

Fat Wife 111

Chapter 111: First Time Buying Candy

Qiao Mei did not expect that Zhang Cong was already old enough to get married. However, given that he was not a hardworking person at all, he would eventually just use up all his family's assets. It took some effort to ensure that he took over Old Man Zhang's position in the food factory, but all he did was to muddle along every day.

Just as Qiao Mei was thinking about all these, Li Gui came back on the bicycle. After putting it away, she headed in the direction of the children. Earlier, when she passed by the convenience store on the way back, she had bought two pieces of candy and put them in her pocket to give to Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao.

"Mei Mei, I sold out everything today. I made some money!" Li Gui took out the money from her pocket and gave 10 dollars to Qiao Mei. "This is the money for the fruits and vegetables I sold today. Here you go."

Qiao Mei knew at a glance that this was the bulk of the money. She took three dollars and said to Li Gui, "How can my things be worth so much? I'll just take three dollars. Don't give me too much."

Qiao Mei took three dollars, which was not a lot, so that Li Gui would feel better and not as if she needed help with everything. Li Gui led Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao to clean up the dining table and wiped the kitchen stove clean, and then entered the house with them.

Li Gui secretly put away the remaining money into a red cloth bag. Then she took out the candies from her pocket and held them in her hands.

"Guess what this is!" Li Gui looked at the two children with a smile.

Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao looked at their mother's hands in front of them, not knowing what was inside. Li Gui opened her hands and showed them two colorful candies. Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao widened their eyes in amazement.

"Wow! Candy!" they said in unison.

“Take it and eat slowly. Don’t choke on it.” Li Gui handed the candies to the two girls. Seeing the two children happy made her happy too. Previously, she had to hand over all her salary to Old Madam Zhang. Now that she had some money, she could buy foodstuff for the two children.

Zhang Qin ate the candy and thought about what elder sister Qiao Mei had said in the morning. She thought to herself that elder sister was right.

The two children used to think that the countryside was not as good as the city, but now they could eat meat and delicious food as much as they wanted, and there was no beating to endure and no one bullying them. Their mother also had money to buy candy for them. It seemed that it was better to be in the countryside than in the city!

This was the first time the two children had eaten candy. In the past, Old Madam Zhang would never buy anything for them even if she had money. She was so busy ordering them around that she would never think about treating them well enough to buy things like candy for them.

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Zhao Liang brought his tools to Qiao Mei’s house and shouted at the door, “Li Gui! Qiao Mei! The builders are here!”

Qiao Mei and Li Gui brought the two children to the site of the new homestead. The wood was ready and the mud bricks were placed at one side. The men from every family came to help out. Of course, when it came to such matters, Qiao Zhuang and his family would not come to “join in the fun”.

During that period of time, there was no such thing as hiring people to build a house. It was always the neighbors who helped out with everything. However, the owner of the house had to reciprocate by being responsible for everyone’s meals.

When she saw Zhao Liang, Li Gui still felt a little uneasy. After all, they were from the same village in the past and everyone had their own opinions about widows getting remarried. However, Qiao Mei had already gone around saying that whoever bullied Li Gui would be akin to bullying Qiao Mei, so no one mentioned it anymore. In addition, they also knew that it was not like Li Gui did not care about Qiao Mei all these years, but it was because Old Madam Li had taken everything away. Everyone felt more sorry for her after knowing that.

“Brother Zhao... thank you.” Li Gui looked at Zhao Liang in embarrassment. Zhao Liang had previously often helped her out in the past when they were in the same village.

Zhao Liang waved his hand and said, “It’s fine. I’m the team leader. This is what I should do. These wooden logs are deducted from the work points. Besides, I’m not the one who sourced these mud bricks.”

Zhao Liang whispered to Li Gui, “These are all sourced by Big Brother Qiao Qiang. Otherwise, who would be able to get so much soil? If you want to thank someone, you should thank him.”

“Ah! Yes I understand.” Li Gui did not expect her former father-in-law to help her out. She thought that she had already offended Qiao Qiang because of past events. If Qiao Qiang had returned a few days earlier during that time, perhaps those things would not have happened...

Chapter 112: Building a House

For a moment, Zhao Liang and Li Gui thought about the same thing, looked at each other and sighed deeply. Zhao Liang carried the shovel and said, “Don’t think about the past. Don’t worry, with Qiao Mei around, no one will bully you.”

“Aye!” Li Gui never dreamed that one day, she would be able to bask in her daughter’s glory and enjoy the blessings of having children.

Zhao Liang waved his hand and went off to help build the house. Li Gui looked at Qiao Mei, who was busy cooking, and quickly stopped her. “Go and take a seat. You’re still in the early stages of pregnancy, so go and rest at the side.”

Qiao Mei did not decline and went to the side to snack on seeds. These seeds were from the sunflowers that she had planted in the courtyard at home a few days ago. Through her careful cultivation and a little extra energy from her, they grew exceptionally well and produced tasty sunflower seeds too.

Throughout the day, there were many people who came around to help, all people who used to have a good relationship with Qiao Mei’s father, Qiao Yue, as well as his previous co-workers. Out of these people, there were probably more than 10 strong strappy men. It would be hard for Li Gui, Zhang Qin

and Zhang Miao to cope with the meal preparation, it would take them a long time to get food ready for so many people.

Qiao Mei sat under the shack, not feeling any sense of anxiety. Not long after, she heard shouting coming from outside the yard.

“Mei Mei! We’re here to help!” Those women who were on good terms with Qiao Mei had come around to help out. A few of them even brought their own pots and pans, while others even brought stools and tables.

It was not as if they came around to help out for no rhyme or reason. Usually, Qiao Mei would help them with growing bean sprouts and their farm work, so they had come over to help with building the house or whatever they could help with. This was the good thing about the countryside. The neighbors were friendly and got along with one another. Thinking back to her other life, she did not know many of her neighbors, to the extent that she did not even know what kind of people they were. The countryside was so much better in this aspect.

Not long after, a few of the older women set up the stove and began to help with the cooking. Qiao Mei had brought vegetables, fruits and meat from her house to thank everyone for their efforts. When it was time to eat, everyone’s eyes lit up. They could not imagine which family would be willing to serve meat from their own kitchen to people who came by to help. Only Qiao Mei’s family would be so generous and everyone felt even more willing to help Qiao Mei.

Although Qiao Mei did not help with the cooking, the vegetables that had gone through energy exchange with Qiao Mei tasted especially delicious and the food made by the womenfolk seemed much more delectable than usual.

Many people regretted not getting a matchmaker to go to Qiao Mei’s house in the past. They had only heard that Qiao Mei was a fierce woman who looked like a black bear spirit and that she ate too much and would squander the family fortune away, but did not know how to do work. At this moment, many people were filled with regret. They never imagined that Qiao Mei was not only fair-skinned and beautiful, but also good at cooking and making money. Anyone would find her to be an eligible partner but unfortunately, she was already married and pregnant.

The older women had also seen the changes in Qiao Mei in the past few months. They thought that Qiao Mei had worked so hard that she lost weight, but the weight loss improved her skin and made her look more beautiful. After mealtime, the women surrounded Qiao Mei and joined her to snack on seeds.

“Mei Mei, I think you must be having a girl!” Auntie Dong said laughingly.

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“I think so too. Mei Mei, who knows it might really be a girl. People say that a mother bearing a son looks ugly while a mother bearing a daughter looks beautiful.” Auntie Wang grabbed a handful of seeds and agreed with what Auntie Dong said.

Qiao Mei smiled and kept quiet. She knew that she was having a pair of twins, and it was even a boy and a girl. However, she could not comment as her pregnancy was not stabilized yet, otherwise it would be terrible if people went around saying that her desire for children had made her talk crazily.

“Aye! If Mei Mei has a daughter, I’ll give her a pig trotter!”

“You only give one! How stingy! I’ll give four pig trotters!”

“I’ll give 10 pig trotters!”

“None of you can make it! I’ll give pork hock!”

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The lively atmosphere was fueled by the discussion about whether Qiao Mei would give birth to a boy or a girl. Li Gui silently wiped her tears at the side. As a mother, she could not give her daughter anything and she could not even compare with this bunch of neighborly village folks. She was determined to earn more money and treat Qiao Mei well so that Qiao Mei would not be shortchanged anymore.

Of course, Qiao Mei did not lack these eight to ten pig trotters that they mentioned as she still had so many pigs at home. However, she knew that they were all expressing their concern for her and she was also happy to see the older women joking around.

Chapter 113: Failure

One of the women held up the grapes and asked Qiao Mei, “Mei Mei, how are your grapes so sweet when my grapes aren’t even this big. and they’re so sour.”

Qiao Mei’s fruits went through energy exchange every day, so naturally they were sweeter than what others grew. Qiao Mei smiled and said, “There’s a lot of knowledge required in growing grapes. It’s not as simple as growing bean sprouts. There’s ambient temperature, the number of times to water it a day, the time to do the watering and the amount of water to use. You also need to know how to remove the weeds, when to water more and when to water less. There’s a lot of things to take note of.”

Everyone was stunned when they heard this as it sounded so believable and they were all in awe of Qiao Mei for knowing so much. Qiao Mei thought to herself that it was a good thing that she had taken a gardening course in her other life. She did not expect it to come in handy here where she could bombard these people with the information.

Everyone started discussing how to grow plump grapes, but Auntie Dong felt that the taste of these grapes was not much different from the ones she grew. So, everyone went to discuss it with Auntie Dong.

Occasionally, when Qiao Mei passed by Auntie Dong’s house, she would help to take care of the vegetables and fruits. She would also do some energy exchange at Auntie Wang’s house. As for the plants at Qiao Zhuang’s house, they were all thin and shriveled though Qiao Mei had only absorbed a little bit of energy from them. Anyway, Qiao Zhuang’s family was about to run out of food, so they could not be concerned about growing fruits.

The days passed quickly. Li Gui had not been idle during the days while the house was being constructed. She had been growing bean sprouts and selling them on the black market. Bean sprouts that would normally grow out in four to five days could grow out in two days here! Li Gui sighed and said, “The water in the village is really different!”

The rapid growth of the bean sprouts was also the result of Qiao Mei secretly taking care of them. Li Gui would go to the black market before dawn to sell them. However, business had not been too good of late. She did not know if it was because people from other villages had heard that there was money to be made from bean sprouts and so every family was growing their own. Once there was an oversupply of bean sprouts in the black market, one would not be able to sell much no matter how low the price was. Fortunately, Li Gui’s bean sprouts were of good quality and she could still sell quite a lot.

The day before yesterday, the supply and marketing cooperative had only collected 200 catties of bean sprouts from the village. They had found that most of the bean sprouts were not up to their standard and the amount of bean sprouts they collected had reduced by 10 times! Every household began to reduce the amount of beans they had. From the initial 10 catties, each household had at most two to three catties now, and some even had only one to two catties. Everyone went to the black market to sell the bean sprouts that were not up-to-mark, and Li Gui found it more and more difficult to sell her bean sprouts.

When Li Gui returned home, she looked at the bean sprouts she had grown and sighed to herself. She reached out to flip the bean sprouts and wondered how she would be able to sell them. Qiao Mei looked at Li Gui, already knowing what had happened recently. Currently, Qiao Mei did not go around taking special care of everyone's bean sprouts as she did not want people from other villages to get jealous and cause trouble if their village sold too much.

"Sigh..." Li Gui looked at her bean sprouts worriedly.

Qiao Mei looked at the empty basket and the bean sprouts in the basin, and asked in confusion, "What's wrong? Is business not good?"

Li Gui shook her head and said, "Mei Mei, there are so many people selling bean sprouts over there now. It's not easy to sell my bean sprouts anymore."

Qiao Mei thought that it was no big deal. She pulled Li Gui to the courtyard and said, "You see, there are so many vegetables here. If we can't sell the bean sprouts, then we'll sell the vegetables. I'm pregnant now and can't go, why not help me sell them. I'll bring Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao up the mountain to pick some vegetables tomorrow."

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Li Gui looked at the fresh vegetables like she had something new to look forward to. However, she changed her mind and said, "Let's not sell these vegetables. Given that you're pregnant now, let's dry them to keep for the winter. Otherwise, you won't have any vegetables during wintertime."

"Look at the storeroom full of vegetables. I can't even finish seven or eight of them. Don't worry about it." Qiao Mei had indeed kept a lot of dried vegetables in the storeroom. Even if they were about to rot,

she could give them some energy to maintain them in their current condition. Furthermore, they had an endless supply of vegetables in the future, so there was no need to worry about food.

Li Gui thought about it and then agreed. After selling the remaining bean sprouts, she would think of another way out.

There were eight or nine days to go before the completion of the house. After the house was built, it had to be left empty for two days. Otherwise, it would not be sturdy enough and it would be a disaster if it collapsed later.

Qiao Mei weaved baskets at home with the two children, making small clay baskets so that it would be easier for the two children to carry them. Otherwise, they would not feel like picking vegetables when they reached the mountaintop after carrying a big heavy basket.

Chapter 114: I Can Make Money Now

Qiao Mei taught the two children how to weave baskets like how Qiao Qiang had taught her. Although they were clumsy, they learned it well. Zhang Miao was still young and did not have much strength, so Zhang Qin went to help Zhang Miao tie up the baskets. Qiao Mei was relieved to see the two children helping each other out.

In this era, many families would give birth to many brothers and then they would quarrel endlessly with each other, over food and property, until both sides ended up getting hurt. Sometimes, brothers would also turn against each other and did not interact again throughout their lifetimes. Even in her other life, when she was still a lawyer, she had seen many such cases. However, at that time, she was a criminal lawyer, so she did not really take on such cases about trivial family matters.

“Xiao Qin is so awesome! You know how to help your younger sister and the baskets you made are so beautiful!” Qiao Mei smiled at the two children.

Previously, Zhang Qin had always been bullied by the Zhang family. Old Madam Zhang always said that she was a money-losing good-for-nothing who was useful and only knew how to eat. Now that Qiao Mei encouraged her and affirmed her efforts, she felt a little embarrassed. Her face went red and she did not dare to look at Qiao Mei while she silently weaved the willow branches in her hand. In the end, the two children made three baskets in one morning.

Qiao Mei brought Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao to the back of the mountain to see if they could make any new discoveries. In the current season, the grass had grown very tall but there were many wild vegetables to dig up and also a lot of mushrooms. While the two children were not paying attention, Qiao Mei hastened the growth of many mushrooms among the grass and also ensured that the bushes in the distance were full of fruits.

When Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao saw the fruits scattered on the ground, they went to take some to put in the basket and totally did not notice what was happening on Qiao Mei's side. Qiao Mei took out her sickle and interrogated the mushrooms on the ground. "Which ones of you are poisonous, make yourself known! Tell me quickly!"

The little mushrooms scrambled to report the poisonous mushrooms. Qiao Mei nodded in satisfaction and called Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao over to identify the mushrooms. When they heard Qiao Mei say that some mushrooms were poisonous and that people would die if they ate them, Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao widened their eyes in amazement. They listened carefully when Qiao Mei told them how to differentiate the edible ones from the ones that were not.

The two children put everything they could recognize into the baskets. Before long, the two small baskets were full. Zhang Qin took the third basket to hold the fruits from the bushes. The two children felt especially proud when they looked at the three full baskets in front of them.

Qiao Mei also picked a basket of mushrooms and then they went back. On the way, the two children did not complain about being tired or put down their baskets. They both showed great fortitude.

"Qin Qin, Miao Miao, are you happy picking mushrooms today?" Qiao Mei asked the two children.

Zhang Miao looked at Qiao Mei and smiled brightly. "I'm so happy! These are enough for us to eat for a long time!"

The two children thought that they were picking these things for their food. Qiao Mei said to them, "It's not for us to eat. After we dry these mushrooms, we can sell them for money, a lot of money. Once we make money, I'll give you some."

Zhang Qin widened her eyes and said excitedly, "Can we also have money!"

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“Of course. After we sell the mushrooms, how about I give you 10 cents for each dollar we make, 20 cents for two dollars. Moreover, each of you will get a share, you don’t have to split it among yourselves.” Qiao Mei wanted the children to be able to buy what they wanted.

Zhang Miao still could not understand how much money that was, but in any case, it meant she had money now. On the other hand, Zhang Qin was ecstatic to hear that. Not to mention it was 10 cents for each dollar, even if it was just a total of 10 or 20 cents, it would be good enough for her.

The three of them went home happily where they put out the mushrooms to dry and transferred the fruits they picked up into the big basket. The two children were so busy that they did not notice the big beads of sweat dripping down their faces.

When Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao first came, they looked like skinny monkeys and their clothes were in tatters. Qiao Mei took her old clothes and made two sets of clothes for her two younger sisters to be able to have a change of clothing. After they came, they ate better than before and they looked like they had put on some weight after a week. They also started to smile more.

“Elder sister! Can we go again!” Zhang Qin ran to Qiao Mei with a small basket and looked at her with sparkling eyes.

Qiao Mei looked at the sky. It was still early and there was time for them to go to the stream nearby to take a look. Moreover, she had yet to exchange energy with the plants today. Qiao Mei took the basket and set off with the two children.

The endless supply of mushrooms along the way made the two children extremely excited. Qiao Mei silently absorbed the energy released by the plants near the stream and used a portion of it to grow mushrooms. Perspiration soaked through the clothes on the backs of Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao. The two children ran all over the wilderness, afraid that they would miss a mushroom that could be picked.

Chapter 115: Hard Work

The three of them could only bear to go home in the evening. The two children were already exhausted after a day of work, but they insisted on putting the last of these mushrooms out to dry. The entire

courtyard was covered in mushrooms, and the baskets in the corner of the courtyard were filled with fruits.

When Li Gui came back from work that night, she was stunned to see the entire courtyard filled with mushrooms. "Did you guys pick all the mushrooms in the entire mountain? How can there be so many!"

Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao rushed to Li Gui and held her hand. "Mom! Mom! Look at the mushrooms we picked! Elder sister brought us to pick these and there were so many of them! They were everywhere!"

"Look! Look! And these..." The two children pulled Li Gui one by one to introduce their "battle results" today.

"I'll go to the county city with you to sell them tomorrow," Qiao Mei said as she looked at Li Gui.

Li Gui placed everything in the corner and said, "You're pregnant, so it's better that you don't go."

"Alright, I'll find an auntie from the village to accompany you. There are too many people going there recently and I'm afraid that you won't be able to cope." Qiao Mei went to look for her neighbor, Auntie Dong. Recently, everyone was worried about not being able to earn money given that they were unable to sell their bean sprouts. Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang, who were usually on good terms with Qiao Mei, had a lot of vegetables at home and were preparing to go to the county city to sell them. However, they were timid and did not dare to go on their own as it would be a terrible thing if they were to get caught.

Qiao Mei asked Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang to come over to her house. She thought of asking them to help her bring some fruits and the last of the pumpkins to sell tomorrow.

"Oh, Qiao Mei! Why are there so many mushrooms in your house!" Auntie Dong exclaimed as soon as she entered the courtyard and saw the mushrooms all over the ground .

Qiao Mei pointed towards the stream they went to today. "Aunties, the two of you can go over there tomorrow to take a look. There's a lot of mushrooms over there and they're all growing very well." There were still some mushrooms left among the grass as their baskets were full and they had no way of

bringing them back. She had never been too stingy with people who were good to her. Instead of letting strangers take them, it would be better for her own people to pick them.

“Aye! Aye! I’ll go tomorrow when I’m free,” Auntie Wang replied with a smile.

Qiao Mei had taken out a total of five baskets of things, namely a basket of watermelons, a basket of grapes, a basket of cucumbers, a basket of the last few pumpkins that they could not manage to finish, as well as the bean sprouts that did not grow out well at the end.

“Auntie Dong, Auntie Wang, this is what I want to sell tomorrow. Please go to the county city with my mother.” Qiao Mei handed the two women a slice of sweet watermelon each.

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“It’s fine, it’s fine! It’s just a small matter!” Auntie Dong took a bite of the watermelon. This was much more delicious than what she had at home. Even if Qiao Mei did not come to ask Auntie Dong to go to the county city, Auntie Dong had already intended to go there to sell some vegetables to supplement her family’s income. Ever since everyone could not manage to sell all their bean sprouts, her family had been spending more than they earned and her rations were almost running out.

Li Gui had finished preparing dinner in the kitchen. A few days ago, the hens at home had laid two eggs and it was just nice to give to Qiao Mei for extra nourishment. She added some water to the eggs to make the texture more tender. First, she made stir-fried cucumbers with eggs and then, she made some pumpkin porridge. It was summer now and the hot weather was a little unbearable. She also made some green bean soup, but Qiao Mei could not drink it so she did not make too much.

After the two older women left, she called out to Qiao Mei and Qiao Qiang to have a meal at home. In the past, she had been afraid of her former father-in-law and felt that she owed him for what happened back then. Now that Qiao Qiang did not quibble about the past and even helped her in the construction of her house, she could not be more grateful.

In the beginning, the two children did not dare to eat at the table nor take any food. Now, they were very close to Qiao Mei and Qiao Qiang. They also knew who was good and who was bad and understood that they had been deceived by Old Madam Zhang’s words all these years.

After Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao washed the dishes and tidied up the courtyard, they went to bed early. After a tiring day, they finally could not stay awake anymore. Li Gui came to the courtyard to enjoy the evening breeze with Qiao Mei and they enjoyed an unprecedented moment together as mother and daughter.

Some people wanted to go to the county city to exchange for some things to earn some money, while some people in the county city were discussing how to go to the countryside to ask for things and money and food to supplement their families.

Chapter 116: Mixed Feelings

In life, one man's joy could be another man's sorrow. The Zhang family had been living an eventful and exciting life for the past week. In the beginning, when Li Gui left with the two children, there were three less people to feed in the house and the happiest person was Old Madam Zhang. However, as time went by, when no one did the housework and she had to do the cooking, she complained non-stop.

"You good-for-nothing! Go and find Li Gui and get her to come back!" Old Madam Zhang shouted at her son, Zhang Qian.

Zhang Qian ate in silence. He had already gotten used to such verbal abuse which had been going on for a week. In the beginning, he would even retort a little, but later on, Old Madam Zhang was brazen enough to go from house to house to spread rumors that she had been beaten up by her son and that her daughter-in-law had run away. She may be shameless, but Zhang Qian still cared about his reputation. Otherwise, in the past, he would not have spent so much money on betrothal gifts to marry a beautiful widow.

Zhang Cong quickly stopped Old Madam Zhang and said, "Grandma, what can she do here when it's better to let her earn money there. She can make more than 30 dollars a day. That's easily 300 dollars in a month."

It was not that Zhang Cong did not want Li Gui to come back, but he had taken a fancy to a girl in the factory. Her surname was Sun and her full name was Sun Yan. She was 19 years old, beautiful and capable. Her registered residence and household register was in the city, so her family wanted a lot of betrothal gifts. They wanted 300 dollars and the Four Big Things.

At that time, it was popular to have the Four Big Things, also known as 'three turns and one sound', which referred to four items, namely a wristwatch, a bicycle, a sewing machine and a radio. They were

all symbols of respectability. The Sun family even said that if getting the 'one sound' was not possible, they were fine with the 'three turns' and 500 dollars.

"As if I don't know what you're up to! You just want to marry Sun Yan! You got her pregnant and now you need your family to clean up your mess!" Old Madam Zhang berated him. The Sun family was not in a hurry and insisted on having the 'three turns and one sound' as the betrothal gifts. If they could not get it, they would report Zhang Cong for committing rape and send him to jail.

The only people in the family who were able to go out and make money were Zhang Qian and Zhang Cong. They could not count on the two younger ones. Zhang Wei was only ten years old, while Zhang Chao was eight years old. They could not go out to work and still depended on the family to support them.

Zhang Qian did not care whether Zhang Cong wanted to marry the daughter of the Sun family. After all, he would support his son if his son liked beautiful women as it would make the family look good. Moreover, he handed over his salary to Old Madam Zhang every month. He did not have a single cent to his name and Zhang Cong would never come to him for money.

"The supply and marketing cooperative has stopped taking in bean sprouts recently! If you ask me, Li Gui just made up a lie and ran away! How much money can she make from selling that! It would be hard to make 30 dollars a month, what more to think about 300 dollars." Old Madam Zhang looked at Zhang Cong and rolled her eyes. This Zhang Cong was still counting on Li Gui to earn money. It would already be good enough if she came back.

"What!" Upon hearing this, Zhang Cong panicked. His plan to propose to Sun Yan this month was about to go down the drain. It would be so embarrassing as he had already made a promise to her. That would not do, he would need to go to the countryside to take a look.

As soon as he decided on that, Zhang Cong left home early in the morning to go to the village to find out more. He even brought along a big bag, thinking that even if he could not get the money, there was at least farmland in the village and he could get some vegetables and send them to Sun Yan's family to appease them. This could probably help to ease the tension and get him a grace period of a few more days.

Zhang Cong had just bought the train ticket and was about to leave when he heard a bunch of people near the county train station saying that they were going somewhere to buy something. Zhang Cong

followed them out of curiosity and when he got closer to the destination, he could smell the fragrance of fruits .

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Li Gui and the other two aunties had already been selling vegetables and fruits in the area since early in the morning. Due to the bumpy road on their journey, the basket of watermelons was not transported properly and some of the bigger watermelons with thinner skins had cracked open. Li Gui was initially worried that it would not be easy to sell the cracked watermelons, but it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Due to these cracked watermelons, people could smell the fragrance from faraway and were attracted to the area to buy them. Some people even got into arguments and fought over the watermelons, and it did not take long for them to be sold out.

Zhang Cong also went forward curiously to find out the source of the fragrance. When he got closer and saw Li Gui, he was so shocked that he quickly covered his face and turned around to leave. He only dared to look around secretly after he reached a corner. This business was so good that she could not say she did not have any money. Zhang Cong now felt that he would be able to get the money for the betrothal gifts this month.

Chapter 117: Came to the Door

When Li Gui was doing her sales, she saw a shadow flash past in the crowd, but she did not pay much attention to it and continued to sell the remaining vegetables and grapes. After she sold all her things, she even helped Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang to sell theirs. Zhang Cong saw many people buying from them and counted more than 10 baskets of items which he thought all belonged to Li Gui. He estimated her earnings to be more than 50 dollars and quickly engaged in some wishful thinking and came up with a plan.

After everything was sold, Li Gui packed up her things and prepared to go to the county city with Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang to buy some household items. After all, they could find more things in the county city than in their small village. Auntie Wang did not need to buy anything, so she stayed behind to keep an eye on all their things. Otherwise, it would be inconvenient for them to go shopping while carrying their big baskets. Auntie Dong went to buy needles and thread as she wanted to mend the torn clothing in her house so that her family could continue to wear them.

Li Gui first went to buy shoe soles and crochet needles, then some fabric, needles and thread. She looked joyful as she thought about the two pairs of shoes that she was going to make for Qiao Mei's

baby. After hiding the rest of her money, she went back to look for Auntie Wang. She did not expect Zhang Cong to see all of this.

Zhang Cong followed behind silently, feeling very unhappy. Li Gui had always said that she had no money and no food to eat. Yet, she went to the black market every day to sell vegetables and even had the spare money to buy fabric to make new clothes. This was really outrageous. Zhang Cong followed her all the way to the village and only revealed himself after Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang had left.

“How great, so you’ve made a lot of money here.” Zhang Cong stood outside the door and looked at Li Gui, who was putting the baskets back in their places. Li Gui was shocked when she heard Zhang Cong’s voice and thought that she had heard wrongly. She turned around and saw him standing at the entrance of the courtyard.

Zhang Cong pushed open the door and looked around the house. He had no intention of entering the house as it was obvious that it was a newly built mud house. There was probably not even a warm mat in the house, let alone anything valuable.

“I... I’m not earning any money. I’m usually busy with work, how can I have the time to earn money...” Li Gui looked at Zhang Cong guiltily and grabbed the corner of her clothes, not daring to speak loudly.

“Don’t deny it! I saw everything. You had watermelons and grapes. Look at all the mushrooms in this courtyard. Tsk, tsk, tsk. How can you say that you don’t have money?” Zhang Cong casually grabbed a handful of mushrooms and looked at them before throwing them aside with a look of disdain. The things in the countryside were so uncouth that even the mushrooms smelled low-class.

Li Gui was so frightened that she did not dare to move and quickly denied, “No, no, no, these are not mine. I sell them for others. I usually have to go out and work.”

When Li Gui got married to Zhang Cong’s father, Zhang Cong was about 15 or 16 years old. He often watched his father beat up his mother, so he also felt that women were meant to be beaten up. and he often hit Li Gui as well. After four or five years, when Zhang Cong was already in his twenties, the neighbors all gossiped about Zhang Cong beating up his stepmother. Therefore, Zhang Cong no longer hit her, but he still beat up her children often. She could not stop him from doing that and she remained very afraid of Zhang Cong.

“Oh, then where did you get this house, don’t tell me you stole our family’s money.” Zhang Cong looked carefully at the newly built house.

Li Gui hurriedly explained, “I borrowed it from the brigade! I borrowed money to build this house...”

Before she could finish her sentence, Zhang Cong already stepped forward quickly and gave her a slap on the face. Li Gui fell to the ground from the force and covered her face, not daring to look at Zhang Cong directly. There was no one in this place who knew him, so he could hit her however he wanted.

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“You money-losing good-for-nothing! My father is right! You’re not thinking about how to earn money for your family! You actually spent money to build a house! How much money does this house cost!” After saying that, Zhang Cong was still all worked up and he slapped Li Gui again.

Li Gui lay on the ground and cried silently. She did not dare to resist because she knew that as long as she resisted, she would be beaten up even more. No matter what, she would still be beaten up anyway. As long as she gave Zhang Cong the money, he would calm down and not beat her anymore.

However, she felt really indignant! The money was from the mushrooms that her three daughters had painstakingly gathered on the mountain, and the vegetables that Qiao Mei had to water and irrigate every day. She was unwilling to let Zhang Cong snatch everything away just like that. Even if she had to be beaten up, she refused to say where she kept the money she had earned today.

At this moment, she only hoped that her three daughters would return later so that Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao would not get beaten up. Also, she worried about what could happen to Qiao Mei if she came back.

“Mom!” A shout at the door made Li Gui widen her eyes.

Chapter 118: First Time Meeting Zhang Cong

Coincidentally, at this moment, Qiao Mei returned with Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao from their outing to pick mushrooms and dig up wild vegetables. The two children were originally very happy and had run home to show Li Gui their harvest, but as soon as they entered the house, they were stunned and the

small baskets in their hands fell to the ground. They did not dare to retreat nor move forward to approach Zhang Cong.

“Eh? Why are you...” Qiao Mei felt curious about their strange behavior, then she saw Li Gui lying on the ground as soon as she entered. The two children also seemed to be very afraid of the man.

“Who are you!” Qiao Mei hugged the two children and looked at this man that she had never seen before.

Zhang Cong turned around and saw a beautiful girl standing at the entrance of the courtyard with his two younger sisters beside her. This was probably Li Gui’s daughter, Qiao Mei. Wasn’t she supposed to be a fatty who weighed more than 200 pounds, and was dark and ugly like a black bear spirit. The person in front of him did not fit this description at all. She had milky smooth skin, a slender figure, and a beautiful face with red lips, pearly white teeth and a sweet voice. Even when she was angry, she looked like she was throwing a charming little tantrum.

“Oh! I’m Zhang Cong. Are you Qiao Mei?” Like his father, Zhang Cong liked beautiful women. He did not expect to see such a beautiful young woman in this remote village, and she was so much prettier than Sun Yan.

Qiao Mei lowered her head and asked Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao, “Who is this?”

“It’s... it’s my big brother,” Zhang Qin said softly.

He looked to be in his twenties, so it was likely not Zhang Wei, but the ignorant and incompetent Zhang Cong. At this moment, Li Gui slowly got up. Her nervousness about the wellbeing of her children made her forget that she was injured. She could only remember that she had to protect her children. Furthermore, Qiao Mei was pregnant and nothing must happen to her.

“Go, dry the mushrooms before entering the house.” Qiao Mei patted the two children’s shoulders. If there was going to be a fight later, she did not want them to get hurt. Zhang Qin and Zhang Miao picked up the baskets on the ground and put back the mushrooms that had dropped out. The two children walked along the side of the fence, not daring to go near Zhang Cong.

Zhang Qin brought her sister, Zhang Miao, into the house first and told her not to make a sound while she carefully laid out the mushrooms to dry outside. From time to time, she would use her peripheral vision to see if Zhang Cong was coming towards her.

“Why are you here to look for my mother?” Qiao Mei actually already knew what he was here for.

“Ah... I came to see if Auntie Zhang is doing well here and if she lacks anything. I’m here to visit her.” Zhang Cong smiled awkwardly.

Qiao Mei looked at Zhang Cong mockingly and sneered, “But you came empty-handed. Is this how you visit someone?”

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Zhang Cong was caught in speechless surprise and he turned around to look at Li Gui. His gaze was not fierce, but rather to size her up.

Li Gui knew that something was wrong when she saw Zhang Cong’s gaze and quickly said, “It’s fine, it’s fine! I don’t lack anything! Don’t come again!”

Zhang Cong did not expect Li Gui to have such a trick up her sleeve. This young woman was beautiful and had a sharp tongue. Yet Old Madam Zhang had always said that she was a “Black Bear Spirit” who weighed more than 200 pounds and was greedy and lazy!

The two of them had probably teamed up to cook up this scheme so that he would not take a fancy to Qiao Mei. If he had known that Qiao Mei was so beautiful, then Sun Yan would never have been in the picture!

Old Madam Zhang would have felt so grievous about this unjust accusation. It was really a disaster that befell her out of the blue as Old Madam Zhang did not even know that Qiao Mei had already become as beautiful as a flower.

“I... left in a hurry and did not have time!”

Zhang Cong took two steps forward and slowly approached Qiao Mei. "Oh dear, is the thing that you're carrying heavy, let me help you!"

When Li Gui saw Zhang Cong walking towards Qiao Mei, she hurriedly limped over to stop him. Zhang Cong pushed Li Gui away and thought to himself, "What an obstructive old thing. I'm looking at the little beauty, don't cause trouble for me."

Seeing Li Gui fall to the ground, Qiao Mei frowned. Zhang Qin quickly ran over to help Li Gui up and pulled her away from Zhang Cong. At this moment, Zhang Cong was not in the mood to look at them. His attention was all on Qiao Mei, especially her curvaceous figure and beautiful face.

Seeing that he was about to get close to Qiao Mei, Zhang Cong said fawningly, "Younger sis, you must be exhausted. Come, let me help you carry the basket. There's no need to be so formal with your big brother." As he reached out, his hands veered towards Qiao Mei's chest instead of the shoulder strap of the carrying pole holding the baskets.

Chapter 119: Extremely Fragile

Zhang Cong reached out and was about to pounce on Qiao Mei when Qiao Mei nimbly turned around, stretched out her leg, and took advantage of Zhang Cong's posture to give him a push.

Zhang Cong fell on his face and got covered in dust. His legs even hit the sharp stones on the ground. This set of clothes was new! He had intended to rush off to see Sun Yan after getting the money, but now, he had gotten himself injured without managing to get the money.

"Ah! Ouch... What the hell!" Zhang Cong wanted to stand up and hit Qiao Mei but he fell back into a sitting position. Only then did he realize that his right leg was injured and he had twisted his ankle. His injury looked quite serious.

Qiao Mei shrugged and pretended to be concerned with a look of panic. "Oh no! What happened to you!"

Zhang Cong's shouting at the door had attracted the attention of the surrounding neighbors who came over to take a look. The people of this era did not have any communication equipment. Their usual

pastime was to see who had something going on in their family and then discussed it with one another. Even if it was something that happened in the mountain area, it would spread throughout the village the next day and the story would usually sound more ridiculous than what actually happened.

Therefore, everyone went around to see what was going on when something happened. When they heard that this was about Qiao Mei's family, Qiao Zhuang's family naturally came to add insult to injury.

"Who is this..."

"I don't know, I've never seen him before!"

"What's wrong with him?"

The people around them discussed the situation animatedly. Seeing that everyone was here, Zhang Cong did not want to be outdone and thought that this would be the best time to embarrass Qiao Mei. He lay on the ground and stopped moving, then he cried loudly, "Qiao Mei, why are you so vicious? You actually pushed me down."

Auntie Dong arrived late, but seeing this unfamiliar man admonishing Qiao Mei, she pointed at him and asked, "You said Qiao Mei pushed you? Look at Qiao Mei's small build, how can she have the strength to push you!"

"That's right, that's right..."

"Qiao Mei is so thin, how can she have the strength to push down a man..."

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"You don't even blush when you lie!"

The people around them did not think that Qiao Mei could push the man down. If he was talking about the original Qiao Mei, he might still be able to convince people. However, the current Qiao Mei was

petite and looked weak. The fact that she was also pregnant made her seem even more frail. People thought it was obvious that this man was lying.

Only a few people knew that Qiao Mei was actually very strong. People like Zhao Liang, Auntie Dong, Auntie Wang, and the others who were close to her knew the amount of strength Qiao Mei had when she worked. The rest of the people felt that Qiao Mei was thin and weak and had become even weaker after she got pregnant.

“You!” Zhang Cong covered his leg and pointed at Qiao Mei, not knowing what to say.

“Uncle Zhao, you have to help me. I’m just a girl, how strong can I be? He’s just extorting me!” Qiao Mei looked at Zhao Liang, who was rushing over.

Zhao Liang naturally knew how strong Qiao Mei was, but she was from his village after all, so he could only go against his conscience and said, “Well... that’s true. You’re a girl, so you really don’t have much strength... What does everyone think? Don’t you agree!”

“That’s right, that’s right!”

“Yes!” Everyone laughed.

Between a stranger from elsewhere and Qiao Mei, their neighbor who helped them earn money, it was obvious who everyone would side with.

“You! All of you!” Zhang Cong pointed at the people around him and was speechless from anger. He had never seen such shameless people. Were they all blind!

Zhang Cong was indeed quite seriously injured. He would probably need to rest his ankle for a period of time, otherwise it might not heal properly. Anyone could tell from the huge beads of sweat on Zhang Cong’s forehead that it must be very painful. In addition, the small slope outside Li Gui’s house was not steep at all.

But so what? Putting aside the question of whether Qiao Mei was the one who did it or not, everyone believed that the amiable Qiao Mei would not hit someone for no reason. This person must have done something first.

“He wanted to push me! He’s my mother’s stepson and came to ask my mother for money! He took all my mother’s money! Then he found it was not enough so he came and asked me for more!”

Qiao Mei pointed at Zhang Cong when she spoke and then she quickly pretended to cover her face and sobbed bitterly. “That’s all my hard-earned money! That’s the money I need to raise my children!”

Qiao Mei slapped her leg as she sobbed. When the people around her heard this, they looked at Zhang Cong fiercely.

Chapter 120: Chased Out of the Village

These lies just flowed out of her mouth. Auntie Dong was the closest to Qiao Mei among all the rest. When she heard what Qiao Mei said, she clenched her fists and wanted to hit Zhang Cong. However, seeing that Zhao Liang was around, she held back and went over to hold Qiao Mei.

“Mei Mei, your body is weak so don’t cry.” Zhang Qin thoughtfully brought a stool out from inside the house for Qiao Mei to sit on, but Qiao Mei cried even louder.

“You black-hearted b*tch! I’m not here to ask for money! I was kind enough to want to help you when I saw you carrying things, but you pushed me! You’re such an ungrateful person! I’m going to sue you!” Zhang Cong stood up with a limp and pointed at Qiao Mei as he scolded her.

“Huh? You said you’re not here to ask for money?” Qiao Mei immediately stopped crying once she heard what she was waiting to hear and she quickly posed a question to him.

“Of course not!”

“Then you won’t come back and ask for money in the future as well, right?” Qiao Mei looked at Zhang Cong with a smile. Only then did Zhang Cong realize that this woman was trying to trick him.

However, he did not know how to answer her as he definitely still wanted the money. In the end, the longer he stayed silent, the more everyone understood why this guy was here.

“He’s been exposed!”

“It’s so obvious that he’s not a good person!”

“The people in the city must find life very tough! They need to come to the countryside to ask for money, how great is that!” Auntie Dong put her hands on her hips and looked at Zhang Cong mockingly.

“Hahahahahahahaha...” Everyone around them burst out laughing.

“That’s right. His father even said that my mother has to hand over all the money she earns in the future. Also that my mother has been living off him all these years and even gave birth to four children, and that she will never be able to pay back the Zhang family in this lifetime!” Qiao Mei shouted from the door.

The villagers all spat at Zhang Cong. “Pfft! What a joke! What rubbish! A woman bears children for your family and yet she still owes her life to your family. What a joke, we can laugh our heads off!”

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Zhang Cong really could not bring himself to deny that his family ever said all these because he was afraid that Qiao Mei would use his words against him again. He also could not say that he would not come to Li Gui for money and vegetables in the future. Otherwise, Zhang Qian would skin him alive when he returned home.

“You! Aiyo... You have to take me to the hospital! You’ve caused me to break my leg!” Zhang Cong moaned when he saw that there was no way for him to rebut.

Qiao Mei looked at Zhao Liang, not knowing how Uncle Zhao was going to handle this. In this era, the Public Security Bureau did not really deal with issues like this, they only took up matters like murder, arson or poisoning. Basically, for such matters, the production brigade had the final say.

“This is extortion! He’s trying to extort money! Which one of you saw that happened!” Qiao Qiang stepped out and pointed at Zhang Cong, though he could tell that the bruised ankle was really injured. Whatever Qiao Mei did, she really did not hold back.

Ever since Qiao Mei had this pendant, she had become stronger and her body constitution had improved a lot. Her face had also become rosy.

Everyone shook their heads and said that they did not see it. This time, Zhang Cong was even angrier and cursed, “You bloody old man...” Before he could finish speaking, everyone got angry with him. Qiao Qiang was an old war hero and the pride of the village, no one could slander him. How dare he scold Qiao Qiang!

“Quickly get lost from our village!” Zhao Liang did not bother to be polite this time. A few militiamen grabbed Zhang Cong and wanted to drag him off. Seeing this situation, Zhang Cong did not dare to stay any longer and limped away. Before he left, he saw Li Gui standing at the edge of the crowd and shouted at her, “Give me money! I want to go to the hospital!”

Li Gui was afraid of getting into more trouble, so she just followed behind the crowd, not expecting that Zhang Cong still caught a glimpse of her. Just as she was about to reach into her pocket for the money, Auntie Dong stopped her and said quietly, “Sister, are you stupid, what good is there from giving him money. Then he will still come back to ask for money again and there will be no end to it. Just don’t give it to him!”

Li Gui fell into deep thought when she heard this. Although Li Gui was timid, she was not irrational and took the advice. She covered her pocket and said softly, “I... I don’t have money!”

“You still say that you’re not extorting money!” Auntie Wang, who was at the front of the crowd, said mockingly.

“Who’s extorting money! You’re all so unreasonable!” Seeing that everyone sided with Li Gui and Qiao Mei, Zhang Cong was so angry that he pointed at Li Gui and said, “Li Gui, let me tell you! You’re dead meat! Wait for my father to come! My father will beat you to death!”