Farmhouse 651

Chapter 651: Going Back to the Lin Family Together

Pulling the thread of the Princess, she would often have the chance to visit the palace. The fear lay in being asked to stay frequently.

The opportunity to enter the palace came too swiftly, and these decisions were indeed made in haste, so much so that she dared not speak of them to Jin Zijin.

"Come every few days?"

The Empress seemed to ponder something, her eyebrows rising slightly as she looked towards the Ninth Princess, who was almost hiding behind the Empress Dowager.

"What do you think, Mother?" The Empress turned to the Empress Dowager and asked with a smile.

The Empress Dowager sighed and said, "I'm old, and I don't have many years left. Such trivial matters can be decided by you, the Empress."

The Empress smiled and replied, "Since Mother has no objections, then let it be every few days. It's just, will Youyou be able to handle it with your constitution?"

"Replying to Her Majesty the Empress, Youyou will be careful."

"Mm!"

Between these exchanges, Gu Youyou could not discern much, only a vague sense that the Empress was not as simple as she seemed.

In the palace, although the Empress Dowager appeared to be the most powerful, with the Empress still needing to please her, many matters were, in fact, decided by the Empress. The Empress Dowager had to maintain her dignity but could not overstep.

Gu Youyou observed Lin Qianqing, who was making faces at her, and hurriedly said, "Your Majesty the Empress, my maternal grandmother has fallen ill recently, and she was asking about my older female cousin..."

The Empress raised her eyebrows, her gaze shifting to Gu Youyou.

The Empress Dowager made a sound of acknowledgment and asked, "Madam Lin is ill?"

Lin Qianqing feigned concern with an "Ah," hurriedly saying, "Grandmother is ill again?"

"Again? Has Madam Lin been getting sick often lately?" The Empress Dowager inquired further.

Before Gu Youyou could reply, Lin Qianqing could no longer restrain herself and was about to burst into tears as she said, "Empress Dowager, my grandmother has been in poor health in recent years, and she has fallen ill many times from last year to this year. The illness during the New Year was the most severe—we thought she wouldn't make it. It scared my father into sending Butler Qiu to Lingnan to fetch my cousin. If it weren't for my cousin's miraculous healing, we don't know what would have become of grandmother."

As she spoke, tears were already streaming down her face.

The Empress Dowager sighed woefully, "Ah, when people get old, these days are inevitable. Don't be too heartbroken."

After a moment of contemplation, the Empress warmly said to Lin Qianqing, "Originally, I had planned to keep you here for a few more days, but under the circumstances, you may follow your cousin back to the Lin Family later."

Lin Qianqing could hardly contain her joy, "Thank you for Your Majesty the Empress's grace!"

"You, next time your cousin comes to the palace, come and accompany me," said the Empress.

Lin Qianqing: "..." Suddenly feeling unloved.

The next round of acupuncture for the Empress Dowager would be performed by Physician Cui, who already had a foundation in acupuncture. Having observed Gu Youyou a few times, she was able to perform very well.

Therefore, the responsibility of giving acupuncture to the Empress Dowager fell upon her, and Gu Youyou only needed to come and check every few days while teaching the Ninth Princess medical skills in passing.

This turned out to be an unexpected delight.

...

Returning to the Lin Family, her aunt's face darkened further upon seeing Lin Qianqing trailing behind Gu Youyou, the sight fueling her ire.

"Why have you returned?"

Lin Qianqing replied, "I heard that grandmother was ill and wanted to see me."

Madam Lin's eyebrows rose sharply, and at the same time, she glared fiercely at Gu Youyou, saying sternly, "Since the Empress has sent you back, you should go see your grandmother."

"Alright, then I'll go now." Lin Qianqing glanced at Madam Lin and then sympathetically looked at Gu Youyou before quickly making her escape.

Madam Lin's gaze towards Gu Youyou was as black as the bottom of a pot.

She had run off to the old lady's compound early in the morning, and afterwards, word spread that the old lady was seriously ill.

Chapter 652: Take Abao away

These two girls, one being my own daughter, plus her cunning, how could I not know what schemes they were devising.

This niece of mine, to speak of her, is better than I had imagined, not at all the unsophisticated bumpkin I had anticipated.

But she really lacks a sense of propriety, just as worrisome as the old lady.

I can only tolerate the old lady’s lack of manners, but I see no need to tolerate this younger generation.

Just as Gu Youyou was planning to slip away, Madam Lin called out to her.

"Youyou, come with me."

With that, she flung her sleeve and headed to the side hall.

I knew it, I was going to be lectured today, Gu Youyou stuck out her tongue and followed.

"Aunt!" Madam Lin was seated, and Gu Youyou stood.

Madam Lin stared at her, sighing, about to say something but swallowing her words instead. After several attempts, she finally voiced her concerns.

"You say you want to keep a dog, of all the breeds you could choose, why insist on such a large one? And one that looks like a wolf at that. Keeping such a big dog at home, what if it accidentally hurts someone?"

Gu Youyou, with her head lowered, said, "Abao is very obedient, as long as Aunt instructs the servants not to provoke it, it won’t bite anyone."

"Can that beast understand rules?" Madam Lin immediately retorted, "Will it stay put in its own place? Just today it was strutting around the yard. I heard it even ate two chickens and a big white goose belonging to your maternal grandmother. I suspect your grandmother fell ill because of this dog's antics."

Gu Youyou: "..." Unfair!

"Aunt, how did Abao get out?" she clearly remembered telling Xiang Chun to latch the yard gate securely when she left.

"Hmph, how indeed?" fumed Madam Lin, slapping the table with a degree of unsteadiness, and said, "What kind of dog is this? It's clearly a wolf; it eats living creatures. The servants reported that it chased a Phoenix Chicken and then got loose. The yard wall is over a person's height, the Phoenix Chicken flying over is one thing, but how did it get out? Could an ordinary dog jump over a wall that high? What on earth did you raise?"

After hearing this, Gu Youyou blinked.

Nothing wrong!

She had instructed someone to fetch chickens and ducks from her grandmother's place to feed it, live ones.

Of course Abao would chase the Phoenix Chicken if it flew over the wall.

However, such a deep courtyard life could not condone such upheaval, especially not with an aunt of noble upbringing like hers, absolutely intolerable.

"You need to get rid of that dog. It made a bloody mess in the courtyard, if it frightens the old lady into some serious illness, no one can bear that responsibility."

Recalling the sight of the big dog pouncing on live prey, Madam Lin was still very unsettled.

Despite having a courtyard full of house servants to protect the place, they couldn’t subdue it; it returned to Gu Youyou’s courtyard only after satisfying its hunger.

Just one such incident terrified her soul-deep. If this happened daily, how could anyone continue to live normally?

Gu Youyou could clearly see her aunt’s somewhat pale complexion and the slight trembling of her fingers.

There was no chance of keeping Abao here; the determination on her face said it all.

Gu Youyou sighed, "Although Abao is my dog, it was Yue Rujing who took it to Lingnan Barracks to be trained and grow up. They’ve always fed it live prey, so it seems a bit wild. But it won’t attack people without reason!"

"Even so, we can’t keep it here," Madam Lin said firmly. No matter who raised the dog, even the Heavenly King himself wouldn’t change her mind.

When Gu Youyou mentioned it yesterday, she had thought it was an ordinary puppy, never imagining it would be such a large one.

Chapter 653: Miss Du’s Invitation

"Alright, then, I’ll have Yue Rujing pick it up another day,"

"Yes, that would be good." Madam Lin sighed in relief and then asked, "What is the matter with your cousin returning from the palace?"

Gu Youyou said, "My cousin missed her maternal grandmother, so she asked me to pass on a message to her. After that, the grandmother fell ill. The Empress learned of this and allowed my cousin to return to visit her, but she also said that my cousin should return to the palace in a few days."

She reassured Madam Lin with a definitive statement, saying that she would go back in a few days, to prevent any endless concerns.

Hearing Gu Youyou say this, Madam Lin did not ask any further questions.

However, Madam Lin whispered into Lin Xingyi's ear at night, mentioning that Gu Youyou was not young anymore, and it was time to find a suitable family to marry her into.

Of course, Gu Youyou did not know this yet.

As for Madam Lin, she merely notified Lin Xingyi, and regardless of what he said, she had already made up her mind to marry off Gu Youyou.

So, the next day, she began searching for a suitable candidate for Gu Youyou.

...

After leaving the Jie Family, Miss Du seemed reborn.

She took her only maid Cuiya to Jinxiu City, where people repaired the Yu Family's Manxiu Building. They hung up the sign again, preparing for the grand opening.

Looking at the refurbished building, Miss Du inevitably thought of Gu Youyou.

It was her words, along with the grace of saving her life, that had given her this chance at rebirth.

"Cuiya, go to the Lin Residence yourself and hand over the invitation for me to Doctor Gu and Miss Lin. Our Manxiu Building is reopening, and they should be invited to come," Miss Du directed.

Cuiya was overjoyed and repeatedly assured her acceptance.

"Yes, Miss," she replied.

Reborn was not only Miss Du herself. If she had not encountered Doctor Gu and Miss Lin that day, after her miss passed away, she too would not have survived.

They both would have wasted their lives in that desolate courtyard, never reconciling to death.

Soon, the invitation arrived at the Lin Family. Lin Qianqing took it and went to find Gu Youyou in her courtyard.

"Cousin, Miss Du of the Manxiu Building is reopening and inviting us as guests. Will you go?"

Gu Youyou took the invitation and looked it over.

Neat and graceful script captured the elegance of Miss Du herself.

She smiled and said, "Of course, I'll go. If she's treating me to a meal, I definitely will. I haven't been to Jinxiu City yet, so this is a great opportunity to check it out."

Lin Qianqing chirped excitedly, "That's great; I'm going too. I've grown up and never been to Jinxiu City. It's so close to Beijing, sigh, every time I want to go, my mother won't allow it."

Gu Youyou patted her head and sighed, "How pitiful."

The rebuff was too much for Lin Qianqing, who sulked all afternoon.

Gu Youyou had to report to Madam Lin before going to Jinxiu City.

Lin Qianqing did not dare tell Madam Lin about going because she was certain Madam Lin would not agree; therefore, she had already gone to seek help from her grandmother.

"Aunt, the former Miss Du of the Jie Family intends to reopen Manxiu Building in Jinxiu City, and she has also sent me an invitation," Gu Youyou said while handing over the invitation.

Madam Lin glanced at it and pressed the invitation down, saying, "Let’s put this aside for now. This matter is significant; I need to discuss it with your uncle."

A simple outing is a significant matter?

Anyway, whether she agreed or not, Gu Youyou was going to go; it was just a courtesy to inform her about a trip that was somewhat far.

"Thank you, Aunt," Gu Youyou replied.

Gu Youyou tried to be as respectful as possible to Madam Lin. As for the skimping on her rations and clothes, which her uncle’s concubines worried over and compared, Gu Youyou didn’t mind at all.

As a niece, it really wasn’t worth it for her to quarrel with her aunt over these things.

Chapter 654: Have My Own Ways

Gu Youyou finished speaking and retreated, and Madam Lin felt a pang of unease in her heart.

"Why am I still so calm after taking her invitation? I’ve strictly forbidden her from entering and leaving the Lin Residence recently, fearing that her mind might have flown away long ago, especially since this is about going to Jinxiu City."

It must be said that Madam Lin was born to be a matriarch.

Apart from Lin Xingyi, whom she could not control, she oversaw everyone else.

Every servant in the yard had to get a pass from her when they went out on errands.

Her loyal maid, Hen Xiang, said, "Miss Youyou has always been even-tempered; neither arrogant nor impatient; she probably has a plan in mind, and her visit was merely to notify you."

Those favored by Madam Lin were no fools, and they immediately guessed Gu Youyou's intentions.

Madam Lin's face darkened as she snorted, "That means whether I agree or not, she is still going to go."

The maid, Hen Xiang, nodded and said, "That's the implication."

"Not one of them gives me peace. With her frail body, what if she falls ill on the way? It angers me to death. Why did I ever marry into the Lin Family, where not one is well-mannered? If it weren't for me working like an ox and a horse for the Lin Family, it would be no better than a disordered household... The heavens would be in chaos..."

Madam Lin cursed non-stop, furious, then suddenly thought of something and asked Hen Xiang, "Have you seen the young master?"

Seeing Madam Lin in such a temper, Hen Xiang hesitated on how to approach her.

"Speak now." Growing impatient waiting for a response, Madam Lin slammed the table forcefully.

Hen Xiang hurriedly said, "The major examination is approaching, and the young master has gone out with a few classmates."

"Gone out when the major examination is approaching?" Madam Lin stamped her foot in an unbecoming manner and said, "Go, have someone find him and bring him back. Lock him in the study until the examination is over, and don't let anyone let him out."

After Hen Xiang left, Madam Lin gazed at the invitation sent by Miss Du that Gu Youyou had given her, remaining silent for a long while.

After thinking for some time, she said to herself, "Well, for the sake of Official Du... let her go."

Having decided, she summoned two maids and handed the invitation to one of them, saying, "Deliver this to Miss Youyou, tell her to go early and come back early."

"Yes, Madam."

"Ah, wait a moment." Madam Lin thought again and said, "Don’t go now, deliver it tomorrow. Take it away for now."

Having to deal with these matters irritated her.

...

At the Lin Qianqing’s end, the old Madam had already thought of a plan.

On the day when Miss Du’s shop opened, she planned to take Lin Qianqing out for a trip, to go to the outskirts of the city to the Sanqing Temple to offer incense and listen to the Dharma meeting.

The ones in this household who did not need to report to Madam Lin when going out were just the old Madam and Lin Xingyi.

For these few days, they planned to say nothing. When the time came, they would directly take people out of the city; even if she knew, there would be nothing she could do.

Lin Qianqing, thrilled, told Gu Youyou about the strategy she and her grandmother had come up with. Gu Youyou heard it and sighed, "Your life is like a prison sentence. What is your mother thinking? It’s as if she would prefer to keep the whole family confined within the courtyard."

Lin Qianqing snorted, "She’s been confined herself all her life, and she certainly wishes that everyone else would be like her. There are so many high-ranking officials and nobles in Beijing, yet I haven’t seen other ladies and Madams as tightly controlling as she is. She’s never taken me out for a stroll on the streets."

Talking about it made her feel melancholic again, so Gu Youyou quickly changed the subject.

"The carriage ride from Beijing to Jinxiu City takes nearly half an hour. Considering our status as young ladies, we will inevitably need to arrange for some people to follow us. I'll bring Abao with me; make it grand and proper. By the way, are you afraid of dogs?"

Chapter 655: Congratulatory Gift

"Your dog?" Lin Qianqing recalled the large dog that had been sent away when she returned home and shuddered a little at the servants' descriptions. "If you like it, take it with you, but if it's going on the carriage, I'm not riding with you."

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "You don't want to ride with me, so you plan to go there openly, huh? Well, we'll see."

In ancient times, gift-giving was a meticulous affair. It wasn't about how expensive the gift was.

It depended on the relationship, status, and the status of the guests invited by the other party. As a humble doctor, you couldn't overshadow the gifts presented to the esteemed guests they had invited.

Thus, preparing a gift had become a significant problem.

"Zijin, I'm preparing a congratulatory gift for Miss Du. What should I send?"

Gu Youyou figured that Jin Zijin, as a person from ancient times, would have a clearer idea than her.

Jin Zijin pondered for a moment and said, "Miss Du has just left the Jie Family, and the Du and Yu families' businesses have been neglected for a long time and are in dire need of revival. They're in need of silver. If you don't mind being banal, giving her some silver would be the most practical."

Gu Youyou said, "It's practical, but it also seems a bit coarse, making it seem as though our relationship is common. Moreover, it's hard to decide how much silver to give. Too little appears stingy, but too much may invite idle gossip..."

Suddenly, Gu Youyou had an idea and said, "Hey, I could place a few business orders with her. That would solve her silver problem, right? That's better than giving silver directly, isn't it?"

Jin Zijin couldn’t help but smile and said, "It’s good, but that’s you spending silver to buy goods, which is business. What does that have to do with your congratulatory gift?"

Gu Youyou: "..." He had a point.

"Then how about... oh, I’ll draw her a design, a clothing design. Let her embroider those patterns directly onto clothes in the future. I guarantee they will sell well. Yes, that’s what I’ll do!"

Gu Youyou was still thinking about how to do business with Jinxiu City, and the matter of giving a gift to Miss Du... led her to a lucrative business idea.

She intended to collaborate with Miss Du’s Manxiu Building; she would design the clothes for high-end customization, and Manxiu Building would manufacture them.

In any era, the easiest money to earn is from women. In just a short while, this money-making idea had taken shape in Gu Youyou’s mind.

She excitedly looked at Jin Zijin and shared her thoughts with him.

After listening, Jin Zijin simply smiled at her and said, "Indeed, it is a way to make money, but you also have a medical clinic, and you’re under the supervision of your aunt. Where will you find the time to do business with the embroidery building?"

Gu Youyou said, "Tomorrow I’ll ask Yue Rujing to find me a few dependable overseers; men or women will do. I have to start handling the business for both the pharmacy and the embroidery building. I don’t need to be there all the time. If managed well, I can make money sitting right here in this large residence."

"But your aunt advocates that a woman’s greatest virtue is to have no talent. As part of the official class, she looks down on merchants the most. Living in the Lin Family, you’ll inevitably have to endure her contempt."

"Then find a way to get me out of here!"

"Not now, it’s safest in the Lin Family," said Jin Zijin.

Gu Youyou sighed and said, "Well, that’s that. My aunt’s obsessive-compulsive behavior is a bit bothersome, but she’s not a bad person and she treats me fairly well, at least compared to my previous bunch of appalling relatives."

"That’s true!"

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "That settles it then. There’s no need for me to clash with her compulsions. If she dislikes it, I’ll just avoid her. If she forbids it... I’ll still do as I please. They’re so set in their ways, how could they understand that silver, in any era, is the most powerful thing? With it, what can’t be bought in this world?"

Chapter 656: He Also Earns Silver

"Don’t go saying that money can’t buy life, status, or affection; the truth is that it can buy them all. Without silver, when sick, one can only wait for death; with silver, one can afford to hire the best doctor and take life-saving medicines. There have been instances of people donating to obtain an official rank in every dynasty, proving that fame and fortune can indeed be bought with silver. With enough silver, friends and relatives would wear down your threshold, while without it, the threshold of the less fortunate remains cold and bare, wouldn’t it?"

"That makes sense," Jin Zijin sighed, "Silver indeed is a good thing."

He patted Gu Youyou’s back and added, "Youyou is so capable, why not also..." He thought for a moment, then said, "Nevermind. You should first get the embroidery business going."

"What are you talking about?" Gu Youyou was hung up by his suggestive words and immediately perked up. With this going on, she wouldn’t need to sleep tonight.

Jin Zijin laughed and said, "I was thinking of handing over some business in Beijing to you, but I’m afraid you’d be too busy to handle it."

Gu Youyou’s face was full of surprise: "You do business in Beijing, too?"

"What else?" Jin Zijin pinched her face gently and said, "Didn’t you just say, without silver, everything is difficult in this world? The Dao Family didn’t earn its status in the mundane world just through alms."

Uh...

That seemed true.

"Moreover... secretly raising so many dead soldiers, who undertake missions that are equivalent to suicide, they wouldn’t be loyal without silver, would they?"

Gu Youyou blinked, as if she didn’t recognize him.

For someone of his disposition to be discussing these matters with her was unexpected.

"I’ve always been investigating the swap that happened to me that year. The adversary is very powerful; many excellent dead soldiers raised have perished during missions."

Gu Youyou hugged his neck with a pained heart.

She had heard from Jin Zijin before about this matter, about how today’s Princess had taken over his identity.

Who exactly had manipulated the situation from behind the scenes, no one knew.

Even with Jin Zijin’s current power, he was unable to uncover the slightest information about the adversary.

"Alright, alright, it’s getting late, let’s sleep. As for those matters, they’ve gone on so many years, there’s no point in rushing now. Concerning silver, you have a good eye; you found a wife who can make money, so be at ease. It won’t be long before you will have plenty of silver flowing in."

"Oh? Are you complimenting me, or are you praising yourself?"

"Ha ha, both. You've got a good eye, and I know how to make money."

After preparing the bed, Gu Youyou remembered her concerns and said, "I've heard the roads aren't very safe. I'll take Abao to Jinxiu City, have Yue Rujing send Abao to Jisheng Hall, so I can collect him."

...

It was already quite hot, and Gu Youyou wore a thin silk garment while Xiang Chun supported her into the carriage.

Down by the carriage, the aunt kept nattering on with advice, "In Jinxiu City, you'll find the homes of the wealthy, who are not like our official families. They reek of money and have an air about them that's no less than ours, each of them lacking manners. Be sure to avoid getting into disputes with them in public, lest you lose our status and bring dishonor to the Lin Residence.

Moreover, do not stay too long. After delivering the gifts, come back. Although you are our head young lady, your actions represent the Lin Residence. You've grown up in the countryside, and I don't expect you to be as cultured and literate as the other young ladies, but you must still maintain the demeanor of an official's daughter. Your aunt may be a bit long-winded, but it's all for your own good. I am still hoping to see you marry into a good family, and the families your aunt has considered for you are all from the official class."

Madam Lin's earlier rambling was of little concern to Gu Youyou, but the latter words frightened her quite a bit.

Chapter 657: Setting You Up on a Blind Date

"Aunt, you're arranging a marriage for me? What do you mean by that?"

Madam Lin said, "At your age, you're still unmarried, leaving only you. Without father or mother, now that you have come to take refuge in the Lin Residence, if I, as your aunt, don't arrange it for you, who will? That will be all; a young lady like you shouldn't worry about these matters. Just wait for my good news."

"It’s not that..." Gu Youyou stammered anxiously. She had barely managed to dodge the topic when the Empress and Empress Dowager brought up her marriage last time, so why was her aunt still trying to find her a match?

"With my current illness... it might flare up at any time. My situation is not suitable for marriage, aunt. Have you told them about my condition?"

Madam Lin spoke with assurance, "Rest assured, there are plenty who want to ingratiate themselves with the Lin Family, and with the Empress and the Crown Prince. With the fact that I am personally talking about this match, no one would dare to reject you."

Gu Youyou felt like she was about to cry.

The more her aunt said, the more frightened she became. There were plenty who sought to cling to those with power. Those vile people would jump at the chance to marry a woman from a noble family, even if she died soon after the marriage, as it would still help them climb the ranks and amass wealth.

Gu Youyou did not want to become a tool for someone else’s promotion and wealth.

She said, "Those kinds of people must be of low morals, aunt. Aren’t you afraid that by using the Lin Family name, they will cause trouble and hold us back?"

Madam Lin sighed and said, "That’s why I am carefully selecting, naturally I will find someone of good character for you." She glanced at the sky, noting it was already late, and rushed, "You better go now, remember to go and return quickly."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Seeing that she only had one maid and one coachman with her, Madam Lin felt worried again.

"I have arranged for several skilled house servants to follow you, why have you dismissed them all? What use are just one maid and one coachman if something happens? What could they do?"

Gu Youyou said, "The road from Beijing to Jinxiu City is very peaceful, nothing will happen. Besides, if something truly were to happen, those few house servants wouldn't be of much use either, not as much as my Abao anyway. I have already agreed with Yue Rujing; he will bring Abao with me."

"Abao?" Madam Lin was somewhat surprised.

"Yes, my big dog. He's trained by the military, more useful than several house servants. I brought him from Lotus Village in Qingshui Town, from the mountains behind my home. I heard his father is the White Wolf King of the mountains."

"Truly a wolf then?" A shiver went through Madam Lin, but she also felt considerably relieved.

"Alright, then take it with you. Be careful on your way."

After finishing, she addressed Xiang Chun, who was organizing things, "Xiang Chun, take good care of Miss Youyou. If something happens, you will be held accountable by Madam."

"Yes, Madam!"

Gu Youyou withdrew back into the carriage, resting her head on her hand, deep in thought.

She needed to discuss with Jin Zijin about her aunt speaking of arranging her marriage; if she wanted to be picky, then let her. Let Jin Zijin's people manipulate the situation in the background, it would be best if they made sure her aunt couldn't find a suitable match even after three to five years.

Gu Youyou needed to stop by Jisheng Hall to pick up Abao before leaving the city, which was conveniently on the way out.

Once outside the city, she stopped at the agreed spot, waiting for Lin Qianqing.

Meanwhile, shortly after Gu Youyou left, the main gate of the Lin Residence opened once again.

Old Madam Lin went out with her eldest granddaughter, youngest granddaughter, and grandson from the Lin Residence’s main gate.

The gatekeeper’s eyes widened in shock; he signaled to someone next to him, and that person hurried toward the courtyard of Madam Lin within the residence.

Madam Lin had just left, and surely she wouldn’t know about Old Madam taking the young misses and young master out.

Chapter 658: Teaching the Concubine a Lesson

And the other, hesitating whether he should step forward to ask?

With such a status as the elderly Madam, naturally, no one dared to stop her from going out, not even the esteemed Lin official. But it was the Madam of the Lin Family who was in charge, and they knew very well what kind of temperament she had. If they did not ask, when the Madam started to blame, it would cost them a layer of skin.

After much deliberation, the gatekeeper decided he must muster the courage to ask, if only to stall for time.

The young masters and ladies were getting into the carriage when the gatehouse servant hurried over and addressed the elderly lady, "Old Madam, are you taking the young masters and ladies out today?"

"Hmm, going out," the elderly Madam answered calmly.

The gatehouse servant twitched at the corner of his mouth and asked further, "Then the Old Madam is..."

"What about it?" The elderly Madam suddenly flared up, poking the gatehouse servant with her cane, "Do I need to notify you when I go out? Speak clearly, are you trying to block my way or not?"

"No, no, how would I dare?" The servant shuddered in fright, a thin sheen of sweat forming on his forehead, "I was just worried about what the Madam might ask..."

"Hmph, the Madam." The elderly Madam was just short of hitting him with her cane, furiously saying, "I'm not afraid of her even if she comes; I don't believe she could send me back. Move aside!"

Everyone boarded the carriage, and the elderly Madam urged the servant to clear the way, adding, "We are merely going to Sanqing Temple to offer incense, hurry and finish the task."

After saying that, she urged the coachman to hurry along.

The gatehouse servant sweated profusely, naturally not daring to block the Old Madam's carriage, thinking his companion was slow in fetching the Madam.

Meanwhile, Madam Lin, who was infuriated by Lin Xingyi's favored concubine, Qiu Ling, stumbling over her feet, was at the height of her anger, scolding her. The servant who came to report did not dare to approach, blocked by Madam Lin's maidservants.

"Shameless wretch, who allowed you to go into the master's study?" Madam Lin slapped the armrest of the chair.

That morning, someone had reported seeing the Concubine Qiu sneaking out of Lin Xingyi's study, news that made Madam Lin quite irate.

Lin Xingyi often resided in his study, and now he was only in his thirties to forties. If a woman from the inner court bore him a son at this time, what would happen?

In her view, one young master, Lin Shenxing, was enough for the Lin Family. Lin Shenxing had no birth mother and was raised entirely by her hand, essentially being her own son. The Lin Family handed down to him would mean she wouldn't be at a loss.

But if a young master with a birth mother emerged, her status would be somewhat threatened, and this was something she absolutely could not allow to happen.

"Wench, did you take my words as a passing breeze or what? You concubines can weave your seductive schemes in the inner court all you want, I might not care, but dare you bring those schemes to the master's study, do you want me to sell you off?"

Madam Lin always had a method for managing the inner house, normally keeping the concubines submissive, but now a disobedient one had popped up. If she tolerated this one, there was no saying a second wouldn't appear. And where there's a second, a third will follow, she absolutely could not tolerate it.

The Concubine Qiu was pinned to the ground by two strong maidservants, crying bitterly with her exquisite makeup smeared, making a mess of her face.

"Qiu Ling dares not disobey the Madam, but yesterday afternoon, the Old Madam asked me to accompany her in conversation. Seeing that it was getting late, the Old Madam then asked me to take a bowl of soup to the master's study. After the master drank the soup... he... he kept me there," she said.

Chapter 659: The Man Sent by the Fifth Prince

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Madam Lin frowned, casting a cold glance at Concubine Qiu.

Indeed, the old lady would occasionally call Concubine Qiu over for a chat or to participate in gardening, as she, too, was once a village girl.

"Since the old lady instructed you to bring soup to the master, you should have left after delivering it. Yet you—were you waiting for the master to finish before leaving?"

That was indeed Concubine Qiu's secret hope. She wished that Lin Xingyi would take pity on her for bringing him soup so late in the day and allow her to stay longer, which was why she lingered.

As it happened, Lin Xingyi did keep her afterwards and they spent a steamy interlude together, bringing her joy all night long.

Upon dawn, fearing Madam Lin's tactics, she wanted to leave sneakily, but to her dismay, she still got caught.

Concubine Qiu, now a sobbing mess, could only say, "Madam, I dare not do it again; it was just this once, please spare me!"

"Spare you?" How could such behavior be condoned? If this went unpunished, the other women would follow suit, seizing any opportunity to bring soup. That would be intolerable.

Madam Lin looked at Concubine Qiu coldly and said angrily, "I cannot let you break the rules of the house by yourself, so I cannot overlook this. Someone, go call the human trafficker."

Upon hearing this, Concubine Qiu froze, a look of utter hopelessness in her eyes.

Lin Xingyi was not a man swayed by lust, and opportunities for these concubines were already scarce. Furthermore, with the mistress of the house practically a tyrant, treating them like animals, their chances of receiving favor were even rarer.

Having finally received more affection than the others, she had been hoping for a chance to conceive a child. How could she willingly accept being sold off?

All of a sudden, Concubine Qiu, as if driven mad, pushed away the two maids holding her down and laughed loudly, "Jin Yuan, you are too much! I am the master's woman, a concubine with status. I will not leave; I want to see the master, I want to see the old lady. What right do you have to sell me?"

At that, Madam Lin flew into a rage.

She had no intention of actually selling Concubine Qiu, since these women were gifts to Lin Xingyi from others, or bestowed by the emperor himself. Since Lin Xingyi had taken them in, it meant they had to be accepted, and naturally, they were not for sale.

What she meant to sell was the personal maid of Concubine Qiu. What use was a maid who couldn't even keep watch over her own mistress?

Yet who would have thought, the foolish Concubine Qiu misunderstood and even dared to challenge her?

"Hold down this cheap wench and slap her," Madam Lin commanded loudly.

A frail woman, Concubine Qiu was quickly subdued by the maids. In a moment, the sound of slaps began as she was hit across the face.

Only after both sides of Concubine Qiu's face swelled red and blood seeped from her mouth did Madam Lin begin to feel a hint of relief.

Scared from the beating, Concubine Qiu no longer dared to resist and pleaded bitterly, "Madam, I won't dare again, please don't sell me; you can't sell me, I was given to the master by Prince Wu..."

Madam Lin snorted. Did she think she would still be here if not for being a gift from Prince Wu?

"Take her away, she's not to leave the house for a month, not even to walk in the garden," Madam Lin ordered. She kept Lin Xingyi's mistresses in a shared courtyard, not allowing them casual egress. Yet, fearing it might be too much to handle if something went wrong, she allowed them an outing each day for the appearance of mercy, but it was limited to one hour.

This timing was deliberate; after all, none of them would have a chance encounter with Lin Xingyi during that hour anyway.

Concubine Qiu was dragged away by the maids back to the large servant quarters, weeping all the way.

Chapter 660: The Old Lady's Series of Schemes

She was a beautiful maiden given to Lin Xingyi by Prince, and her hometown was near Qingshui Town, making them almost fellow villagers. Her family was too poor when she was a child, so she was sold. Being the most beautiful among her sisters, she did not wait long before she was passed from hand to hand until she ended up with Prince, and from there, she was given to Lin Xingyi.

After ten years of ups and downs, life in the Lin Residence was tough, but because she could speak the same dialect as Lin Xingyi, he showed her some favoritism, indeed treating her slightly better than the other concubines in the household.

Now, all she lacked was a child. With a child, she could have her own courtyard like the mother of the Second Miss, Concubine Kong, and be free to move about the inner quarters of the house, something she had dreamed of countless times.

Having just been beaten, she could only hope that the fierce Family Head Madam wouldn't really sell her off.

After sending Concubine Qiu away, Madam Lin massaged her temples, and only then did the scared servant step forward to report.

"Madam, the Old Madam just left the residence with the two young misses and the young master."

"What?" Madam Lin staggered and felt an even stronger headache coming on.

When did this happen, and where did they go?

"I don't know!" the servant confessed innocently.

"You don't know?" Madam Lin touched her forehead, nearly collapsing, but her quick-acting maid was fast enough to support her in time.

"What use is there in keeping you if not to check on these things? Go and find out at once."

By the time Madam Lin got to the main gate, there was no one there.

Another gatekeeping servant quickly explained the situation to Madam Lin, and as clever as she was, she understood the whole scenario in a flash.

It seems the Old Madam had set a trap for her!

Just the day before, she had sent that wretched Concubine Qiu to speak with her, casually allowing her to bring soup to the master, and then, as if by logic, Concubine Qiu stayed in the study.

When she found out in the morning and flew into a rage, the Old Madam took the opportunity to flee with the young ones.

To offer incense?

Hah, in all the years the Old Madam had been in Beijing, she had never seen her offer incense or attend any religious ceremony.

She never believed in that stuff.

Madam Lin clenched the handkerchief in her hand, her heart settling on an understanding.

It must have been Lin Qianqing, that wretched girl, pestering the Old Madam to go out that led to this scheme.

Going to Sanqing Temple? She must have gone to Jinxiu City with Gu Youyou.

She had said it, hadn’t she? When Miss Du from the Jie Family opened her embroidery shop, she invited Gu Youyou. How could she not have invited that wretched girl?

Turns out they were waiting for her here.

Madam Lin turned her head and instructed, "Inform the Qiu officials to send several capable men to Jinxiu City to bring back both the cousins and the eldest miss."

...

Meanwhile, Lin Qianqing was in the carriage with Gu Youyou.

At first, when she saw Gu Youyou with such a large dog, she was frightened for quite a while.

But after seeing the affectionate interactions between Abao and Gu Youyou, she gradually calmed down and even curiously petted it a few times.

Abao was raised wonderfully by Yue Rujing, with fur beautiful and soft, even more comfortable to the touch than her own fox fur cloak—so much so that she could not help but become addicted to petting it.

By this time, she had already gotten cozy with Abao.

"How about it, my Abao is well-behaved, right? They just discriminate because he’s too big."

"Indeed, indeed, he’s just like my grandmother’s little cat, only a bit bigger."

The eldest miss was no longer afraid of Abao, but Xiang Chun, who had come with Gu Youyou, was still terrified, shrinking fearfully into a corner.