

Fat Wife 101

Chapter 101: Going Home and Getting Blamed

Qiao Mei nodded after hearing her concern. "I understand now. As long as you return, I'll find you a place to stay. Just come back."

This made Li Gui assume that there were still empty houses in the village.

If she would be able to find a house just by giving notice to the village, then that would take care of her very last concern. She wanted to discuss it with the Zhang family immediately as she felt like moving back as soon as possible.

Li Gui took out a small cloth bag from her pocket and placed it on the table, revealing the money inside. "This is the dowry that mom saved up for you. There's not much but that's because I don't have money. When I have money in the future, I'll make it up to you."

Qiao Mei smiled sweetly and replied, "Thank you, Mom!"

Li Gui was also overjoyed. It was already a very good thing that Qiao Mei was willing to call her mom. The mother-daughter relationship that had been delayed for so many years had finally started again today.

"Take a rest first. Mom is going back, wait for news from me!" Li Gui said.

"You can leave after dinner!" Qiao Mei stopped her.

"No, no, I still have to walk 10 miles. Otherwise, I won't be able to catch the train back today." Li Gui insisted on leaving.

Qiao Mei turned around and walked into the kitchen. She then said loudly, "I'm going to cook now and I'll send you there on my bicycle after dinner. You're not allowed to leave."

When Li Gui heard this, she had to stay.

She did not want to leave either. It would be great to be able to eat a meal that was prepared by her daughter.

As soon as the food was served, Li Gui knew that Qiao Mei had excellent culinary skills.

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Li Gui ate happily. She felt that Qiao Mei's culinary skills were so good that even at her in-laws' place, people would look up to her because of it.

After dinner, Qiao Mei wanted to give her a ride on her bicycle but Li Gui was unwilling to accept it. "You're currently pregnant so don't mess around. I'll just walk back."

Li Gui looked at Qiao Mei's stomach and felt a greater urge to return.

Now that her daughter was pregnant, she naturally needed someone to take care of her. She also needed a female elder by her side to guide her and this should fall under the responsibility of her mother.

Qiao Mei nodded in agreement and asked Auntie Dong from the neighboring house to send Li Gui off instead. Then she turned around and went back.

Although she could not ride the bicycle herself after she got it, she still got a few of the older women to bring it out to learn how to ride it. Given that knowing how to ride a bicycle was a skillset, the gesture made the older women more willing to be friends with Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei was generous and nice.

Besides, not everyone could borrow this bicycle. She would only lend it to people who were close to her and she did not let herself get bullied into lending it to just anyone.

When Li Gui reached home, she was more than 20 minutes later than usual. This made the Zhang family very unhappy.

The Zhang family members were sitting around the table. Zhang Qian and his eldest son, Zhang Cong, sat at the table and drank water out of boredom with no food on the table. Clearly, the family was waiting for Li Gui to cook dinner.

Everyone was upset by her late return.

“Why are you back so late today?” Zhang Qian slammed the cup in his hand down with displeasure in his eyes.

Li Gui quickly took out a bundle of vegetables and squatted down to pluck them to prepare dinner. She lowered her head and said, “I’m late today as I ran into some issues.”

“Your team doesn’t work overtime. What important issue can you have?” Zhang Cong, the eldest son borne by Zhang Qian’s ex-wife, sneered.

The entire Zhang family worked in the food factory in town.

When Zhang Cong was getting off work, he saw her team leader, Wang Qiu, passing by. She had said mockingly to him, “As an elder brother, you have to give your younger sister a dowry when she gets married.”

He asked around and found out that Li Gui did not go to work today, but had gone back to her ex-husband’s village.

How outrageous!

The Zhang family helped her raise her children, yet Li Gui still missed that worthless daughter of hers.

As soon as Zhang Cong got home, he told Zhang Qian about it.

Now, Zhang Qian looked at Li Gui angrily with regret and disdain in his eyes. The “village belle” he married with expensive betrothal gifts back then had actually become so old and ugly now.

How unlucky!

Chapter 102: Being Beaten Up

Li Gui lowered her head silently to pluck the vegetables. She did not dare to raise her head to look at Zhang Qian or answer Zhang Cong’s question.

Seeing that Li Gui remained silent, Zhang Qian stepped forward and gave her a slap across the face. He grabbed her collar and pointed at her as he asked, “Did you go back to the village to send money to your ex-husband’s daughter?! You dare to lie nowadays! You still lie to us even though the story has already spread throughout the factory!” After saying that, he gave Li Gui another hard slap.

When Li Gui fell to the ground, the four children hurriedly ran into the room, afraid that Zhang Qian would vent his anger on them as well. There was only Old Man Zhang, Old Madam Zhang and Zhang Cong left in the house.

Zhang Qian hit Li Gui regularly, he would beat her up every two days. Every time Li Gui received her salary, she would have to give 25 dollars to the family first. As Li Gui was registered as a village resident, her four children were also registered as village residents. In the city, there were no such things as coupons. The 25 dollars was meant to be used to supplement the family’s food rations. The remaining few dollars was left for Li Gui to buy her own meals so that it would not be said that the Zhang family did not even give her food.

Whatever money that Li Gui had was saved by eating less or not eating. Zhang Qian knew that Li Gui had some money on the side and he also knew that she did not have the guts to steal from the family. This time, he was just looking for a reason to beat her up.

He beat her up for 15 minutes.

“Alright, alright, are you going to beat her to death? Hurry up and let her clean up and cook. We’ll starve to death otherwise,” said the old lady of the house.

Zhang Qian stopped and pointed at Li Gui. "See if I ever find out that you're lying again! Go and cook now!"

Li Gui got up with difficulty. There were no marks on her face, but her body was covered in bruises. Zhang Qian would avoid beating her on the face for fear that outsiders would gossip about her again. The pain all over her body made Li Gui even more determined to return to the village and not be beaten up here.

She took the vegetables and started to cook. When the four children saw that there was no more commotion outside, they came out of the room to set up the tables and chairs. Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao went to help Li Gui with the cooking. The two sons, Zhang Wei and Zhang Chao, sat in the living room and did not dare to say anything. Matters like cooking and cleaning had always been done by the womenfolk.

"Tsk, you good-for-nothing. Hurry up and get things done faster. Do you want to starve me to death!" Zhang Qian cursed towards the kitchen.

After she finished cooking, Li Gui called out to them to have dinner. She and her two daughters could only eat in the kitchen as there were not enough seats at home. Seeing her two daughters holding their bowls and eating in the corner, tears fell down Li Gui's cheeks.

As the Zhang family got ready to leave after having dinner, Li Gui wiped the tears off her face and rushed out, saying, "Wait... wait! I have something to say!"

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Zhang Qian laughed mockingly and said, "You? What have you got to say, come tell me." He waved his hand as an indication for his family to sit down and listen to her.

Li Gui grabbed the front of her clothes and wiped her hands nervously. She said in a very soft voice, "I... I want to go back... back to the village."

Upon hearing this, Zhang Qian immediately smacked the table and stood up. He glared at Li Gui and rushed forward in a few steps, ready to hit her.

Back then, he had spent a lot of money to marry this “loss-making proposition”. Now, she still wanted to run away! He wanted to roll up his sleeves and beat her up again.

“You still want to run away!”

Li Gui hurriedly waved her hands and collapsed to the ground in fear. “No, no! I’m not running away! I’m going back there to grow bean sprouts!”

When Zhang Qian heard this, he still did not understand what Li Gui wanted to do. He pointed at her and said, “You can grow bean sprouts at home, why do you need to go back to the village to grow bean sprouts! I think you just want to run away!”

Li Gui hurriedly crawled over and grabbed Zhang Qian’s trouser leg as she explained, “No, no! It’s bean sprouts for the supply and marketing cooperative! I know how to grow bean sprouts too! I can go and earn money!”

After Zhang Qian heard this and finally understood that it was not Li Gui’s intention to run away, he patted his pants and sat back down.

“So it’s to earn money. As if you can earn money.” Zhang Qian looked disdainful.

“That’s right. It’s not like we haven’t eaten your bean sprouts before. How can your bean sprouts compare with the ones from the supply and marketing cooperative?” Zhang Cong laughed mockingly from the side, his eyes filled with disbelief.

Li Gui could feel that the atmosphere had eased up a little and she stood up to pour them a few glasses of water, getting ready to tell them what she had seen today.

Chapter 103: Discussion About Returning to the Village

“That’s because of the water! Only the water from the village can do that! I already went back and asked around!” Li Gui said hurriedly.

“Then since you said you’ll earn money, tell me how you’re going to do it.” Zhang Qian took a sip of water, waiting to hear what she could say.

“It’s like this, I... did go back to see my daughter today, but I found out that the bean sprouts from the supply and marketing cooperative are supplied by their village! They supply it at 20 cents a catty and they can harvest 2,000 catties a day! The supply is collected from every household and each family can produce about 70 to 80 catties.” Li Gui stared at Zhang Qian’s face, afraid that he would be angered if she said something wrong.

After hearing that, Zhang Qian looked at his mother while he did some mental calculations on how much money could be made from 70 to 80 catties at 20 cents a catty. He concluded that it was quite a fair bit of money per day.

Looking at Zhang Qian’s erratic expression, Li Gui immediately said, “I’m still a registered resident in the village! If I go back, they will allow it!”

“So if you go back, they will collect bean sprouts from you and give you money!” Zhang Cong had recently taken a fancy to a city girl in the factory. She was young and beautiful and he was just about to woo her.

“The supply and marketing cooperative based their collection on the quality of the bean sprouts. If the quality doesn’t meet their standards, then they won’t accept the bean sprouts.” Li Gui saw the look in Zhang Cong’s eyes and was afraid that Zhang Cong would think that he could also earn a lot of money by going to the village. “Moreover, they only accept up to 2,000 catties a day. For bean sprout production, there is always a possibility of not meeting the standards three or four times out of ten times and getting rejected.”

“You money-losing good-for-nothing! As if those beans are not money!” When Old Madam Zhang heard this, she immediately scolded Li Gui. However, on second thought, she felt that there was still a lot to be earned. She thought that given Li Gui was unable to get any coupons by staying here, she might as well let Li Gui go back to the village, and it would also be more peaceful at home.

“You can go back, but you have to hand over the money you earn to this family. You’ve been staying here for so many years and we have taken care of your four children. Cong Cong has been subsidizing the expenses of this family, so you have to pay it back when you earn money. Also, you have to find the

money for the beans yourself as we don't have money." Old Man Zhang looked at Old Madam Zhang. He thought that women from the village were more obedient than the daughters-in-law from the city as they did not dare to have any requests or complaints.

"I will definitely hand it over." Li Gui did not dare to say anything to the contrary, afraid that they would go back on their word again.

Old Madam Zhang was about to get up and leave when she saw Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao in the corner.

"Bring the two of them along as well so that they can give you a hand." She had no use for the two girls, and it would be good for Li Gui to take them away so she could get some peace and quiet.

"After you return to the village, plant more vegetables and bring more home." Old Madam Zhang left in satisfaction and the group dispersed.

At the village.

Ever since Li Gui left, Qiao Mei had been mulling over where Li Gui could stay. Her house was not suitable as there was still her grandfather, Qiao Qiang, at home and also, it would not sound too appropriate if word got out. However, it would cost quite a fair amount to apply for a house at the brigade. Then suddenly, she remembered that she still had a house here!

Qiao Mei sat in the courtyard and pondered over how to get the house back. In the past, the house was left to Qiao Zhuang's family for them to take care of Qiao Mei. Now, the house was in the hands of Qiao Zhuang's eldest son, Qiao Fu. Back then, they had signed an agreement at the brigade regarding the arrangement.

Once she thought of the solution, Qiao Mei looked for Qiao Qiang excitedly and said, "Grandfather! I'm going to ask Qiao Fu for the house!"

Qiao Qiang was shocked and said, "Mei Mei, you're pregnant now. That Qiao Fu is not someone to be trifled with. Don't let anything happen to you."

Qiao Mei touched her stomach and said to Qiao Qiang, "Don't be afraid. I'll get Uncle Zhao to go with me. He still has the written agreement. Besides, don't you believe me by now. Don't worry, grandfather. I'm going now!"

Qiao Mei went to the brigade to explain the situation and asked Zhao Liang to find the written agreement and then go to Qiao Fu's house with her to ask for a resolution. Zhao Liang thought for a while and called a few militiamen to follow them in case anything should go wrong. Then he took the written agreement and followed Qiao Mei.

It was noontime and also the time when everyone finished their work and returned for lunch. They all came out when they saw Qiao Mei leading a big group of people. The big troop attracted a lot of attention and everyone crowded around, afraid of missing out on something. When Auntie Dong saw them, she also joined in. Before they reached the main door of the house, Qiao Mei shouted, "Everyone, are you having lunch! Second Grandpa, I'm here to ask you to return the house!"

Chapter 104: Asking for the House

The family had an early lunch today and most of the others had left the house after eating. Only the second son of the Qiao family, Qiao Gui, and his wife, Wang Qin, were at home. When they heard what Qiao Mei shouted at the door, they initially thought they had misheard. Their neighbors in the vicinity came out faster than the two of them, not wanting to miss out on such an exciting scene.

Qiao Gui and Wang Qin came to the courtyard and saw Qiao Mei leading Zhao Liang and a group of people in an imposing manner. She looked to be serious about something this time round.

"Qiao Mei, your second grandfather is not at home. What did you say just now?" Wang Qin asked again, as if she did not hear her clearly.

Qiao Mei smiled and said, "Second Auntie, I said I'm here to ask for the house."

"House? What house? This is my house!" Qiao Gui panicked when he heard that Qiao Mei was here to ask for the house, and yelled at her loudly.

The neighbors standing around were all whispering softly among themselves. So Qiao Mei was here to ask for the house. This house really seemed to belong to Qiao Mei. This news spread like wildfire and everyone in the village, young and old, came to Qiao Gui's house to see what was happening.

“Second Uncle, it seems that an important man like yourself has short memories. What do you mean it’s your house? This is my mother’s house, I don’t know how it became yours.” Qiao Mei was not worried about the neighbors crowding around. The more people there were, the better. Then she would have witnesses.

Qiao Gui snorted. “Hmph, when your mother left, she said that she would give me this house.”

“My mother didn’t say that she would give it to you. Back then, she asked all of you to take care of me until I got married, then after that the house would belong to you. If my grandfather hadn’t come back in time, I would have died in your pigsty in the house!” Qiao Mei pointed at Qiao Gui and shouted at him.

The villagers around them were all feeling indignant because what she said was true. If Qiao Qiang had not come back and brought Qiao Mei away, Qiao Gui and the others would have starved Qiao Mei to death, and everything left behind by Li Gui would have fallen into their hands.

“Aren’t you already married and pregnant?! I don’t care! Anyway, this house is mine!” Qiao Gui took a few steps forward and glared at them to prevent them from going forward. Seeing this, Qiao Mei took a few steps back. It was not that she was afraid, but she was worried that she would hurt her children. She had to be extra careful at this moment.

Zhao Liang looked at the unreasonable Qiao Gui and frowned. “Qiao Gui, back then, you all signed the agreement at the brigade and I was the witness. It’s true that you all did not take care of Qiao Mei. Please just return this house to her.”

When Qiao Gui saw Zhao Liang about to take out the agreement, he picked up the shovel beside him and wanted to swing it. Seeing this, Wang Qin was so frightened that she hurriedly pulled her man back. Wang Qin was the village accountant, a fact that she showed off for most of her life. If Qiao Gui hit Zhao Liang, it would definitely cost her the job. It would be so embarrassing if she were to lose her job on top of all the mess this could cause, and she would lose her standing in the Qiao family.

“Team Leader Zhao, isn’t it against the rules for Qiao Mei to be married and yet live alone? How can her family be allowed to have two homesteads?” Wang Qin blocked Qiao Gui and made him stand back so that he could not cause trouble here.

Qiao Gui was not as ruthless as his eldest brother, Qiao Fu, nor was he as smart as the third son, Qiao Wang. He was just a silly big man who only knew how to fight.

When Qiao Mei heard this, she said laughingly, "My mother is coming back to live in the village. Who told you that I'm getting married and setting up my own household! This is my mother's house, so of course my mother will be living here."

Upon hearing this, Wang Qin could not find any other reason to refute it. Seeing that the house was about to belong to Qiao Mei, Wang Qin's attitude softened a little.

"Then Mei Mei, if you want us to move away, where can we go? You can't be asking us to sleep outside, right?"

Qiao Mei was not one to fall for that. She still remembered Wang Qin's attitude towards her in the past. "When I was young, you people even let me sleep in the pigsty. I didn't remember you feeling sorry for me then! Hurry up and move out!"

Seeing that Qiao Mei remained unmoved by both force and persuasion, Wang Qin became anxious. "It's fine if you want us to move! Then you have to pay us! We've lived here for so long and helped you keep the place clean, otherwise it would have become dilapidated without anyone living here! We've been helping you take care of it! You have to pay us!"

When the neighbors heard this, they all thought that it was a joke. This woman was really too obsessed with money and all she could think of was how to make money. They all knew that a tenant needed to pay money to live in a house, but no one had heard of a tenant asking the owner of the house for money. Auntie Dong could not stand it anymore and pointed at Wang Qin while saying, "You have the cheek to say that!"

Wang Qin rolled her eyes and ignored the comment. Money was the most important thing to her now. She could not have a situation where there was no house and no money.

Chapter 105: Coming to Ask for the House

Qiao Mei weighed her options and asked Wang Qin, "How much do you want?"

The neighbors around her all felt that Qiao Mei was still too young and had fallen into Wang Qin's trap. How could she really want to give Wang Qin money? Auntie Dong was also anxious, afraid that Qiao Mei would suffer a loss, and looked at Qiao Mei worriedly.

No matter whether the villagers thought that Qiao Mei was stupid, even Wang Qin thought that Qiao Mei was really going to give them money. She did not know how much money Qiao Mei had earned, but she had actually seen Qiao Mei's wedding gift with her own eyes.

"800 dollars!" Wang Qin looked at Qiao Mei smugly. The neighboring villagers standing around scolded Wang Qin for being heartless when they heard that.

A villager standing at the side scolded, "Wang Qin, you're so shameless! You didn't take care of the child for even a day and you dare to ask for 800 dollars to stay in her house for free!"

Wang Qin did not know who said it, but she turned around and shouted, "It's none of your business!"

"So you think this house is worth 800 dollars." Qiao Mei looked around the house. The Qiao family members were all lazy people. This village was full of mud houses which needed to be repaired regularly to be kept in an acceptable condition. There were many people in the Qiao family and they did not even have enough to eat, let alone be able to raise livestock. The pigsty had long collapsed and there was not much clean space in the courtyard.

Wang Qin looked at Qiao Mei and said, "That's right! We even used the best soil for this house! You even ate at our house before! We even helped you plow this land, otherwise it wouldn't be usable anymore! It's worth 800 dollars! We'll leave if you pay up!"

Qiao Mei smiled even wider and her sweet voice made every word she spoke sounded coquettish. Qiao Mei said happily, "Then give me 800 dollars and I'll sell this house to you."

The people around her all burst out laughing. Wang Qin was stunned. She did not expect Qiao Mei to set her up and replied in exasperation, "No way. Look, this place doesn't look like it's worth 800 dollars. At most it's worth 50 dollars!"

Auntie Dong looked at Wang Qin with disdain. This woman could even go back on her word when she had just said that this place was worth 800 dollars. She said mockingly, "Wang Qin, aren't you an accountant, how come you don't seem to know how to calculate. You can't even tell the difference between 800 dollars and 50 dollars."

As soon as Auntie Dong finished speaking, the people around her burst out laughing. Wang Qin's face also turned red and she forgot about maintaining her image as she pointed at Auntie Dong and scolded, "Dong old woman, what do you know! You can't even manage your own affairs! If I say this house is worth 50 dollars, then it's worth 50 dollars!"

Auntie Dong was so angry that she wanted to go forward and put up a fight. Auntie Wang and Auntie Fu, who were next to her, were all ready to stand up for her. Auntie Dong was a very helpful person in the village and she would help anyone who had any problems. Everyone had a good relationship with her.

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Qiao Mei stopped Auntie Dong and said to Wang Qin, "200 dollars!"

Wang Qin thought about it and still felt that it was too much. "100 dollars! There's no room for discussion!"

Qiao Mei could not be bothered to say anything more to her and finally said, "150 dollars, or I'll tear down the house!"

Wang Qin really could not argue with that and could only agree to what Qiao Mei said in the end. However, she did not want to bear the full amount and wanted the Qiao family to pay it. After all, she was not the one who made the written agreement back then.

Wang Qin gritted her teeth and said, "Alright..."

"Alright, send it to the brigade tomorrow! Uncle Zhao will give you the agreement then! It's settled then, 150 dollars!" After saying that out loud, Qiao Mei left.

When the villagers saw what happened, they also dispersed and went home to discuss this matter in private. Wang Qin usually walked around the village proudly just because she was the village accountant. She was haughty and looked down on everyone, and her high and mighty manner made everyone unhappy. Today, everyone felt appeased to see her behaving like a shrew.

Qiao Gui threw down the shovel in his hand and watched as Qiao Mei and the others left. He was so angry that his face turned red. When he looked at his wife, he was even more furious. Although they had managed to keep the house, they still had to give 150 dollars. They did not have so much money at home.

At night, the Qiao family gathered together and everyone looked at Qiao Zhuang without saying a word. When Qiao Zhuang heard about what happened today, he could not think of any good countermeasures. Seeing that no one said anything, Wang Qin asked Qiao Zhuang carefully, "Father, are we really going to give her 150 dollars?"

All these years, Qiao Zhuang had been able to act like a tyrant because the village accountant was his daughter-in-law. Therefore, he was polite to Wang Qin and did not beat or scold her like he did to his other daughters-in-law.

The Qiao family members all had their own thoughts. The third daughter-in-law, Jiang Ye, was usually the most simple-minded. She only stayed at home to do housework, so she was straightforward and spoke bluntly. When she heard that Wang Qin wanted 150 dollars from the family, she said enviously to Wang Qin, "Why should we give it to you when everyone in the family needs money. Where can we find 150 dollars, especially since you agreed to the price yourself."

Qiao Zhuang looked fiercely at his third daughter-in-law. Qiao Wang was the smartest son in the family and very good at reading someone from their body language, and he knew how to curry favor with Qiao Zhuang. However, Jiang Ye did not manage to give birth to a boy and they only had a daughter, causing him to have very little standing in the family. When he saw Qiao Zhuang's expression, he went up to his wife and slapped her.

Chapter 106: Compromise

There was silence in the Qiao family house. Jiang Ye looked at her husband, Qiao Wang, in confusion. Qiao Yu was so frightened that she hid in a corner, afraid that she would be implicated.

“The house is Father’s house! What do you mean by yours and his!” Qiao Wang expressed his thoughts and also took the chance to remind everyone that the house did not belong to them. If they wanted to pay for it, they had to consider it carefully. This statement made the eldest son, Qiao Fu, and his wife, Liu Ying, take notice.

There were a total of three houses in the Qiao family now. One was the Qiao family’s old residence, which belonged to Qiao Zhuang, and the other house belonged to Qiao Fu. Although the Qiao family did not have much money, Qiao Fu treated his wife quite well. His wife, Liu Ying, was an eloquent woman, she helped out with the family as well as went out to work, and was generally diligent. Back then, he had spent 100 dollars to marry her and they managed to build a house together after all these years with some difficulties.

The last house was the current residence of Qiao Gui and Wang Qin. Initially, they all agreed that the family would not give any betrothal gifts when the fourth son, Qiao Liang, married his wife but rather, the couple would be given them the house to live in when the time came. In the end, Wang Qin took a fancy to the house and snatched it away. Although Qiao Liang was married now, he still lived with Qiao Zhuang.

The fifth son, Qiao Gang, had just reached marriageable age. The family found a matchmaker from the neighboring village to introduce him to a good family who said that they would be giving a dowry. However, they wanted the Qiao family to give them 300 dollars as the betrothal gift. So while the 300 dollars were not even prepared yet, they were now saddled with another payment of 150 dollars.

Qiao Gang hurriedly went to Qiao Zhuang’s side and said pitifully, “Father, I still have to get married. You can’t give everything to second brother’s family. If there’s really no other way, let’s go and talk to Qiao Mei and see if we can just owe her first. My marriage is more important.”

Wang Qin was unhappy when she heard this. “Hey, you can’t say that. You can get a wife anytime. If you really can’t, I’ll find you a nice girl later. You can’t just watch while my family has nowhere to live.”

Wang Qin turned to look at Qiao Gui, her husband. Qiao Gui was a simple man who did not know what to say and Wang Qin quietly poked his thigh.

“That’s right! That’s right, Father! We can’t sleep outside, otherwise we’d just be a joke!” Qiao Gui finally understood his wife’s intentions this time round, so he was not really that stupid.

Qiao Gang was about to retort when Qiao Zhuang shouted, "Stop arguing! You're all useless!"

The house went quiet and there was no sound at all. Qiao Yu, who was standing in the corner, got so frightened that she lost her balance and fell to the ground. It was only then that everyone noticed her. Liu Ying thought for a moment and said to Qiao Yu, "Xiao Yu, don't you usually get on well with Qiao Mei? Go and talk to her and see if there's any way for us not to have to give her 150 dollars."

Everyone looked at Qiao Yu, who looked back at them in panic because they were like a pack of hungry wolves staring at a thin goat. Qiao Yu quickly stepped forward and said, "I'm not that close to her! Last time! Last time, she even beat me out of the door with a big stick! She said that she won't let me go near again! If I go near again, she'll beat me to death! Believe me! It's useless even if I go!"

Not long ago, Qiao Yu had indeed gone over once to borrow some grains from Qiao Mei. In the end, before she could enter, Qiao Mei had scared her off with a big stick and she did not even dare to look back. When she returned home, she got a beating from the Qiao family as well. Qiao Yu looked at Qiao Zhuang in panic.

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Qiao Zhuang sighed and thought for a moment before saying to Qiao Gui and Wang Qin, "The family will give you 80 dollars and that's all. The remainder needs to be given to your fifth brother for him to get married. As for the rest of what you need, you have to find a way to make up for it yourself." With that, he chased these few members of the Qiao family away.

Wang Qin put the 80 dollars into her pocket and went home quickly. Actually, she had the 150 dollars that was required, but she could not allow herself to take all of it out for nothing. After all, the house belonged to the Qiao family. If the eldest son, Qiao Fu, came to ask for the house, she could not count on her man for help. He was just a simple person who could not win against the eldest son and the third son. This 80 dollars could be considered enough to cover some cost. Wang Qin went home happily, and when Liu Ying saw Wang Qin's expression, she secretly made her own plans.

"Did you see that your second brother's Wang Qin actually has money, but she just wants to cheat the old man out of his money. We have to be careful."

Qiao Fu nodded and went home with his wife, Liu Ying.

Chapter 107: Returning to the Village

Early the next morning, Qiao Gui and Wang Qin went to the brigade to look for Zhao Liang, afraid that Qiao Mei would bring people around to cause trouble again. If that happened, Wang Qin wondered where she could hide her face. She did not want Qiao Mei to go looking for her superiors to say that she had occupied someone else's house and in turn caused her to lose her job.

After paying 150 dollars and getting the original agreement, Wang Qin finally felt relieved. Zhao Liang quickly took the 150 dollars and went to Qiao Mei's house. On the way, he could smell the fragrance of food from afar. It would appear that it was not a lie to say that Qiao Mei was capable.

"Brother Qiao! Brother Qiao, are you there!" Zhao Liang shouted from the door.

Qiao Mei hurriedly came out when she heard the sound. "Uncle Zhao, why are you here so early! My grandfather went out to pick vegetables."

Zhao Liang took out the money from his pocket and handed it to Qiao Mei. "This is the money that Wang Qin's family came to pay this morning. I came by to give it to you. Take a look."

Qiao Mei walked over and put the money in her pocket without looking at it. She said smilingly, "Uncle Zhao, of course I trust you. Uncle Zhao, I just made steamed pumpkin, how about having some! Come in and eat. My grandfather will be back soon."

Zhao Liang waved his hand and was about to leave when Qiao Mei suddenly said, "Uncle Zhao, does our village still have any homestead, as I want to get one for my mother."

Zhao Liang thought for a moment and looked at the surrounding houses. He pointed in the southeast direction and said, "Look at that area. It's not very big, but it's quite close to your house. Otherwise, the area next to your Auntie Wang's house is still empty, or the area close to Qiao Zhuang's place. You can decide which area you like and just come to the brigade to let us know."

Qiao Mei looked in the direction that Zhao Liang was pointing at and thought that it was not too bad, except that there was only one and a half mu of private land. Still, she thought that she should not ask for too much. Now that she was a prominent person in the village, people would talk about it if she

asked for more private land. Besides, her mother would not have the energy to manage so much land, and having more land also meant that the Zhang family could demand for more later.

“Yes, alright! Uncle Zhao, I’ll go and look for you after I eat with my grandfather! Take care, Uncle Zhao!” Qiao Mei did not force Zhao Liang to stay. After sending him off, she went into the house to get the dishes ready and waited for Qiao Qiang to come back to eat.

At the dining table, Qiao Qiang could tell that Qiao Mei had something on her mind, but he did not say anything as he knew this child well. The previous Qiao Mei was impulsive and willful and he was always worried that she would get bullied outside. Given that she was all grown up now, he need not worry too much.

“Grandfather, do you think it is alright if the homestead for my mother is located next to Auntie Dong’s house?” Qiao Mei looked at Qiao Qiang with her big bright eyes.

Qiao Qiang smiled. “Sure, as long as you think it’s alright. Grandfather trusts you.”

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“Right! I’ll talk to Uncle Zhao about this later.” Qiao Mei started to eat faster to quickly finish the food in her bowl.

“Hey! Slow down, slow down! You’re going to be a mother soon, yet you’re still so rash. It’s not good for your child if you’re like this!” Qiao Qiang hurriedly stopped Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei put down the bowl in her hand and smiled foolishly. She had almost forgotten that she was the mother of two children. She touched her slightly protruding stomach and put down the bowl and chopsticks.

“I know, I know. I was so anxious that I forgot.” Qiao Mei looked at the time and said, “Grandfather, I’m off to the brigade.”

Qiao Mei went to the brigade to choose the location of the homestead and exchanged her work points for some wood. Then, she asked Uncle Zhao to help her find out where she could find someone who sold mud bricks from home. Although people were not allowed to buy and sell items in private during this period in time, it was fine to carry out it secretly and nobody would talk about it.

She then went home and got on her bicycle to go to the train station to pick up Li Gui. After all, that was still her mother. Although Li Gui was not by her side to take care of her when she was young, she still looked forward to having her mother around.

When Qiao Mei reached the train station, it was still much earlier than the scheduled arrival time. The month of June in the northeast of the country was not as hot as summer in the south, and it did not feel stuffy while she waited at the train station. Looking at the clouds in the sky, Qiao Mei felt much more relaxed. A train slowly stopped in front of Qiao Mei and as there were not many people getting off at the mountain village, Qiao Mei saw her mother at one glance.

“Mom! Here!” Qiao Mei waved her hands and looked at Li Gui. She also noticed the two little girls beside Li Gui.

Chapter 108: Preparing to Build a House

Li Gui returned to the village with just one big bag given that she did not have many things to begin with. As soon as she got down the train with the two children, she heard someone calling her. She followed the voice and realized that Qiao Mei had come to pick her up. Li Gui was very shocked to see that and walked over with the two children.

“Qiao Mei, why are you here? It’s such a hot day and furthermore, you’re pregnant. What if something should happen to you.” Li Gui asked nervously when she saw the bicycle next to Qiao Mei.

“It’s fine, I’m in good health. I came by to pick you up.” Qiao Mei lowered her head to look at the two girls beside Li Gui. The older one was still looking at Qiao Mei warily but the younger one did not seem to know anything. She just felt that the person standing in front of her was a beautiful big sister who looked good and whom she liked very much.

Li Gui gave the two children a little push and said, “This is Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao. Both of you, come greet your elder sister.”

Zhang Qin was stunned for a moment before she said awkwardly, "Hello, elder sister."

As for the younger Zhang Miao, her eyes were filled with innocence. She hid beside her mother's legs and did not dare to look up at Qiao Mei. This was because back home, her grandmother said that her mother had a daughter in the countryside who looked like a black bear, and that the person was her elder sister. That elder sister was evil and could eat people up, and she would beat people up for no reason.

Of course, the first part of what she said could be considered to be true, but the second part was a lie made up by Old Madam Zhang to scare the child.

"Sigh, this child seems to be afraid of strangers. I'll give you a ride back, so you don't do anything." Li Gui took the luggage that she was holding and placed it onto the bicycle. She then pushed it forward and walked in front while the two little girls followed behind obediently.

When they reached the village, Li Gui started to feel a little uncomfortable. She had not returned for so many years and did not know what the neighbors would say.

As Li Gui's house in the village had not been built yet, she had to stay at Qiao Mei's house for a few days. When they entered the house, Qiao Mei brought the three of them to the west room. The east room was Qiao Qiang's room.

Qiao Mei went to the storeroom to get some fruits and vegetables, as well as took out three taels of meat to prepare a few dishes. Li Gui helped out at the side while Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao tidied up the tables and chairs in the courtyard. There were now three more people in the house, so they had to wipe down the unused furniture and clean them up.

Not long after, the fragrance of food filled the entire house. Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao had never smelled such a nice aroma before. They crouched at the door and stared at the meat in the pot.

"Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao, come over and eat." Qiao Mei smiled at the two children as she brought out the dishes.

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At the dining table, Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao only focused on eating the rice in their bowls and did not dare to reach out to pick up any of the vegetables and side dishes. At the Zhang family's house, they were not even allowed to eat at the dining table, let alone eat any meat. Just looking at the meat would get them a beating. Qiao Mei's heart ached when she saw the two children behaving like this and she kept serving food to the three of them.

After dinner, Qiao Mei brought the two children to the courtyard to look at her family's fruits and livestock. She plucked a bunch of grapes and placed them in Zhang Qin's hands.

"Bring your sister along to wash them before eating." Qiao Mei patted Zhang Qin's head and went into the house.

Li Gui teared up when she saw the scene outside the window. Before this, she had never dared to imagine that her daughter would acknowledge her, nor had she ever thought that Qiao Mei would be nice to the children she had with Zhang Qian.

Qiao Mei took a bunch of grapes that had already been washed and handed them to Li Gui. She said gently, "Try it. These are fresh grapes and they're very sweet."

Li Gui quickly took one and tasted it. The grape was plump and juicy and it was very sweet. Qiao Mei took out a cloth bag containing the 150 dollars that the Qiao Gui couple had given her. Li Gui did not know what had transpired but when she saw that Qiao Mei wanted to give her the money, she quickly waved her hands and refused, asking Qiao Mei to take it back.

"Mei Mei, what are you doing, I don't want money! Take it back quickly!" Li Gui said anxiously.

Qiao Mei placed the cloth bag in her hand and said, "Listen to me. Your house is still occupied by Qiao Gui and Wang Qin, but they gave me 150 dollars, so let's just take it that they bought that house. I've chosen a site for a homestead near my house. You can go and take a look later, it's not very big though. As for the wood needed to construct the house, I told Uncle Zhao Liang to use the work points to get them. I also bought mud bricks from the other families in the village and I've spent 500 dollars so far. Let's build the house first and we can talk about other things later."

When Li Gui saw that Qiao Mei had already made all the arrangements for her residence, she was so touched that she did not know what to say. She did not know how to make it up to Qiao Mei for all these years.

Chapter 109: Having a Home

Qiao Mei held Li Gui's hand and stroked it gently. She knew that Li Gui was thinking about how to make it up to her, but it was not as if Li Gui did not care about her during all these years. It was just that she had been deceived by Old Madam Li, who was Qiao Mei's grandmother.

"My little girl, please consider the building costs of 500 dollars to be a loan to me which I'll pay back later. I'll leave this 150 dollars with you for now." Li Gui looked into Qiao Mei's eyes, afraid that she would refuse.

Qiao Mei nodded. Although she did not quite understand if Li Gui intended to use the money to repay her or it was meant for something else, she thought about it and decided that it would be safer for her to keep the money. Otherwise, if the Zhang and Li families came over during this period of time, they might just take the money away.

"Alright, and I want to ask if you have any plans for Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao." Qiao Mei looked at the two children in the courtyard.

Li Gui sighed and said, "It's better for them to be by my side. If they stay with the Zhang family, they might get beaten or scolded. Zhang Wei and Zhang Chao are still in their hands. I wonder how they are doing."

"They'll be fine. After all, they're two boys, nothing will happen to them." Qiao Mei brought Li Gui to the storeroom to take a look at the remaining beans in the house. The baskets of beans were growing quite well. Qiao Mei quietly exchanged some energy with the baskets of beans in front of her so that they could grow even better.

"There are a total of five catties of beans in this basket. You can take them to grow bean sprouts first. We'll talk about it after the house is built." Qiao Mei pointed at the basket in front of her.

Li Gui nodded and said, "Alright, take it that I'm borrowing the beans from you. I'll return it when I can."

After all, the money earned from these beans had to be handed over to the Zhang family, so the money to buy the beans should be paid by the Zhang family. Even biological brothers would settle their accounts clearly, let alone this was her own daughter. Qiao Mei had already given her enough help.

Li Gui called Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao over from the courtyard. "Zhang Qin, Zhang Miao! Come and help mom grow bean sprouts!"

Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao put down the grapes in their hands and ran over to help. When she saw her two daughters standing around her to help her with the bean sprouts, she recalled that the young Qiao Mei had also looked at her like this in the past.

The two children did not find it tiring to help out and they did their tasks reliably. Back when they were living with the Zhang family, Old Madam Zhang always ordered them around to do the housework and sometimes, they even had to cook for themselves. Naturally, they did not feel tired at all even with the current tasks at hand.

Qiao Mei's heart ached when she saw the two children working so hard, but there was nothing she could do about it. Children from poor families had to manage the households from young. The more they learned while they were young, the better they would be able to support themselves in the future, and they would not be as spoiled as the original owner of this body. Qiao Mei did not stay around for too long and went out to busy herself with her chores in the courtyard. She had not exchanged energy with the plants yet today.

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After dealing with all the beans, Li Gui brought the two children to the site of her homestead to take a look. Earlier, the ground was still filled with bushes and branches, but there were only some weeds left on the ground now. Li Gui squatted down and hugged the two children, saying, "Look, this is our home. From now on, we will live here!"

The four-year-old Zhang Miao looked around and said softly, "But there's nothing here, how do we stay here."

Li Gui smiled and patted Zhang Miao and Zhang Qin on their heads. She casually pointed at an empty space and said, "Let's see, how about we build a house there and then build a shed here and put a table here..."

Listening to Li Gui's description, Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao ran around happily in the middle of the yard. They took a look here at one moment and then jumped around there the next moment. They chatted about their ideas and also shared their thoughts about the future.

"Mom, let's get a shelf here to grow grapes that are as delicious as elder sister's grapes!"

"Here, here! Let's put a pigsty here! Elder sister's pigs are so pretty! We'll get to eat meat every day!"

"And here! And here..."

Seeing the long-lost smiles reappearing on the two children's faces, Li Gui was also very happy. The two children's laughter was clear and hearty, and the sky also seemed to look bluer on this day.

"Come pluck the weeds with mom. Let's clean up the yard together." Li Gui and the two children went around plucking the weeds and only returned to Qiao Mei's house when it was dark. Although it was very tiring, she had boundless energy when she thought about the beautiful life they were going to have in the future.

Chapter 110: Selling Vegetables on the Black Market

The next day, at the crack of dawn, Qiao Mei woke Li Gui up and took her to the storeroom for a discussion. She originally had hundreds of baskets of beans but after the agreement between the village and the supply and marketing cooperative was made, she had sold most of those beans to the villagers at a low price. Therefore, there were only about 10 baskets of beans left in the storeroom. In the corner, there were also a few baskets of shriveled bean sprouts. Qiao Mei had taken back some of the energy from the bean sprouts early in the morning so as to make them look more realistic.

"These few baskets of bean sprouts are not up to standard. If you have time, you can go to the black market to sell them. It's not so convenient for me to go now but it's a pity to throw them away." Qiao Mei looked at these bean sprouts regretfully.

Li Gui squatted down and looked at the bean sprouts carefully, the quality was indeed not at the level required by the supply and marketing cooperative. She said confidently, "Don't worry, I will definitely be able to sell it."

She had been going to the black market since she was young, so she knew very well where to find the most suitable spot to sell these bean sprouts, and it should not take her too long to sell everything. It was just that these few baskets of bean sprouts already weighed around 80 pounds. Fortunately, Li Gui had been doing manual labor in the factory previously, and there was also the bicycle available for use, so she did not have to worry about not being able to carry it.

"Oh right, I still have a few pumpkins and some fruits here. Help me sell them and I'll give you half of the earnings." Qiao Mei handed the basket beside her to Li Gui.

Li Gui took it and slung it over her shoulder. "No, no need. Take it as I'm helping you run an errand or something. You don't have to give me money." Li Gui looked at the color of the sky outside and said, "I'll go now or the market will close soon."

It turned out that it was not that strenuous to carry the four big baskets, so Li Gui rode the bicycle and made her way to the black market. Although the rules and regulations did not allow people to buy and sell items in private now, due to the lack of supplies, everyone came together in an unplanned manner to put things up for sale in an inconspicuous place. Over time, this place became known as the black market.

As soon as Li Gui arrived at the black market, she found a place near the exit and set up a stall. The bean sprouts sold at the supply and marketing cooperative went for 30 cents a catty. She priced her stock at 10 cents a catty and was naturally able to sell them quickly. A few people grabbed a handful of bean sprouts to try and agreed that it indeed tasted similar to the ones sold at the supply and marketing cooperative. They then generously bought more than 10 catties of bean sprouts and it did not take long for the bean sprouts to be sold out.

Li Gui held the empty baskets and grinned from ear to ear. She did a quick count and noted that there were 13 dollars and 30 cents in her hands. This was more profitable than working in the factory. She had never made so much money in a day.

After Li Gui left, Qiao Mei cooked some pumpkin porridge and stewed some pork with cabbage for the two children. When the food was served, Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao still only focused on eating the

porridge in their bowls and did not dare to take any of the meat and vegetables. Qiao Mei had to pick out the meat piece by piece for them.

As Zhang Qin scooped the rice porridge from her bowl, she muttered softly, "Thank you, elder sister..."

Qiao Mei smiled when she heard that. This was still a good child after all and not an ungrateful ingrate. It was good to know that the child knew how to feel thankful. Qiao Mei looked at Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao and said, "Is elder sister a nice person?"

Zhang Miao looked up excitedly and said, "Yes! Elder sister is great!"

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Qiao Mei touched Zhang Miao's head and asked, "Then do you think mom is a nice person?"

Zhang Qin lowered her head and shook it silently while Zhang Miao also kept quiet. Seeing this, Qiao Mei brought them to the grapevine and took a bunch of grapes for the two children. She sat on a stool and said, "Actually, mom is very good to you, but mom doesn't have the ability to give you a lot. Look, elder sister has all these fruits and vegetables. I can give them to you, but if mom has vegetables, she has to give them to your grandmother, am I right."

Zhang Miao was young, but she was starting to remember things. Zhang Qin was a little older and was six years old this year and there were things that she could remember. Zhang Qin thought for a moment and nodded. It was true that if there was any food, she had to give them to her brother and father first, and she had to give everything that was nice to her grandparents.

Qiao Mei looked at the two children's reactions and continued, "Mom has to hand over her salary to your grandmother every month and your father has to hand over his salary to her as well. She gets more than 80 dollars a month and can totally support you four siblings. Why is it that you still don't have enough to eat."

Zhang Miao thought for a moment and said, "Because Grandma said that she wants to feed the boys first!"

Qiao Mei waved her hands and said, "That's not right. Both boys and girls should have food. Your grandmother took everything away from mom, so mom has nothing to give you. Actually, mom wants to treat you well. Your grandmother has so much money but why didn't she spend any money on you, the clothes you're wearing are from a long time ago."

Zhang Qin suddenly remembered and said, "Grandma said that she wanted to save money for big brother to get married..."