

The 80s 531

Chapter 531: What Belongs to Cheng Su Belongs to the Qi Family

Mother Qi sneezed twice and wiped her nose with the back of her hand, thinking to herself, who is cursing me behind my back!

"Granny, happy New Year!" The crisp voice of a child made Mother Qi's eyebrows rise and her eyes light up with a smile.

"Mom, happy New Year."

"Mother-in-law, happy New Year!"

"Oh my, my darling treasure, you've arrived." Mother Qi grinned, hugging the charging Yunyun and, seeing the family approaching with their arms full of items, her eyes squinted with joy, "You've all arrived, that's wonderful, come on in!"

The ones who had just arrived were none other than the Qi Fenglian family, clutching their child and carrying gifts in bundles, flocking into the house.

Qi Jianguo and the others were already present; after exchanging greetings with their siblings and distributing red envelopes to the younger generation and chatting with smiles, it was under the guidance of Qi Fengping that Yunyun went outside to play, and only then did Qi Fenglian's family start talking with their parents.

"Did the family from Taiguo go back to their maternal home?" Qi Fenglian inquired upon not seeing anyone around.

Mother Qi's expression fell halfway, "That's right! They even said they're staying overnight and not coming back until tomorrow. I told them that you all were coming back today, and even if they returned in a couple of days, it would have been fine, but they just wouldn't listen."

Upon hearing this, Qi Fenglian knew her mother was displeased and said, "Mom, it's the daughter-in-law from Taiguo's first year joining the Qi family, so she's a new bride. Going back this time, she has to pay

New Year's visits to several homes, and if she's late, it might lead to gossip from others. Anyway, we're staying for two or three days, so it doesn't matter if they're not here."

"Your mom, the better our days are, the more bizarre ideas pop into her head!" Father Qi chimed in from the side.

Mother Qi shot him an indignant glare.

Father Qi cleared his throat, clasped his hands behind his back, and called out to Zhang Jisheng, "Let's go have a drink outside, just the two of us men!"

Zhang Jisheng agreed with a smile.

"It's not even dark yet, and you're already starting to drink, don't overdo it!" Mother Qi shouted, "It's so cold out, we've got a charcoal brazier in here, isn't it better to drink inside? No need to go outside and catch a chill."

"Mom, just let them be," Qi Fenglian said with a laugh.

Mother Qi then took Xiao Bao from her arms and kissed her several times before sizing her up. She saw that she was wearing the new cotton coat obtained from Cheng Su while in Qing City, bright red and making her look especially lively.

"Red suits you, makes you look spirited," Mother Qi complimented and then asked, "In the past years, you didn't come back until the fourth day of the New Year, why did you come back on the second day this year? Did your mother-in-law have anything to say?"

"If it were a few years earlier, definitely not, even my sister-in-law came back on the second day. This year, she's heavily pregnant and about to give birth, so she stayed put." Qi Fenglian pursed her lips.

"About to give birth?"

"Not yet, it's expected in a few more days. That's why it's not easy for her to travel, and that's why I came back today!" Qi Fenglian replied, "So you shouldn't fuss about the daughter-in-law from Taiguo either. On the second day, everyone wants to go back to their maternal home, and it's no big deal if someone is missing."

Mother Qi, slightly embarrassed, inquired, "By the way, did you talk to her about it, the matter of working at her place?"

"It's all settled. Once the New Year starts, I'm going to Qing City to learn in the restaurant. When her new shop opens, I'll go there," Qi Fenglian said.

Mother Qi was surprised: "New shop?"

"Mom, didn't you know? The daughter-in-law from Taiguo bought a shop to open a branch, and it's not a lease, she bought it!" Qi Fenglian said admiringly, "To be honest, I really admire this sister-in-law. She hasn't been in business long, and she's already bought a new shop, a shop of her very own!"

If it were her, she didn't know how long it would take to earn such a nest egg.

Mother Qi said with a trace of envy, "How would I know, when they didn't make a peep about it to anyone, who knows who they are being cautious against!"

Buying a shop, such a big event, and she had no idea. Who are they guarding against?

But then again, whether they tell her or not, once married into the family, whatever she buys is still Taiguo's, still the Qi family's!

With that thought, she smiled again.

Chapter 532: The Shabby Wares of the Cold-Stricken Man

The saying goes, while some families revel in joy, others may be steeped in sorrow. During the grand celebration of the New Year, the whole of Xiashui Village seemed to bask in harmonious joy, yet in

Beijing, the atmosphere at the Chiang Family's was more oppressive than it had been in the past two decades.

"What is this messy pile of trash? Who sent it? Get rid of it all, throw it out immediately," Lu Shufen practically breathed fire as she looked at the local products arranged in the living room.

The servant looked toward Jiang Conghe, not daring to move.

"What, I can't even order you around now? Or are you also going against my wishes? Do you want to lose your job?" Lu Shufen grew even more furious at the servant's inaction.

The servant was close to tears.

"Throw it away," Jiang Conghe said with what seemed like mercy.

The servant quickly took the pile of items and threw them out, thinking that they would not have a good New Year's either.

Having served the Chiang Family for over a decade, she had never seen Director Lu lose his temper like this, nor had she felt such a suffocating atmosphere. Why was all of this happening?

Why, indeed?

Lu Shufen wouldn't have made such a fuss over some simple local products. She was angry because of the person who sent them – that despicable Jiang Dafang. Sending such a pile of things, was he trying to provoke someone, to pierce someone's heart?

"Those are the child's good intentions, why must you be so angry?" Jiang Conghe said softly.

Jiang Dafang had sent him New Year's gifts, and to tell the truth, he was quite pleased. Even though Dafang hadn't shown up, the local products were from his hometown, a token of sentiment, showing that the boy still had his father in his heart!

Lu Shufen glared, scoffing coldly, "Child? What child? Are you talking about that little wretch? He's certainly not my child. I, Lu Shufen, come from a respectable background; I'm not the kind to give birth to lowlifes!"

Jiang Conghe's face darkened slightly. "There you go again."

"What 'there you go again'? Jiang Conghe, am I wrong?" Lu Shufen glared coldly at him. "Just look, dressed in rags, not to mention anyone else, even ordinary people would disdain to put such trash on my table, calling it sentiment. Pah!"

"I was just as shabby when we first met, and you still looked up to me?" Jiang Conghe's face hardened.

Lu Shufen's expression changed, and through gritted teeth, she said, "I was blind, okay?"

"You..." Angered to the core, Jiang Conghe dismissed her with a wave of his hand, "You're unreasonable; I can't be bothered with you!"

Lu Shufen watched him disappear and slumped on the couch, tears welling up in her eyes, her breathing coming in sniffles.

She was certain that little wretch did it on purpose, deliberately becoming the thorn in her side, intent on making her uncomfortable.

Otherwise, why would he not have shown up in so many years, and just had to appear now? Their family had lived in peace for decades, and it was his emergence that turned their home into a place of constant unrest. It was undoubtedly intentional.

What's with sending sentiments through local products? Pah, such poor taste, it only serves to chill people to the bone.

"Mom..." Chiang Qing came over, handing her a handkerchief. "Don't be sad, Dad didn't mean to quarrel with you!"

These past few days, the house couldn't even enjoy a peaceful New Year. With the mood so gloomy, she too was aggravated; and thinking of Taiguo, far away, only added to her frustration, especially with her parents' discord. She'd been sleeping so poorly that two pimples had appeared on her face.

"Not mean to quarrel with me? I think he very much wants to. He's just siding with his beloved little wretch to freeze me out," Lu Shufen scoffed coldly. Seeing her daughter reminded her of the original argument they had about her, so she took the chance to say, "You see what comes of matching with someone from an unsuitable family, from a poor family? If you're set on that boy, then I am your example!"

Chapter 533: The Thief Who Steals Someone Else's Husband

Hearing her mother's cold words, Chiang Qing felt a mix of emotions and couldn't help but retort, "Mom, don't you and Dad have a good relationship? After you married Dad, you had me and Xiao Tian without ever fighting before. Now, just because you've had a little spat with Dad, how has it become such a big deal? Just ask yourself, all these years you've been married to Dad, have you ever regretted it?"

Listen to how she speaks—it's as if she's still siding with that poor boy!

Lu Shufen was so angry that her body trembled, and, pointing at her, she was unable to utter a single word.

Who said she hadn't regretted it? She thought she had married for love, but seeing other people's glances made her feel particularly unusual, as if they were implying she was a thief who stole someone else's husband.

During that time, she was especially miserable, barely daring to meet anyone, let alone look them in the eye. It took her a long time before she gradually put it behind her.

If she had married a man with a clear conscience, she would not have had to endure those looks and moral condemnation.

It was precisely because of this that the appearance of Jiang Dafang now infuriated her. His presence meant she had to relive those days when she couldn't hold her head up high.

Because of his presence, she was reminded that she was a thief who stole someone else's husband.

Because of his presence, the façade of morality ensnared her like a giant spider web, tightening until she could barely breathe.

This was the reason for her anger—not because of any so-called specialty; Jiang Dafang was like a bone spur lodged in her flesh, painfully and irritatingly stuck.

She had endured such difficult times herself, yet was her daughter going to follow the same path?

Was she going to follow in her footsteps and become a thief who stole someone else's husband?

"Do you realize what you're saying? Huh? Have you gone mad?" Lu Shufen truly wanted to slap her daughter awake.

But looking at her daughter's beautiful face, she couldn't bear to do it. This was the flesh that had fallen from her body!

"Mom..."

Lu Shufen closed her eyes, then reopened them and said with a cold laugh, "Fine, I had no shame and fell in love with a married man, so if you want to do the same, I have nothing to say. I deserve it. If you and that boy truly love each other, your father and I will fulfill your wish for once! But what's the result?"

Chiang Qing first felt joy, then a chill in her heart.

"I'm not even going to say that Qi Taiguo is a married man. Even if he were, it wouldn't matter, as long as both of you are willing. But what's the situation with you? He doesn't even look your way, does he?"

He doesn't like you at all, does he? Are you the one cheapening yourself, passionately chasing after him?"

Lu Shufen's every word struck Chiang Qing like a sword, turning her complexion pale.

"If he doesn't like you, what's the use of your persistent pursuit? Even if you have him, can you have his heart? How will you be happy with a man whose heart isn't with you?" Lu Shufen continued regardless of her daughter's expression, "Even if you have him, a loveless man is just a walking corpse. Can you live with that for a lifetime? Qingqing, even though your father and I genuinely loved each other and have been through so much, I just don't want you to suffer and make the same mistakes I did!"

Chiang Qing's lips trembled, and it took her a while to find her heartbeat. She took a deep breath and said, "I will make him fall in love with me. I refuse to believe I can't compare to his current peasant wife. As long as he is by my side, he will eventually recognize my worth!"

Chapter 534: Yearning but Unfulfilled

Blind obsession!

Lu Shufen couldn't hold back anymore, and a slap flew across!

Smack!

Chiang Qing's fair cheek immediately showed the imprint of five fingers, as she covered her face in shock and looked at her mother.

"Mom!"

"Don't call me!" Lu Shufen, in pain from anger, shouted, "I don't have such a foolish and stupid daughter!"

She had said so much, used both hard and soft tactics, all just to pull this girl back from the edge of a cliff, but to no avail, as if everything she said was in one ear and out the other!

This daughter of hers wanted to follow in the footsteps of that cheap scoundrel and infuriate her to death!

"Your father and I put so much effort into raising and educating you, and it wasn't to teach you to steal someone else's husband. What's so good about that boy that you don't even care about your face anymore, huh?" Lu Shufen raged, "Does he have an extra pair of horns on his head that you're so headstrong about him?"

The more she thought, the angrier she became. She went to the table to find the phone book, muttering, "I have to see what kind of creature he is to dare seduce my daughter. I'm going to ask his superiors, what kind of scum this is, fire him, get him fired!"

She pulled out the phone book, found a number, and was about to dial the phone beside the sofa when Chiang Qing rushed over and pressed her mother's hand down, crying, "Mom, please don't, I love him, I really love him!"

"Get lost!"

"Mom, I'm begging you. You were young once, your heart has raced before, how can you not understand your daughter's heart? When you were lovesick and couldn't have what you yearned for, the torment, you must know it better than anyone!" Chiang Qing cried, "In those difficult times, you and Dad made it through, now the times are so open, why can't we make it through? If need be, we'll fly far away, as long as he is with me."

The taste of unrequited love, how could Lu Shufen not know it?

Looking at her daughter's tear-stained face, a pang of pain struck her heart, as the days and nights she spent weeping in the past suddenly resurfaced.

It's too hard!

Lu Shufen dropped the phone, pulled her daughter close, and said, "Qingqing, that's too hard, it's not worth it, really not worth it! He doesn't love you, it's pointless. Qingqing, a short pain is better than a long one, listen to your mother, take your heart back!"

"Mom, I can't, I just can't!"

"How can you not? How long have you been with him to feel so deeply already?" Lu Shufen was incredulous.

"Mom, you don't understand, some feelings, you know, last a lifetime at first glance, unrelated to time, my whole heart is full of him!" Chiang Qing wept.

Qi Taiguo's coldness towards her, his heartlessness, and the smiles he once showed her, were all like poppy flowers, addictive to her.

It had nothing to do with how long they had been together; she just felt that the only person in her heart was him; no one else could enter!

"Mom, in here, it's barren because of him, nothing else can grow!" Chiang Qing cried, clutching at her chest.

Lu Shufen was dumbfounded.

She had never imagined her girl would fall so deeply!

What could be done now? If Qi Taiguo had feelings for her, that would be easier to handle, but now, it was clearly just her daughter's one-sided love. If a bull doesn't drink water, can you force its head down?

Unrequited love, unrequited love!

Lu Shufen thought of herself in the past, then her current situation with Jiang Dafang being a thorn in her side nearby, and suddenly she was overwhelmed with sadness and embraced her daughter, crying together.

"Why is our mother and daughter's fate so hard?"

Jiang Conghe was drawn from his study by their crying. Seeing the mother and daughter crying bitterly, he asked, "What happened? Has the sky fallen?"

Lu Shufen looked over, her gaze forlorn, Old Chiang, our excellent daughter, I'm afraid she's ruined!

Chapter 535: Make Her Restless

"Absurd!" Jiang Conghe slammed the table after hearing Lu Shufen's words, "If she wants to be mad, do you have to join her in her madness?"

What was this wife of his thinking, suggesting to find a way to win over Qi Taiguo and match him with Chiang Qing?

"Do you think I want this?" Lu Shufen yelled back, her voice shrill, "The hardships I've endured, I remember them all too well. Do you think I want her to follow in my footsteps and suffer in the same way?"

Jiang Conghe's aura weakened, his voice softening, "But we can't just let her do whatever she wants! That boy, how is he worthy of my daughter?"

Lu Shufen sneered coldly, "So what about Commander Chiang's daughter? They don't even hold her in high regard, otherwise, would she be suffering like this?"

If the two of them saw eye to eye, well, that would make things easier, even if it meant settling for someone less well-to-do. With their elders around, they wouldn't worry about not being able to support him.

The problem was, Chiang Qing was in unrequited love!

In love, the hardest thing to deal with is unrequited love—the Goddess may be willing, but the King has no dreams of her!

Jiang Conghe couldn't stand it any longer, his eyes glaring, "What does he have to be so picky about? What's not to like about my daughter?"

That's how fathers are, seeing their daughters as the best in every way, believing no man is worthy enough, with men merely lined up, awaiting her selection.

Qi Taiguo, dare he!

"The flower pines, but the stream flows heartlessly, no matter how wonderful she is, what's the use? That's why I want you to make a move!" Lu Shufen said.

"No, no, that won't do!" Jiang Conghe shook his head, "That boy won't do, this would not look good if word got out. It would delay our daughter's prospects!"

"Then what do you suggest we do? Seeing her cry breaks my heart!" Lu Shufen felt a sourness in her heart again, "All blame that Qi Taiguo, it must've been him who seduced our Qingqing. Without him, could this have happened?"

As Jiang Conghe paced back and forth, he thought for a moment and then said, "What if, after the New Year, we don't let Qingqing return to Qing City? Out of sight, out of mind—after some time, it will naturally fade."

But Lu Shufen was not as optimistic as he was, "She's stubborn, you know that: If it were so easy, why would there be such a fuss?"

"Time can erase everything. Let's settle on that." Jiang Conghe pondered and then added, "I think, find an opportunity to transfer that young man somewhere else, away, far away. Yes, send him off to Xinjiang! See how he'll seduce Qingqing then."

Lu Shufen opened her mouth to speak but said nothing. If only it could be that simple, that would indeed be good.

But would Qingqing agree?

Seeing her silent, Jiang Conghe walked over, put his arm around her shoulder, and said, "Don't worry. Our daughter is the apple of our eye; I will definitely do what's best for her!"

Lu Shufen was still annoyed with him and shrugged off his hand, huffing, "Jiang Dafang, that little wretch, must be the real apple of your eye!" Then she walked out.

Jiang Conghe fumed, smoke almost coming out of his seven orifices – she was getting harder and harder to please!

And the "little wretch" Jiang Dafang that Lu Shufen referred to was in a drinking session, chatting with someone.

"Why bother bringing gifts to their house? That woman will surely not appreciate them. Aren't you just asking for rejection?" Liu Cheng topped up Jiang Dafang's cup with alcohol.

Jiang Dafang sneered coldly, "I'm not looking for rejection; I'm aiming to make their life miserable!"

Liu Cheng was taken aback, looking at him, "In the past, didn't you want to avoid contact with your father... with Commander Chiang? Why now..."

Jiang Dafang was supposed to hate them, wasn't he?

"When my mother was around, we lived in peace, but now she is gone, and I have no reservations." Jiang Dafang drained his cup, his cold smirk deepening, "The Chiang family has been happy long enough; their time is up. It's about time their house was in turmoil, just perfect."

He intended to make Lu Shufen and the rest of them live in constant anxiety, without a moment of peace in their home.

Chapter 536: Mother-in-Law is Not Like Mother

The Chiang Family was in disarray because of Chiang Qing's affair and Jiang Dafang's appearance, while Cheng Su and her family were chatting and laughing, full of joy.

Mother Cheng had sent Qi Taiguo off to chop wood again, while she herself took Cheng Su into the room to talk in private.

"Your mother-in-law came to our house before, saying that you two weren't having kids, and it scared me half to death. I thought something was wrong with you physically and you couldn't have them. Over the phone, you didn't go into detail. What exactly is going on? You're really fine, aren't you?" Mother Cheng glanced at her belly.

Cheng Su rolled her eyes and said, "I'm perfectly healthy, I just don't want to have a child right now, I'm too busy."

"What are you so busy with? If you say you're running a business, you're not the one who does the work anyway, don't you have other people handling it? What does that have to do with having a child?" Mother Cheng disagreed.

Cheng Su replied, "You make it sound so easy. Doesn't having a child require raising, don't they need care and education? I'm just not ready for it yet!" And besides, she was only twenty-one and didn't want to be tied down by a child so soon.

"You're not without a mother-in-law, if you have the child, aren't there people to help you raise them?" Mother Cheng snorted lightly, "I advise you to have one sooner rather than later, while you're young. It gets harder when you're older."

"Alright, you don't need to worry about this, we have it under control," Cheng Su said, a bit impatiently, then added, "And you talk about letting my mother-in-law help, but can I really trust her to take care of my child?"

Surely, she did not agree with her mother-in-law's character; if she let her mother-in-law completely take over the child-rearing, the kid might end up having the same disposition!

Just thinking of a child who was sharp-tongued, stingy, and miserly sent shivers down Cheng Su's spine.

"Everyone else gets help from their mothers-in-law, what makes you so special?" Mother Cheng scoffed, but her face soured a bit as she recalled her own mother-in-law's attitude, "Your mother-in-law really isn't easy to deal with. You don't know, the last time she came to speak to me, she all but pointed at my face and scolded me for how I raised you!"

"Why would you even bother with her?" Cheng Su responded, unamused.

Mother Cheng sighed.

"By the way, when you went to pay New Year's visits, how did it go with your uncles and aunts? Did they ask you to arrange jobs or anything?" Mother Cheng asked.

At the mention of that, Cheng Su's face darkened and she said, "Can we not mention that? Each one of them thinks I'm some kind of super boss, asking me to arrange jobs. When I refused, they gave me dirty looks! Mom, I'm done with these annual New Year's visits, okay? Do we have to go again in the future?"

"You've only done it for one year, for future years you just have to pay a visit to your third uncle, and of course, if you want to visit them too, that's also okay, it's the thought that counts," Mother Cheng explained the custom.

"I wouldn't dare," said Cheng Su.

Would she be scared of the shadows after seeing the ghost? She definitely didn't want to invite trouble for herself!

"Look at you, handling big things and getting too big for your britches, looking down on people now, aren't we?" Mother Cheng poked her forehead.

"Would you be happy if I arranged things? You have no idea, each and every one of them aren't simple characters," Cheng Su huffed lightly.

That was true indeed!

"Also, Mom, if anyone comes to you asking for favors, don't get carried away and agree, causing me trouble. Just say you don't dare make decisions for me," Cheng Su added another reminder.

"I know, I'm not stupid. Besides, would you even listen to what I say?" Mother Cheng replied irritably.

Cheng Su, grinning, moved closer and embraced her mother's arm: "Nothing beats my own mom!" Unlike her mother-in-law, who only caused her trouble.

Mother Cheng watched her daughter act coyly, the corner of her lips curling up in mock disdain, "Get lost, who needs your affection!"

"I need yours though!" Cheng Su nuzzled against her, and mother and daughter laughed and played together.

Chapter 537: Mother's Worries

After spending a night at her parental home, Cheng Su and Qi Taiguo had breakfast and were ready to head back to Huangtian Village. Cheng Su was extremely reluctant to leave. Once she got back, she would have to cater to her mother-in-law's moods and serve the whole family; it was truly exhausting!

Mother Cheng pulled her aside and said, "You haven't gone back to Qing City these past two days, have you? We have some cured pork at home. Come and collect it when you leave. I won't give it to you now; if you take it back, I'm afraid it won't be you who ends up eating it."

This was her way of protecting the food, fearing that if taken back home, her daughter's in-laws might consume all of it, leaving nothing for her to bring back to Qing City.

Cheng Su found it amusing but felt a warm feeling inside. She said, "Okay, I'll swing by the house before I leave."

Mother Cheng nodded and added, "With the New Year coming up, try to control your temper a bit, and don't take it to heart what your mother-in-law has been spreading about you being in business. There's no need to compete with her over who's right. She's your mother-in-law. If you argue with her, you're the one who'll suffer. Nowadays, people, right or wrong, will instinctively side with the elderly first."

This was out of fear that Cheng Su would argue with her mother-in-law when she gets back!

Cheng Su simply replied, "I understand."

"Make sure it's not just talk. Don't just say it without following through. And let me tell you, what's said is like water spilled; it cannot be taken back. Anyway, no matter what she says, you won't agree and do as she says, so just let it go in one ear and out the other!" Seeing her daughter's indifferent look, Mother Cheng added with more emphasis, "If I hear about you being disrespectful or back-talking, when you come back, I'll twist your ear for sure!"

Cheng Su playfully tugged at her ear and said, "Mom, I'm your own daughter. Why are you not siding with me first? Are you implying I was picked up from a pit?"

"I picked you up from the stove corner! You are just ungrateful. It's because I'm on your side and don't want you to suffer losses that I advise you not to be obstinate. Anyway, you never listen to me. Stop hanging around before me and go on, you ungrateful girl!" Mother Cheng pretended to look disgusted.

"Fine, seeing how disgusted you are, I must really be picked up." Cheng Su said, chuckling. "Then I'll come back in a couple of days!"

"Mm!"

After Cheng Su and Qi Taiguo left, Mother Cheng continued to sigh and shake her head until they were out of sight, then she returned to the courtyard.

"What's the matter, did you say something to Su Girl again? You're shaking your head and sighing so much, if it were winter with leaves on the trees, you'd have sighed them all off!" Father Cheng asked upon seeing this.

"It's nothing much. I just think this girl is too stubborn and quick-tempered. The saying 'too rigid, too easy to break' is true, and I really worry she might suffer because of her temperament one day!" Mother Cheng expressed her deep concern.

Father Cheng said, "How could that be? I think her behavior has become much more reliable than when she was a girl; she has changed a lot." After a pause, he continued, "Actually, I think she's becoming more and more like her grandmother in how she conducts herself."

Mother Cheng was startled: "Grandmother?"

Father Cheng nodded and said, "Not only does she resemble her in appearance, but also in her mannerisms."

Mother Cheng was even more shocked. Her grandmother had not lived long and had died in sorrow.

"Stop talking; you're making me more anxious." Mother Cheng did not want to think about it.

Father Cheng followed her inside.

Meanwhile, Cheng Su and her husband quickly returned to his family home. Upon seeing the eldest sister and the others, they exchanged greetings, handed out red envelopes to the children, chatted for a while, and as nearly noon approached, Cheng Su went to the kitchen to start preparing lunch.

"Let me help you," Qi Fenglian offered with a smile as she followed her to the kitchen.

Mother Qi, who was entertaining Baobao, heard this and wanted to say that as the sister-in-law, you're a guest; guests aren't supposed to help with chores.

But thinking that her daughter might have something to say to Cheng Su, she let it go.

The sisters-in-law were busying themselves in the kitchen while chatting, discussing the new shop. Cheng Su felt it was necessary to discuss the shop's situation with Qi Fengping first, so she told her everything exactly as it was, without adding or omitting anything.

Qi Fengping was stunned, "What? A shop with a bad omen? Goodness, why are you so bold to buy a shop like that?"

A shop where someone had died was a huge taboo to many people!

Cheng Su smiled, "It's nothing, really. That was just an accident, and besides, it happened so long ago that it's been forgotten. I've also had a Taoist priest perform rituals there."

Even so, Qi Fengping still felt uneasy inside, just the thought of it made her skin crawl.

Watching her sister-in-law's expression closely, Cheng Su said, "Big sister, if you think there's something wrong with the place, I won't force you to go. Just think it over!"

After all, one should do things willingly; she didn't want to impose on anyone.

Qi Fenglian stiffened slightly, shoved the firewood into the stove, thought for a moment, and said, "I'll go!"

Cheng Su was slightly surprised, "Big sister, you're not afraid?"

"Afraid? It's not that I'm afraid, just feeling a bit squeamish. But as you said, the incident is long past and forgotten. And it's not like we were the ones who harmed her, so why should we feel guilty?" said Qi Fenglian, trying to sound nonchalant.

Cheng Su smiled.

Qi Fenglian sighed, "Frankly, even if I were afraid, I'd still have to go. It's a great opportunity to make a change, and I'm certainly not going to pass it up!"

Her in-laws' home was like a quagmire, trapping her and leaving her unable to move. Finally, someone offered her a lifeline, which she was of course going to hold on to tightly—this could be her only chance!

And as for the shop being haunted, what of it? One could get used to it!

"Are you sure your mother-in-law will let you go?" Cheng Su asked again.

"She'll have to let me go, we can't just stay at home, tending to that small patch of farm forever, can we? What future would there be in that?" said Qi Fenglian with a hint of bitterness, adding, "Besides, I don't want to stay at home and face them, it's too distressing."

"If you've made up your mind, big sister, then go to Qing City on the tenth. Our restaurant will open on the eighth day of the lunar month. Once you're there, get familiar with the restaurant's operations first, learn a bit, and when the new shop opens, you'll be able to pick things up more quickly," Cheng Su suggested.

Qi Fenglian nodded.

As they were speaking, Qi Fengping peeked her head through the kitchen door and called out, "Sister-in-law, mom says to cook two more cups of rice and two more dishes, we have guests."

Cheng Su was startled, dinner was almost ready, what guests were these, and how many of them were there?

Seeing Qi Fengping about to leave after dropping the message, she quickly said, "Hey, little sister-in-law, don't rush off. Who are these guests, and how many are there?"

Qi Fenglian was also puzzled, saying, "It's only the third day of the lunar month, who would be visiting relatives at this time?"

Qi Fengping replied, "It's Auntie, along with my elder cousin sister and her kids, and my younger cousin brother and sister, five people in total."

Auntie?

Qi Fenglian was surprised and stood up, "Auntie has come?"

Qi Fengping nodded and dashed off.

Qi Fenglian was about to head out when Cheng Su quickly grabbed her and asked, "Big sister, who is this auntie? How come I don't remember her?"

"She's mom's real elder sister, who moved to Liu County. It's no wonder you don't know, when you and Taiguo got married, Auntie's family didn't even come to the wedding feast," sighed Qi Fenglian.

Cheng Su found this even more strange. If Auntie was a close relative, why wouldn't she attend her own nephew's wedding?

Chapter 539: the Chaste and Strong-Willed Woman

Speaking of Elder Sister, she was also a woman with a tragic fate. She became a widow at a young age and had to raise her three children on her own, leading a tough life.

Elder Sister was an exceedingly diligent and traditionally conservative person. When she was younger, many people advised her to remarry, but she would say, "A woman should not serve two husbands," insisting on remaining faithful to her late husband. She rejected all matchmakers who came knocking and even drove them out of the house. Any man who harbored those intentions and harassed her was met with her chasing them off with a knife.

Therefore, Elder Sister had quite a reputation for her chastity and righteousness in the local area, and people often praised her.

It's not easy for a widow to raise several children, but she was strict with herself, never relying on another man or remarrying no matter how tough or exhausting life was. She managed to raise her three children, even married off the eldest son, and had a grandchild. She thought the hardships were over and better days were ahead. But life is unpredictable, and disaster can strike overnight. Elder Sister's

eldest son, Deng Weidong, died in a traffic accident last year while out trading goods early in the morning.

"It happened in April, and you got married to Taiguo in May. It hadn't even been a hundred days since the accident, so their family didn't attend your wedding. We didn't go over either, to avoid any clash," sighed Qi Fenglian as she wiped away a tear from the corner of her eye. "Elder Sister is only two years older than our mom, and her Weidong was about the same age as Taiguo. Since their father passed away early, he had been working since he was young. Being the eldest son, he was like a father figure and the mainstay of the Deng family. Who would've thought that someone so young would... truly a hard life."

Cheng Su hadn't expected this, and felt quite uncomfortable upon hearing it. Thinking about it, she indeed had not met such relatives on her wedding day, and asked, "What happened with the traffic accident? Was the culprit caught?"

"Caught? Not at all!" exclaimed Qi Fenglian, anger apparent on her face. "Weidong sold vegetables, and he would ride out with his cart to get the goods before dawn. The culprit hit him and then ran off; no one saw anything. It wasn't until daylight that someone found him, but it was already too late. That murderer, may heaven deal with them!"

Cheng Su sighed softly at the thought of the hardships awaiting the orphans and the widow left behind.

"You go ahead with your work. I'm going to see Elder Sister, and you should come over later to meet her," said Qi Fenglian.

"Oh, you go ahead. I'll come over in a bit," Cheng Su said hastily.

After Qi Fenglian left, Cheng Su shook her head and swiftly went through the kitchen's ingredients, preparing a couple more dishes. She then recalled her Elder Sister talking about Elder Sister's chastity and frowned slightly.

Thinking that the idea of "A woman should not serve two husbands" was admirable in terms of tradition and chastity, it unfortunately also sounded terribly old-fashioned.

Her thoughts then turned to her elder cousin's widow. Would Elder Sister expect her to remain alone for a lifetime as well?

Reflecting on this, Cheng Su shivered at the thought. It seemed too heartless.

Not wanting to dwell on it further, Cheng Su quickly chopped and prepared the food. Once ready, she took off her apron and went to the main room.

As soon as she entered the main room, Cheng Su could feel a heavy atmosphere lingering; the oppressive air was so dense it almost made it hard to breathe.

Looking around, she saw the room was full of people: some were deep in thought with their heads bowed, some wiping tears away, and some were even sobbing softly.

This was supposed to be during the New Year celebration, and yet with all the weeping, one might think a terrible tragedy had occurred!

When Qi Fenglian saw Cheng Su arrive, she dried the tears from the corners of her eyes and said, "You're here. Come and meet Elder Sister." Leading her to a woman, she added, "Elder Sister, this is Taiguo's wife, Cheng Su. This is your first time meeting her!"

Cheng Su greeted her with a polite smile, "Elder Sister, hello, I am Cheng Su."

As she observed the woman before her, Cheng Su was inwardly startled. Elder Sister was just a couple of years older than her mother-in-law, who was only fifty-two, making Elder Sister merely fifty-four. Yet, she looked as if she were over sixty, with half of her hair already gray.

Chapter 540 Actually, It's an Old-Fashioned

How a person is getting by can be seen on her face, and whether a person is leading a bitter life can be known by comparing her with her peers.

Though they were only about two years apart in age, their own mother-in-law's face was rosy and her hair was still black, her limbs nimble, but this aunt, she looked like a woman in her early sixties, her back slightly hunched, her hair half-gray and half-white, her face full of wrinkles, her eyelids drooping, and the corners of her mouth turned downward, making her entire face seem bitter.

A widow, having been widowed in her early thirties, must have had a hard life.

"Elder sister, last year you couldn't come, but today, have a cup of tea also in honor of Taiguo and acknowledge kinship!" Mother Qi said on the side.

The aunt retracted her assessing gaze from Cheng Su and nodded slightly.

At that moment, Qi Fenglian had already brought over two cups of tea, and Cheng Su along with Qi Taiguo knelt down to offer the tea to her.

"I don't have much to give you, just a small red envelope." The aunt opened her coat and fished out two small red envelopes from the pocket of her underwear and handed them over.

Qi Taiguo smiled as he accepted them. When it was Cheng Su's turn, the aunt said, "As Taiguo's new wife, you should support your husband and teach your children, be filial to your in-laws, and bear offspring for the Qi family as early as possible, not forgetting the ancient teachings of 'women's virtues.'"

Cheng Su's smile stiffened slightly, the corners of her mouth twitching as she accepted the red envelope, and smiled, "Thank you, aunt."

This could be a real problem; she might be an even more traditional and difficult person to handle than the mother-in-law!

After meeting the aunt, and getting acquainted with other people, the elder cousin-in-law Liu Wenjing was a petite woman. According to Qi Fenglian, she was supposed to be around twenty-five or twenty-six, but possibly because of the misfortune of losing her husband, she looked in her early thirties, dressed in drab clothes that made her seem even older.

Liu Wenjing was startled when she saw Cheng Su, managing a strained smile, with a flash of envy quickly passing through her eyes.

Some people just can't be compared; some are born pretty and look good in fine clothes, and with a healthy and tall husband standing beside them, they really matched well together.

As for herself, why was she so unlucky to become a widow at such a young age?

Liu Wenjing was holding her son, whose eyes were rolling around. Cheng Su teased him, calling her "cousin-in-law," and gave him a red envelope.

As for the Deng family's children, the second cousin Deng Weixia, who was twenty-three this year, kept his head down, casting glances at his sister-in-law and then at Cheng Su.

And their cousin Deng Weiqiu was also eighteen by now.

Although they were all unfortunate, the children of the Deng family had grown up and could go out to work and earn money.

"Is the rice ready? If it's ready, let's get the food on the table!" Mother Qi looked toward Cheng Su.

"Almost, there are two more dishes to cook, I'll go and stir-fry them now," Cheng Su replied and then called her sister-in-law to help her set the table.

Qi Fengping went unwillingly.

Cheng Su returned to the kitchen to continue her busy work, while the men talked with Father Qi, and the women were with Mother Qi.

"Erzhen, this daughter-in-law of yours seems like she can't sit still!" The aunt said to Mother Qi, calling her by her name.

Mother Qi heard this, pursed her lips and said, "Sister, you have sharp eyes indeed. My daughter-in-law is full of big ideas. She's not easily scolded."

The aunt frowned and said, "No matter how big her ideas are, she is still a daughter-in-law of the Qi family. Can she be bigger than you, the mother-in-law? You need to take charge, otherwise, does this family bear the Qi name or the Cheng name? A daughter-in-law should act like one, she needs to be well-disciplined."

Liu Wenjing, who was not far away, heard this, lowered her head, a shadow passing across her eyes, and her response to Qi Fenglian's questions also seemed distracted.