

The 80s 541

Chapter 541: Women Can't Sit at the Table

Auntie's whole family came over, and with the increase in people, we set up two tables for lunch, still divided by gender, one for men and one for women. Cheng Su brought out the last dish before finally removing her apron and sitting down.

Auntie stared, gawking at Cheng Su, and even Liu Wenjing seemed bewildered.

"Auntie, what's wrong? Is there something on my face?" Cheng Su asked, touching her cheek.

Auntie's expression was strange, and after hesitating, she said, "Back home, when we have guests over, it's always the men who keep them company, and during meals, women never sit at the table. They only serve from the kitchen and at the tableside and eat separately in the kitchen afterwards."

Cheng Su's face turned green.

"Usually, it's the men who accompany the guests, and the women cook the meals. Even after they've finished, they aren't allowed to sit at the table. Otherwise, it would be laughable. Even during the meal, they shouldn't enter the room, just wait outside to clear the table. No woman from any family should sit at the table, otherwise, it's seen as ill-mannered, a lack of upbringing. Just look at my daughter-in-law; she's never sat at the table," Auntie continued as if she hadn't noticed Cheng Su's changing complexion, turning to Mother Qi, "Don't you have this custom here?"

Mother Qi was somewhat embarrassed: "We don't have that here."

"Then I guess our place follows the ancestral traditions and rules more closely," Auntie said with a nod, making a big deal of it.

By this point, Cheng Su's face had turned from green to black.

Qi Fenglian, seeing that things weren't going right, chimed in, "Auntie, you have so many customs over there! We don't have them here. Even my in-laws don't have such customs!"

Women not allowed at the table during a meal? What kind of international joke is this? This is the progressive 1980s, not the Great Qing Dynasty, okay?

After hearing Auntie's bizarre views, any sympathy Cheng Su had for her hard-luck aunt vanished into thin air.

"Auntie, do you always follow this too?" Cheng Su asked through clenched teeth.

"Of course, when my husband was around, he entertained the guests. Now that he's gone, it's up to my two boys. When have you ever seen a woman accompany guests? The way it is, men are in charge of external affairs, women are responsible for the household; where's the justification for a woman to sit at the table and eat equally with men?" Auntie said with a hint of contempt.

"Auntie, Big Sister-in-law, you two are truly pitiful. What era are we living in now? Men and women are equal. Women are capable of holding up half the sky. Since when can't a woman sit at the table to eat? Anyone who didn't know better would think you're living in ancient times!" Cheng Su clicked her tongue, shaking her head.

Auntie and Liu Wenjing's faces turned in unison.

Mother Qi scolded, "Every place has its own customs; what's wrong with that? Talking about pity. Just eat your meal."

"Yes, Mother-in-law, I'll eat and keep quiet!" Cheng Su bowed her head, using her bowl to hide the sneer on her lips— it's been said that those deserving pity also have detestable aspects. Perhaps, that has always been an eternal truth.

What kind of people are these!

Auntie watched Cheng Su bury her head in her meal and ignore everyone else, casting a meaningful glance at her sister that seemed to say, "You've failed in her education."

Mother Qi was red in the face and glared at Cheng Su, blaming her for causing her own embarrassment in front of her elder sister.

Cheng Su acted as if she hadn't seen, continuing to focus on her meal, which cast an envious look from Liu Wenjing.

She married so well!

She'd never had the chance to sit at the table during big celebrations like the New Year at the Deng family home, always busy outside. Sometimes during the bustle, her meals would be cold dishes and cold rice.

And now, having lost her husband, her life was truly hard!

Qi Fenglian, sensing the tense atmosphere, felt uneasy herself. No wonder she never saw her aunt sit at the table when she visited her aunt's house with her mother as a child. So, there was such a custom, and life for the women there must be really tough.

Chapter 542: Arranging a Secure Job

A meal, Cheng Su ate with such a tastelessness that she wondered if it was her own illusion; she felt that the auntie was watching her every move.

After the meal, Cheng Su began to clean up. Qi Fenglian took off her coat to help, but Auntie stopped her, saying, "You're here as a guest, an auntie visiting relatives. Guests don't do chores. We have a daughter-in-law here; there's no need for you to intervene."

Qi Fenglian and Cheng Su looked at each other, both at a loss.

"Older sister, you rest. Baobao must be getting hungry; I can take care of it," Cheng Su said with a light smile.

Qi Fenglian felt somewhat guilty.

Cheng Su didn't dawdle; she was always someone who handled things efficiently. She first made a pot of tea for them to drink and chat, put out a fruit plate, and then swiftly cleaned up the dining table and did the dishes.

Qi Taiguo quietly followed her to the kitchen and said, "Auntie is traditional by nature and finds many things about young people's behavior hard to accept. If she says something that displeases you, just bear with it, pretend you didn't hear it, and feel sorry for her!"

Cheng Su, while washing dishes, first glanced at the kitchen door and asked in a low voice, "Is it true that in their place, women don't sit at the table?"

Qi Taiguo nodded and said, "Yes, it's true."

Cheng Su sighed sharply and said, "My goodness, what kind of place is that? It seems very closed off, right?"

"Mhm, it's a very closed-off small mountain village, where the traditional customs are quite strict, and they're used to it," Qi Taiguo replied.

"I'm glad when I came over, it was here and not there. Otherwise, what would I have done?" Cheng Su muttered to herself, filled with relief.

She really had not expected such traditional customs to still exist; it was extremely suffocating. With this in mind, her firm decision not to remarry was also a matter of following the example, wasn't it?

If that was the case for her, what about her cousin-in-law?

With such a young child, and so young herself.

Cheng Su shook her head; she couldn't intervene, as these were each person's choices, and she didn't want to worry needlessly.

...

After Cheng Su finished tidying up, she returned to the living room where everyone was talking. However, Auntie and the others had started crying again.

"It's fate, there's nothing to be done, I accept it. Thankfully, Weidong left behind an only child. We mother and daughter-in-law can bring him up together. It's just that Weidong was the mainstay of the family, and now he's gone. Gou Sheng is still young; the burden falls on Weixia. Before, he was helping his brother sell vegetables, but it seems that won't work any longer, it won't bring in much money. Taiguo, you're an officer in the army; perhaps you could pull some strings to get your cousin a government job—holding a secure job would surely be better than being a peddler," Auntie began by lamenting her own fate, but soon shifted the topic to finding a job.

Cheng Suxin felt a sudden pang in her heart and an ominous premonition.

Indeed, before she even settled on the thought, and without Qi Taiguo having to say anything, Mother Qi spoke up first, "There's no need for Taiguo to arrange anything. I think he should just work in Taiguo's wife's store. We're all family, and it's easier to talk. After the New Year, Fenglian and her family are going to work there too!"

Cheng Su's scalp exploded, and her face slightly changed.

Auntie was also surprised and looked toward Cheng Su, "Are you running a business?"

Cheng Su glanced at Qi Taiguo and said, "It's just a small business, nothing like a secure job; it's all just freelancing."

By saying that, she hinted at a refusal.

No sooner had she spoken than Auntie and Mother Qi had understood—while they were looking for a secure job, she said hers wasn't one; wasn't that a refusal if not what?

Mother Qi's face instantly darkened.

Chapter 543: Openly Losing Face of Mother-in-law

Cheng Suxin felt resistant to these job arrangements, especially after those few encounters at her parents' house, all thanks to her mother-in-law.

Now she continued to play nice and fritter away her patience, but Cheng Su was not one with a good temper, and now she was on the brink of exploding.

Mother Qi's face stretched long, and Cheng Su pretended not to see it.

"You say come work in my shop and you just come, once is enough, but to keep trying to push people over here, this isn't a shelter."

Qi Taiguo saw that Cheng Su's face looked displeased and turned to ask Deng Weixia, "Weixia, what can you do? What are you good at? When I go back, I'll see if I can make some arrangements?"

Deng Weixia cleared his throat, glanced at this imposing cousin, then lowered his head again, his voice very small, "I, I don't know."

In fact, he didn't want to leave home and go so far away.

But he dared not say it!

Seeing his quail-like timidity, Qi Taiguo frowned, as a man should not be so cowardly.

Cheng Su watched, even more displeased, a man, shrinking back, what did it look like, how could he achieve anything great?

"What do you want to do?" Qi Taiguo asked again.

Deng Weixia raised his head again and shook it.

Qi Taiguo was speechless.

Seeing this, the aunt said, "It doesn't matter what, as long as he can eat an imperial grain, that's good enough, just looking for stability, no worries about having nothing to eat in the future."

"I'll see what I can do when I go back," Qi Taiguo said.

"Who can you rely on in the army? You have to send favors too. In my opinion, why not just arrange something at your wife's place and be done with it, why bother seeking far and wide?" Mother Qi glared at Cheng Su, her face still hopeful.

"Mom, her place is just a restaurant, do you want Weixia to wait tables?" Qi Taiguo spoke up before Cheng Su, knowing well that Cheng Su was close to erupting.

Mother Qi became frustrated, after all the talking, her son was still siding with Cheng Su, not willing to help.

"Not waiting tables, doing something else is fine too. Besides, aren't you, the older daughter-in-law, going to open another branch? If you're not using the old restaurant, you'll need people for the new one, right? And there's that factory; I can't believe you can't fit one more person there." Mother Qi said.

The aunt's eyes flickered; this daughter-in-law of the Taiguo family was so capable, opening one shop after another, how big was her business?

And Liu Wenjing was also surprised, unable to tell that this young cousin-in-law was so capable, truly admirable.

Cheng Su lifted her eyelids and said, "Mom, my shop has already hired enough people, and I'm not planning to hire more for the time being, so I can't arrange anything. Though if I really had to, it wouldn't be impossible." She said this, and her tone shifted, "It's just that I would have to make the older sister's position available."

An uncle can endure, but an aunt cannot; if she endured any more, they would step all over her. Now, I give you a choice, between your nephew or your own daughter, take your pick.

The outright refusal made Mother Qi feel a burning humiliation, especially in front of her own older sister; to be defied like this by her daughter-in-law was a blow to her pride.

Look at the daughter-in-law in her older sister's house, quiet and obedient, at just one glance from the older sister, she dares not speak further. What about her own daughter-in-law?

Almost like a load-bearing pillar!

And her way of putting it, forcing her to choose, was clearly intentional.

Just as she was about to speak, the aunt cut in ahead of her, "Taiguo, I'm sorry to trouble you." She paused then added, "Our family's fate isn't good, Weidong is gone, and Weixia is the only pillar we have left. Outsiders are not reliable, and you cousins are directly related, so we can only rely on you to lend a hand."

What a covert admonishment!

Cheng Su snorted coldly; this was calling her an outsider, but indeed, she was not wrong, she really is an outsider to them.

She stood up and said, "Aunt, please take your time, I, the niece-in-law, will go down first."

Chapter 544 Your Wife Really Isn't a Simple Character

Cheng Su disregarded the looks from everyone, went straight back to her room, and sat on the bed, seething with frustration.

From the very first glance, she should have known that this aunt-in-law was not easy to get along with. Now she was even more certain that her guess was correct; so-called traditional chastity and strength were nothing but moral excuses to criticize others.

Surmising from that remark about how daughters-in-law will raise their grandsons, she wants them to follow in her footsteps, to be faithful to one, and not to serve another, right?

She wondered what her eldest sister-in-law would think. Would she also adopt her mother-in-law's practices of chastity and erect a monument of virtue for herself?

Pitiable and sad!

Cheng Su lay on the bed, looking at the canopy above, not wanting to stay here a moment longer.

Footsteps approached, Cheng Su looked over and saw Qi Taiguo coming in, closing the door behind him. She sat up and asked, "Why aren't you in the main hall keeping company with your aunt and the others? What are you doing here? I'm telling you, don't try to work on me about arranging jobs for them or anything."

"What are you talking about? I haven't even said a word yet, and you're already making assumptions," Qi Taiguo sat down and said, "I was worried you'd get too upset by yourself."

Cheng Su snorted, "You rushing over here will make things worse; they might even say I'm not abiding by women's virtues!"

Qi Taiguo gave an embarrassed smile, "My aunt has traditional..."

"Traditional she may be, but she can't expect everyone to live and act according to her ways. Didn't you hear? As soon as I said we're not hiring, she insinuated that I'm an outsider. Which is true, as a daughter-in-law, I'll always be an outsider," said Cheng Su, her words laden with sarcasm.

"It doesn't matter who sees you as an outsider; to me, you're my family. Don't be upset, okay?" Qi Taiguo pulled her close.

Cheng Su pushed him away a few times and asked, "What are you thinking, really getting a secure job for Weixia? Let me make it clear, this place isn't a shelter, and I won't be bringing in anyone else, especially not relatives."

"I know, I know. As for Weixia, seeing how he is, I don't even know what to do with him!" Qi Taiguo sighed.

"I suggest you communicate with him properly before making any plans. If he doesn't have the intention and you arrange it out of obligation, it will be thankless work if neither side is pleased. Debts of gratitude are the hardest to repay," Cheng Su said casually.

Qi Taiguo nodded, "Their family situation being what it is, if we can help, we should, sigh."

Cheng Su remained silent.

Meanwhile, Mother Qi was being lectured by the eldest sister.

"Not only is your daughter-in-law unruly, but she's also no saver of effort. Such a temper she has. Tsk tsk, in our side of the family, she would have been drowned by the reputation of being unfilial. How could you let her be so reckless?" The aunt looked at Mother Qi and scolded, "I don't know how you usually discipline her, allowing her to be so inappropriate and disrespectful."

Mother Qi was lectured until she was shamed.

"Taiguo too, I see he's been overwhelmed by her, how can that be, if this continues, will the Qi family even bear the Qi name in the future? Erzhen, you have to stand firm. I see her, going out doing business, her heart went wild. A woman should just stay home obediently, have children, quietly and dutifully raise them properly," the aunt continued, counting on her fingers, "She's been in the family for about eight or nine months now, isn't it? Why is there still no sign of pregnancy?"

The mention of it touched on yet another sore spot for Mother Qi, who couldn't help but pour out her frustrations to the eldest sister, who shook her head as she listened, "That's terrible, terrible. Your daughter-in-law aspires to reach the heavens!"

"Isn't that the truth? But don't worry big sister, if she has her Zhang Liangji, I've got my Over-the-wall Ladder," Mother Qi whispered her strategies for dealing with Cheng Su in her ear.

Chapter 545: Do You Want to Remarry?

Auntie's family had come from afar, and naturally, they were going to stay the night, but Qi Fenglian and company were also there, which made accommodation tight.

In the countryside, when guests stayed overnight and there wasn't enough room at home, you'd borrow lodging from next-door neighbors and let the guests sleep in your rooms.

The room at Cheng Su's was impossible to give up, so those who went to borrow lodging were Qi Fengping and Jianguo—everyone was from the same village and could make do by squeezing into the home of a familiar friend for one night.

With the New Year celebration, the weather so cold, and so many people around, Cheng Su was called by her mother-in-law to dig out quilts to make beds for her aunt and company.

"Cousin, this has been so hard on you, we've really troubled you by coming!" Cousin-in-law Liu Wenjing, watching her bustling about, couldn't help but gratefully express her thanks.

"Guests are a pleasure, there's no trouble at all, it's just that our means are modest, and I'm sad to put you out!" Cheng Su still pitied this woman.

Liu Wenjing nodded, then said, "Cousin, you really are lucky—married well, have a good life, and are good at doing business; such a capable person. Unlike me, so unlucky."

Cheng Su heard these words; they were all good things, but why did they sound so awkward to her?

"What are you saying, cousin-in-law? Your Gou Sheng is so clever and adorable." Unable to think of other compliments, Cheng Su just brought up her son.

"What's the use of that? He hasn't learned to talk yet and he's already lost his father. He's also a child of misfortune and sadness." Liu Wenjing sniffled, staring blankly at a corner.

Uh...

Cheng Su found this even more difficult to respond to, so she simply changed the subject and turned back to fluff up the bedding, making it a bit more comfortable.

"My mother-in-law, as you saw today, is very strong-willed. In our family, no matter the size of the matter, she's the one calling the shots. I, as her daughter-in-law, don't have any say at all. It was bearable when his father was around, but now that he's gone, I don't even have anyone to talk to. My heart aches so much, and sometimes, when I look at the child, I really just want to hold him and follow his father to the grave!" As Liu Wenjing talked, she began to sob softly.

She burst into tears just like that, quite heartbreakingly; Cheng Su was somewhat flustered and said, "Hey, why are you crying all of a sudden? The dead cannot be brought back to life, and the living must remain strong for the sake of your son, you too must stay strong."

"I don't want to cry, but when I think about how hard my life is, I just feel so awful, and I can't stop the tears." Liu Wenjing said as she wiped her tears.

Cheng Su felt a headache coming on.

Auntie was a traditionally virtuous moral stalwart, and this cousin-in-law was a Little Sister Lin who only knew how to wallow in self-pity and melancholy, the cousin Weixia was timid as a quail, and as for the youngest Weiqiu, he was unsociable with an air of someone who felt wronged by the world.

What path would this family take in the future?

"So, what are your plans for the future?" Cheng Su thought for a moment, then asked, "You're still so young, and the child is small, but you have decades ahead of you. Do you plan to remarry?"

The crying stopped abruptly.

Liu Wenjing's head shot up in surprise, her cheeks flushing.

Remarry, she dared not even think about it.

But as Cheng Su brought it up, her heart skipped a beat.

She was only twenty-five; could she really remain alone until old age? Could she manage to do so?

During the day, with the child, things were still manageable, but at night, in the deep silence, those endless long nights, she inevitably felt lonely and it was in those moments, she missed the child's father even more and lamented her own misfortune even more deeply.

About remarrying, she had only entertained the thought briefly when the sound of her mother-in-law's coughing stopped her from thinking further. Her mother-in-law also spent decades raising several children alone. Would she allow her to remarry?

Chapter 546: Being Manipulated

For Cheng Su, if she didn't mention it, all was well, but once she did, Liu Wenjing's loneliness and thoughts, like grass, began to wildly sprout in her heart.

Did she truly not want to remarry?

Of course not.

At her young age, to be blunt, she had decades to endure. Alone, how could she make it to her seventies or eighties? And even if she could, would she?

In other families, husbands and wives would discuss matters together; she had experienced this herself. Although life had been tight, Weidong was always considerate and knew how to cheer her up at night.

Yet, someone like him had been ruthlessly taken by a car accident.

No longer was there anyone to hold her, love her, talk to her through the long nights. In the darkness, there was only herself, silently shedding tears until dawn.

How was she to endure such days, and for how many decades?

What woman didn't want to be cherished? She did too!

Liu Wenjing shuddered, bowed her head, her face reddening with both excitement and a hint of guilt towards Weidong, just because of this thought!

Before she could speak, a harsh voice came from the door.

"What kind of talk is this, Taiguo daughter-in-law? Weidong has been gone less than a year, and here you are inciting my daughter-in-law to remarry? What are your intentions? Do you have any sense of womanly virtue? A woman does not serve two husbands; even an uneducated person like me knows that, didn't you learn that with all your education? Talking about remarriage, how shameless! Do you think you'll die without a man?" The aunt stormed in with a dark face, shooting Cheng Su a scathing look and glaring fiercely at her daughter-in-law.

Remarry, what kind of talk was that?

There were no widows who remarried in the Deng family. If this daughter-in-law remarried, what about her grandson? What about the deceased Weidong? Who would honor his memory?

Liu Wenjing stood up in fright, her complexion turning pale.

The words of her mother-in-law had first scolded Cheng Su, but later, they included her in the scolding as well.

"Mom..."

"Shut your mouth, I'll deal with you later!" The aunt lashed out harshly, her saggy triangle eyes glaring coldly at Cheng Su as she rebuked, "We Deng family haven't offended you, have we? How can you be so malicious, shaming us, and even inciting others to remarry? Have you no shame?"

A barrage of rebukes, one after another, pummeled Cheng Su, causing her to tremble all over.

It was ridiculous. When had she ever incited her sister-in-law to remarry? She had only asked if it was alright, but the aunt heard what she wanted, cursing without distinguishing right from wrong. What kind of behavior was this?

"Aunt, which ear of yours heard me persuading or inciting my sister-in-law to remarry? I merely asked her a casual question," said Cheng Su coldly. "Please listen to the whole conversation."

"Look at how sharp-tongued you are, daring to talk back to your elders. No respect, no manners. No wonder you insisted on marrying into our family despite the rejections. With such behavior, which family would dare accept you? Only our kind-hearted Taiguo," retorted the aunt with a sneer.

Cheng Su, seething with laughter, said, "You're the elder, so if you say I'm disrespectful or rebellious, so be it. Whatever you say goes. But when you claim I have no manners, I disagree. You can insult me, but please don't insult my parents. They raised me well, and at the very least, they didn't teach me to insult someone else's parents. And what about my character? What's wrong with it? I'm surely better than those who forcefully impose widowhood on others!"

Enough was enough. She wouldn't bear the insult meekly; if they thought her a sick cat rather than a roaring tiger, well, cursing, who the hell couldn't do it?

"What did you say?" The aunt trembled with rage, shouting, "Erzhen, Erzhen, come here!"

It was an absolute defiance. A junior daring to talk back to an elder? She couldn't tolerate it!

Chapter 547: More Wronged than Dou E

The argument between the two had disturbed Mother Qi and the others, who hurried over.

"What's going on here?" Mother Qi asked.

The great aunt, trembling with anger, pointed at Cheng Su and said, "Your wonderful daughter-in-law, she sure has some nerve, meddling in other people's family matters. I just thought to come and see you, and now, look at this, my family is about to be torn apart by your daughter-in-law!"

"What happened?" Qi Taiguo, seeing the tense situation, couldn't help but stand beside Cheng Su and quietly ask.

"Great aunt, you must speak with some conscience. When have I ever tried to interfere in your family matters or disrupt your home?" Cheng Su shoved Qi Taiguo's hand away and said, "I did nothing but ask one more question. If I am not even allowed to speak, then I suppose I shouldn't exchange words with anyone from your family anymore, right?"

Heavenly Lord above, take a good look, she is even more wronged than Dou E!

"You still won't admit it? Weren't you the one who instigated my daughter-in-law to remarry? What are you planning?" the great aunt pointed at her and loudly accused.

Deng Weixia, who was standing by, heard this and glanced at Liu Wenjing.

"Great aunt, I think this is probably a misunderstanding. Cheng Su is not that kind of person," Qi Fenglian tried to smooth things over yet again.

"Stop talking. Taiguo's wife, it's not easy for your great aunt to visit, and you managed to upset her like this. Won't you admit your mistake?" Mother Qi, hearing the provocation to remarry, also slightly changed her expression and scolded her.

"Admit my mistake? I will admit that I was wrong to open my mouth. But I will not admit to this accusation. You say I instigated her, elder cousin's wife, did I instigate you?" Cheng Su looked at Liu Wenjing and asked, "Didn't I just ask you what your plans were for the future? About remarrying?"

"You hear, you hear."

"About remarrying? It's a question mark, not a period, it's a question, and it's different from saying 'go ahead and remarry!'" Cheng Su said coldly, "If simply asking is considered instigating, then I have nothing to say."

Liu Wenjing then said, "Mom, my cousin really just asked one question. I, I haven't thought about remarrying, Mom."

The great aunt's face changed expressions, her already stern lips puckered up, and she said coldly, "I cannot stay here any longer, or else if I do, the family will fall apart. Let's go, let's leave. Weixia, Weiqu, go fetch your nephew, we're leaving right now."

They had come from far away, and it was getting dark, how could they leave?

Mother Qi wouldn't let her elder sister leave and hurriedly stopped her, saying, "Elder sister, please calm down, she's just ignorant. Why are you getting so worked up over this?"

"Yes, great aunt, it's almost dark now, and there are dark clouds overhead, it looks like it might snow. Where can you go? Gou Sheng is still young, what if it snows on the way and he catches cold, how can we handle that? It's all just a misunderstanding, right? Once it's cleared up, there's no harm done," Qi Fenglian also persuaded, while giving Liu Wenjing a meaningful look.

Liu Wenjing felt bitter inside and said with a whining tone, "Mom, don't be angry, it's my fault, I won't talk about it anymore!"

"I can't stay, and who knows how others will stir things up," the great aunt hinted with her words.

Seeing her elder sister still angry, Mother Qi looked toward Cheng Su and said, "Taiguo's wife, what are you waiting for, won't you apologize to your great aunt? You're a grown woman; don't you know what should and shouldn't be said?"

"Enough, enough, it's already dark. Go and cook supper, everyone must be hungry by now. We're all family, why fight? No point in hurting feelings. Taiguo's wife, you go help in the kitchen too," Father Qi finally spoke up after staying silent until now.

The great aunt's face darkened, was even her brother-in-law siding with her?

"Let's leave," the great aunt said as she started to walk away.

"You don't need to go, as an elder, you should stay put, lest you step out that door and then people say that I, as the niece's wife, drove an elder out." Cheng Su sneered, "If anyone should leave, it should be me!"

Chapter 548: I've Tolerated Your Family Long Enough

Cheng Su dashed into the bedroom to grab her bags and start packing, but Qi Taiguo followed closely behind, snatching the luggage from her hands.

"Susu, what are you doing?"

Cheng Su reached for the bags and scoffed, "What am I doing? Of course, I'm going back to my mom's house. Is there even a place for me here anymore?"

"It's just that your aunt got carried away, you know. It's been less than a year since Weidong passed, and hearing news about a widow remarrying, of course she panicked. The kids are still young!" Qi Taiguo explained, "She's uneducated, culturally unaware; just a peasant consciousness, a village old lady. You, having seen the world and done big business, are cultured. Are you still fussing with her?"

"Did you see how it all went down just now? I think she clearly won't allow my cousin-in-law to remarry. She wants to trap her for life, which is laughable. What era are we in? Whether to remain a widow or not should be a personal choice, yet she wants to coerce someone for life? As if we're still in the Great Qing Dynasty!" said Cheng Su, her voice dripping with disdain.

"So she's ignorant. Alright, can you calm down, please?" pleaded Qi Taiguo.

"I can't calm down; I've been holding this anger in since the moment we arrived. Your aunt, attacking me indirectly, and now this injustice—I can't stand to look at her face anymore, and nobody wants to either," Cheng Su said as she grabbed her clothes and continued, "And your mom, I didn't settle things

with her from last time, and now without regard to right or wrong, she expects me to apologize, piss on that! Do they think I'm a clay figure to be shaped and molded at will?"

Qi Taiguo made a pained expression.

"Didn't you hear what your aunt said about me? She called me sharp-tongued and disrespectful to my elders, lacking upbringing. She said no one would want me with such poor manners, that I shamelessly clung to marrying you, trapping a promising young man like you!" Cheng Su said with a stern face, "Her insulting me is one thing, but insulting my parents—unacceptable. My parents haven't done a single thing to wrong her."

Hearing this, Qi Taiguo replied, "Just think of it as her talking nonsense. I'm fond of you for wanting to ensnare me—that's fine by me."

"No thanks, your whole family seems to think I'm shamelessly clinging to you. To be honest, if it weren't for the protective measures of a military marriage and the hassle of the procedures, I would have divorced you long ago to save myself the accusations of shamelessly hanging onto you!" Cheng Su said as she snatched the luggage back, stuffing her clothes in hastily and picking it up to leave.

"Cheng Su, haven't you caused enough trouble? It's the New Year's; that's enough. It's getting dark. Even if you're upset, there should be a limit," Qi Taiguo said as he pulled her back.

"Please, what's the limit? Your domineering aunt is too much for me, can't I at least avoid her? Didn't you see her attitude just now? If I really let her go, by tomorrow Xiashui Village will be buzzing with talk of me being unfilial and driving an elder away."

"If you know that, then why leave?" Qi Taiguo said with a dark expression.

With a smirk, Cheng Su responded, "If she doesn't care about kindness, neither will I. Let everyone see, she comes to visit her relatives but ends up driving her nephew's wife back to her parents' home. I want to see if she can keep up her domineering act!"

"You..." Qi Taiguo said, his headache intensifying at her childish tone, "Susu, consider this me begging you, can't you just give me this face?"

"Qi Taiguo, I've given you plenty of face. Last time in Qing City it was the same with your mom, and it's the same now. Tolerating your mom, tolerating your whole family, I've had my fill of it. If I endure any more, I'm going to explode!" said Cheng Su emotionlessly, "I'm going to my mom's first, and in a few days, I'll head directly back to Qing City. Come if you want. If you don't, then go back by yourself."

With those words, she grabbed her luggage and left.

Chapter 549: Protecting the Shortcomings of Maternal Family

Cheng Su left as soon as she said she would, not only shocking the Qi family but even her own aunt was stunned.

She really hadn't expected Cheng Su to have such a fierce temper. After all, once they had given her face, she should have just taken the opportunity to de-escalate the situation. But Cheng Su was serious and truly left, carrying her luggage bag with her.

Heaven, to have such a hot-tempered daughter-in-law, how her own sister could endure it was beyond her!

Father Qi was the first to react; when he chased after her, Cheng Su's shadow was nowhere to be seen.

He became frantic with anger and bellowed at his son, "What are you standing there for? Aren't you going to chase after your wife? It's already dark. Even if she doesn't come back, at the very least you should escort her to her parents' home!"

"What's there to chase? If she wants to leave, let her leave! If she has the guts, then she better not come back!" Mother Qi was so angry that she was fuming.

She had thought Cheng Su's temper had subsided, but who knew it had only grown fiercer? It was like she wanted to turn the world upside down!

"Shut your mouth!" Father Qi roared at her.

A perfectly good daughter-in-law, driven away just like that, and during the New Year's no less. It was all her elder sister's fault for making a mountain out of a molehill. Visiting others and failing to restrain herself, who did she think she was?

Taiguo had already run outside.

In the darkness, the Cheng family was getting ready for dinner when suddenly the gate was being loudly banged on.

"Who is that? Xiaozhi, go have a look," Mother Cheng said while dishing out the rice, instructing her son.

Cheng Zhi went out and soon came rushing back in, shouting, "It's serious, Mom, my sister has been sent back by her in-laws!"

Bang!

The rice bowl in Mother Cheng's hands fell and shattered into pieces.

Cheng Su walked in with her luggage, tapped Cheng Zhi's head, and said, "What are you talking about? What do you mean I've been 'sent back'?"

"Isn't it so? You just went back today, and now you've run back here, still carrying your bag. If that's not being 'sent back,' what is it?" Cheng Zhi pointed at her bag.

"How is it? Just because I'm married, I can't come back to my parents' home anymore?" Cheng Su rolled her eyes.

"What's this all about? Why have you come back at this hour? What happened?" Mother Cheng, not caring about the broken bowl on the floor, advanced and grabbed her, demanding answers.

"It's nothing."

Mother Cheng, getting anxious, pinched her, "You stubborn girl, are you trying to worry me to death? If it's nothing, would you be coming back in the middle of the night carrying a bag? Spit it out quickly, what's going on? Did you have a row with Taiguo?"

"Ouch, Mom, doesn't pinching hurt?" Cheng Su dodged and said, "I didn't argue with him. I just had a few words with his aunt. I didn't want to make a fuss at their home, so I thought I'd come back and stay for a few days."

Before her mother could speak, she continued, "Mom, are you not welcoming me? If that's the case, I'll just go stay in town!"

With that, she turned to leave. Beside her, Cheng Zhi clicked his tongue twice, thinking to himself that his sister was getting craftier by the day. Look at how she was strategically retreating to get her way - she was getting quite skilled!

"Who said we're not welcoming you? But you better explain things clearly before you think about staying. Out with it!" Mother Cheng pulled at her, chiding.

Cheng Su had no choice but to recount the affair with the aunt who paraded around in her moral righteousness. When she finished, she said, "That's the way it is. Tell me, if she really had walked out, wouldn't I be drowned in spit tomorrow? With that kind of talk, I might as well leave. Who cares about squeezing into a big family like that and waiting on them? I'd rather come back home and live like a queen!"

"You're right, that aunt was too overbearing, making a fuss over nothing. As a guest, she was too domineering, and the Qi family did nothing to stand up for you," Father Cheng, having heard the whole story, looked displeased and asked, "You came back by yourself? Did Taiguo follow and escort you back?"

If he didn't even come after her, that son-in-law was no good.

Seeing her father frowning in anger warmed Cheng Su's heart — after all, her own family would always come to her defense!

Chapter 550: Father Cheng Lectures His Son-in-law

Qi Taiguo didn't fail to follow her back, but Cheng Su wouldn't let him enter her maiden home, telling him she'd get cross if he did, and now he was still standing outside in the courtyard.

The north wind howled, and snow had begun to fall at some point. Qi Taiguo, having rushed out, had only grabbed a coat on his way out. Even with his regular exercise, he felt the chill invading.

Footsteps approached, and her younger brother poked his head out, waving, "Brother-in-law, come in. My sister really has a temper. Without her saying anything, none of us would have known you were here. Come in quickly!"

Qi Taiguo hurried inside.

As soon as he entered the main room, it was warm and inviting. Dinner had already been set out, but the looks on his mother-in-law and father-in-law's faces weren't too pleasant.

"Sit down and eat. After dinner, you should head back. I'll stay at my mother's place for the next few days," Cheng Su called out to him.

Qi Taiguo sat down, steeling himself.

Father Cheng opened a bottle of liquor and poured him a drink. Qi Taiguo quickly stood up to take it, his face a picture of panic, "Father-in-law, please let me do it. How could I trouble you to pour me a drink?"

"Sit down," Father Cheng avoided his hand.

Qi Taiguo had no choice but to sit down again.

After a pour, Father Cheng clinked glasses with him, one cup, then another, three cups in a row, until Father Cheng finally slammed the small liquor cup down onto the table.

"Taiguo, there's a saying that a son-in-law is half a son. Today, I, as your father-in-law, will presume to be bold and share what's on my mind with you. Even if it's uncomfortable to hear, you've got to listen to the whole thing," Father Cheng said, looking at Qi Taiguo.

"Father-in-law, please speak. I'm all ears!" Qi Taiguo replied earnestly.

"I know our Cheng family, descendants of a fallen capitalist, are somewhat unsuited for your Qi family. Especially considering you're so young and already an officer with a bright future ahead of you. To tell you the truth, if we hadn't been betrothed to your family long ago, we wouldn't have had the nerve, even with the thickest of skins, to be related by marriage to someone like you," Father Cheng admitted.

"Father-in-law, you're not being fair. I am the one unworthy of Susu," Qi Taiguo said, full of trepidation.

Father Cheng gestured dismissively, "No need for pleasantries with me. I know my daughter's temper better than anyone; her mother and I spoiled her, so we can't blame anyone else. It is admittedly a bit shameless to have wed her to you on account of money, but I truly took a liking to you. You've always been determined and are a man of the righteous faction. As a father, all I wish for is for my daughter to marry a good man, and I had my eye on you long ago."

Qi Taiguo was taken aback, as he hadn't expected this. True, the Cheng family had lent him money for his leg surgery before he'd joined the military.

"The person who took a liking to you wanted you to be good to my daughter. When you married Susu, that was my wish: I wasn't asking for much, not even for a significant dowry from your Qi family, just that you be good to her and protect her. A daughter married off is like water poured away—she married you, so you're her only support. If you can't protect her, then she's left alone and helpless in your Qi family, unable to take a single step without difficulty," Father Cheng explained, staring intently at him. "Take the situation at your home today, for instance; if you'd been protecting her, she wouldn't have had to run to her parents' house late at night. I know my daughter, and she's been pushed into this by your Qi family."

"Taiguo, give me a straight answer today. Can you protect her, or can you not? If you can't, then her mother and I will take her back to the Cheng family and no longer entrust her to your Qi family!"

His words were like a bomb dropping, leaving Cheng Su and Mother Cheng stunned. Tears welled up in Cheng Su's eyes, and she was suddenly reminded that these were her family members, always ready to guard her back.