

His Beloved 371

Chapter 371: Compensation Required by President Mu (14)_1

Qin Mu's greatest fear was the sudden transformation of a loved one into an enemy.

Xiaomei had been with her for so long; naturally, she was the last person Qin Mu wanted to see change.

After their chat, Xiaomei left, and Qin Mu stood alone at the door of the studio, silently watching the empty space, reminiscing their first visit to this place together.

She drove to Jing Feng and Helian Hao's apartment. The two of them sat on the couch, chatting; Helian Hao was completely listless.

"I plan to spend the New Year at my parents' this year," Helian Hao said, her head bowed beside her.

Qin Mu, guessing it was the atmosphere of the Jing Family that made her uncomfortable, just nodded and asked, "What about Jing Feng?"

"He can do as he pleases! Unless something unexpected happens, he'll naturally spend it at his own home," Helian Hao replied, still with her eyes lowered, seemingly very despondent and sentimental.

Qin Mu sat beside her, gently took her hand, and suddenly realized she hadn't been showing Helian Hao enough concern lately.

"Why did we even get married? I knew it wouldn't be happy," Helian Hao mused.

"Xiaohao, don't you think that mindset might be unfair to Jing Feng?" Qin Mu asked her in a soft voice.

"Yes, it's unfair to him. But you know, the word 'fair' seems so simple, yet is so difficult to actually achieve," Helian Hao looked up, the sorrow in her eyes immediately apparent.

"Would you like to hear about my affair with Mu Yichen?" Qin Mu suddenly changed the subject.

Curious, Helian Hao gazed at her. Qin Mu also lowered her eyes with a wry smile.

"I used to think like you, how could two people not blessed by others live a happy life together? However, his care for me exceeded my expectations. He said he wanted to be with me for life and had never considered anyone else. I became very tired later, you know how much prejudice his mother holds against me, and with the Jing Family, Jing Qing going out of her way to torment me. But seeing how good he is to me, I suddenly thought, if I just left, who would be the most pleased? Who would be the most disappointed? Why should I sadden the person who cares about me the most, and bring joy to those who don't care?" Qin Mu said.

Helian Hao instinctively observed her. After Qin Mu finished speaking, she lifted her gaze to look back at her, her hand gently holding Helian Hao's.

"You know I've never believed in love. My parents were once so in love, but then Zhang Rujia brought Qin Mingzhu to my home, and my world was shattered. From that moment, I developed an aversion to love and to men. Yet, he has been by my side all these years. Xiaohao, I believe that no matter what, we should cherish such men and not choose to give up on ourselves," Qin Mu expressed.

Helian Hao slowly rested her forehead on Qin Mu's shoulder, her hair hiding her face. She hummed softly, feeling the shake in her breath.

"But I've been so tired lately!"

"That's because you're in poor health. Eat well and recover quickly. Then you'll be the energetic and spirited doctor once again," Qin Mu comforted her with a chuckle.

Helian Hao laughed too but remained leaning on Qin Mu's shoulder without lifting her face for a while.

She knew Qin Mu was right. Many people had visited her recently: colleagues, parents. But everyone complained to her, making her feel as if her relationship with Jing Feng was truly impossible.

Especially when others spoke of how marriages not blessed by family elders were doomed to unhappiness, thoughts of the Jing Family patriarch and Jing Qing made her feel that her situation with Jing Feng was probably just as others had described.

Thankfully, Qin Mu's visit kept her from sinking further into pessimism.

If even Qin Mu could persevere, how could she be so fragile?

Suddenly, as if coming to a realization, Helian Hao relaxed her mood and said, "Stay for lunch. I'll cook for you myself."

"Let's order takeout, from a hotel," Qin Mu suggested, thinking that Helian Hao was not in a condition to cook, but fearing Jing Feng might get mad over ordinary takeout, so it was better to order nutritious lunch from a hotel.

"Well..."

"I'll ask the manager of AM's restaurant," Qin Mu interjected.

Helian Hao actually meant to bring this up, but hadn't expected that Qin Mu would finally be willing to ask someone for help to make her happy.

After lunch and a brief chat with Helian Hao, Qin Mu left. Firstly, because Helian Hao's health didn't permit her to sit for too long, and secondly, because Qin Mu needed to go home and chat with Mu Qingxin.

Originally, she was quite apprehensive about reuniting with Mu Qingxin, considering the girl had so many grievances against her. But after dealing with Jing Qing, she found Mu Qingxin quite

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Qin Mu and Mu Qingxin were born in the same year. Qin Mu still vaguely remembered how Mu Qingxin looked every time she saw her; because Mu Yichen would always protect the two of them, sometimes

when he walked beside Qin Mu, Mu Qingxin would give her a cold huff, then deliberately go around to the other side, take Mu Yichen's hand and insist that she walk in front.

As Qin Mu passed by a street, she saw a shop selling piping hot corn and stopped her car. She was thinking of buying two, one for herself and one for Mu Qingxin, but then she thought about all the people at home, so she took out a hundred-dollar bill from her wallet.

Later, the whole first floor of the Mu Family home was filled with the smell of corn.

Hiding behind the servant's door to eat, Qin Mu and Mu Qingxin busied themselves nibbling on corn on the sofa.

"Alas, my mom was called out to have lunch with her granddaughter at noon; I thought I was the one she cared about the most."

Mu Qingxin shook her head while eating the corn, the very picture of disappointment.

Qin Mu didn't say anything and just couldn't help but laugh.

"Tell me the truth, have you ever noticed that you've unwittingly tied our whole family down?"

Mu Qingxin suddenly looked up at her with a cob of corn still in her hands.

"Don't scare me, I don't think I have that ability."

Qin Mu shook her head repeatedly. Not to mention others, take Feng Fanghua for example, how could she tie her down?

"My mom does have opinions about you, but you gave birth to Huanhuan, and now Huanhuan is the family's most treasured little baby. Look, with just one phone call saying she wanted to have lunch with grandma, my mom hurried over, even willing to leave me, her own daughter, whom she hasn't seen for years."

Mu Qingxin sighed again while speaking and took a big bite of the corn. Eating corn in the dead of winter felt particularly good.

Qin Mu felt quite convinced by Mu Qingxin's words as if it really was like that.

The two of them were chatting when Qin Mu's cellphone started to ring. Upon seeing the number, she didn't feel like answering.

Because the phone was on the coffee table, Mu Qingxin looked over curiously. No name was displayed, so she asked with curiosity, "Why is there no name?"

"There's no need for a name!"

Qin Mu responded with a light laugh but eventually put down the corn and picked up the phone to answer, "Hello!"

"Tomorrow is New Year's, you should go to your mom's grave this afternoon, right?"

Qin Mu listened but didn't speak; she planned to go after four or five o'clock.

"Mhm!"

"I just visited your mom's grave, Qin Mu, could you come to the house tonight?"

"I'm afraid I'll be busy."

Qin Mu heard the pleading voice on the other end but didn't have the heart to outright refuse; she simply responded indifferently.

Mu Qingxin had been all ears, observing Qin Mu's expression, and suddenly remembered Qin Mu's father.

Ha, that man!

Mu Qingxing thought he was the worst man in the world, having had a one-night stand with another woman without taking precautions. After so many years, the woman showed up with a child, and after his wife died, he had the audacity to remarry.

From this perspective, Mu Qingxin thought that Qin Mu was the most innocent and pitiful person in that sad marriage era. At such a young age, she had watched her own mother die and then saw another woman move into her home, only to be kicked out eventually.

Mu Qingxin also remembered that after Qin Mu left, that mother and daughter moved into the Qin Family home. Later, Qin Mingzhu even went to the same school as her. Ha, she had never seen anyone so shameless.

Qin Haiming and Zhang Rujia got the marriage certificate in a low key and then lived together. But that was the most low-key thing Zhang Rujia did when marrying that man. In the following years, in Rongcheng, Zhang Rujia seemed low-key, but she always carried herself with a certain air. Was there ever a time when someone but her face lit up with pleasure when asking for her favor?

After Qin Mu hung up the phone, Mu Qingxin asked in a low voice, "Your father?"

Qin Mu then came back to her senses, her gaze unfocused as she looked at her, and nodded.

"He has the nerve to call you, why would you even pick up? If he could do something like that back then, if it were me, I'd never want to see him in this lifetime, not answer his calls, not give any news whatsoever."

Mu Qingxin got more and more excited as she spoke. The butler came by from outside and, upon hearing those words, became somewhat worried. The expression on his face involuntarily contorted, but as a servant, he did not say much, simply passing by.

Qin Mu listened to Mu Qingxin's words, smiled, but didn't respond.

Qin Mu thought to herself, originally, she had thought the same way too.

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Only if...

If everything were this simple.

She returned to this city, and for the people in this city, it had become more than a matter of whether she wanted to see them or not.

If she lived a simple life, perhaps it would have been fine, but now she wanted to climb higher, and that meant she had to give up some things.

"You have no idea what happened after you left, Qin Mingzhu replaced you, and at school, she was practically a little overlord, so arrogant, commanding one person to do this today, and tomorrow telling someone else to fetch her ridiculous things. I really don't know what your father is thinking."

Your father...

When Qin Mu heard Mu Qingxin say those words, she felt as if she had traveled back more than a decade.

But...

"He stopped being my father from the moment my mother died."

Qin Mu spoke in a low and calm voice.

Mu Qingxin looked at her a bit unexpectedly, then lowered her eyes, feeling she might have spoken too harshly, especially considering how Qin Mu had been abandoned overseas all these years.

"Ah, don't take it too much to heart. Though heaven took away your mother, it sent my brother to your side. After all, my brother has spent more time with you in comparison."

Mu Qingxin said, raising her eyebrows at her, hoping she would cheer up a bit.

Qin Mu smiled helplessly, "Huh! I didn't expect you to be like this, Mu Qingxin."

"Huh? Like what?"

"Very interesting!"

Qin Mu couldn't help but laugh as she spoke.

Mu Qingxin grinned, her eyes widening as if trying to decide if the comment was meant to be derogatory or complimentary.

"What do you mean 'very interesting'? If you don't like me — well, it's not like I like you either."

Mu Qingxin gave her a provocative look, then a bit proudly, but her tone was no longer as inconsiderate of Qin Mu's feelings as before.

"Did the baby kick you again today?"

Qin Mu suddenly approached her and gently touched her rounded belly.

"Haha, it kicks me several times a day."

Mu Qingxin immediately rubbed her belly with pride as she spoke.

Later, Feng Fanghua and Mu Zihao returned with Huanhuan, and Mu Yichen also rushed back, with Qin Mu and Mu Yichen holding Huanhuan as they went to the cemetery.

But when the two arrived at the cemetery with the child, they saw the grave covered with messy white chrysanthemums, their wrapping papers still fresh, and the flowers seemed new, probably from today.

Qin Mu suddenly stopped, remembering Qin Haiming mentioning on the phone that he had visited her mother.

This afternoon, almost everyone had gone out to visit the graves, so...

Qin Mingzhu!

Qin Mingzhu had come with Qin Haiming and even carried out such a condemnable act.

Qin Mu stood there for several seconds, quietly clenching her teeth and looking at the disheveled flowers with a cold face.

Mu Yichen frowned too, putting Huanhuan down before turning to look at Qin Mu.

Her nose was red from the cold, but that was probably nothing compared to the chill in her heart.

Huanhuan threw the broken and messy chrysanthemums aside, then turned to look at her mother, took the flowers from under her arm, and placed them in front of her grandmother's tombstone.

Qin Mu watched silently, involuntarily letting out a laugh.

This year, Huanhuan was only three years old.

Qin Mu did not pay respects to the older generation of the Qin Family, just looked at her mother's grave and then returned to the city with her husband and child.

She quietly noted the incident in her heart, yet she hadn't taken any concrete steps for retaliation.

Everything could wait till after the New Year's.

Before dinner, the old master returned, and the most important seat on the sofa immediately became his, with the younger generation sitting by his side. Although the old master was over eighty, he looked quite robust, seemingly no less so than the patriarch of the Jing Family. However, unlike the old master of the Jing Family, who always wore traditional attire, the patriarch of the Mu Family dressed more down-to-earth, in casual jackets, tenderly gazing at the little girl across from him who was licking her lollipop without taking her eyes off him.

"Is this our Mu Family's first little treasure?"

The old master asked.

Qin Mu looked at Huanhuan, thinking to herself, Yes!

"Absolutely! Look, doesn't this girl have a striking resemblance to her siblings in her brow and eyes?"

Feng Fanghua settled down quite a bit in front of her father-in-law, her demeanor becoming much more subdued.

"Mm! But I think she looks more like her mother."

The old master said.

Qin Mu was pleasantly surprised; no one in the Mu Family had ever said that Huanhuan looked like her.

Feng Fanghua immediately became unhappy when she heard this, but she didn't dare to retort, instead clasping her hands and lowering her head.

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Mu Zihao didn't speak, just a slight noise came from his throat.

Mu Yichen didn't speak either, and Mu Qingxin even less so, struggling to hold back her laughter, thinking that finally someone had managed to shut the old man up.

"How old is Mumu this year? I remember she's about the same age as Qingxin."

The old master inquired.

"I was born the same year as Qingxin, my birthday is just a little earlier than hers."

Qin Mu couldn't remember Mu Qingxin's exact birthday, but with Mu Yichen around, she remembered roughly.

"She's still a child, Yichen, you have to treat Mumu well, you can't let the girl suffer following you."

The old master then turned to his grandson sitting quietly next to Qin Mu and advised, Mu Yichen lifted his eyes slightly, his mouth immediately forming a straight line: Of course!

But a child...

Mu Yichen thought to retort, but he didn't get the chance.

"Dad, what do you mean by suffering following Yichen? Yichen has never been willing to let her suffer even a little bit."

Feng Fanghua immediately spoke up for her son, thinking to herself how her silly son had suffered for this girl.

"So you were the one making her suffer?"

What's a godly counterattack?

Mu Yichen's faint response left his mother feeling utterly devastated.

"What's the matter? You're not even letting a child off the hook?"

The old master turned his head, not clearly seeing his daughter-in-law's face, just leaning slightly, resting gently against the back of the sofa, and asked lightly.

"I..."

"It's not that, Mom actually has a bark worse than her bite, she's been taking care of me since I returned to the country."

Qin Mu glanced at Feng Fanghua, knowing she revered and feared the old master, so she intercepted Feng Fanghua's response.

Only then did the old master look back at the girl sitting diagonally opposite, with a hint of approval on his face, he suppressed his intimidating aura and nodded slightly.

"Hmm! Your mother-in-law is just fiery by nature, definitely a good mother-in-law."

The old master added.

Upon hearing this, Feng Fanghua, no matter how aggrieved, had to swallow her response.

"Hmm! I know!"

Qin Mu said softly.

Mu Yichen turned his head to look at his silly wife, his hand resting on the arm of the sofa, lifting to gently stroke her hair, his dark eyes also on her hair: Silly, aren't you?

Qin Mu...

"Hahaha! You guys are really good at pretending."

Mu Qingxin burst out laughing uncontrollably.

Everyone...

Had never seen such a mood breaker.

"Cough!"

The old master cleared his throat, after all, having just come back, he still wanted to appear honest, especially now that there was a newcomer in the house. Little did he know his granddaughter would stir things up.

"Grandpa, you haven't given me New Year's money for several years now, you have to give a big one this year."

Uncomfortable with everyone being so rigid, Mu Qingxin immediately sat down next to him, wrapped her arm around his and nestled against his shoulder to start acting cute.

"You still have the cheek to ask for a red envelope after not visiting your grandpa for so many years."

Feng Fanghua couldn't help but chide upon hearing her daughter's words.

"Ah, what are you saying? Isn't it enough that the child is happy? Grandpa will definitely give you a big red envelope this year."

The old master said, embracing his granddaughter, thinking it had also been many years since he gave her a red envelope, so he must make a good show of it this time.

"Grandpa loves Qingxin the most."

Mu Qingxin immediately hugged her grandfather and planted a big kiss on his face.

Qin Mu couldn't help but stare openly, the envy in her eyes only concealed discreetly.

Later, she lowered her eyes, only to realize he was still touching her hair.

Mu Yichen drew her into his arms and gently kissed her forehead.

Qin Mu instinctively tried to pull away, but Mu Yichen's hand firmly clasped her head, preventing her from leaving his chest.

With so many people in the house.

Huanhuan, not sure if he heard the words "red envelope," moseyed over to the old master, then turned his head and saw Dad kissing Mom; holding his lollipop, he immediately covered his eyes.

"Brother, be mindful of the impact."

Mu Qingxin immediately reminded him, seeing the child's reaction.

"Did you mind your manners?"

Mu Yichen asked pointedly, and only after being pushed away by Qin Mu did he sit down next to her, not moving away. On the other hand, Qin Mu glared at him annoyed, while Feng Fanghua looked on with a stomachache.

Qin Mu lowered her head awkwardly, wanting to apologize but not knowing where to start.

But being so affectionate in front of the elders really wasn't appropriate, Qin Mu felt so embarrassed, yet she couldn't scold him in front of the elders.

Probably wouldn't make a difference if she did scold him.

"How am I not being mindful? I wasn't hugging and embracing anyone..."

Mu Qingxin started to say, then turned to look at Grandpa and quietly sat up straight, smoothed her clothes, lowered her eyes and stopped talking back.

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Mu Zihao suddenly remembered something and looked at his son and daughter-in-law, "Right, according to our local customs, you two should visit the Mayor of Qin City to deliver some gifts before the New Year. Are you planning to go in person, or do you plan to send someone else?"

"Dad, isn't that just disgusting? Why send any gifts? After being driven out for so many years..."

When Mu Qingxin heard what Mu Zihao said, she felt it was too formal and also too insincere. How could Qin Mu possibly want to give gifts?

"You little kids should not interrupt arbitrarily."

Feng Fanghua reminded her.

"Please, I'm only two months younger than that girl, and we both are mothers. Why call me a little child?"

Mu Qingxin hated it most when others called her young, clearly, she had a man and was a mother.

"You... can't you just talk less?"

At that moment, Feng Fanghua deeply understood what it meant to be incessantly annoyed by your own daughter at home, though truly worrying about her when she was not around.

"Alright, alright, let's have a good New Year. No one lose their temper, but as for the matter of bringing gifts to your maternal family during the New Year, you young couple should make the trip."

The elder pondered for a moment and then said in a heavy tone.

Mu Yichen didn't say anything but just looked up at the elder.

"Whatever happened in the past is over now. Girl, since you have come back and are looking to turn over a new leaf, you have to be able to swallow this."

—

So, that day she stood with Mu Yichen in the Qin Family's living room.

Some were happy, and some were not. Qin Mingzhu, dressed beautifully, came down from upstairs, humming a tune and carrying her purse, ready to go out with friends for a meal when she saw Qin Mu and Mu Yichen standing by the sofa.

"You two, sit down."

Qin Haiming also came down from upstairs and said as he walked over and sat down.

Qin Mu stood there, not willing to sit down, and Mu Yichen gave her a glance and said in a low voice, "Okay!"

Qin Mu subconsciously looked up at him, then remembering their purpose, followed him to sit down.

Qin Mingzhu's mouth was wide open, seemingly shocked by Qin Mu's actions. She wanted to call out to Qin Mu but then thought better of it and walked over to sit down, whispering, "Brother-in-law!"

Mu Yichen looked up at her and then gave a slight smile, "Good!"

Qin Mingzhu...

Qin Mu...

But it was Qin Haiming who sat there very calmly, "Smoke?"

Mu Yichen glanced at Qin Mu before saying again, "Quit recently."

"Oh?"

Qin Haiming looked up at Mu Yichen, looking curiously at him.

"We're trying for a child."

Mu Yichen sat on the sofa with his legs crossed, holding Qin Mu's hand as he spoke.

Qin Mu...

Qin Haiming laughed heartily, "Haha, that's great news! You two really should have another child."

Qin Mu didn't know why Qin Haiming was so happy but felt somewhat satisfied when she looked at Qin Mingzhu's slightly pale face.

"Don't you have a child already? Why have another?"

Qin Mingzhu muttered.

"You should be offering your blessings that your sister is having a child."

Qin Haiming immediately said.

The maid brought in tea, and Qin Haiming directed, "Could you pour tea for your sister and brother-in-law?"

"What?"

Qin Mingzhu thought she had misheard.

"All you know is to go out and eat, eat, eat. Why can't you be as comforting as your sister, despite being my daughter?"

Qin Haiming sighed looking at her unseemly behavior.

Qin Mingzhu's eyes were practically popping out. Her father was actually asking her to learn from that woman?

"Dad!"

Qin Mingzhu called out in discontent, wanting to act coquettishly but also adoring Mu Yichen, so she held back.

"Pour tea for your sister and brother-in-law first, then we'll talk."

Mu Yichen suddenly whispered a reminder.

Qin Mingzhu reluctantly squatted beside the coffee table to pour their tea.

Qin Haiming watched Qin Mingzhu pour the tea, thinking his daughter was far from being well-behaved but didn't say more.

"Where's your mother? Why hasn't she come down yet?"

Qin Haiming asked.

"Mom said she would be down in a moment."

After Qin Mingzhu poured the tea, she returned to her seat and replied sullenly.

"Here she comes, here she comes, oh, we have a distinguished guest in our house today."

Zhang Rujia, dressed in an expensive cheongsam, came down from upstairs. The first thing she noticed was Qin Mu sitting on her sofa, and a chill rose in her heart. But no sooner had she finished speaking than she saw Mu Yichen sitting beside her, and she instantly walked down with a smile.

"The young master Yichen is here too! Today really is a blessed day for us."

Saying this, Zhang Rujia walked over and sat beside Qin Haiming, immediately composing herself.

"The patriarch sent us to see Mayor Qin, and we also want to thank the Mayor for looking after Mumu since her return."

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"Grandpa is back! I should be the one visiting him. Go back and tell him to wait for a couple of days; I will definitely go over to wish him a Happy New Year,"

Qin Haiming became even more courteous upon hearing that the Mu family's patriarch had also returned.

"I will surely pass on the message,"

Mu Yichen said.

"Mom, Yichen said he wants to have kids with her—with sister,"

Qin Mingzhu was somewhat anxious, but just as she was about to call the little enchantress, she saw her father and Mu Yichen's faces and immediately twisted her own skirt with both hands, whispering to Zhang Rujia, who was diagonally across from her.

Zhang Rujia's heart trembled upon hearing this, then she pretended to smile: "What's this? At such a young age, you're already thinking about having both sons and daughters? Don't you want to enjoy a few more years? Nowadays, young people all want to play for a few more years, and besides, you two have the habit of smoking and drinking, right? Before having kids, you really need to quit these bad habits, or it will affect the fetus's development,"

"Yichen quit smoking a long time ago, and I heard Mumu also stopped taking traditional Chinese medicine. It's better to have kids while young; we can always play later, right?"

Qin Haiming held a different opinion.

"You're right, and besides, Mumu has been away from home since she was young. What she desires the most is just a warm family. Children are the people closest to us,"

Qin Mu unconsciously glanced at Mu Yichen again, thinking that his remark was probably for Qin Haiming, so she didn't interject and just quietly listened.

"Then go ahead and have them, as long as Mumu is happy, that's all that matters. As for us, we hope Mumu is happy and lives a blessed life. As long as she's fine, our family will be fine,"

Zhang Rujia suddenly became more generous in her response and smiled so magnanimously.

Qin Mingzhu was frightened and couldn't believe it, thinking to herself, are you really my mother?

"Rujia is right, as long as Mumu is happy, I will be completely satisfied. If there's anything in the future, just come and find me at home. No matter whether I can handle it well or not, I will put in all my effort to assist you guys—and since you two are planning for a second child, shouldn't we also schedule the wedding soon? We can't keep hiding Mumu's identity forever, can we?"

"Yes—"

"I have always said it's not him hiding me; it's me who doesn't let him make it public,"

Qin Mu finally spoke up, her voice coldly reminding everyone.

This topic was not the first time she had brought it up with Qin Haiming, and it was not the first time she had explained.

That's why she disliked Qin Haiming demanding Mu Yichen to do something for her under the guise of paternal responsibility. In her heart, she believed he still wasn't qualified.

"Look at how you talk. Your father is just worried about you being taken advantage of. How can you talk back to an elder like that?"

Zhang Rujia, upon hearing her words and seeing her face, immediately disapproved and her eyes conveyed blame.

"Please shut up when I'm talking to my father,"

Qin Mu said to her coldly.

Zhang Rujia was even more upset: "You, how can you talk to me like that? Haiming, you heard everything, right? You never believe me when I say how she treats me, but you heard it just now, didn't you? Has she ever treated me like an elder?"

"Enough, Mumu didn't say anything wrong. It's you who shouldn't be blowing things out of proportion all the time,"

Qin Haiming admonished her, his eyes downcast and somewhat angry.

"I..."

"They rarely come back home for a meal; go to the kitchen and have a look, and prepare a few dishes Mumu likes to eat. I have told you what she likes to eat not long ago,"

Qin Haiming suddenly instructed her again.

Qin Mingzhu was stunned, feeling as though she was being sidelined.

And in Qin Haiming's mind, only three words were spinning: "my father."

Qin Mu easily dealt with Qin Haiming with just those three words, and neither the mother-daughter duo noticed that these three words were the crux of the matter.

Mu Yichen suddenly fell silent. Knowing his wife had opened her mouth to say this, he understood she would no longer allow others to bully her.

"Weren't you going out to eat? Not going anymore?"

Qin Haiming asked his uneasy younger daughter, sitting across from him with a dark face.

"I, I..."

Qin Mingzhu stammered, her eyes nervously looking to her mother.

"Since we have guests at home now, there's no need to go out. Come with me to the kitchen to see,"

Zhang Rujia said as she stood up, her hanging hands gesturing to her daughter.

Qin Mingzhu immediately followed Zhang Rujia into the kitchen, then with tears of grievance about to fall she said, "Mom, is that little wench here to steal my place? Mom, why hasn't she left? Is she really going to stay and eat with our family? The place she's sitting now used to be my spot."

Qin Mingzhu, holding Zhang Rujia's hand, hid in a corner, glancing outside before stomping her feet with anger within, because Qin Haiming was there, she didn't dare to speak loudly. At this moment, the treasured Mingzhu felt her own status teetering on the brink, wishing she could immediately drive Qin Mu out with a stick.

"Hold back for now, the real drama hasn't even started. Just wait until those two can't have a child for a year or a half, hmph!"

Zhang Rujia let out a cold snort, her malicious gaze fixed on the three people outside who were chatting and laughing on the couch.

"But what if she gets pregnant?"

Qin Mingzhu asked worriedly, her voice very low.

"There won't be a 'what if'!"

Zhang Rujia said hatefully.

"Madam!"

Just as the mother and daughter were bitterly resenting each other, an aunt walked up from behind them, startling them both. Zhang Rujia clutched her chest and hissed a curse: "Are you sick? What are you shouting for?"

"Madam, I just wanted to ask if I should prepare an extra meal."

The aunt bowed her head, unwilling to look up at her, only tolerating her commands for the sake of her salary.

"Extra meal? Feeding that little wench is worse than feeding a dog."

Zhang Rujia continued to spew out cruel words in a hushed tone.

"Yes!"

The aunt, thinking she was serious, turned to leave.

"Come back!"

Zhang Rujia wanted Qin Mu to leave in her heart, but she dared not show it, especially when Qin Hai was at home. Even if she had to pretend, she had to do it boldly and openly.

After all, she had promised Qin Hai she would not oppose Qin Mu again. Zhang Rujia took two deep breaths, then turned her head and entered the kitchen.

Qin Mingzhu was still sneakily watching from the corner, catching only a few indistinct words from outside.

"Next year, we will consider getting married."

Mu Yichen said to Qin Haiming.

Qin Haiming nodded in approval.

Qin Mu didn't say anything, just boredly went to the restroom to wash her hands while they were chatting.

Hmm! The chilly water made her all the more rational.

She had to eat this meal here, she had to make that mother and daughter afraid.

If it weren't for seeing the flowers Qin Hai had brought to her mother's grave trampled yesterday afternoon, she wouldn't have taken this action today.

It wasn't because the Mu family's patriarch and her father-in-law told her to come; in fact, she wanted to come to disturb the peace of the mother and daughter. Since they didn't treat her like a person, she would ensure they didn't have a good year either. If she couldn't have a good time, neither would they.

However, she didn't expect that the restroom, which was originally empty, suddenly had another person in it.

Qin Mu looked up into the mirror and saw Qin Mingzhu biting her teeth and trembling with anger, as if she wanted to kill her with her gaze or swallow her like some disgusting thing.

"You wretched girl, why did you come to my home? What exactly is your purpose?"

Initially, Qin Mingzhu's voice was controlled, but at the end it rose sharply.

Qin Mu watched the arrogant girl in the mirror and unconsciously lowered her eyes, washing her fingers forcefully one by one, then calmly wiped her hands as she asked faintly, "Who trampled the flowers at my mom's tombstone yesterday?"

"What?"

Qin Mingzhu's eyes widened again.

Qin Mu then looked up at the mirror at the girl whose face was turning white: "What's wrong? You're afraid now?"

Qin Mu smiled, her eyes staring through the mirror into the eyes of the girl, sharp and shrewd.

"Don't slander me. You're just trying to drive a wedge between me and my dad, right? I'm telling you, don't even think about it. If you dare to ruin my family, I will definitely get back at you."

Qin Mu turned around, closing in on her.

"You and your mom, who have already destroyed my family, I...."

"You and your mother have already ruined my family, and I will take revenge."

Qin Mu stood close to her, whispering a reminder.

Qin Mingzhu got scared looking at Qin Mu's flawless face and the sharp, undoubtedly perceptive gaze so close to her. But since she was in her own home, she quickly tried to push Qin Mu away: "I'm not easily scared!"

Qin Mu dodged to the side, but her clothes were still grabbed by Qin Mingzhu, who then raised her hand and grasped Qin Mingzhu's hand, undoing the fabric her hand had caught and then forcefully shoved her aside.

"Ah!"

A sharp scream suddenly came from the restroom. It wasn't very loud, but fortunately, there was no one there.

When Qin Mu walked out, she appeared relaxed, returning to the living room with a faint smile.

"Just now, Mingzhu fell in the restroom, it seems!"

Qin Mu said softly as she sat back down.

"She is always so clumsy!"

Qin Haiming said with a light smile, his gaze lowered as he sipped his tea.

Qin Mu glanced at him and then lowered her eyes without saying anything further.

It was Mu Yichen who, with his legs crossed and smoking a cigarette, narrowed his eyes and smiled faintly at his wife.

Qin Haiming also took a puff of his cigarette, his lips curling slightly when he saw Qin Mu and Mu Yichen sitting together; a gentle warmth flowed in the depths of his eyes.

Qin Mingzhu limped out, massaging her buttocks and muttering softly: "Bitch! Bitch! Bitch!"

Since she was speaking softly, no one could hear her clearly, but the resentment in her expression was unmistakably visible to all.

"What happened to you?"

Qin Haiming looked at his younger daughter with concern, frowning slightly.

"Nothing, I just got accidentally knocked over by a dog."

Qin Mingzhu replied with resentment in her eyes as she looked at Qin Mu.

"Your family got a dog?"

Qin Mu asked curiously.

"Don't listen to her nonsense."

Qin Haiming responded.

The living room was always filled with an indescribable awkwardness, but Qin Haiming was unwilling to end the dinner on that note.

"Miss, there are two boys outside claiming to be your classmates, here to take you to a gathering."

On hearing this, Qin Mingzhu remembered she had been preoccupied with thoughts of Qin Mu, forgetting to call her friends to say she wouldn't be joining the dinner.

"Okay!"

Qin Mingzhu stood up just after sitting down, looked down at Qin Haiming politely: "Dad, I'm going to let them know I won't be going to the dinner with them tonight."

"Sit down!"

Qin Haiming put down his teacup, his brows knitting together.

Qin Mingzhu's heart tightened with urgency, but her classmates were waiting outside, so she whispered: "Just a word or two, or else I could get my phone to call them."

"Old Li, you go and tell them, from now on, Mingzhu won't be joining them for meals, let them disperse,"

Qin Haiming ordered in a low voice to the servant at the door.

"Yes!"

"Come back! Dad, what are you doing? We've been good friends for many years."

Qin Mingzhu immediately became anxious upon hearing those instructions.

"Good friends? Those who just eat and drink together aren't good friends. After the New Year, you'll start working, and you won't deal with these people anymore."

Qin Haiming knew well the reasons those young men spent time with his daughter, and he felt it was unsafe for a girl to mingle with boys outside; he had long wanted to put a stop to it.

"I don't want to work, and even less do I want to lose contact with them."

Qin Mingzhu said with a whine as she ran outside, as if the limping figure who came out of the restroom earlier wasn't her.

"She seems to frequently dine and meet at AM with those people. When you have time, ask the staff there to keep an eye on her; I'm afraid she's too naive and could be deceived,"

Qin Haiming stated, both angry and worried about Qin Mingzhu suddenly running off, speaking to Mu Yichen.

Mu Yichen softly chuckled: "She has her freedom to choose friends, you really don't need to restrict her so much."

"Me, not restrict her? I'm too lenient with her, that's why she's ended up uneducated. I've even thought about letting her make her own living outside, but her mother can't bear it,"

Qin Haiming said, sighing again.

"Letting her out on her own indeed isn't appropriate. With Mingzhu's temperament, she'd definitely turn to those friends of hers you mentioned. Others knowing she's your daughter would look after her too, so it's better to have her work during the day and spend her evenings properly at home with you."

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Qin Mu raised her chin slightly, smiling with what seemed like respect as she spoke to Qin Haiming.

"Hmm! I'm glad to hear you say that."

Qin Haiming watched her, the joyful smile in his eyes revealing itself.

Qin Mu didn't say anything more, just smiled faintly. It was the woman inside who walked out: "My, Mumu really looks like her sister. No wonder your dad can't let go of you."

Zhang Rujia spoke with a chuckle as she walked over, then whispered to Qin Haiming, "Since Mingzhu has gone out, let's eat first, shall we?"

"Hmm!"

After the meal, Qin Mu returned home with Mu Yichen. Mu Yichen, sitting in the passenger seat, said to Qin Mu, who was driving, "One would think you were pleading for Qin Mingzhu!"

"I plead for her?"

Qin Mu's eyes were cool as she laughed in response.

Mu Yichen couldn't help but keep looking at her; the complex emotions in his dark eyes showed slightly.

He knew, Qin Mu had changed!

But then he could only look helplessly out of the car window.

The night was so beautiful, yet the human heart could be so cold.

Acting!

Qin Mu felt she had long been a master at it; it's just that she, never wanting to be part of the play, had only now truly entered the role.

Qin Mingzhu, in the restroom, pointed at Qin Mu's nose and told her not to think about entering the Qin Family. Qin Mu had no desire to enter the Qin Family, but she was interested in giving it a try if it meant fulfilling a certain goal.

After all, since those people couldn't even tolerate a dead person.

Her heart was provoked to anger by those broken flowers, though on the surface, she remained as indifferent as always, without any apparent fluctuation.

As soon as the two of them returned home, Mu Yichen was called to the study by the old master, and Qin Mu was pulled into the bedroom by Mu Qingxin who whispered, "Did you really have dinner at the Qin Family?"

Qin Mu saw her curiosity and didn't hide it from her: "Yes!"

"My goodness, my mom and grandpa were hoping you'd have a maternal family as backing, but why did you do it?"

Mu Qingxin asked her with fluttering long lashes, seemingly baffled by Qin Mu's actions.

"I did it for the sake of having a maternal family as backing too."

"But your mom is already dead! ——"

Mu Qingxin stopped abruptly and covered her mouth, her face turning pale with nervousness due to her slip of the tongue.

A pain as if a stinger had viciously pierced Qin Mu's heart emerged, and it took a long time to be pulled out, the anguish deep-seated and unforgettable.

"She is dead, but I'm still alive. And since Qin Haiming is willing to give, why can't I take?"

Mu Qingxin didn't quite understand Qin Mu anymore; she stepped back, blinking her lashes unconsciously again, reminiscing that in her memory, Qin Mu was an innocent, silly girl, a naive girl living in her own world, not the calculating girl she saw now.

"Then, will you drive Qin Mingzhu out of the Qin Family, just like she and her mother did to you back then?"

Mu Qingxin asked again, curious.

"I won't, but someone will."

Qin Mu suddenly chuckled, took a step forward, and raised her hand to gently hold Mu Qingxin's hand that was once again against her chest: "Qingxin, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but now that I am in Rongcheng, this is what I must face."

Qin Mu knew in her heart that Mu Qingxin hated and yet loved her.

Mu Qingxin suddenly found herself at a loss for words, just looking at Qin Mu with an expression that spoke volumes.

Qin Mu smiled faintly: "I need to check on Huanhuan, shall we talk more tomorrow?"

"Hmm!"

Mu Qingxin nodded and murmured an agreement. After Qin Mu left, she stood at the door until Qin Mu entered Huanhuan's room and closed the door. Only then did she turn around, leaning against the door without entering her room for a long time.

Mu Qingxin suddenly felt she might be too naive, although good at retorting, maybe still too naïve.

No wonder Jiang Yan didn't dare to let her stay in that city, always worrying about her.

She couldn't help but look toward that distant doorway again, wondering if Jiang Yan would worry less if she became more shrewd?

When Mu Yi came out from the grandfather's place, he went back to his room and saw his sister standing there foolishly, he paused to ask, "What's wrong?"

"Brother, am I useless?"

Mu Yichen's brows furrowed slightly, his probing gaze on her.

"Am I too naïve? If I became as astute as Qin Mu, would Jiang Yan let me face dangers with him?"

Mu Qingxin asked sadly, her gaze stubborn and sorrowful.

"No man wants his woman to follow him into danger, no matter how shrewd she is."

Mu Yichen raised his hand to gently grasp her shoulder, speaking to her softly.

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"Really?"

Mu Qingxin couldn't quite believe it, but she knew her older brother was trustworthy.

"Mhm! Go get some rest, don't think too much, okay?"

"Alright! Good night, brother."

"Good night!"

Mu Yichen comfortingly touched her cheek, then returned to his room.

Mu Qingxin then closed the door and sat down on her bed, feeling a lot better after her brother's comforting words.

Capable men always want to protect their women, Mu Qingxin suddenly thought that she should trust Jiang Yan; he was just too worried about her because he loved her too much, cared too much.

Later, Mu Qingxin lay in bed, sent Jiang Yan a message, and went to sleep.

Tomorrow night was New Year's Eve, and not daring to think too much about it, she closed her eyes.

After returning from his daughter's room, Qin Mu saw Mu Yichen already in bed and asked him, "Are you done talking with Grandpa?"

"Yes! Come over here!"

He put down his phone and watched her approach, then gently stroked her slender back, his gaze deep and meaningful.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Qin Mu's back tingled from his touch while his gaze made her feel a bit uneasy.

"It's nothing, I just want to look at you!"

He said softly.

Qin Mu...

Suddenly, he laughed, enveloped her head in his embrace, pressing it against his chest; Qin Mu had no choice but to lie beside him and wrap her arms around him.

In the silence of the room, they could hear each other's heartbeats.

"Mumu, do you like it? Your life now?"

He suddenly asked.

Qin Mu's heart skipped a beat.

But she didn't answer, only looked up at him: "Why the sudden question?"

"It'll be okay."

He meant to reply, but in the end, he simply held her and said those three words.

Qin Mu suddenly felt uneasy, and her eyes began to sting with pain.

She didn't know what he was thinking, but she was aware of her own thoughts.

Later, they held each other without speaking, simply caressing each other's backs, comforting each other in this silent way.

It wasn't until after midnight that Qin Mu fell asleep.

Do you like your life now?

Can life really be altered by liking or disliking?

She didn't know why Mu Yichen had suddenly asked that question; she just wished he wouldn't worry about her so much, always feeling like he was quietly planning something for her.

The next morning, as Qin Mu was chatting with Mu Qingxin and Feng Fanghua, she received a call: "Mumu, come quickly to the cemetery!"

Helian Hao, who had gone to visit the Qin family's graves, had only intended to pay his respects to Qin Mu's mother but was shocked by what he found.

The gravestone had been dug up from the ground and lay broken in two slanted halves.

Qin Mu sped all the way there; the journey that usually took an hour was completed in just half an hour, but...

Though she was wearing a pair of canvas shoes, she nearly stumbled and fell.

Helian Hao, standing by her side, steadied her and looked worriedly at her mother's grave.

Qin Mu just felt an intense headache coming on and kept her head lowered for a long time before she could catch her breath.

"There are no cameras around here, so who could be so heartless as to do such a thing?"

Helian Hao asked angrily.

After regaining her posture, Qin Mu gently pushed away Helian Hao's hand; her eyes were cold with despair.

"I know who it is!"

Qin Mu's voice was low as her gaze stayed fixed on the fallen gravestone, along with the shattered portrait of her mother.

Her vision blurred, and when she could finally see clearly, her heart felt utterly cold.

Helian Hao looked at her in surprise: "Mumu..."

"You go back first, I'll handle this."

Seeing her resolved, Helian Hao nodded and, after a few words of caution, left.

Qin Mu, watching her mother's broken gravestone, took out her phone and dialed Qin Haiming: "I only ask you, can my mother's gravestone still stand in the Qin family cemetery? — Good! You come here!"

Qin Mu spoke indifferently and then hung up.

She just stood there quietly, waiting for the man's arrival.

She thought, her mother died because of him, so it shouldn't be too much to ask him to repair her mother's gravestone, right?

She wanted him to give her mother an explanation, wanted him to personally investigate the truth.

Since he wanted to maintain the image of a good father, then he couldn't avoid paying the price.

But for some reason, once she made her resolution, when there was no one else in the cemetery, as the cold wind blew, tears flowed down her face uncontrollably.

She thought she wouldn't cry, but remembering her mother's death, recalling being sent abroad, thinking about the harrowing ordeals and plots laid against her since her return, Qin Mu felt intense hatred, a hatred so profound she could barely contain her murderous rage.

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But she could only bite her teeth hard and follow, for she couldn't be so impulsive, otherwise the enemy wouldn't have to be defeated, and she would first be imprisoned.

The weather was gloomy, and on New Year's Eve, it was destined to snow, perhaps starting by the afternoon.

When Qin Haiming arrived at the cemetery, he was also shocked and couldn't calm down for a long time.

"Will you find out who did all this?"

Qin Mu turned to look at him, her eyes utterly cold, as she could only hold herself back from accusing and scolding him.

"I will!"

Qin Haiming promised, but he couldn't help but lower his head to look at the broken tombstone again.

How carelessly must this tombstone have been made to break so easily?

Or how much hatred must that person have to smash her mother's tombstone?

"You also have to repair my mother's tombstone."

Qin Mu looked at him again, clasping her hands tightly before crying, reminding him.

She was trembling, Qin Haiming could see it.

"I will, Mumu..."

"Don't say anything else, I'm waiting for your results."

Qin Mu shook her head, disregarding the pain on his face as she didn't believe him, thinking he was pretending, then turned and walked away.

But after just a few steps, she turned back, her sharp eyes watching the man who was still looking at her: did Qin Mingzhu come home last night?

"..."

Qin Haiming was about to answer that Qin Mingzhu had come home, but then he paused in thought.

Qin Mu could guess from his expression and suppressed a breath, forcing out the words: if she did it, if you cover for her, then I will settle things with her personally, and between the two daughters, you can only choose one. You abandoned me once over a decade ago, I don't mind if you abandon me again.

Tears drift away as she turned, not knowing where they went.

Afterward, Qin Haiming crouched alone there, in front of the shattered tombstone, took off the leather gloves he was wearing, and gently swept the dust from the surface.

That black and white photo, the woman's face, was again so clearly presented before him.

It's just that because it was broken, every time he thought of what Qin Mu's mother used to be like, his heart would tremble with hatred, as if a mountain weighed upon it.

He never expected that someone would come to smash her tombstone.

He suddenly remembered Qin Mu's question and his brow furrowed unintentionally again.

He didn't believe that his younger daughter had the audacity. He had said that without his permission, no one should touch the tombstone, not even a little bit.

Qin Mu wanted an explanation from him. In fact, rather than giving Qin Mu an explanation, he actually wanted to give one to this woman even more.

For over a decade, he owed her an explanation.

Of course, he also owed Qin Mu one, but he felt that what he owed Qin Mu could still be returned, but what he owed the woman before him seems too long overdue, long past due for redemption.

After Qin Mu came back, she didn't say anything, nor did she have the chance to.

Because sitting at home were the Jing Family's old master and Jing Qing.

The old master was probably there to catch up with an old friend, and Jing Qing naturally had many reasons to come.

Yet the grandfather and granddaughter duo looked too displeased to see her.

But Qin Mu went up to them resolutely: Old Master Jing!

The Jing Family's old master ignored her, but the Mu Family's old master said to Qin Mu: You're back!

"Yes, Grandfather!"

Qin Mu nodded.

Mu Qingxin, seeing the redness around her eyes, obviously cried before, stood up: Qin Mu, take me upstairs, I'm a bit tired.

Qin Mu looked at her and understood implicitly.

Jing Qing watched silently as the aunt and niece went upstairs, wondering why Mu Qingxin suddenly had such a good relationship with Qin Mu, suspicion creeping into her eyes.

"This girl has become particularly delicate after getting pregnant, Uncle have some tea."

Mu Zihao spoke a few words to quickly move past the topic.

"It's appropriate to be delicate when pregnant, especially since Qingxin has the means, but what about that girl from the Qin Family, why is she wearing a mourning face as if she's very unhappy during the New Year?"

The old Jing master said slowly, brushing his traditional gown.

Jing Qing gently pressed the old master's hand: Grandfather, how can you talk like that in front of Grandfather Mu?

"Hmph! Your Grandfather Mu is back and you should be telling him your grievances, why are you afraid I'll talk too much? Didn't you always say that your Grandfather Mu doted on you more than your own grandfather? Why the estrangement now?"

The old Jing master spoke.

"Grievances? Who dares to let Jing girl suffer? Is it Yichen? Tell me what's the matter, and I'll settle the account with that boy."