortune to be able to mend the collar ribbon for Madam. Please wait a moment, Madam, I will have it fixed for you shortly."

"You have my thanks."

Hearing that Miss Du could mend her collar ribbon, Madam Ru was in high spirits. All the discomfort she felt since arriving at the Jie Family’s residence vanished completely thanks to Miss Du’s magnanimity and grace.

"Cuiya, go to my room and bring the tools."

"Yes, Miss."

Upon hearing the maid address Miss Du as "Miss" instead of "second young madam", Madam Ru looked at her with newfound surprise.

This family is indeed very interesting.

Concubine Du waited outside the flower hall, nearly tearing the embroidered handkerchief in her hands to shreds with anxiety.

She wanted to enter, but the formidable old lady accompanying Madam Ru guarded the door, allowing only Miss Du to enter while she was barred from doing so.

Cuiya dodged Concubine Du and ran back to fetch the mending tools before joining them in the flower hall.

Soon, the second young master of the Jie Family, who had gone out early in the morning to Jisheng Hall to get medicine, also returned.

The sight of the opulent carriage at the gate startled him, and upon entering, the sight of Concubine Du’s vile expression shocked him even more.

In his eyes, Concubine Du had always been a gentle and amiable person. How could she wear such an expression?

"Aqing, what happened?"

The second young master had already instructed someone to prepare medicine for Miss Du, and seeing Concubine Du like this made him feel both alienated and frightened.

What on earth happened to make her look like this?

Concubine Du jumped at the sound of the voice and quickly turned around, only to see the second young master of the Jie Family in a green robe.

The second young master of the Jie Family was a handsome man with prominent features, matching well with Xintong, as she had heard from Madam Du before.

Back then, she was young and only knew that she liked the second brother from the Jie Family, so she always believed that she was the only one who matched the second young master.

Madam Du said he paired well with Miss Du because she was her daughter, that’s all.

But now, the fleeting image of the calm figure that had just entered her mind suddenly made Madam Du’s words seem reasonable.

This thought sent a chill down her spine.

She quickly shook her head, casting away the discomfort, and then said to the second young master of the Jie Family, "My lord, Madam Ru has come, she wanted to see my sister only and disdained me for being just a concubine, so I... had no choice but to wait outside."

From a distance, the old ladies guarding outside for Madam Ru felt displeased upon hearing these words.

Indeed, Madam Ru did not like her and had not let her in, but when had Madam Ru ever said she despised her for being a concubine?

The words of Concubine Du reached the ears of the second young master of the Jie Family, and he instantly became infuriated.

No wonder his Aqing was in such a state.

He had intended to remark that Madam Ru was also a concubine and therefore without the right to judge, but seeing the hostile expressions of the women in front of the flower hall, he swallowed his words.

He patted Concubine Du's shoulder and whispered, "Come, I'll take you inside."

Chapter 577: The Legacy of Manxiu

The Jie Family's butler and eldest son were extremely busy and seldom involved in the household affairs, with all the major and minor matters in the house managed by the second son of the Jie Family and that concubine from the Du Family.

It wouldn't have been a big deal to deny that Du Concubine entry, after all, in such grand households, only the male head of the household and his legitimate wife held sway. A concubine was merely a step above a servant. So, there was no complaint if a concubine was denied entry.

But they could hardly stop Jie's second son from entering.

After all, Madam had come that day to ask for a favor, and Jie's second son was the master of the house.

"Second Master Jie, please!"

Jie's second son grimly took the Du Concubine by the hand and entered, and with the second master leading, those old women had no grounds to stop them, and could only let her pass.

Upon entering the flower hall, they saw Madam leisurely drinking tea and enjoying some pastries. Meanwhile, Miss Du was sitting by the window, earnestly embroidering something—a beautiful collar tie, upon closer inspection.

Jie's second son stood awkwardly at the doorway, hand in hand with the Du Concubine, and everyone inside turned their heads to look at them.

He quickly let go of the Du Concubine and saluted Madam.

"Your humble servant Jie Zhonglin greets Madam!"

Madam gently put down her teacup and softly said, "Master Jie, please, there's no need for formalities."

Miss Du gave him a small nod and then lowered her head to continue her stitching.

This was his first time seeing Miss Du so focused on her work. The sunlight streaming in from outside the window was dazzling, and it stunned him for a bit.

And the look the Du Concubine gave to Miss Du was strange. Just now, she had claimed to be worried about her sister's health, but now, her gaze held not a trace of sisterly affection.

This was a woman who loved to play roles.

Madam noted the actions of these three and chuckled softly, "Second Master Jie, I've imposed on you rather abruptly, asking your ailing wife to mend this collar tie for me. I hope you don't mind?"

Jie Zhonglin, returning to his senses and hearing the word "wife," quickly looked toward the Du Concubine by his side.

The Du Concubine's expression instantly became amiable, and in the very moment the second master looked at her, she switched to a beaming, lotus-like smile.

Madam instantly understood.

She wondered if this skill was acquired or innate, no wonder nobody liked that Du Concubine, yet Jie's second master treated her like a treasure.

Seeing his beloved concubine not showing much of a reaction, Jie's second son breathed a sigh of relief and said to Madam, "It is my humble wife's honor to be able to mend a collar tie for Madam. How could I, Zhonglin, possibly mind?"

"Hmm, as long as you don’t mind, that’s good," Madam nodded and then praised, "Yu Family’s Manxiu Building has already closed down, and I thought my collar tie was beyond repair. Fortunately, we have Xintong, the sole inheritor of Manxiu’s craft. It would really be a pity if this skill were lost, as not many know it."

Miss Du slightly bowed and said, "Thank you for your praise, Madam. Xintong will ensure that Manxiu’s legacy does not end with me."

"That would be very good, it would be such a pity if it were lost."

Jie’s second son, who had been listening, frowned. Miss Du intended to divorce him, and a woman who was divorced or abandoned was called a discarded wife. Naturally, a discarded wife would no longer remarry.

In that case, how would she carry on the legacy of Manxiu?

Would she take on disciples, passing it on to outsiders?

He looked at his beloved concubine, the Du Concubine, and said, "How could it be lost? Aqing is also a daughter of the Du Family, and she knows Manxiu too, just not as expertly as... Xintong. In the future, Aqing will surely carry on the craft of Manxiu..."

Chapter 578: Did You Secretly Learn Manchu Embroidery?

He almost said that the technique was passed down to him and Concubine Du’s daughter.

When outsiders were present, he couldn’t say such things, even though he would soon be divorcing Miss Du.

For the Jie Residence had already lost enough face, it could not afford to lose face once again in the end.

"You know it too?" Madam looked at Concubine Du in surprise.

Miss Du also looked towards Concubine Du, puzzled as to how she was unaware that she knew the full embroidery technique.

Looking at Concubine Du, who was already scared pale.

She glanced at Madam, then at Jie Zhonglin, and suddenly knelt down before Miss Du.

That kneel stunned Zhonglin.

For some reason, this time he did not come to her and help her up.

In the past, whenever she admitted her mistakes, he would stand by her side, pulling her up without a word, not allowing her to act so humbly.

"Big sister, I...I was wrong, I shouldn't have secretly learned the full embroidery. At that time, when mother was teaching you the technique, I also wanted to learn, so I...I just hid and secretly watched."

Miss Du, with needle in hand, looked furious, nearly piercing her own finger.

And Zhonglin, at that moment, couldn't describe his feelings.

She clearly said that in the past, when Madam was teaching them full embroidery, she just couldn't do it well and that was why her embroidery looked so bad, but now it turned out to be secretly learned.

Why did she have to lie to him?

On the other hand, Madam lightly laughed and said, "Secretly learned? Such family techniques are passed down to the legitimate, not the illegitimate. To secretly learn someone else's family technique is to be sent to the Ministry of Punishment's Prison, Concubine Du really is audacious!"

Concubine Du, terrified and pale, suddenly fell to the ground, tears rolling in her eyes.

What Madam referred to wasn't just any prison, but the Ministry of Justice's Prison. Because the full embroidery was to be offered to the Imperial Court, this skill receives the Imperial Court's attention.

"Madam, big sister, I didn't do it on purpose, I was young at the time, I didn't mean to secretly watch! Please don't send me to the Ministry of Punishment's Prison." Concubine Du's tears fell endlessly as she kept kowtowing to Miss Du.

What place was the Ministry of Punishment's Prison? It was not a place for women like them.

Miss Du furrowed her brow; she only remembered her late mother always required privacy when she taught her the full embroidery. Moreover, even with hands-on teaching, it was extremely hard to learn, how was it possible for her to secretly learn it?

It was a sheer impossibility.

Yet looking at Zhonglin's expression, it seemed as if she really had secretly learned the technique.

Zhonglin obviously did not know about these rules concerning women's embroidery, nor did he know that Madam Du could not possibly pass this skill on to Wanqing. Hence, faced with this situation, he still stood there, dumbfounded.

"How much did you learn?" Miss Du, struggling to control her anger, would have no choice but to hand her over to the Ministry of Justice if she really had secretly learned the technique.

She had already figured it all out, she would leave and grant them happiness, but she didn't expect such a complication to arise.

Who knew what Zhonglin would think of her now, or whether he would use this issue to trouble her and if he dragged his feet on their divorce, things would certainly get complicated.

Alas! Perhaps in his eyes, she had once again become the villain.

"What Concubine Du also called your mother for many years, she is your sister, just a child ignorant enough to secretly learn embroidery for a few days, and you, a heartless woman, actually intend to send her to the Ministry of Punishment’s Prison," so he might say.

Now, without him uttering a word, she already guessed the words he would have said.

"Just... learned a little bit," said Concubine Du in a low voice.

Chapter 579: What Do You Think I Could Do to Her Anymore?

She glanced at the second young master of the Jie Residence, assuming that he would protect her, but unexpectedly, he just stood there, stupefied, lost in thought.

"A little bit?" A little bit could mean anything, depending on how much "a little" actually is.

Considering the importance of the matter, Miss Du shifted her gaze to the second son of the Jie Residence and inquired, "May I ask how the second young master came to know of Wanqing learning Manchu embroidery, have you seen her embroidery works?"

The second son of the Jie Residence looked down at the sobbing Concubine Du and felt there was something not quite right about the situation.

She said she learned by stealing? So, is that why those little tigers were embroidered so ugly?

He wasn’t skilled in embroidery, but he also felt that if she had learned all this while stealing at such a young age, it would have been quite impressive.

However, given that this skill is passed down only to the legitimate descendants and not to the children of concubines, Madam Du would certainly not pass on Manchu embroidery to the child of a concubine, so she must have learned it by stealing.

For some reason, the second son of the Jie Residence felt his mind was in complete disarray.

Seeing that Miss Du and Madam Ru were waiting for his response, he raised his hand in a salute to Madam Ru and started to respond, "This official has indeed..."

"My lord!" Before the second young master could finish his sentence, he was interrupted by Concubine Du's outcry.

She shook her head at him subtly, signaling him not to speak.

Therefore, the words on the tip of the second young master's tongue became, indeed, he had never seen it.

Both Miss Du and Madam Ru watched their actions clearly and unmistakably.

This second young master of the Jie Residence was trying to cover for Concubine Du, Madam Ru thought, giving Miss Du a look filled with a few more shades of sympathy.

The rumors outside were not false, and it seemed that Miss Du must be having a hard time. No wonder the terms they used with each other were strange, just like how the maids in the Jie Residence addressed Miss Du.

Seeing that the sash was almost mended, Madam Ru sighed, "This is your family's affair, and I shall not intrude. Xintong, thank you."

Since their interactions were so peculiar, calling Miss Du by her first name, Xintong, appeared more fitting.

Such a remarkable woman, the second son of the Jie Residence did not deserve her.

Miss Du stood up, personally handed the mended sash to Madam Ru, and personally escorted her out.

After Madam Ru got into her carriage, she lifted the curtain and said, "If you have any trouble, come seek me at the imperial villa."

Miss Du understood her meaning and expressed her thanks.

She had no family of her own, and her husband of the Jie Residence was biased toward his concubine. She could only endure any bullying. Helping her was a way of repaying her for mending the sash.

Once the three of them entered the residence and closed the door, the scene changed completely.

Miss Du knew very well what would happen next. She had grown numb to it.

"Say what you have to say quickly. I'm sick and I've been burdened all morning; I need to go back and rest."

The second young master couldn't stand her attitude and said sternly, "Don't think anyone owes you anything; this is all your doing."

Miss Du sneered, "So your point is that I should just let this slide?"

Because he had misspoken, causing Concubine Du to be stuck in a difficult position, the second young master felt extremely guilty.

Tightly protecting the tearful, trembling Concubine Du behind him.

Miss Du saw this and felt a chill settle into her heart.

Even though she no longer cared, it still hurt her eyes to see.

She said, "I'm this sick, what do you think I could possibly do to her?"

Even if she planned to do something to her, she had no intention of taking action within the Jie Residence. Everything would wait until she left the Jie Residence. As for the matter of stealing the Manchu embroidery knowledge, she would not let it rest.

A maid came in with medicine and saw the three in such a hostile stand-off, uncertain whether to enter or retreat.

Chapter 580: Don’t Want His Pity

The young master ordered that as soon as the medicine was decocted, it had to be sent to the young mistress immediately. The doctor mentioned that it must be drunk while hot.

But looking at her now... had the three of them had an argument again?

Alas...

Seeing the young mistress in such a pitiable state, the maid braved her nerves to break the awkward silence.

"Young Master, the medicine for the young mistress is ready."

Just now, the young master was still absorbed in his own thoughts, contemplating how to phrase his words.

Miss Du had not yet expressed any intention to hold Concubine Du accountable, which made it difficult for him to broach the subject.

Now, this tactful maid had relieved him from the awkward position, which he truly appreciated.

He heaved a sigh of relief, softened his voice, and said, "Give it to her to drink, you may leave."

After putting down the medicine, the maid ran off as if escaping.

The young master's gaze returned to Miss Du and saw that she had not drunk the medicine, so he reminded her, "The doctor said the medicine must be drunk while hot."

Upon seeing the medicine, Miss Du became lost in thought.

So, was he really out early in the morning to collect medicine?

The young master noticed Miss Du was still not drinking and said again, "Since we've agreed on a divorce, I certainly wouldn't harm you at this moment. You might not care for your life, but the Jie Residence still cares for its reputation. Rest assured and drink, it's not poisoned."

Indeed, they had always been wary of each other.

Miss Du truly feared that the young master would give her a bowl of poisoned medicine for Concubine Du's sake.

In their presence, she drank it down.

Seeing the empty medicine bowl, the young master added, "After you've recovered, we'll get a divorce. I'll provide you with some compensation that will be sufficient for you to start anew with your embroidery business in Jinxiu City. From then on, we owe nothing to each other. Regarding Aqing's matter, I hope you won't pursue it further, otherwise..."

He didn't finish his sentence, but she knew what he wanted to say.

It was a warning.

Miss Du swallowed back the tears that were about to spill, along with the bitter medicine that she hadn't managed to gulp down in time, and said, "I'm tired, I'll go back first. When Lord Jie returns, have someone call me, and we'll proceed with the divorce."

Without another glance at the two of them, Miss Du stood up and walked away.

Cuiya was waiting outside the door, and when she saw Miss Du coming out, she quickly supported her.

Seeing her like this, the young master felt a heaviness in his heart.

Pushing away Concubine Du who was lurking behind him, clutching at his sleeve, he followed the frail figure to the doorway and said, "There's no rush, let's talk about it when you're feeling better."

No rush? Miss Du was taken aback. The sudden shock had made her so dizzy that she could barely move her feet.

Perhaps it was her apparent illness that had elicited a flicker of pity from him.

For him to utter the words "no rush," didn't he want her out of his sight every second?

Cuiya, seeing her mistress's abnormal condition, became anxious. Why wasn't she moving?

"Miss?"

Miss Du bit her own tongue tip to clear her head a bit. She couldn't faint here and now; she had to make it to that desolate courtyard no matter what.

Otherwise, that man and woman would think she was plotting something.

"Cui... Cuiya, quickly help... me out!" Miss Du said weakly.

"Miss, what's wrong with you?" Miss Du's body felt powerless, almost collapsing her entire weight onto Cuiya.

As frail as Miss Du, Cuiya found it difficult to support her. Seeing her mistress in such a state, she became even more worried.

"Miss, Miss..." Cuiya cried out to her with a quivering voice.

"Shush, don’t... don’t speak, quickly take me away."

From behind the hall, as the young master of the Jie Residence looked at Miss Du and her maid beside a tree of apricot blossoms, he finally sensed that something was amiss.