

Reborn as a Landlord

Chapter 18: Chapter 11 Sweet Girl_1

Lian Manman opened her eyes to find that daylight had already brightened the sky. Perhaps it was drinking that bowl of medicine last night that made her feel so spirited, her body not as weak as it had been the day before.

"Manman's awake?"

Lian Manman nodded and sat up on the kang. Everyone else had already gotten up; she was the last one.

Lian Zhizhi came over to help Lian Manman get dressed, then quickly and efficiently folded up the bedding and stored it in a cabinet at the head of the kang against the wall.

"Wait a moment, Manman. I'll get you some water to wash your face," said Lian Zhizhi as she headed out. In a short while, she brought back a basin of clean water and a small box of green salt.

The family's hygiene habits were quite good. Lian Manman thought as she brushed her teeth and washed her face. Lian Zhizhi then took a comb and began to undo Lian Manman's braids.

"Your head wound probably hasn't healed yet, Manman, so you can't get it wet. It'll be some days before you can wash your hair," Lian Zhizhi said as she combed Lian Manman's hair gently, careful not to touch the injured part. Afterward, she braided Lian Manman's hair into two plaits.

"Where did Dad, Mom, my brother, and Xiao Qi go?" asked Lian Manman.

"Dad's gone with your uncle to the Old Jin Family to exchange some silver, and Mom's outside boiling medicine for you. Wu Lang and Xiao Qi left early in the morning and didn't say what for," replied Lian Zhizhi.

While the sisters were talking, Lady Zhang came in with a pot of freshly brewed medicine.

"Manman, drink your medicine first, so you can eat later."

The sight of the dark medicinal soup made Lian Manman's mouth feel bitter, and she hesitated to take the bowl.

Lady Zhang could see what Lian Manman was thinking and felt a pang of sadness. Early that morning, she had gone to the Upper Room to get an egg and some sugar for Lian Manman, but Lady Zhou had scolded her and sent her away, accusing her of indulging her child and having no respect for the elderly.

"I'm all better now. Do I still need to take medicine?" said Lian Manman in a low voice.

"Manman, the medicine isn't bitter. Mom just tasted it. It wasn't easy for you to get this... Just bear with it, drink it all in one go, and it'll be over," Lady Zhang could only coax Lian Manman.

It seemed the medicine really did have some effect. To live a better life in the future, she needed to get her health back first. With that thought, Lian Manman took the medicine bowl.

Just then, Lian Wulang and Xiao Qi ran in from outside.

"Manman, here's your Sweet Girl," said Lian Wulang as he poured out a handful of small green fruits from the front of his shirt.

Lian Manman put down the medicine bowl and picked up one of the fruits to examine. This Sweet Girl's outer layer was a mesh-like skin that had turned somewhat yellow and dry. When she peeled off this outer layer, a plump, slightly yellowed Sweet Girl fruit was revealed inside. She had tasted one when she was very young—it was very sweet. One could also scoop out the juice and chew it for fun.

"Try one, Manman. It's very sweet," Lian Wulang said as he peeled one and handed it to her.

Lian Manman plucked the fruit, put it in her mouth to chew, and then nodded. It was sweet.

"If you drink the medicine and then eat this, your mouth won't be bitter," said Xiao Qi, looking up.

Lian Manman couldn't help but smile. Seeing Lian Manman smile, Lady Zhang, Lian Zhizhi, Lian Wulang, and Xiao Qi all smiled too.

Lian Wulang and Xiao Qi came in covered with dew; they had gone out early in the morning to pick Sweet Girl fruits, worried she would find the medicine bitter. But were these Sweet Girls wild?

"Where did you get so many Sweet Girls?" Before Lian Manman could ask, Lady Zhang had already posed the question.

"From Er Ya's house," Xiao Qi quickly replied.

"Who picked them for you? Does their family know?"

"Don't worry, Mom. Wu Lang and I caught several crickets early this morning and traded with Er Ya's brother for them. Er Ya's mom knows too," Lian Wulang explained.

Lady Zhang was relieved.

So they weren't wild. Lian Manman thought. She knew the fruit, also called ground cherry, came in two varieties. One was sweet, tasting sweet even when green. The other was bitter and turned red when fully ripe, then it was sweet and sour and very tasty, with medicinal properties too. It was particularly effective for sore throats and also used to treat colds, dysentery, menstrual pain, and gynecological inflammations.

"Only Sweet Girls and no Bitter Girls?" murmured Lian Manman.

"Bitter Girls?" Xiao Qi heard her and hastily said, "We have Bitter Girls too, but Aunt Xiuxiu won't let us touch them."

"Bitter Girls aren't as sweet as Sweet Girls. If you want to eat them, you still have to wait a couple of days. If you'd like to try some, I can pick them for you from the mountain when the time comes. There's a big patch of them there," said Lian Wulang.

So there were wild ones too. Lian Manman thought. For the medicinal Bitter Girls, there was no need to wait for full ripeness; perhaps they could be harvested for some extra cash.

"When the time comes, pick a lot. They could be sold for money," said Lian Manman.

In their area, Sweet Girls were rare, but Bitter Girls were common. Almost every household had a few, and they were seldom eaten, mostly just chewed on by girls for fun. The patch in the mountains he had discovered was unattended, and nobody went picking there. Could these things really be exchanged for money? Lian Wulang was skeptical, but to make his sister happy, he nodded in agreement.

"Okay, I'll pick them all for you when the time comes," he said.

"Manman, hurry up and take your medicine, or it'll get cold," Lady Zhang urged.

Lian Manman obediently picked up the medicine bowl this time, but even before she started drinking, she heard the strong cursing voice of Lady Zhou coming from the Upper Room.

"...Black-hearted, lazy and greedy bitch, sleeping till the sun shines on your butt and still not knowing to come work, wanting to starve us old folks to death..."

Lady Zhang hurriedly stood up and was about to go to the Upper Room.

"Mother," Lian Manman quickly called out to Lady Zhang. She knew that the daughters-in-law of the Lian Family took turns cooking, and while it was Lady Zhang's turn yesterday, today it wasn't her concern, regardless of who was supposed to cook. Lady Zhou was unreasonable anyway, and if Lady Zhang went up now, she would only invite pointless scolding and end up taking the blame for others.

"It must be your Second Aunt who forgot to cook, Mother needs to go help out. Otherwise, who knows when this family will be able to eat. Your big uncle, second uncle, and your father still need to go into town," Lady Zhou said to Lian Manman but still insisted on going out.

Lian Manman silently pressed her hand to her forehead, truly an overwhelming sense of responsibility, just misplaced.

"Mother, I don't want to take the medicine. You feed me," plead Lian Manman with wide eyes at Lady Zhang. Directly preventing Lady Zhang from going wouldn't work; she had to act coy.

Sure enough, as Lady Zhang looked at her young daughter with her head wrapped in cloth and her big shimmering eyes filled with expectation, her heart softened. The step she had taken was withdrawn. She sat down on the Kang bed and indeed picked up the bowl to start feeding Lian Manman medicine.

"Mother, I want to drink it one sip at a time, and after each sip, I'll eat one Sweet Girl," Lian Manman deliberately said.

"Fine." No matter how anxious Lady Zhang was to go to the Upper Room, seeing her daughter like this, she could only patiently comply.

Lian Manman continued to drink the medicine fed to her by Lady Zhang while eating the Sweet Girls that Lian Zhizhi and Xiao Qi had peeled for her. In the Upper Room, Lady Zhou had already gone through a round of inventive cursing, but receiving no response, eventually fell silent.

"Sister-in-law, Mother is calling you," Lian Xiuxiu entered with a dark face, dropped those words, turned, and left, going to call Lady Zhao and Lady He.

Lady Zhou was clearly out to teach the daughters-in-law a lesson, Lian Manman silently stuck out her tongue.

With no more reasons to stop Lady Zhang, Lian Manman followed her to the Upper Room.

Old Master Lian wasn't in the room. Old Lady Lian, Lady Zhou, was sitting upright on the Kang bed, glaring fiercely at the daughters-in-law standing below.

"Whose turn is it to cook today?" Lady Zhou asked.

Lady He wiped the corner of her eye with her hand, flicking a piece of eye gunk onto the ground, and kept silent. Lady Zhao shrank back, bowing her head, too afraid to speak. Lady Gu hadn't come, apparently not feeling well.

Lady Zhang was about to speak up.

Lian Manman quickly tugged hard at Lady Zhang's sleeve. Lady Zhou couldn't be unaware of whose turn it was to cook today; asking like this was clearly a trap.

Lady Zhang looked down at Lian Manman's anxious eyes, signaling her not to speak. Thinking of her clever, sensible, and filial daughter, she involuntarily closed her mouth.

The eldest daughter-in-law said she felt unwell and didn't come; the second daughter-in-law put on a shameless demeanor; even the usually honest and decent Lady Zhang wasn't willing to partake, which made Lady Zhou even more irritated.

"Have you all gone mute? Didn't hear when I asked you something?" Lady Zhou shouted.

Lian Manman just held onto Lady Zhang tightly, preventing her from speaking.

Seeing still no one answered, Lady Zhou reluctantly suppressed her anger, glanced at the daughters-in-law, and finally pointed at Lady Zhang.

"Daughter-in-law of Old Fourth, you tell me, whose turn is it to cook today?"

What was this, picking on the soft persimmon, or deliberately picking on a vulnerable target?

"Mother, today..." Lady Zhang started to say hastily.

"Mother, yesterday it was our house's turn to cook," Lian Manman hurriedly interrupted Lady Zhang's words, "Who's turn is it today?"

Lady Zhang, wanting to support her daughter, chimed in, "Yes, indeed."

Lady Zhou, so infuriated she nearly fell backward, but with Lady Zhang not biting the bait, she could only turn towards Lady He.

"Yesterday was Old Fourth's wife on duty, today should not be your turn, why did you get up only now, trying to starve me and your father?"

Lady He was well prepared.

"Mother, you also said that yesterday was Old Fourth's Family on duty, how could it be my turn today, my man is ranked second," said Lady He, "When the eldest sister-in-law was in town, we didn't say anything, but now she has finally come home, isn't she still a daughter-in-law to father and you, shouldn't she cook for father and mother?"

"You!" Lady Zhou pointed at Lady He, normally the laziest, and somewhat brazen, not taking her words seriously. However, Lady He's words today were also sensible. Lady Gu was often with Eldest of the Lian Family in town and seldom served her directly. Now that she had returned, wasn't it right for her to serve Lady Zhou?

Now to say one is feeling unwell and not to come, what about the future? Lady Zhou's heart sank, then she relaxed again. Even if Lady Gu became Madame Official someday, she would still be her daughter-in-law. She was the Old Lady, the mother of the Eldest of the Lian Family.

Indeed, she thought it would be best to establish the rules now so that in the future, Lady Gu would not disregard her even more.

With this in mind, Lady Zhou made up her mind.

"Go call your eldest sister-in-law over," Lady Zhou instructed.