

The 80s 721

Chapter 721 Competition Among Peers

Cheng Su wasn't intentionally putting on airs. These days, their way of interacting was somewhat polite and reserved. He knew the fault wasn't with him but with his mother, yet he couldn't help feeling resentful and uncertain about how the two of them should move forward.

Just as mom had said, they were being calm. Perhaps it was good to take a moment to calmly think and figure out how to handle this relationship.

When Cheng Su showed up at the restaurant, everyone was surprised and came to greet him.

Cheng Su deliberately smiled and pointed at his face, saying, "If I weren't fine, my face wouldn't look like a baozi. Go on with your work, I'm just here to look around."

Once everyone dispersed to their tasks, Liang Dan let him sit down behind the cash register and took the initiative to bring out the account books from the past few days.

"I'm just checking how the business is, the account books aren't urgent. You always handle things properly," Cheng Su said, patting her hand. "I've been thinking, we should hire another cashier. From now on, the restaurant will operate in shifts. That way, if you need to rest, there will be someone to take over. What do you think?"

"You're the boss; of course, we'll follow your lead," Liang Dan replied with an indifferent expression.

Cheng Su hummed in agreement, "Then let's hire another one."

Liang Dan saw that despite her smile, there was a trace of worry between Cheng Su's brows, so she asked, "Are you really okay?"

"I'm fine. Oh, and please thank your cousin for me, thank him for his kindness and thoughts!" Cheng Su remembered the tonic gifts that Qiulan and Luh Kai had brought when she was recuperating, saying it was just a small gesture.

Luh Kai hadn't come in person, but when he heard about her accident, he sent a thoughtful gift. Of course, she was grateful.

"It's nothing much to thank for, just some food," Liang Dan shrugged.

"Still, those tonics aren't cheap at all; they're good stuff!" Cheng Su scoffed with a playful smile. The gifts were valuable items like fish maw and bird's nest. "Tell him that I'll treat him to a meal another day."

"Oh!"

Cheng Su patted her hand and said, "Carry on with your work, I need to talk to Qiulan for a bit."

She went outside to sit down, called over Qiulan and Old Song, and asked if there was anything inappropriate at the restaurant or if there were improvements to be made. She also mentioned hiring another cashier so that the restaurant could start operating in shifts.

"That's a good idea. The business is getting better and we need to be fully staffed. It's just that our space isn't big enough," Old Song commented. "However, I heard that Fa Ji is closing down!"

Cheng Su was startled, "It's closing down already?"

Old Song nodded and explained, "Yes, and it's being taken over by a food business. I heard they're opening branches, with a main store in Shanghai called Li Ji. If they open, our business might be affected to some extent."

"They specialize in Shanghai cuisine?" Cheng Su inquired.

"I looked into it, and they mainly offer Jiangsu and Zhejiang cuisine. The standard seems to be mid to high-end," Old Song said.

Cheng Su pursed her lips and said, "That's how the industry works, competition exists in every field. Let's just wait and see. Once they open, we'll go and test out their dishes."

"I was thinking the same thing."

"Though Joy Soon Loy is small, we do have aspirations to expand like the big restaurants, so we need to keep innovating our dishes. Signature dishes must maintain quality; I don't need to mention that—I trust you to handle it, Old Song. As for innovating new dishes, see if they have any unique ideas. Don't worry about wasting ingredients, be bold in creation, and strive to make the best dishes," Cheng Su advised.

"Alright, I'll arrange a meeting with everyone soon."

Cheng Su thought for a moment before adding, "Here's an idea, if someone comes up with a new dish that reaches a certain level of sales, we'll provide a reward. This should help inspire everyone's innovative capabilities!"

Old Song was momentarily taken aback, then expressed his admiration for her idea.

Chapter 722: Focus on Building a Brand

Cheng Su and Old Song discussed innovating awards for the kitchen staff and simply established a monthly "Employee of the Month" award for the service floor as well.

They hung a board at the entrance for customers to rate the service. Whoever received good service would give a star, and the person with the most stars by the end of the month would be the star employee, eligible for a bonus.

In addition, there was a complaint book. The rewards and penalties were clear; if someone received too many complaints, their year-end bonus would definitely be docked.

Cheng Su's intention was to stimulate everyone's ambition and to adjust the overall work atmosphere.

A team that is positive and upward striving is always better than one that is dispirited and listless.

Both Old Song and Qiulan had no objections to this approach.

Cheng Su gave a few instructions and then let Qiulan go off to get busy, while Old Song continued the discussion with Cheng Su.

"Now our business is quite good, but what we need is more dining space. Some people don't want to queue, and if they can't get a seat, they simply go elsewhere to eat. You see, if our restaurant could expand, we might not lose customers," said Old Song, who regretted every time he saw people leaving because they didn't want to wait and couldn't find a seat.

Cheng Su started with a compliment, "It's all thanks to the leadership of your kitchen team and the delicious food you make that we have so many returning customers!"

Old Song modestly deflected the praise.

"As for expanding the business," Cheng Su continued, "look, we've taken over the two shops on either side to form one big area, but the shops further down won't rent to us." She showed a bitter smile.

Old Song knew this too, and it only added to his regrets.

Looking towards the main hall, he sighed, "If we could buy it, adding to our own building would be great, but it's a pity."

Cheng Su replied, "For now, let's not think about that. Let's first maintain our quality, establishing a well-regarded brand name. Once the quality is there, there will always be people willing to wait."

She also knew that some places only serve a set number of customers each day and still have no shortage of business due to the draw of their brand. As long as they delivered high quality, people would be on board.

Her ultimate goal was to create a time-honored establishment. Later generations always have a soft spot for such places, with its accumulated popularity and prestige bringing long-term benefits.

Therefore, the size of the place is not the most important thing—it's the reputation that counts. Once the brand is established, even a shop just ten paces wide will be jam-packed with people.

In her previous life, Cheng Su had visited many old shops tucked away in small streets and alleys. These aged establishments, with their outdated decor, often reflected the authenticity of great food better with their antiquated ambiance.

After hearing Cheng Su's thoughts, Old Song laughed and said, "You are younger, but you think further ahead than I do. My vision is still not as broad as yours."

He had only lamented the loss of customers without considering the benefits and advantages of focusing on creating a brand.

Cheng Su modestly objected, "You flatter me. I'm just a strategist on paper. Building the brand depends on your leadership; the quality of the product is what matters most!"

Old Song smiled and didn't argue, knowing she was being humble.

"Well, I'll go get busy," Old Song stood up and said.

Cheng Su nodded and agreed.

Old Song took a couple of steps, then turned back, pointing to Cheng Su's forehead, "Young person, it's better to look ahead. Don't think too much; what's lost is lost. Who knows, one day it might come back to surprise you. A gloomy look doesn't suit you; appreciate the present, open your heart, and you'll find that you have more than you've lost."

Cheng Su was slightly taken aback, her eyes tinged with redness, and she smiled gratefully, "I understand, thank you!"

With a smile, Old Song turned and headed to the kitchen.

Chapter 723: Still Heartbroken

Cheng Su left the restaurant and suddenly felt she had nowhere to go. She considered visiting the fast-food eatery near the train station, but the thought of running into Elder Sister there, who would probably bombard her with a myriad of persuasive words, made her feel sick to her stomach. So she decided against it; right now, she didn't really want to see anyone from the Qi family.

Glancing at her watch, she knew going home would mean enduring another silent confrontation with Qi Taiguo, which would be even more unbearable. Cheng Su sighed and boarded the shuttle bus to the factory.

Fine rain began to fall from the sky. Sitting on the bus and looking out, she saw the fields passing by. Spring had arrived, and the farmers were already tilling the land. Despite the drizzle, some took shelter under trees, while others continued to toil.

Cheng Su's thoughts were somewhat ethereal. The people here toiled for their daily meals, and even if they argued with their spouses or had an unspeakable mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship, they probably wouldn't complain about divorce as sentimentally as she did, would they?

Inside the shuttle bus, it was noisy and bustling, with women carrying children on their backs, letting the children cry out without comforting them, engrossed in their conversations instead.

Some men simply smoked cigarettes inside the bus, some chatted loudly, and others set baskets at their feet, discussing the day's business with the person next to them.

The scene was full and vivid. Cheng Su hooked her lips in a faint smile and looked out the window.

She had integrated herself into this era, yet she also hadn't; her thoughts were still stuck in the values of her previous life, which is why she felt her rights had been greatly violated when she learned what her mother-in-law had done, and why she contemplated whether to divorce just because of disrespect?

The bus came to a stop; some people got off, and others got on, one sitting down next to her.

"Big sister, may I sit here?"

Cheng Su turned her head and saw a woman in patch-covered clothes with a child who had a runny nose carried on her back. She nodded to indicate it was okay.

The child, barely seven or eight months old, with big black eyes sucking on its thumb, looked curiously at her. The child stared wide-eyed and flashed her a naive smile.

Cheng Su's eyes suddenly became warm, and her nose tingled as she turned her head away.

If it weren't for what had happened, she too might have had such an innocent child, right?

The bus journey continued for a while and soon approached the factory's nearby stop. Cheng Su almost stumbled off the bus, breathing heavily, as tears rolled down her face.

She thought she had moved on, but the sight of another person's child and the thought of herself still brought her pain.

She walked quickly through the rain to the factory. Seeing Cheng Su, Ying Xiaoya and the others, who were talking, were all taken aback.

"What are you doing here? Oh my, you're soaked from the rain!" Ying Xiaoya jumped up.

Cheng Su dashed into the office.

"Yanmei, go make some Ginger Tea." Ying Xiaoya took down her own towel from the wall to help Cheng Su dry her hair while saying, "You're still not well, why did you come here? There's nothing urgent at the company. You got yourself wet in the rain; you're joking with your health."

"It's fine, the rain wasn't heavy, just caught me in these few steps." Cheng Su waved her hand and took the towel from her, rubbing her hair roughly.

"It's not even April yet; this rain is cold, and you've also just... why are you so stubborn!" Ying Xiaoya was scolding her like an older sister at that moment.

"All right, Xiao Ya, stop lecturing, I really just got caught a little. I came on the bus, and it wasn't raining then. It started only midway. Look, my clothes aren't that wet either!" Cheng Su pleaded.

Ying Xiaoya huffed, and Mai Yanmei came with the Ginger Tea. She handed it over, watched Cheng Su drink it down, then continued the conversation, "Why didn't you rest at home and came here instead?"

"It was stuffy at home, no one to talk to, so I just came over," Cheng Su pursed her lips.

Seeing Cheng Su's face clouded with unresolved worries and the red-rimmed eyes, Ying Xiaoya frowned and couldn't help asking, "What happened?"

Chapter 724: Xiao Ya Comforts

The frustration of the past few days at home needed an outlet, and Cheng Su needed to find someone to confide in. Ying Xiaoya was a very close friend and sister to her here, so when the question came, her eyes reddened.

Seeing this, Ying Xiaoya sat down next to her and asked, "Did you have a fight with Qi Taiguo?"

Cheng Su shook her head.

Ying Xiaoya glanced at Yanmei, who then said she would go to the sales department to see if they needed help filling out some forms.

After Yanmei left, Ying Xiaoya poured another cup of hot water for Cheng Su and placed it in front of her, "What happened? Tell me."

Cheng Su took a sip of water and said, "It's nothing really, just feeling repressed and annoyed."

Ying Xiaoya waited for her to continue.

"Do you know what my mother-in-law did regarding my pregnancy? What 'amazing' thing she pulled off?" Cheng Su let out a scoff and without waiting for Ying Xiaoya to respond, she spilled everything about her mother-in-law's actions like pouring beans out of a bamboo tube.

Ying Xiaoya's eyes widened in shock, No way, how can there be such people!

"I mean, what bad luck have I run into to end up with such a peculiar mother-in-law?" Cheng Su took a breath.

"This, this is too, too bizarre!" Ying Xiaoya gulped, "How can a mother-in-law act like this... Are all mothers-in-law this terrifying? Oh my, it makes me not even want to get married."

Cheng Su, already feeling gloomy, couldn't help but let out a laugh at this, which seemed to lessen some of the heaviness in her heart.

"There are good mothers-in-law out there, don't worry," Cheng Su chided her with a glance.

Ying Xiaoya then sighed, "Even the best mother-in-law is not like a mom. No matter how close, there's always a barrier, a layer of skin between."

That was true, and Cheng Su admitted, "I'm not as clear-sighted as you are."

Ying Xiaoya asked, "Did you confront her about this? Have you fallen out with your mother-in-law?"

Cheng Su snorted, "How could I not? At that moment, I really felt like tearing her face off."

"And what happened after that? Does Big Brother Qi know?"

"Of course, he knows. He was there when it happened." Cheng Su lowered her eyelids, "He sent his mother home and told her not to come anymore."

Ying Xiaoya uttered an "Eh" and asked, "So what's still bothering you?"

"Because of this, I brought up divorce with him, and we've been at odds these past few days. We've been married so long, and aside from the beginning, this is the first time we've been this polite with each other, treating each other with such courtesy. It's really uncomfortable!"

Ying Xiaoya was stunned, "You brought up divorce? Just because of his mother?"

"Yes, I've had that thought, simply because I can't stand my mother-in-law's behavior," Cheng Su said.

"With your personality, well, how do I put this! I think you both dearly love each other, and it would be a real shame to divorce over a mother-in-law. A mother-in-law can be annoying, sure, but she's not the one you have to live with your whole life. If you really can't get along, just keep your distance. Is that reason really worth a divorce?" Ying Xiaoya consoled.

"That's what's bothering me. I love him, and I don't want a divorce. But when I think about what his mom did, I just feel so sad, so fed up," Cheng Su sighed deeply, "Sometimes I wonder, why do people insist on getting married? Being alone isn't so bad, right? Once you're married, there are two families, double the trouble."

"It's pointless to talk about that now. If you ask for my opinion, I'm definitely against you getting a divorce, especially for this reason with your mother-in-law. Like I said, if you can't get along, just keep your distance," Ying Xiaoya said.

Cheng Su pursed her lips and replied, "I'll think it through carefully."

She needed to seriously consider which path they should take from here.

Chapter 725: Business Trip Avoidance

After Cheng Su finished speaking with Ying Xiaoya, Xiao Pinshan came over with a notebook to report on various things that had occurred during her absence.

"...The new variety of apple jam is made, but it's somewhat lacking. The main ingredient, apples, is grown locally, but they're not very crisp or sweet. Technician Zhu mentioned that the apples grown in the Shu region of the countryside are very famous. I'm thinking, should we make a trip there to take a look at their apples? If they're suitable, can we use them as the main ingredient?" Xiao Pinshan said.

Joy Soon Loy is currently developing new varieties of jam; apple jam is one of them. I didn't expect it to be made already?

"Is this it?" Cheng Su looked at the table.

"Yes, this is a sample made yesterday. I was just planning to call and report to you, but it's good that you came today." Xiao Pinshan replied with a smile.

Cheng Su looked at Yanmei and asked her to fetch a glass bowl and spoon. After tasting it, she found it both sour and sweet, but the sweetness wasn't the natural fruit kind—it was the thick, syrupy kind, which made it cloying to eat.

Cheng Su had always been very particular. After taking just one bite, she put down the spoon, and her brows furrowed in dissatisfaction.

Seeing this, Xiao Pinshan knew she wasn't satisfied.

"It's too sweet!" Cheng Su said, wiping the corner of her mouth with a handkerchief.

"Apples are naturally tart. If we don't add more sugar, they'll taste completely bland. This has maltose in it," Xiao Pinshan explained.

No wonder.

"The Shu region, which city is that?" Cheng Su thought for a moment—Sichuan, Sichuan, that's the former Sichuan Province, right?

Xiao Pinshan mentioned a place and said, "If you agree, I'll arrange the trip."

Cheng Su nodded, then on impulse, she said, "I'll go on this business trip."

Xiao Pinshan was taken aback, "You're going?"

Cheng Su smiled faintly, "I will go. Have Technician Zhu and Zhu Lifen go with me."

"Your health..." Xiao Pinshan instinctively looked at Ying Xiaoya.

Ying Xiaoya was also startled to hear that Cheng Su wanted to take this trip. Catching Xiao Pinshan's look, she said, "You haven't fully recovered yet, why would you go on a trip? This long and tiring journey, walking all around, can your health handle it? Someone else should go!"

"Yes, we just need to see if the apples there are suitable. With Technician Zhu, and sending a business manager, that should suffice," Xiao Pinshan said. "If you're worried, I can also go."

"It's not that I'm worried. I'm thinking, if the apples there are suitable, we can take the opportunity to establish a cooperative approach, saving trouble," Cheng Su said.

Xiao Pinshan shook his head, "First we need to bring back some samples for repeated testing to know for sure. We also need to compare with other producing areas. We'll choose the one that's most suitable; it's not something we can just decide on the spot."

"Then let's first go to inspect the orchards there. Let me go, I have the time anyway," Cheng Su insisted.

Xiao Pinshan had no choice but to agree, saying, "I'll make the arrangements."

As soon as he left, Ying Xiaoya grabbed Cheng Su, saying, "You're being too willful, treating your health like it's nothing. Tell me the truth, taking a trip is secondary; clearing your mind is the primary reason, right? You just want to avoid Qi Taiguo?"

Cheng Su laughed, "Since you already know, why ask? We're obviously in an awkward phase right now. It's good to be apart for a while, to think things through thoroughly."

It was a sudden stroke of inspiration for her. Everyone's relationship at home was currently awkward. Wouldn't it be better to separate for a few days and carefully contemplate the future path, rather than maintaining a polite but strained atmosphere?

"Alright then!" Ying Xiaoya said, deflated, "I bet Qi Taiguo definitely won't want you to go!"

Cheng Su pursed her lips—whether he wanted her to or not, she was going to go.

Chapter 726: Compromise

Cheng Su stayed in the office until closing time before she returned home, and by the time she entered, she already smelled the fragrance of the meal.

"You're back? I've made dinner. Would you like to wash your face before eating, or would you prefer to eat first and then wash?" Qi Taiguo asked as he stood up from the couch.

Cheng Su looked at the dining table where they usually ate together. Dishes were set, but covered with plates, obscuring their contents.

"Let's eat first." Cheng Su set down her bag, washed her hands, and sat at the table.

Qi Taiguo opened the thermos first, ladling out a bowl of soup for her and said, "It's chicken soup. I've skimmed off the fat after removing the skin. Drink it while it's hot!"

Cheng Su looked at the soup that exuded a hint of angelica aroma without much oil; after taking a sip, the corners of her mouth curved slightly: "Thank you."

Seeing her smile, Qi Taiguo seemed encouraged and exhaled deeply before uncovering the dishes and said, "You don't like salty food, so I used less salt."

Steamed ribs, a few fried eggs, and a pile of stir-fried greens.

"You've gone to a lot of trouble!" Cheng Su's heart felt indescribably mixed as she looked at the dishes.

"We're husband and wife, no need for such formalities. You make meals for me often, don't you? It's not a great merit for me to cook a meal for you occasionally. It's just that I can't make it as tasty as you do," Qi Taiguo said hesitantly.

Cheng Su hummed in acknowledgement, served herself some rice, took a bite, and then said, "In a couple of days, I need to go on a business trip to Sichuan to see how the apples there taste. Our company is planning to make a new sauce."

Just as Ying Xiaoya had predicted, the moment Cheng Su brought up the business trip, Qi Taiguo's smiling face instantly changed, and without thinking, he said it wasn't possible.

He put down his chopsticks and looked at Cheng Su: "Sichuan is too far away, the travel is strenuous, involving both trains and buses, and too roundabout. Your body can't withstand such a bumpy journey right now. When you're well, you can go wherever you want, and I won't stop you. But now, no."

It was almost exactly as Xiao Ya had said.

Cheng Su also put down her chopsticks and said calmly, "I'm not made of glass that will shatter at the slightest touch. After resting all these days, my body has already recovered."

"No," Qi Taiguo looked into her eyes and said, "I know your business trip is just an excuse. In fact, you just want to avoid me."

Cheng Su's hand, which was picking up chopsticks, paused as she said, "Actually, that's not the main reason. I think it might be good to cool off separately. I'm afraid if things continue like this, I might actually end up leaving you."

Qi Taiguo trembled slightly, his complexion turning pale.

"Furthermore, when I'm at home, my mind wanders. If I have something to do, I can divert my attention, and not keep thinking about..." She touched her lower abdomen and pursed her lips.

Qi Taiguo's gaze darkened and he said, "If you really don't want to see me, then how about I stay in the barracks for a few days? You can rest well at home, and it's too tiring to travel about."

Cheng Su lowered her head and silently picked up a spoonful of greens, chewing gently, she said, "I want to get out and have a walk."

Qi Taiguo watched her quietly for a while then asked, "How many days will you go for?"

"At least three or five days, maybe seven or eight," Cheng Su replied casually.

"I see," he said as he picked up his chopsticks again.

Cheng Su looked at him unexpectedly; she thought he would persist in not allowing her to go, but now he seemed nonchalant, as if he had compromised.

For some reason, Cheng Su felt a strange sensation in her heart and a vague sense of loss.

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Chapter 727: Strange Monk

The business trip was quickly scheduled, and after all the procedures were handled, Cheng Su took the company's technicians and Zhu Lifen on the train. Qi Taiguo did not come to see her off.

She must be angry, Cheng Su thought to herself.

The train rumbled forward, with Technician Zhu and Zhu Lifen sitting behind Cheng Su—playing poker with two other people across them—while Cheng Su remained by the window, watching the scenery flashing by, her chaotic thoughts seemingly calming down as well.

She reckoned that it was almost the end of March; in just a month or so, it would be a full year since she had returned to this era.

A year, not too fast yet not too slow, from initial bewilderment to eventual adaptation, she had become integrated into this world, its people, and its affairs.

Heaven seemed to have given her a cheat as if ensuring her return, and in under a year, she'd found love, made a career, and a few close friends.

But everything had gone too smoothly, so as much as she gained, she also lost some things, like her child.

All her discontent here had largely revolved around one person—her mother-in-law.

Her mother-in-law's hostility towards her, aside from the age-old mother-in-law and daughter-in-law conflicts, was also influenced by Qi Taiguo. Her mother-in-law always saw her son as her own and regarded daughters-in-law as outsiders, so she felt justified in everything she did.

But was she herself without fault?

Haven't I been indulgent?

Her forbearance was for Qi Taiguo's sake because she loved him, so she respected his mother too and put up with her.

But this forbearance led to repeated disrespect, ultimately pushing her into an awkward position.

Cheng Su chuckled self-deprecatingly.

Qi Taiguo did love her, but he couldn't abandon his role as a son; that was his own mother. And herself? Should she separate from the one who loved her because of an outsider, because of such displeasure?

Is this the only way?

If they separated, would everything be as she wished?

Not because the love had faded, but separated over an outsider while still harboring love—was it worth it?

With love and yearning in her heart, how could she be at ease once separated?

Cheng Su sighed deeply.

Suddenly, a scent of sandalwood wafted around her.

Cheng Su looked up to see an old monk in a red kasaya sitting opposite her. When he caught her gaze, he smiled gently and peacefully at her, his hands clasped together holding a shiny wooden Mala.

Cheng Su quickly pressed her hands together and nodded slightly in greeting.

After the greeting, the old monk closed his eyes again, mumbling scripture. Cheng Su did not quite understand it, but it sounded like texts from Tibetan Buddhism, which she had briefly encountered during a previous trip to Tibet.

With the soothing sound of the Buddhist chant, Cheng Su no longer gazed out the window but just watched the old monk and listened to the chant, her eyes gradually welling up with silent tears.

She thought of the child, and of Qi Taiguo.

Her heart ached and ached.

Is it that the more you cherish something, the harder it is to keep?

"Benefactor, what is lost will always come again. Parting is for the sake of the next reunion; why dwell on it?" The old monk, having seemingly sensed her thoughts, opened his eyes, smiled at her, and spoke.

Cheng Su, choked up, managed, "Master..."

"All things in this world are subject to the cycle of cause and effect; it's not necessary to scrutinize them too closely. Benefactor, this life of yours, even if filled with suffering and hardships, is also due to your own desires. With patience, you will see the clear sky and the bright moon again. Benefactor, do not speak lightly of giving up!"

Cheng Su stared at him blankly, her mind buzzing.

Chapter 728: Mother Qi's Panic

Cheng Su's head buzzed, and in her ears, the old monk's words persisted, "You've come this time by your own will; there's no need for detailed inquiry."

Coming this time, coming this time!

Cheng Su suddenly had a realization and came to her senses, but when she looked up, the old monk had vanished without a trace. She hastily stood up and looked ahead, barely catching sight of a dark red corner disappearing at the junction between train cars.

She lifted her foot, wanting to chase after him, but after taking one step, she stopped and sat down again.

If the monk had wanted to say more, had wanted to guide her, why would he have left?

If he had already guided her, why would there be any reason for him to stay?

Cheng Su gazed out the window, lost in a daze.

Will what's lost ever return, and should one never readily give up?

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Mother Qi was agitated, depressed, and panicked these past few days.

Because Father Qi had not come to fetch her home as she had hoped. Instead, her belongings in the old house were mounting.

Mother Qi had a fear that she would end up living here for good, alone until her death. No, perhaps even if she died and began to decay, nobody would know.

On several nights, she dreamt that people were standing beside her bed, looking at her and cursing, and those people - weren't they the ancestors of the Qi family hanging in the hall?

Whether it was a dream or reality, she couldn't tell.

Thinking of this, Mother Qi shuddered. Looking once more at the dilapidated old house behind her, she felt even more frightened and instinctively backed away a few steps.

"Mom!" Her younger son Jianguo came forward, carrying a bag of something.

Mother Qi ran over like an arrow, "Jianguo, you've come? Was it your dad who sent you?"

"Yeah!"

Mother Qi was overjoyed, "Did your dad send you to take me home? Just wait, I'll pack up right away!" That old coot, he's finally softened.

Qi Jianguo hurriedly held her back, "No, Mom, Dad didn't say to bring you back. He sent me to bring rice to you!"

Mother Qi's expression changed, looking down at the thing in the snakeskin bag by his feet - was that rice?

"Bringing over rice?" Mother Qi clenched her teeth, "Is your dad set on making me live alone here? Didn't you talk to your dad? What about Fengping! What have you all been eating to grow up if you can't even speak up for your mom?"

Qi Jianguo felt awkward, "I've talked to him, but Dad... he..." He hesitated, carefully gauging his mother's mood, "Dad said you should reflect on your own mistakes?"

Mother Qi leaped up and cursed heaven, "Qi Shuhua, that black-hearted, rotten scoundrel, wants me to reflect? I'll reflect on nothing. Heartless bastard, I was blind to have married him, this conscienceless man! Wuu wuu..."

Qi Jianguo's head hurt, not this again.

After Mother Qi cried for a while, she desperately grabbed the hand of her younger son, "Jianguo, go beg your dad again. This old house is uninhabitable, water leaks from the roof, and at night, at night there are ghosts!"

Qi Jianguo's expression subtly changed, "Mom, don't talk nonsense. This is our ancestral house, the ancestors of the Qi family are all enshrined here. If Dad hears what you said, he'll only be angrier with you!"

"I'm not lying to you, at night they all stand beside my bed talking to me. Wuu wuu, Jianguo, I can't live here, if I keep staying here, I'll die. Jianguo, you can't just leave me to die, you can't be without a mother!" Mother Qi cried out.

Qi Jianguo pursed his lips, his eyes filled with pity.

"Jianguo, you're a promising student, Dad values you the most. Just talk to him, he'll surely listen to you. Just tell him, if he doesn't let me return, you won't go to school anymore, okay?" Mother Qi had a sudden spark of inspiration, voicing a suggestion.

Chapter 729: A Mother-in-law Can't Lose

Upon hearing his mother's suggestion, Qi Jianguo furrowed his brows, feeling somewhat displeased.

"Mom, how can you say that? Actually, you just need to apologize to Dad, and all will be well," Qi Jianguo said. "Dad isn't heartless. An apology from you won't cost you anything."

It should be easy for a woman to soften towards her husband, yet his mother wanted him to lie about his studies? No matter how he thought about it, he felt uncomfortable.

"It's not about softening now. Your father said it's up to your sister-in-law to let go of her anger, what does that mean? Don't you understand? He's trying to force me, his mother-in-law, to humble myself and apologize to your sister-in-law. Pah! What kind of mother-in-law does that?" Mother Qi spat on the ground.

"But you're the one who did something underhanded. It's no wonder they're angry with you... How could you do such a thing!" Qi Jianguo said, his face turning red. He was a conservative young man and just couldn't bring himself to say it outright.

If he hadn't been so reluctant to upset his father, going all out to ask why he was angry, he would never have known about the shameful thing his mother had done behind the scenes.

Really, how could she even think to do that? It was too much!

Listening to the tone of his voice change, Mother Qi's expression darkened as she glared at him. "What, are you going to side with outsiders against your own mother, too? You think I'm embarrassing? You little ingrate, when you were born, you would always cry at night. It was I, your mother, who had just given birth, yet still carried you around until dawn. Your older brother has no conscience, completely bewitched by a woman, and now you're following in his footsteps, losing your conscience too, aren't you? Don't forget who paid for your education and the milk you drank."

There she goes again, bringing up that story she's retold for a thousand years!

Qi Jianguo, losing patience, said, "Mom, that's not what I mean. But you know Dad's temper as well as I do. He seems easy to talk to about everyday issues, but when it comes to important matters, once he's made up his mind, there's no changing it. Remember how much you opposed big brother's marriage? What did Dad say? In the end, didn't you give in?"

Thinking back on this made Mother Qi regret everything deeply. If she had truly refused to consent to her eldest son's marriage, even threatening to take her own life rather than agree, would they have avoided today's situation?

She knew all too well the stubbornness of her husband of many years.

But to back down just like that was something she couldn't bring herself to do. If she gave in, she would never be able to hold her head up high for the rest of her life, only to be trampled on by her daughter-in-law!

"That's why I'm asking you to plead with your father. He adores you the most. You're doing well in your studies. Just threaten a little, and he'll definitely back down. Son, I'm begging you. I can't go on living here!" Mother Qi started to dab at her tears again.

Qi Jianguo didn't want to continue the conversation and said, "Mom, I'll talk to Dad, but I can't guarantee he'll listen. You know how he is. Honestly, if you just apologize to sister-in-law, the whole thing will blow over!" Seeing the change on his mother's face, he quickly added, "Mom, I'm leaving the rice here for you, I have to go back now."

Mother Qi watched as her youngest son effectively ran away from her, infuriated, she took a few steps forward and yelled, "Remember, I'm counting on you!"

Qi Jianguo waved his hand without turning back.

Full of anticipation, Mother Qi refused to go and humble herself before Cheng Su. Pah, as if she would. This was a war between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, and she could not afford to lose. Otherwise, she'd have no say in this house ever again!

Chapter 730: Protecting the Daughter

Qi Jianguo was not a carefree person; he first called his older brother to see if there were any possibilities for a turnaround, but nobody answered the home phone or his office phone, so he gave up.

Returning home, Father Qi saw him and asked with a stern face, "You're back? Why were you gone for so long?"

Qi Jianguo glanced at his father and cautiously replied, "Mom dragged me aside to talk for a bit."

Father Qi snorted and plucked at the bamboo strips of the basket in his hand, saying, "No matter what your mother says, don't bother with it. This isn't something you should deal with. Just focus on your studies and strive to get into college."

"Mm." Qi Jianguo nodded but hesitated before adding, "Dad, Mom said she feels very uncomfortable living in the old house and she has lost weight. I think Mom knows she was wrong. How about..."

Father Qi's hands paused in their work and he glanced at him, "Don't you know what kind of person your mother is? How much of what she says can you really believe? Don't concern yourself with it, I'll handle it."

This meant he had no intention of letting Mother Qi come back. Qi Jianguo felt a rush of heat to his head and said, "Dad, this can't go on forever, right? Mom is getting older, are you two going to be at odds for the rest of your lives? As for Sister-in-law... Dad, must we wait until Sister-in-law says it's okay?"

"Jianguo, you still don't understand. A harmonious home leads to prosperity in all endeavors. The prosperity of a family absolutely requires a good daughter-in-law and cannot tolerate troublemakers. Your sister-in-law is capable. She and your brother are the foundation of the Qi family's prosperity. Of course, there's you as well. Once you've completed your studies, our family will have made its mark!"

Qi Jianguo pursed his lips.

"Go and study now, you don't need to worry about the family matters," Father Qi lowered his head again.

Qi Jianguo sullenly went inside, and behind him, his father's voice came again, "Jianguo, wrong is wrong, right is right, regardless of whether one is an elder or younger, if a mistake is made, it should be acknowledged and corrected. You can't refuse to admit it just because you are older. People must distinguish right from wrong, black from white."

Qi Jianguo paused and said, "Dad, I understand!"

At the Cheng family, Cheng Su's parents were also talking about this matter.

"I see Mother Qi has been staying in that house for a few days now, and she hasn't moved back yet. It seems Father Qi is determined to discipline her!" Mother Cheng remarked.

Father Cheng was fixing a hoe and answered, "She should have been disciplined long ago. Cheng Su's mother-in-law really is unreasonable."

Mother Cheng shot him a look and said, "You always take your daughter's side, but have you thought about how people will speak of her if this continues? If you ask me, it's probably enough by now. She is still an elder, after all. If she is accused of being unfilial in the future, it will be serious trouble."

"This isn't the feudal age anymore. Even if she's unfilial, that started with unkindness from the elders. Our Su has always been excellent," Father Cheng defended his daughter.

"Just spoil her," Mother Cheng said with a worried expression, "Now she's having issues with her son-in-law as well, and I've no idea if they've made up yet. Ah, this girl has ability, but she's too headstrong. All it would take is for a man to indulge her, but she's making a fuss. If she really ruins her marriage, I fear she'll have her own time to cry!"

Father Cheng put away the fixed hoe and stood up, saying, "You stay out of their affairs. Su knows what she's doing. We just need to watch from the sidelines. If we get involved, we might just make things worse. Look at her mother-in-law; it's all because of her meddling that the two of them are like this."

Mother Cheng sighed deeply and said, "Alright, alright, I won't interfere anymore!"