

Fat Wife 151

Chapter 151: Plotting Revenge

“Grandfather!”

“Grandpa, we’re here!”

The children chattered noisily as they walked into the courtyard. The originally quiet courtyard instantly became lively and brought a smile on Qiao Qiang’s face. As he got older, he preferred his surroundings to be bustling with activities.

“It’s good that you’re here! Good that you’re here! All you kids hurry up and come in!” Qiao Qiang brought the children into the house with Li Gui and Qiao Mei following closely behind.

Li Gui looked at Qiao Qiang and wondered how to address him. Qiao Qiang could also tell what Li Gui was thinking. After all, he was her ex-father-in-law and it was quite inappropriate for her to call him father.

“Just call me uncle,” Qiao Qiang said to Li Gui.

“Alright!” Li Gui replied.

The family had a jolly meal together.

Qiao Yu was not so lucky. She had already started to get cold feet on the way and did not want to go back to face her family. If she went home empty-handed, she might be beaten to death.

Qiao Yu entered the courtyard nervously. The moment she entered, everyone in the house looked at her in unison.

“Oh, Qiao Yu is back!” Liu Ying said.

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“Why are you back empty-handed, what happened, is there nothing good today,” Wang Qin teased.

Qiao Yu stood at the doorway and did not dare to enter the courtyard. She was afraid that Qiao Zhuang would be unhappy and beat her up again.

“Why did I hear that you didn’t go to work today, so you didn’t manage to find food and also didn’t go to work today! What else can you do!” Qiao Zhuang said.

As expected, Qiao Zhuang lost his temper. When he went to work today, he realized that Qiao Yu was not there. Having one less person around made a lot of difference. Besides, being a girl, if she did not work, did she expect them to feed her!

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Qiao Yu stood at the door and explained, “I... I... I was chased out of someone’s house today...”

Qiao Yu did not dare to say whose house she was chased out from. If she said it was Qiao Mei’s house, Qiao Zhuang would definitely not believe it. Previously, they had already fallen out with Qiao Mei over the matter with the bean sprouts. Now that Qiao Mei viewed them with great enmity, they did not dare to provoke Qiao Mei for no reason. However, if she said that it was Li Gui’s house, Qiao Mei would not let her off as well. Either way, she was in a dilemma.

“Someone’s house? Whose house? Don’t tell me you have a lover!” Liu Ying teased.

Qiao Yu hurriedly waved her hand and said, “No, no! I don’t have a lover! There’s no such thing!”

Qiao Zhuang did not have the energy to care about Qiao Yu and left these things to his wife. She dragged Qiao Yu into the room and gave her a good beating. The rest of the family ate in the east room and pretended not to hear no matter how terribly Qiao Yu screamed inside the other room.

Qiao Yu was not the only one singled out for a beating. All the women in the family who could not contribute money or food would get beaten up. The eldest son was capable and provided a lot of food, so Liu Ying had never been beaten up. The second daughter-in-law was the accountant of the brigade and just needed to contribute a little money every month. The third daughter-in-law was capable and was basically the one who did all the housework at home.

Everyone else at home either contributed money or effort. Qiao Yu was the only one who did not have money or the energy to do work. Her family ostracized her and kept wanting to find a random family so that they could marry her off.

Qiao Yu felt indignant. Why could the ugly Qiao Mei find a soldier from the capital who was also so handsome, and yet she could not do the same! Qiao Yu silently noted these things as she was being beaten up. She blamed everything on Qiao Mei.

Qiao Yu stared at the door with hatred in her eyes. She would definitely take revenge on Qiao Mei and live a happier life!

"Achoo!" Qiao Mei sneezed out of the blue.

"Mei Mei, what's wrong, did you catch a cold?" Li Gui asked with concern.

Qiao Mei touched her stomach and rubbed her nose and said, "I'm fine. What's going on, someone must be talking bad about me behind my back."

"Good to hear you're fine. Don't catch a cold." Li Gui felt relieved to hear that.

"Oh right. Mom, please accompany me to the county city tomorrow. I still have a few things I haven't bought. I forgot about them the last time," Qiao Mei said as she looked at Li Gui.

"Sure, no problem." Li Gui nodded.

"It's settled then!" Qiao Mei smiled happily. By her own estimate, there were still three days before she had to set off for Gushan.

Chapter 152: Tagging Along to the County City

Qiao Yu originally wanted to take a stroll around the village in the morning to see if there was any family who would let her in to have a meal. She did not expect to see Li Gui and Qiao Mei early in the morning, heading to the county city with their cloth bags to buy things.

“So early? Where are they going?” Qiao Yu muttered to herself.

When she got closer, she saw that they did not have any baskets or vegetables or mushrooms from the mountain in their hands. They were definitely not going to the black market so where were they going?

Qiao Yu followed them cautiously. When they reached the county city, Qiao Yu was already tired out and drenched in sweat. She then saw Qiao Mei and Li Gui enter a fabric shop.

“Are they buying fabric?” Qiao Yu hid in the alley beside the fabric shop and looked around quietly.

Qiao Mei looked at the dazzling display of fabrics in the shop and did not know how to make a choice. She looked around and did not see anything she liked.

“Are all these the latest designs?” Qiao Mei pointed at the display.

“That’s right. These are the latest ones,” said the shopkeeper.

Li Gui had never been to the fabric shop. As she did not have any money or cloth coupons, she had no way of buying clothes for herself and her children. She could only take the old unwanted clothes from the adults to modify them for the children, and the children would make do with the clothes for a long time.

Qiao Mei said to the shopkeeper, “Please show me some fabric that is plain-colored and made of dirt-resistant material.”

Qiao Mei was thinking about making clothes and cloth bags for the children. They were going to school soon and needed to have some presentable clothes.

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Qiao Yu could not see anything after the two of them had gone in for a long time. She wanted to go into the shop to take a look but she did not dare to. In the crowd, she vaguely saw the people she had met at the village entrance the last time, the ones from the Zhang family or the Liu family? She could not remember their surname, but they should be related to Li Gui in some way.

Coincidentally, ever since the Zhang family took 600 dollars from Li Gui the last time, they did not draw any attention to Zhang Cong's marriage. They set about buying the new bed and blanket after preparing the betrothal gifts and money. However, wherever they went, they could only find very expensive fabric and did not see any cheap ones at all. Old Madam Zhang came up with the idea of going to someone's house to buy a blanket made of red fabric at a low price.

"Cong Cong, let's go next door to buy the blanket. It's very cheap," Old Madam Zhang said.

"Next door? What do you mean by next door?" Zhang Cong asked in confusion.

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"The Cao family next door," Old Madam Zhang said.

When Zhang Cong heard this, he immediately refused. "Why does my father get to have new things when he gets married! I have to get old things! I won't do it! This is my first marriage and everything has to be new! My father is going to get married for the third time! He can use the old ones!"

Zhang Qian raised his hand to hit Zhang Cong and said angrily, "You brat! You're starting to interfere in your old man's business! I can use whatever I want!"

Old Madam Zhang hurriedly went to stop him. The injury on Zhang Cong's leg had not healed yet. If he were to be beaten up again, he would definitely have to limp around for a while longer.

“Don’t touch Cong Cong! Let’s buy all new ones! I really owe your Zhang family in my previous life!” Old Madam Zhang cursed.

After hearing that, Zhang Qian slammed the door and went out. He still had a date with Feng Fang later today, so staying at home would really affect his mood. How unlucky!

“So shameless and still have the cheek to hit me. You’ve already gotten married so many times, yet you still don’t let others talk about it. Pfft!” Zhang Cong spat at the door.

“Alright, alright. Hurry up and go to the fabric shop to buy fabric. Aren’t you in a hurry?” Old Madam Zhang took some money and cloth coupons and prepared to leave.

When Zhang Cong heard that she was going to buy new fabric, his anger dissipated and he coaxed Old Madam Zhang out the door.

“I just know that my grandmother doted on me the most. I will definitely be filial to you in the future,” Zhang Cong said with a smile.

“Hmph, I think you just know how to talk. You start to flatter me when you see that I have money, you young brat.” Although Old Madam Zhang criticized Zhang Cong, she still felt happy inside. This was the reason why even though Zhang Cong caused so much trouble so many times, Old Madam Zhang would settle the issue for her grandson no matter how much money she had to spend or how many people she had to offend. It was because Zhang Cong knew how to sweet talk. Otherwise, how could Sun Yan have fallen for Zhang Cong at such a young age, if not for the fact that Zhang Cong made exaggerated promises that made her happy and enticed her to fall for him.

Chapter 153: An Encounter at the Fabric Shop

When he was only a few steps away from the fabric shop, Zhang Cong saw the woman that their family met when they left Li Gui’s village. He grabbed Old Madam Zhang and pointed in that direction.

“What are you doing?” Old Madam Zhang said.

“Grandma, have we met that woman before?” Zhang Cong said.

“Why are you always looking at women and everyone of them always looks familiar to you, why don’t you just leave your eyes on them?” Old Madam Zhang frowned and said.

It was no wonder that Old Madam Zhang felt that way. Zhang Cong always had roving eyes. When he walked on the streets, he was always looking out for beautiful women. He just liked to look at women. If they were good-looking, he would take a few glances; if they were not so good-looking, he would just look once.

“No, no! What are you talking about! Take a look for yourself!” Zhang Cong pointed at Qiao Yu behind the pillar.

Old Madam Zhang looked closer as Qiao Yu also saw them at the same time.

“Oh, it’s true. Why is she here?” Old Madam Zhang said.

Before Old Madam Zhang and Zhang Cong could figure out why Qiao Yu was in the county city, Qiao Yu walked up to them.

“Do you remember me? It’s me. We met in the village the last time,” Qiao Yu said with a smile.

“Ah, yes, yes. What’s the matter?” Zhang Cong looked at Qiao Yu lecherously.

Although Qiao Yu was not as good-looking as Qiao Mei and did not have Qiao Mei’s curvaceous figure, she still had some good genes and was fairly good-looking.

“Ah, nothing’s the matter. I just saw you both and came to say hello,” Qiao Yu said.

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“Then what are you doing in the county city? You’re not here to look for us, are you?” Old Madam Zhang said suspiciously, afraid that Qiao Yu was here to claim to be their relatives or look for trouble.

“No, no. I’m here with Qiao Mei. She’s in that shop with her mother.” Qiao Yu looked at Old Madam Zhang and pretended to be traveling with Qiao Mei. She wanted to tell Old Madam Zhang this so that they would go and cause trouble for Qiao Mei.

When Old Madam Zhang heard that Li Gui was also there, her eyes lit up. If it was only Qiao Mei by herself, they would not be able to say anything. However, if Li Gui was also around, then it was a different situation. After all, Li Gui had not gotten a divorce yet and was still Zhang Cong’s mother in name. She would definitely have to give Zhang Cong some money for his marriage.

“Then why aren’t you going in?” Old Madam Zhang was still a little suspicious of Qiao Yu..

“I.. I still have to help buy some other things. I’m about to go off so I won’t talk to you any longer. I have to get busy.” After saying that, Qiao Yu quickly left the place and walked as far away as she could.

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Old Madam Zhang watched Qiao Yu walk away and did not really care whether she was telling the truth. Going into the shop to look for Li Gui was the most important thing for her to do now. Old Madam Zhang excitedly brought Zhang Cong into the fabric shop.

Qiao Yu popped her head out from the alley next door to make sure that Old Madam Zhang and Zhang Cong had entered the shop before she felt satisfied.

“Haha, Qiao Mei, let’s see what you can do this time,” Qiao Yu said with a sly smile.

As soon as Old Madam Zhang entered the shop, she greeted Li Gui warmly, “Oh! Isn’t this Li Gui, why are you here?”

Li Gui was a little surprised by Old Madam Zhang's sudden appearance and she kept retreating to avoid Old Madam Zhang. However, Zhang Cong was still standing at the doorway and she could not go out. Therefore, she could only smile awkwardly and said, "Ah... Mom, why are you here?"

Old Madam Zhang's face bloomed with joy. It seemed that Qiao Yu was telling the truth. Qiao Mei stood at one side and looked coldly at Old Madam Zhang and Zhang Cong. When Zhang Cong saw Qiao Mei, his eyes were fixated on her.

With such a beautiful face, fair skin and voluptuous figure, it was a pity that she was already married. Although her temper was a little feisty, such a woman was very attractive in her own way. Zhang Cong looked at Qiao Mei lustfully.

"Younger sister Qiao Mei is here too. How have you been recently?" Zhang Cong said with a lecherous smile.

Zhang Cong was a person who harbored evil intentions but did not have the guts to do anything. Although he sized Qiao Mei up from head to toe, he did not dare to get too close to her. He remembered the loss he suffered the last time and he did not want to get beaten up again. If the same thing should happen again, he would really be crippled.

Chapter 154: Going Back on One's Word

Qiao Mei glanced sideways at Zhang Cong. It seemed that he still had not learned his lesson as he still dared to take the initiative to talk to her.

"Who's your younger sister?" Qiao Mei rolled her eyes and said.

"You're Li Gui's daughter, so of course we're siblings, hahaha..." Zhang Cong said awkwardly.

"Stop trying to claim to be my relative. Doesn't your leg hurt enough?" Qiao Mei said.

"..." At this point, Zhang Cong did not dare to talk to Qiao Mei anymore. It had not been easy for him to recover from his leg injury and he was going to get married in a few days. It would be a joke if he were to get married with a limp and a bruised face.

Zhang Cong looked at Li Gui with a smug expression. He had to extort some money from Li Gui today so that his wedding would be taken care of. This would also prevent that old thing, Zhang Qian, from being so concerned about the family having money for him to get married. He was already marrying his third wife and he still wanted to buy wedding items. How shameless.

“Isn’t Cong Cong getting married soon, so we are here to buy a red blanket. You should express some form of concern for him since he is getting married,” Old Madam Zhang said as she looked at Li Gui.

“Zhang Cong is getting married? Who’s so unlucky to marry him?” Qiao Mei said mockingly.

“You! What are you saying! Little girl! Don’t interrupt when adults are talking! You ill-bred thing! I wonder who brought you up!” Old Madam Zhang scolded.

Last time, I was outsmarted by this little girl. Now we are in the county city and there is no one around Qiao Mei to speak up for her. There is nothing a little girl could do and this time, I am going to teach her a good lesson.

Qiao Mei had been brought up by her grandfather since young. She did not get angry when she heard Old Madam Zhang pass comments about her, but if her grandfather was being bad-mouthed, then no one could blame her for showing no mercy.

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“Should you be considered as an elder? A filthy mouth cannot utter decent language. The last time, you came to our village to extort money, and now, how do you intend to extort money this time?” Qiao Mei crossed her arms and looked at Old Madam Zhang.

The shopkeeper also did not know what to do as he did not know what kind of grudges these people had. It was fine if they just quarreled, but if they got into a fight, his shop would be trashed. However, he had been listening to their conversation out of curiosity and he found it really funny that a city dweller had gone to extort money from a villager. If word got out, people would laugh their heads off.

Seeing the shopkeeper snickering behind the counter, Old Madam Zhang's face turned red with anger. Not to be outdone, she said, "Who's extorting money! Which eye of yours saw me extorting money! That's the food expenses your mother paid us back for her children! What do you mean we extorted money!"

"That's right! The money you gave us last time! It's short by 80 dollars!" Zhang Cong said from the side.

"You guys are really good at lying through your teeth. I gave you all 100-dollar bills, a total of six notes. Everyone in the village saw it clearly. How can it be short by 80 dollars?" Qiao Mei smiled at Zhang Cong.

Zhang Cong was lost for words for a moment. Old Madam Zhang glared at Zhang Cong angrily. He did not even know how to round up the figure. It looked like they would not be able to get this sum of money from Qiao Mei in the future.

"Li Gui, you should control your daughter. She has such a sharp tongue. How can she talk to me like that?" Old Madam Zhang vented her anger on Li Gui, who did not dare to retort.

Looking at how timid Li Gui was, Qiao Mei did not know how to advise Li Gui. She was going to leave in a few days. If the Li family or the Zhang family came around during her absence, she wondered how Li Gui and the children would be able to deal with it. Yet, she could not possibly help Li Gui to solve these problems for the rest of her life.

Qiao Mei fell into deep thought.

"Back... back then we already gave you all the money. You can't deny it. It's 600 dollars," Li Gui said shakily.

"The 600 dollars are for the four children's food expenses. Shouldn't you contribute some money for Zhang Cong's wedding?" Old Madam Zhang looked at Li Gui arrogantly.

"This... I don't have any money to give him anymore. I've already given you all my money. I still owe other people money that I haven't repaid," Li Gui said.

“Owe money? You’re the one who owes money, not the Zhang family, so make sure you pay it back yourself. You have to contribute some money for Zhang Cong’s wedding, so go borrow some more,” Old Madam Zhang said.

Chapter 155: Resistance

“I don’t have any money left. No one wants to lend me any money,” Li Gui said.

“Who are you trying to fool? Who doesn’t know that your eldest daughter, Qiao Mei, is very swank and that her groom gave her 2,000 dollars for the betrothal gift and ‘three turns and one sound’. I think his salary should be quite high. You should borrow money from your eldest daughter.” Old Madam Zhang glanced at Qiao Mei.

“So this is a scheme to get to me,” Qiao Mei thought.

However, how did Old Madam Zhang know about the betrothal gift? Everyone in the village knew about Qiao Mei and the Zhang family and many people had helped chase the Zhang family away, so who could have told Old Madam Zhang about this?

Qiao Mei thought hard about it and finally remembered that back then, the people who saw the betrothal gift of 2,000 dollars were Qiao Yu, as well as Liu Ying and Wang Qin, Qiao Zhuang’s eldest and second daughters-in-law. Back then, they were the ones who spread the news about the betrothal gift in the village. However, Liu Ying and Wang Qin would not go around gossiping with outsiders. Although they hated Qiao Mei, Zhang Cong had wanted to report the people in the village for being capitalists when he was at the village, so they also hated Zhang Cong.

In that case, the only person who could go around saying things was Qiao Yu. A few days ago, she had just sneaked into their house to eat all their food, and now she was causing this kind of trouble for her. How capable.

Qiao Mei made a mental note of this matter, she would settle the score in the future.

“Oh, that bit of money. Didn’t you find out that the money had all been used to buy meat and already all used up by me back then. What can 2,000 dollars do!” Qiao Mei said laughingly.

Old Madam Zhang had previously heard from Old Madam Li that Qiao Mei was fat and tanned and that her grandfather's monthly salary of 50 dollars was not even enough for her to spend. She had also used so many food stamps by herself. It was indeed possible that the 2,000 dollars was really gone.

"What an extravagant girl! That's 2,000 dollars! You spent it just like that! What a wasteful girl!" Old Madam Zhang stomped her feet in anger, as if the 2,000 dollars belonged to her family.

"That's my money and I can spend it however I want. Since you are so nosy about my business, shouldn't you give me some money too? Let's start with my mother marrying into your family. My mother has worked for so many years and all her money has fallen into your hands. Zhang Cong must have spent quite a bit of that, so you also have to give me some money. Not much, how about 300 dollars for 10 years," Qiao Mei sat down and quoted an amount as she looked at Old Madam Zhang.

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Before Old Madam Zhang could speak, Qiao Mei continued, "By the way, shouldn't you give me some money for my wedding as well? All in all, give me 600 dollars, no more and no less. How about that?"

"You! You! Pfft! You shameless person! Why should we give you 600 dollars!" Old Madam Zhang pointed at Qiao Mei and scolded angrily.

"Then why should my mother give Zhang Cong money to get married! I think you're just out to extort money!" Qiao Mei said without backing down.

Old Madam Zhang did not know how to answer her. Zhang Cong was the child that Zhang Qian had with his ex-wife, and Qiao Mei was the child that Li Gui had with her ex-husband. Logically speaking, it was the same scenario. If Li Gui needed to give Zhang Cong money for his wedding, then they would have to give Qiao Mei money for her wedding. This would be a huge loss to them.

"You're just a girl, why do you need money! A married daughter is like spilled water! You still have the cheek to ask our family for money! You haven't even given us your betrothal gift, so why should we give you money?" Zhang Cong, who had been keeping quiet at one side, suddenly spoke up.

Old Madam Zhang looked at Zhang Cong and smiled in satisfaction. It seemed that he was still not too silly and what he said made sense. Let's see what Qiao Mei has to say now.

"We've never raised Qiao Mei either. Let's just forget about this matter. It has nothing to do with your Zhang family so don't get Qiao Mei involved. I really don't have money for Zhang Cong's wedding," Li Gui looked at Old Madam Zhang and said firmly.

The usually quiet Li Gui even dared to talk back to her now. Old Madam Zhang was so angry that she raised her hand to slap Li Gui and Li Gui reached out and grabbed her arm. Li Gui had thought it through and decided that she could not be a burden to Qiao Mei anymore. Even if she got beaten up, she would not let Qiao Mei suffer!

"You! You've really gone overboard! So independent since leaving our Zhang family! So you think you have someone backing you up! How great!" Old Madam Zhang looked at Li Gui with hatred.

Chapter 156: Bargaining

Qiao Yu stood outside and watched in fascination as more and more people gathered at the door. If this continued, someone would soon come to investigate the commotion. Zhang Cong held on to Old Madam Zhang and said softly, "Grandma, there are too many people here. In a while, more people will come. If this gets out of hand, then it's all over."

Old Madam Zhang looked at the increasing number of people at the door. It appeared that she would not be able to get any money today, so she picked up a piece of cloth and threw it at Li Gui.

"Just you wait! This isn't over! I'll get my son to deal with you!" Old Madam Zhang glared fiercely at Li Gui and Qiao Mei before leaving quickly with Zhang Cong.

"What are you looking at! Get lost!" Old Madam Zhang shouted at the crowd at the door.

She pushed her way through the crowd and left quickly.

"What kind of person..."

“That’s right, why are you scolding people? No manners!”

A few people in the crowd muttered unhappily. Qiao Mei then saw a familiar figure in the crowd who was dressed in unfashionable clothes and looked disheveled, and did not look like she was from the city. Wasn’t this Qiao Yu? Why was she here?

Qiao Mei wanted to go forward to take a closer look. Li Gui thought that Qiao Mei wanted to chase after Old Madam Zhang, so she immediately stopped Qiao Mei and said, “Mei Mei, forget it. Don’t look for them. Don’t be angry. Your health is more important, so let’s forget about it.”

“Mom, I’m not angry, but what if they come looking for trouble again?” Qiao Mei looked at Li Gui and said.

Li Gui smiled at Qiao Mei and said, “It’s fine, Mei Mei. Look at me, I have nothing left. They won’t be able to get anything. Besides, even if they go to the village to cause trouble, didn’t you tell me to look for Zhao Liang, and we also have militia in the village. It’s fine. They won’t dare to do anything to me.”

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Qiao Mei knew that Li Gui put on a smile to comfort her. She decided to go to the brigade to speak with Uncle Zhao before she headed out in two days’ time and to ask him to help out more with her family. This situation could not go on forever.

“Alright, then be it. Take care of yourself,” Qiao Mei said.

“Aye, alright.” Li Gui nodded.

The shopkeeper, who had been silent all this while, spoke up at this moment, “Are you... still buying fabric as that person from just now had dirtied my fabric. You guys have to be responsible for this.”

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Qiao Mei looked at the fabric on the ground. The color looked alright to her. It was dark blue and she could make clothes and cloth bags for the children. It just needed to be washed.

“We’re not the ones who dirtied this. You can go to whoever dirtied it.” Although Qiao Mei said that, she was thinking about bargaining on the price. He definitely would not be able to sell this dirty fabric, and even if he went to the police station to make a report, there would not be any outcome. If she put on an act, she would be able to get this piece of fabric at a lower price.

“But you know them! They all ran away! You have to take responsibility! I’ll look for you!” The shopkeeper immediately panicked when he heard that Qiao Mei did not want to take responsibility.

“You definitely won’t be able to sell this fabric. But we’re not the ones who dirtied it. How about you offer to sell me the fabric at a cheaper price and I’ll take it. If you don’t agree, you can go to the police station.” Qiao Mei picked up the fabric from the ground and showed it to the shopkeeper.

The shopkeeper was also wondering if he should quote them the original price or to give them a discount. These were all goods that were clearly priced and had to be exchanged with cloth coupons. It would be difficult to account for it if he had a shortfall of cloth coupons.

“I know you’re in a difficult position too. How about I give you the coupons, but you don’t charge me any money. How about that?” Qiao Mei looked at the shopkeeper and said.

The shopkeeper thought about it and said, “Alright, let’s do it. Then I don’t have to go to the police station.”

Qiao Mei was overjoyed. She did not expect her bargaining to be so effective. It turned out that the method from her other life was still useful now. Her favorite thing to do was to bargain and get a good deal.

Li Gui looked at Qiao Mei with admiration. She did not know that it was possible to bargain at the shops.

“And those two blue-colored fabrics, I want them all,” Qiao Mei said.

The shopkeeper packed up everything and handed it to Qiao Mei. Li Gui reached out to grab it and said, "Let me take it."

Qiao Mei did not refuse her help.

"Alright, let's go home and cook something delicious for the children!" Qiao Mei said happily.

Seeing Qiao Mei and Li Gui coming out of the shop, Qiao Yu also left quietly. This time, she did not manage to let Qiao Mei suffer a loss, but it did not matter. There would still be other chances.

Chapter 157: Speculation

By the time Qiao Mei reached home, it was already dusk. Qiao Qiang was waiting anxiously at home and kept going to the entrance of the courtyard to look around. Logically speaking, if they had gone to the county city in the morning, they should be back by noon. He wondered why there was still no sign of them.

"Why hasn't Mei Mei returned after so long, sigh, seriously." Qiao Qiang paced around the courtyard anxiously.

The children watched Qiao Qiang but they did not know what was going on. The young Zhang Miao asked, "Grandpa, why do you keep going round in circles?"

Qiao Qiang smiled and said, "I'm not going round in circles. I'm just anxious. Your elder sister Mei Mei isn't back yet."

"Grandfather, don't worry. My mother also went with elder sister Qiao Mei so everything should be fine," Zhang Wei said.

Ever since Zhang Wei came to the village, his temper and personality had changed a lot. At first, he only knew how to say bad things about Li Gui, complained about others and he did not take care of his siblings. Now, he would help others in the village and even took good care of his siblings like the big brother he was.

Not long after, Li Gui returned with Qiao Mei on the bicycle.

“Grandfather! I’m back!” Qiao Mei shouted happily into the courtyard.

Qiao Qiang finally felt relieved. He smiled at Qiao Mei and said, “Come and eat. The food’s ready and I’m just waiting for you to come back for dinner.”

Zhang Wei secretly ran to Qiao Mei’s side and whispered, “Elder sister Qiao Mei, you don’t know this, but grandpa was so anxious to see that you were not back and he walked around the courtyard for the entire afternoon.”

Qiao Mei smiled. She knew that her grandfather doted on her the most. If it were not for Old Madam Zhang and the others causing trouble and taking up so much of their time, they would not have returned only now, making her grandfather wait for them to come back and eat.

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The whole family finished their meal happily. Qiao Mei sat in the courtyard and started to think about the extent of Qiao Yu’s involvement in the matter today. She stared out the door steadfastly and did not even notice Qiao Qiang appearing behind her.

“What are you thinking about?” Qiao Qiang took a small stool and sat beside Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei told Qiao Qiang everything that had happened today in detail. She also told him about how Qiao Yu had been freeloading at Li Gui’s house for two days. When Qiao Mei finished, she lowered her head and pondered for a long while.

“Grandfather, do you think Qiao Yu was involved in what happened today?” Qiao Mei asked.

“I think we should pretend that nothing happened, but we have to be on guard,” Qiao Qiang said as he looked at Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei looked at Qiao Qiang, not understanding what he meant. Qiao Qiang continued, "You don't have enough evidence to say that Qiao Yu told the Zhang family all these things, so you can't accuse her wrongly. We have to be careful and not just take what they say at face value. But we still have to guard against Qiao Yu. She doesn't have much ability, but it will still be troublesome if she creates any problems."

"Grandfather is right. I'm leaving in two days. What if Qiao Yu comes to find trouble with you." Qiao Mei looked at Qiao Qiang worriedly.

"Hahahahaha, I'm afraid that Mei Mei has forgotten that grandpa used to be a soldier. Grandpa is old, but he can still deal with a little girl. Besides, she won't dare to find trouble with me," Qiao Qiang said.

"Yes, that's right. Grandfather is so capable, she definitely won't dare to come here." Qiao Mei felt assured that Qiao Qiang was safe at home. She was more worried about Li Gui. Not only was Qiao Yu looking for trouble there, but the Zhang and Li families might also go there to ask for money.

Qiao Mei told Qiao Qiang in the evening that she was going out for a walk after dinner when in fact, she was going to the brigade to look for Zhao Liang.

"Uncle Zhao! Is Uncle Zhao here!" Qiao Mei asked.

"Aye! Who is it!" Zhao Liang shouted from inside the house.

"It's me, Uncle Zhao. It's Qiao Mei. I'm here regarding something." Qiao Mei entered and saw Zhao Liang dealing with the village matters.

The brigade was basically in charge of everything and the team leader had to be aware of all the matters in the village. The team leader also had to mediate any disputes that happened in the village. Basically, as long as it was not an issue of life and death, the villagers could consult the team leader about anything.

"Qiao Mei, what's wrong? Did something happen in your family?" Zhao Liang asked.

“Uncle, I’m leaving next week to go to the capital to look for my husband. Please take care of my grandfather during this period.” Qiao Mei had brought along two watermelons from her house for Zhao Liang.

Chapter 158: Chance Encounter

Qiao Mei placed the watermelons on Zhao Liang’s table and said, “Uncle, take these two watermelons to quench your thirst in the summer.”

“Oh, no, no! It’s my duty to help the people in the village. Qiao Mei, quickly take it back.” Zhao Liang pushed away the watermelons that Qiao Mei gave.

“Uncle! It’s not specially for you. The last time, didn’t auntie say that she liked the watermelons from my house and that she thought they were sweet. Please take it that I have brought them for auntie and accept them,” Qiao Mei said.

When he heard that the watermelons were for his wife, he felt that he had no reason to reject them. Zhao Liang took the watermelons and placed them under the table. “Then I thank you on behalf of your auntie.”

“Uncle Zhao, don’t stand on ceremony with me. By the way, I need your help with something,” Qiao Mei said.

Zhao Liang patted his chest and said, “Then why are you standing on ceremony with me? If there’s anything you need, just say it and I’ll help you with it.”

“It’s just that after I leave, there’ll be no one to take care of my mother given that my grandfather is old. Today, I went to the county city to buy something and ran into my mother’s current mother-in-law and stepson. They tried to find trouble with my mother but at least I was around today. When I’m not around, they might bully her and extort money from her. Uncle, can you keep an eye on my mother and also not let those people enter the village,” Qiao Mei asked.

“What a thing to happen! They’re really too much! They’ve really gone overboard!” Zhao Liang banged the table and scolded.

“Uncle, don’t be angry.” Qiao Mei quickly stopped Zhao Liang.

“Don’t worry, Qiao Mei. Your mother is from our village after all. Since she’s from our village, Uncle will take care of her. Don’t worry,” Zhao Liang promised Qiao Mei.

“Aye! Thank you, Uncle! Then I’m so relieved. Uncle, I’ll be leaving now. My grandfather is still waiting for me at home.” Qiao Mei smiled brightly upon knowing that Zhao Liang had agreed to her request and slowly walked towards the door to leave.

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“Alright, go back slowly and give my regards to your grandfather. Don’t worry, I’ll definitely help you with what you told me.” Zhao Liang stood at the door of the house and looked at Qiao Mei.

“Yes, then I’ll be leaving, Uncle!” Qiao Mei waved goodbye to Zhao Liang.

The brigade office was located at the left corner of the village entrance and was not very far away. As soon as Qiao Mei came out, she bumped into Qiao Yu, who was returning to the village. Usually, Qiao Mei would pretend not to see her and just walk away. However, it was such a coincidence today that she just caught a glimpse of a figure that looked like Qiao Yu in the county city and now, Qiao Yu was returning from outside the village the same night.

Qiao Yu also saw Qiao Mei and lowered her head to run away, but Qiao Mei blocked her way.

“Qiao Yu, why are you back so late? Did you go to the county city?” Qiao Mei asked.

“No, I just... I just came back from work.” Qiao Yu lied awkwardly, wondering what excuse she could use to make Qiao Mei let her go.

Qiao Mei smiled and did not say anything. She just turned around and left. Those who went to work would not return at this hour, they would have come back long ago. It was obvious that Qiao Yu had gone out of the village and did not go to work. On the way back, Qiao Mei went to Auntie Dong’s house

for a chat. Coincidentally, Auntie Wang was also there today, which made it a much more interesting day.

“Qiao Mei, you’re here!” Auntie Dong welcomed Qiao Mei warmly and set up a stool for her.

“Auntie Dong, Auntie Wang, good to see that you’re free today. You’re both here.” Qiao Mei did not stand on ceremony and sat on the stool to chat with them.

“Sigh, now that you mention it. The rainy season has just passed and the mushrooms in the mountains have long been emptied. Also, the children from your family are really tireless. Zhang Wei brings his brothers and sisters to the mountains to pick vegetables every day. He’s such a sensible boy,” Auntie Dong praised.

“You don’t say! Zhang Wei and the rest of the kids are really sensible. If my child is half as sensible as Zhang Wei, life would be much easier for me.” Auntie Wang sighed.

“I think the children are too bored. I told them that there’s always things to eat in the mountains and they’ve never seen it in the city. They’re at the age when they’re curious, which is why they go up the mountain every day. They’re not as good as you say,” Qiao Mei said humbly.

Chapter 159: Spreading Rumors

Qiao Mei did not expect that even though no one had watched over the children these few days, everyone’s impression of them had improved a lot and most people said that they were sensible and capable.

On the surface, Qiao Mei said that this was a small matter and that everyone’s children were the same, but in reality, she was overjoyed. There was no one who did not like to hear others praise their siblings.

“Sigh, aunties, I’m really unlucky today,” Qiao Mei said with a sigh.

“What’s wrong with you, what happened?” Auntie Wang said.

“That’s right, don’t worry. We all have a lot of experience in life. Tell us about it and we’ll give you some advice. As the saying goes, two heads are better than one!” Auntie Dong said.

“Hahahahaha! You sound quite cultured saying that!” Auntie Wang laughed loudly.

“Shoo, shoo, shoo. Let’s get down to business,” Auntie Dong said.

Qiao Mei pretended to be worried and thought for a while before saying, “Aunties, the weather has been hot recently and I don’t go out much, so I haven’t been to my mother’s house for a while. In the end, for some reason, Qiao Yu refused to leave my mother’s house and ate all the food that my mother had. Even when she couldn’t finish it, she took it all away. She cried and made a fuss and said that she would die in our house if we didn’t give it to her.”

“What a thing to happen!” Auntie Wang said in surprise.

“Why is she so shameless! Previously, she came to our house to freeload on food and drinks and I beat her up with a big stick and chased her out,” Auntie Dong said.

“Sigh, what can I do since it wasn’t easy for me to chase her away. She has been quiet recently but I went to the county city to buy things today and ran into people from the family of my mother’s current husband. They came to extort money from us again, and even said that Qiao Yu told them that my husband gave me a lot of betrothal gifts when I got married. Therefore, they came to demand money from me.” Qiao Mei looked at the two aunties’ expressions and then she pretended to cry.

When the two women saw Qiao Mei like this, they were furious. They spoke about wanting to settle the score with Qiao Yu and avenge Qiao Mei.

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“Oh! Aunties, don’t go! I’ve already dealt with them. I don’t think they’ll come looking for trouble during this period of time.” Qiao Mei stopped the two women.

“Don’t worry about this and leave it to us. You’re currently pregnant and if you continue to be concerned about these things, you’ll really be exhausted.” Auntie Dong looked at Qiao Mei caringly.

“That’s right, Qiao Mei. You’ve been so good to your mother. You have to take care of yourself. Don’t tire yourself out, you know?” Auntie Wang said with concern.

Qiao Mei nodded obediently and said, “Okay, I’ll listen to aunties. By the way, aunties, what about the sale of your bean sprouts recently.”

The two women were all smiles. Auntie Dong said excitedly to Qiao Mei, “I don’t know why, but the feng shui at my house has been good recently. I still go to the mountains to get the water for growing the bean sprouts and the harvest is not bad recently. The supply and marketing cooperative has taken a lot from me!”

“It’s the same for our family. Ever since I heard what your Auntie Dong said, I’ve tried it too. The effect is really good,” Auntie Wang also told Qiao Mei in a low voice, afraid that others would hear what she said. If others learned from them, she would not be able to sell hers anymore.

In actual fact, the two women’s bean sprouts had been selling well recently because Qiao Mei had been secretly helping them. When she came down the mountain every day and stood in her courtyard, she could sense the fruits and vegetables inside the two women’s houses and secretly gave them some energy. Fortunately, the two women lived near Qiao Mei’s house. Her recent energy exchanges with the wild ginseng had increased the range of her perception by two kilometers.

“That’s good, that’s good. Aunties, I’ll go back then. It’s getting quite late.” Qiao Mei got up to leave.

“Alright, go back slowly. Don’t remain angry,” Auntie Dong said.

“Yes, I’ll remember that, aunties. I’m going off!” Qiao Mei said and left the courtyard.

The news that she told Auntie Dong and Auntie Wang quickly spread throughout the village. It spread like wildfire and everyone knew that Qiao Yu was now going from house to house asking for vegetables. If people did not give it to her, she would throw a tantrum and refuse to leave. As the news spread, it became more and more ridiculous. Some people even said that it was Qiao Zhuang who beat and

scolded Qiao Yu to make her come out and do all that. Of course, Qiao Mei also contributed to these stories.

Chapter 160: Retribution Time

The rumors spread around in the village and reached Qiao Zhuang's ears very quickly. The version that Qiao Zhuang heard was even more ridiculous. The story was that Qiao Zhuang had threatened Qiao Yu to go from house to house to beg for food and even when she got the food, he still abused her. As soon as this story came out, Zhao Liang brought a group of militiamen to Qiao Zhuang's house to look for him.

"Is Qiao Zhuang here!" Zhao Liang shouted from the door.

"Who is it! What's the matter!" Qiao Zhuang came out of the house, and even though he saw that Zhao Liang had brought so many militiamen with him, he was not afraid at all. After all, he had been a bully in this village for most of his life and everyone knew what he was capable of.

"Do you know about the rumors flying around in the village recently?" Zhao Liang did not beat around the bush and went straight to the point.

"In the village? What did people say?" Qiao Zhuang looked puzzled.

"Oh, you still don't know. They said that you, Qiao Zhuang, abused Qiao Yu and beat her up and asked her to go from house to house to ask for food, and told her to cause trouble in other people's houses if she couldn't get the food. Many villagers have already confirmed that Qiao Yu has done this at many houses," Zhao Liang said.

Qiao Zhuang was furious when he heard this. He smashed the hoe beside him and said, "Which bastard is lying! When have I ever done this!"

Zhao Liang did not want to waste any more time with him since the purpose of the visit was to inform him of the issue. There was nothing beneficial about continuing with the conversation given that it may lead to trouble.

"Qiao Zhuang, please handle your own family matters. Don't let such rumors spread in the village anymore." After saying that, Zhao Liang left with the militiamen.

Qiao Zhuang picked up a stick in the courtyard angrily and went into the house to look for Qiao Yu. All the people in the house were so frightened that they quickly hid from him. The eldest son, Qiao Fu, hurriedly stopped Qiao Zhuang and said, "Father, what's wrong with you, why are you so angry?"

Qiao Zhuang threw the stick down and said furiously, "Go! Find that asshole Qiao Yu for me! How dare she go out and spread rumors! How dare she go out and embarrass me!"

When Liu Ying and Jiang Ye heard this, they quickly ran out to look for Qiao Yu. Wang Qin had a very high status in the family and was about to get up to look for Qiao Yu when Qiao Zhuang stopped her.

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"You're the accountant of the village brigade. How can you not know when even Zhao Liang knows about this matter?" Qiao Zhuang narrowed his eyes and looked at Wang Qin.

Wang Qin got so frightened that her legs went weak. She sat down near the fireplace and stammered but no words came out.

"Speak up! Are you mute!" Qiao Zhuang picked up the stick from the ground and struck it against the ground.

Wang Qin was so afraid that she kept trembling and sputtered, "I... I've been going there early recently... and coming back early. I really didn't hear about what happened in the village..."

Qiao Gui tried to allay Wang Qin's fear by saying, "Father, what my wife said is true. She really hasn't been to the brigade much recently. I don't even know about this matter."

Qiao Zhuang's wife stayed at the side and kept quiet. Qiao Zhuang looked at the family and felt that he had nowhere to vent his anger, so he pointed at his wife and said, "You've raised such a good daughter! She's been spreading nonsense outside! Where are the things she got from others! She says she goes out every day to beg for food! So where are the things!"

Qiao Zhuang pointed at his sons and daughters-in-law and asked them. No one knew what Qiao Yu had brought back. The fourth daughter-in-law said softly, "I... I saw Qiao Yu leave the village yesterday... I don't know where she went..."

"Left the village? How could she leave the village? She didn't go to work and went out of the village instead?" Qiao Zhuang frowned and looked at his fourth daughter-in-law.

"!! I'm telling the truth! I saw it with my own eyes! But I don't know where she went!" The fourth daughter-in-law quickly waved her hands. She was afraid that Qiao Zhuang would think that she was in cahoots with Qiao Yu and that he would think that she was lying.

Qiao put down the stick in his hand angrily and sat near the fireplace. He said to his fourth daughter-in-law, "Alright, I hear you. Go get me some water."

The fourth daughter-in-law hurriedly left the fireplace and went to pour water for him. The sons all sat in the house and did not dare to make any sound. The house was quiet as they waited for the eldest daughter-in-law, Liu Ying, and the third daughter-in-law, Jiang Ye, to find Qiao Yu to come back and clarify the matter so that they would not be implicated.

Qiao Zhuang thought about what Zhao Liang had said and planned how to deal with that wretched girl Qiao Yu.