

Fat Wife 191

Chapter 191: Loss of Water Resources

“Ah, sister-in-law is here,” the cookhouse squad leader said.

“Sister-in-law, it’s nothing. It’s just a small matter,” said a soldier from the cookhouse.

A small matter? If it was a small matter, was there a need for so many people to gather around and look so bitter? It was obvious that they were lying.

“Tell me what’s wrong. I’ll help you think of a way to resolve it.” Qiao Mei took a small stool and sat down to hear them out.

Everyone looked around at one another and finally decided to tell Qiao Mei about the issue.

“Sister-in-law, don’t tell our Commander Xia about this. This matter is indeed quite strange...” the cookhouse squad leader stammered.

Qiao Mei nodded and said, “Alright, tell me what kind of problem you’ve encountered?”

“It’s like this, sister-in-law. Our water storage tanks are actually not quite big enough to contain the amount of water needed for our military purposes. Last night, when we went to check on the water storage tanks, they were still fine. There was enough water then, but now, more than half the amount of water in the tanks had disappeared. I’m afraid that after everyone used up the water tonight, there won’t be enough to prepare meals for everyone tomorrow,” said the cookhouse squad leader.

“How can that be? Are there leaks in the water tanks?” Qiao Mei asked.

Qiao Mei had seen the water storage tanks at the camp. All of them were very big and sturdy, but a few were made of solid wood, so it was inevitable that there would be some leaks.

"It's true but there are no water stains on the ground and the water has just disappeared. We have rules to follow when we need to get water. We can't just take it as and when we like. I don't know why there's so much less water all of a sudden," the cookhouse squad leader said in frustration.

The more Qiao Mei thought about it, the more she felt that something was wrong. She had only just washed her clothes today and then there was already water missing at the camp, for which no one could find any reason.

"Then do you have any clues?" Qiao Mei asked.

"No, we don't know where to start. Can it be that someone secretly stole water from the tank?" a soldier from the cookhouse said.

"Why don't we talk to Deputy Commander Zheng?" the cookhouse deputy squad leader looked at the squad leader and asked.

Zheng Yuan again? Could this matter have anything to do with her?

"Why don't you look for Xia Zhe about this?" Qiao Mei felt puzzled and asked.

"Sister-in-law, you probably don't know this. Matters regarding the logistics troops are all under the care of Deputy Commander Zheng. It's like if there are any problems with the military troops, they have to talk to Commander Xia," the cookhouse squad leader explained.

Qiao Mei lowered her head and pondered. Today, she had encountered one incident after another, and all of them had to be with her. Also, this person called Zheng Yuan was involved in all the incidents. Was it a coincidence or was this person targeting her?

However, what good would it do to target her, unless it was because this person wanted to vent her anger?

There was silence all around again and everyone did not know what to say.

“What if you can make up for the missing water?” Qiao Mei said.

The soldiers looked at one another and felt that this idea was not very feasible.

“Sister-in-law, we’ve already checked this whole area and there’s no water source. That’s why there’s not enough water despite the water storage tanks. Otherwise, we would have gone to collect water every day,” said the cookhouse squad leader.

“That’s right. If we report this matter, there’s a high chance that we’ll be punished. Punishment is a small matter, but if there’s no food for the soldiers tomorrow, what are we going to do!” the cookhouse deputy squad leader said as he slapped his thigh angrily.

Everyone lowered their heads and blamed themselves. It was the cookhouse squad’s failure to patrol the area properly that caused such a serious matter to happen. They could not let the cookhouse squad leader take the blame for this matter alone.

“Squad leader! It’s my fault for not being thorough when I did the night patrol! It’s my fault! I’ll go and talk to Deputy Commander Zheng!” a young soldier from the cookhouse stood up and said.

This young soldier was one of the squad leader’s trainees and felt strongly for the squad leader. If needed, he would go through hell and high water for the squad leader. The squad leader had done a lot for him in the past and he felt that it was his responsibility to help the squad leader in this matter.

“Sit down! How can a young boy like you fight to take on such a matter? Do you think it’s a good thing to do? Don’t cause trouble for me!” the cookhouse squad leader said sternly.

“But!”

“Sit down! Follow orders!”

The young soldier wanted to retort, but he still decided to obey the squad leader’s orders.

Qiao Mei watched the interaction between the two of them and was deeply moved by the relationship between these brothers-in-arms.

Chapter 192: Preparing for Work

In her other life, when she was a lawyer, she was surrounded by people who schemed against one another. The cases she worked on were all about cold-blooded and heartless people who would not yield an inch and would even fight over small matters.

Now that she witnessed such friendship between comrades helping each other, she was both touched and envious.

“Why does it sound as if we have to offer a human sacrifice if there is no water? I know where there’s water nearby,” Qiao Mei said.

“Sister-in-law, are you trying to bluff us, how can there be water nearby?” asked the cookhouse deputy squad leader.

Everyone else also looked at Qiao Mei expectantly. Was it possible that Qiao Mei had really discovered a water source that they had not been able to find?

“It’s about five kilometers over that side. There’s a small stream over there. The water flow isn’t very strong, but there should still be enough water for everyone,” Qiao Mei said as she pointed in that direction.

A new hope was ignited in everyone’s hearts. With water, they would be able to cook for the soldiers and there would also be certainty in having enough water for the entire camp’s use!

Everyone was so happy that most of them were lost for words and a few of them even cheered loudly.

“Sister-in-law, is that water really usable?” the cookhouse squad leader asked Qiao Mei repeatedly.

After all, he was the squad leader of the cookhouse. If anything should happen, he would definitely need to take responsibility for it. He had no issue with having to be responsible, but he just did not want everyone to get all happy for nothing.

“It’s true. I saw it when I went there today,” Qiao Mei said.

“Eh? Sister-in-law, what were you doing there? We have rules here, you can’t leave the camp without reporting your movements,” a young soldier asked ignorantly.

The cookhouse deputy squad leader hurriedly gave the young soldier a kick.

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“What are you talking about, did sister-in-law go out whenever she wants?” the cookhouse deputy squad leader said quickly.

Only then did Qiao Mei understand why Zheng Yuan had stopped her, as well as why the water had gone missing from the tanks. Moreover, Zheng Yuan had gone around in the afternoon saying that she had suffered serious injuries to her waist. It turned out that all these things were targeted at her.

Qiao Mei remained silent as she thought about the trap that Zheng Yuan had set for her. The soldiers around her all felt as if they had said something wrong. Qiao Mei had clearly helped them solve the problem, yet they were only hung up about Qiao Mei leaving the camp on her own accord.

“It’s fine. I don’t know much about military rules. It’s just that I heard from a young soldier that there’s not much water left in the water storage tanks, so I just wanted to see if I can help everyone,” Qiao Mei said with a smile.

When everyone heard what Qiao Mei said, they were too embarrassed to talk further about the fact that Qiao Mei had violated military rules. After all, she was not a soldier in the army, not to mention that she had done what she did for the sake of the soldiers having enough water. They felt bad for treating her in this manner.

“Don’t worry, everyone. When the time comes, I’ll look for the person in charge to reflect on my mistakes. But for now, we still have to hurry up and replenish the water supply. Otherwise, everyone won’t have food tomorrow,” Qiao Mei said.

“That’s right! Let’s go get the water first!” said the cookhouse squad leader.

Everyone spontaneously went around looking for vessels that could hold water. Just these few people from the cookhouse would not be able to fill up the water tanks even if they worked through the entire night. Qiao Mei wanted to talk to Xia Zhe and get help from the teams under the charge of Zhang Yong, Zhao Wu and Zhuang Hua.

“I’ll go look for Zhang Yong and the rest to help. We don’t have enough people here right now,” Qiao Mei said to the cookhouse squad leader.

“Sister-in-law! This won’t do! There are rules to follow. We can’t just casually assign people to do things. We must follow the rules. There’s enough people among us, really!” said the cookhouse squad leader as he hurriedly stopped Qiao Mei.

“That’s right, sister-in-law. We have all undergone training and five kilometers is a piece of cake for us. Don’t worry, it’s fine that there’s just the few of us!” said a young soldier from the cookhouse.

Seeing that they were all so insistent, Qiao Mei gave up on the idea of asking others for help. She still had to bring the team to the water source in the distance.

Everyone quietly looked around for tools that could be used to hold water. It so happened that Zheng Yuan came out to take a look at night and ran into a young soldier. When the young soldier saw Zheng Yuan, he turned around and ran.

“You! Stop right there!” Zheng Yuan pointed at the young soldier and said.

The young soldier was so frightened that he did not dare to move and even dropped the basin in his hand. Trembling with fear, he stood still and waited for Zheng Yuan to walk over step by step.

Zheng Yuan walked up to the young soldier and sized him up.

Chapter 193: Holding Someone Accountable

“What are you doing, being so sneaky!” Zheng Yuan said.

“Report! I... I didn’t... didn’t do anything!” the young soldier stammered in reply.

Zheng Yuan snatched the basin from the young soldier’s hands and he tried to reach out to take it back.

“Stand properly!” Zheng Yuan said sternly.

The young soldier could only stand at attention and wait for Zheng Yuan to question him.

“Tell me where exactly you’re going! What you’re doing! What you’re trying to achieve!” Zheng Yuan asked.

“Report! I can’t say anything!” The young soldier held back the facts and did not want to leak any details about this matter.

Zheng Yuan looked at the young soldier’s uniform, then at his posture and noted the smell on his body. Given that she was in charge of the logistics team and the medics, she generally knew most of the staff. Even if she did not know them personally, she knew them by face.

“You’re... from the cookhouse, right?” Zheng Yuan asked.

“Report! I can’t say anything!” The young soldier gritted his teeth and refused to say anything.

Zheng Yuan was so angry that she threw the basin down and walked off. Before she left, she said to the young soldier, “You! Follow me!”

“Yes!” The young soldier picked up the basin from the side and followed behind Zheng Yuan dejectedly.

The cookhouse staff had all gathered by now. When they took attendance, they realized that there was one person missing. No matter how they counted, the number did not seem right.

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“That’s not right. Why is there one person missing?” The cookhouse squad leader looked at the team in puzzlement.

“What’s wrong?” Qiao Mei asked when she saw that the cookhouse team had not set off yet.

“One person is missing and he’s not back yet,” the cookhouse squad leader said anxiously.

Qiao Mei counted carefully. There was indeed one person missing, but it did require some time to find the relevant tools. It was possible that the person was just running late.

“Let’s wait a little longer. Maybe he found something really suitable that can store a lot of water?” Qiao Mei comforted the cookhouse squad leader.

“He didn’t find anything good, but does it count if he accidentally found me?” Zheng Yuan’s voice came from behind Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei turned around and saw Zheng Yuan’s malicious expression, as well as the young soldier behind her who had lowered his head and did not dare to look up.

No one knew what to say. They all looked at Zheng Yuan quietly and did not even dare to breathe loudly.

“What are you getting up to in the middle of the night?” Zheng Yuan looked at the cookhouse squad leader and asked.

“Report! We’re... we’re going to look for water!” said the cookhouse squad leader.

Zheng Yuan smiled in satisfaction. Her plan had succeeded and the fish had taken the bait.

“Water? Isn’t there water in the water storage tanks? What do you need to look for?” Zheng Yuan asked.

“We... we...” The cookhouse squad leader did not know how to explain the current situation.

“What are you stammering about! Do you want to be punished! Tell me! What are you doing!” Zheng Yuan roared.

“Report! The water in the water storage tanks has been stolen!” said the cookhouse squad leader.

“Stolen? Why didn’t you report this matter and chose to cover it up instead?” Zheng Yuan’s eagle-like eyes swept across the soldiers.

“We thought that we should solve the problem of being able to provide sustenance for the soldiers first, so we want to go out and find a water source. Otherwise, the soldiers will not have any food tomorrow,” the cookhouse squad leader said.

Zheng Yuan approached the cookhouse squad leader and asked, “So you have considered all these on my behalf?”

The cookhouse squad leader was so frightened that he immediately straightened up and said, “Report! I dare not do that!”

Qiao Mei stood at one side and looked at Zheng Yuan uncomfortably. This was a complete waste of time and did not help the situation at all. There was no point in pursuing who was right or who was wrong at this moment.

“Say, can we go look for water first? Otherwise, what time can we be done?” Qiao Mei crossed her arms and said.

Zheng Yuan raised her head to look at Qiao Mei. She had been worried that she would not be able to pick on Qiao Mei, but now Qiao Mei had come running into trouble by herself.

“Since when is it your place to speak about the matters of the army? I’m teaching my troop a lesson. What has it got to do with you?” Zheng Yuan stood in front of Qiao Mei and asked.

Qiao Mei raised her head and stared at Zheng Yuan. She would not be outdone, but she did not show any emotions. She only looked at Zheng Yuan quietly. Compared to what Zheng Yuan had under her sleeves, Li Gui’s mother-in-law, Old Madam Zhang, had much wiler tricks. Even Qiao Yu was craftier than Zheng Yuan.

Chapter 194: Handling the Matter

“I’m not trying to interfere, but I know that if you continue to cause the delay, the soldiers will not have anything to eat tomorrow morning,” Qiao Mei said to Zheng Yuan. She looked at Zheng Yuan evenly, in a manner that was neither servile nor overbearing.

“I had wanted to ask you. Didn’t you say that you wanted to wash your clothes? Don’t tell me that you used the water from the storage tanks?” Zheng Yuan asked.

Qiao Mei laughed out loudly, amazed that Zheng Yuan thought of herself as being skillful enough to make things difficult for Qiao Mei. As Qiao Mei had expected, it was Zheng Yuan who did the dirty task and then went on to play the trick of a thief calling another person the thief. Such a small trick was not enough to do anything.

“What are you laughing at?” Zheng Yuan looked at Qiao Mei in confusion.

“Hahahahaha. Nothing, it’s nothing. I just find it quite interesting. You said I did it? Do you have any evidence?” Qiao Mei looked at Zheng Yuan and asked.

Zheng Yuan looked at Qiao Mei and said, “Everyone in the army knows that only medics and soldiers from the cookhouse can use the water in the water storage tanks. Other soldiers are self-disciplined

enough not to do it. You wanted to leave the camp on your own this afternoon and I stopped you. Who knows if you went to the water tanks to get water after that?"

This seemingly meticulous logic was actually untenable at all. The way Zheng Yuan was behaving, it was obvious that she was single-mindedly trying her best to set up a trap to frame Qiao Mei. However, Qiao Mei had the upper hand and was simply watching her dig her own grave.

"Then why don't you explain how I know that there is a water source five kilometers away? If I really stole the water, why am I bringing all the cookhouse staff to the water source and not just secretly transporting it back to fill in the shortfall?" Qiao Mei said.

"You! Of course you won't say anything! Because you want to frame others!" Caught unaware and embarrassed by the question, Zheng Yuan flew into a rage and shouted angrily as she looked at Qiao Mei.

"Me? Who am I framing? I'm helping you guys solve the problem of the water source. Is there a need for me to frame anyone?" Qiao Mei shrugged as she looked at Zheng Yuan, who was starting to get disconcerted.

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"Who knows if you're lying about the water source you're talking about!" Zheng Yuan said as she pointed at Qiao Mei.

"I'm lying? Why would I lie to these dozen or so men? I'm the only woman here. Why would I lie to them to trick them into going outside? Moreover, they're all soldiers. Is there a need for me to lie to them?" Qiao Mei was incredulous to hear what Zheng Yuan just said.

She wondered how Zheng Yuan got to the position of deputy battalion commander with this level of intelligence and means of doing things. Anyone from her village was a hundred times more capable than Zheng Yuan.

"You! You!" Zheng Yuan did not know what else to blame on Qiao Mei. She was so angry that she pointed at Qiao Mei but could not find anything to say.

The noise from the commotion reached Xia Zhe's ears. He opened the tent door and saw a group of people gathered in the distance but he could not tell what they were arguing about. Xia Zhe jogged over to find that it was Qiao Mei and Zheng Yuan having an argument, and he hurriedly ran to stand behind Qiao Mei.

Xia Zhe gently hugged Qiao Mei's shoulder. Qiao Mei was shocked by the touch and turned around only to see Xia Zhe's gentle expression. His warm arm holding her shoulder made her feel doubly at ease.

"What's happening? Can someone tell me?" Xia Zhe did not even look at Zheng Yuan and only stared at the cookhouse squad leader as he spoke.

When the cookhouse squad leader saw Xia Zhe, he finally felt a reassuring presence and said forcefully, "Report! The cookhouse team has made a mistake!"

"The cookhouse squad leader will follow me. The rest of you are dismissed." Xia Zhe looked at the soldiers and gave his order.

"Report! No! We have to find a water source before we can be dismissed! Otherwise, the rest of the soldiers won't have anything to eat tomorrow!" said the cookhouse squad leader.

Qiao Mei also looked at Xia Zhe and gently tugged at the corner of his shirt. She said softly, "Report... I found a water source in the distance where they can go. It's five kilometers away."

Xia Zhe looked at Qiao Mei and then at the cookhouse squad leader before saying, "Approval given. Take Qiao Mei with you and be careful on the road. I will allow you to use the army trucks and you must ensure Qiao Mei's physical safety, do you understand? You can also take the water storage tanks with you on the trucks so there's no need for so many soldiers to go together."

"Yes!" the cookhouse squad leader said animatedly.

"Comrade Qiao Mei, you have to work with the cookhouse deputy squad leader to look for the water source. You have to be careful of your own safety, understand?" Xia Zhe looked at Qiao Mei and said

seriously. In actual fact, it would be more appropriate to term his words as a reminder rather than an order.

“Yes, I promise to complete the mission!” Qiao Mei said.

Looking at how cute Qiao Mei was, Xia Zhe’s heart melted. However, he had to remain solemn and lived up to the standard of being a good battalion commander in front of everyone.

Chapter 195: Getting Sorted Out

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

“I want the cookhouse squad leader to come with me after making the arrangements. Get the deputy squad leader to lead the team to the site. After you’re done, come and explain to me what’s going on,” Xia Zhe said.

“Yes!” The cookhouse squad leader went to make the arrangements.

Zheng Yuan stood where she was and watched Xia Zhe organize everything. Her plan had failed, but she was unwilling to accept the fact. She wanted to make it clear to Xia Zhe that Qiao Mei was a bad woman and that they were not suitable for each other!

Zheng Yuan’s father was the regiment commander, so Zheng Yuan had grown up in the army and everyone took special care of her. Within her world, she was like everyone’s daughter and she had never come into contact with the outside world, so it was inevitable that her character was a little domineering.

“Xia Zhe! You can’t just deal with it like this!” Zheng Yuan said aggrievedly.

Xia Zhe looked at Zheng Yuan, not knowing what to say. Qiao Mei raised her eyebrows and looked at Zheng Yuan’s distressed expression. Zheng Yuan was still so arrogant just now, but she looked so aggrieved the moment she saw Xia Zhe. This was really a difficult woman to deal with.

“You can tell me about it later. I’ll get back to you after I understand the situation from the cookhouse squad leader,” Xia Zhe said.

The naive Zheng Yuan thought that Xia Zhe was feeling sorry for her and wanted her to go back and rest. He even said that he would come by to look for her.

“Alright, come and look for me later!” Zheng Yuan left in a happy mood.

Qiao Mei looked at Xia Zhe and gave him a slight smile as she said, “Are you going to go look for her?”

“Mei Mei, that’s not what I mean. This is about work and I don’t intend to go and look for her. What I meant is I will ask her to come and see me. She had misunderstood what I meant,” Xia Zhe explained in a state of panic.

Qiao Mei knew that Xia Zhe did not have any crooked intentions, but the fact that Xia Zhe did not have any bad intent did not mean that Zheng Yuan also did not have any. She just wanted to remind Xia Zhe to be careful and to watch his own actions.

“I’m off to get water.” Qiao Mei waved her hand and left with the rest of the team.

“Yes, go.” Xia Zhe looked worriedly in the direction that Qiao Mei had left.

The cookhouse squad leader ran to Xia Zhe’s side, stood at attention and said, “Report. The preparations are completed.”

“Let’s go. Follow me to the tent.” Xia Zhe and the cookhouse squad leader walked back to the tent together. Before they could enter, they bumped into Zhuang Hua.

Xia Zhe looked at Zhuang Hua and asked, “Do you need something?”

“I heard the commotion and came over to take a look,” Zhuang Hua said.

Zhuang Hua was in charge of the troops’ equipment and vehicles. When Xia Zhe allowed the cookhouse staff to use the army trucks, they would definitely have gone to Zhuang Hua to make the arrangements.

He already knew that something had happened and actually wanted to come by and eavesdrop, but he did not expect to be discovered.

Zhuang Hua touched the tip of his nose with a guilty conscience. Xia Zhe knew what Zhuang Hua was thinking and did not expose him. After all, they had a brotherly relationship, and it was also not a big deal to let him know about these matters. Moreover, Xia Zhe had indeed authorized the use of the vehicles under Zhuang Hua's care.

"Come in for the discussion. I'll explain to you why we need to use the vehicles in the middle of the night," Xia Zhe said.

Xia Zhe, Zhuang Hua and the cookhouse squad leader walked into the tent. Zhuang Hua sat on the bed in a familiar manner. After all, apart from the bed, there was only one table and one chair in the tent.

"Get down!" Xia Zhe said as he looked at Zhuang Hua.

"Sigh! How petty of you! I used to be a commander, Ah, I have a sister-in-law now. Alright, alright, I'll sit on the chair then," Zhuang Hua stood up and said.

Xia Zhe nodded and sat on the bed while Zhuang Hua sat on the chair. The cookhouse squad leader stood there earnestly, not knowing how to start.

"Don't be nervous. I'm not here to accuse you of anything. I just want to know what happened. So you can relax," Xia Zhe said gently.

"Yes, Commander. I'll definitely tell you everything I know," the cookhouse squad leader said.

"It's nothing much. I just want to know what difficulties you have encountered," Xia Zhe asked.

Zhuang Hua thought to himself, "You sly old fox, taking a soft touch. I'd better watch the show quietly."

“Last night, all of us saw there was still enough water in the water storage tanks, but when we went to check again tonight, we found that more than half the amount of water was gone. There’s simply not enough water for everyone to use tomorrow morning,” said the cookhouse squad leader as he explained the cause of the matter.

Xia Zhe lowered his head in deep thought. There were too many incidents today. First, there was the news that Qiao Mei had left the camp on her own accord, then there was the fake news that Qiao Mei had suffered a serious waist injury, and now there was the theft of water from the water storage tanks. Everything had happened on the same day.

Chapter 196: Finding Out Clearly

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

“Do you do patrols at standard intervals?” Xia Zhe asked.

The cookhouse squad leader thought carefully for a moment and said, “Yes, because we have to prepare three meals a day for the soldiers, so we will patrol once around the water storage tanks at night. Usually, we will also check the water level first before taking it for cooking. However, when we checked tonight, we realized that there was a lot less water in the water storage tanks.”

Under normal circumstances, the storage area for important supplies in the army were strictly guarded by designated teams who specifically patrol the area so as to prevent any losses. However, as the frequency of people going to the water storage tanks was relatively high, the frequency of patrol around the area was lesser than that of the military equipment area.

“Did your team discover this yourselves or did someone inform you?” Xia Zhe asked.

“One of our own people discovered it,” the cookhouse squad leader said.

“Then why didn’t you report it to Deputy Commander Zheng immediately?” Xia Zhe asked.

The cookhouse squad leader was hesitant to speak and did not know what to say. There were some things that he felt he could not say to Xia Zhe directly.

“If you have something to say, just say it. We’re all on the same side. I won’t blame you after you say it,” Xia Zhe looked at the cookhouse squad leader and promised him.

“If Deputy Commander Zheng finds out about this, I’m afraid our cookhouse team will be punished. The thing is our main concern is not about getting punished. It’s that if the amount of water is not replenished, the soldiers will not have anything to eat tomorrow,” the cookhouse squad leader frowned and said.

Zhuang Hua thought to himself, “He seems to be a good squad leader. He knows to put everyone’s safety in the first place and that he needs to prioritize the provision of sustenance for the soldiers. However, the way he handled it is indeed inappropriate. No matter what, he should have told Deputy Commander Zheng first.”

“Your team needs to shoulder the main responsibility for this matter. When the time comes, we’ll discuss your punishment. I understand the details of the matter now and there’s nothing else I need to ask you. However, if something like this happens again, you have to talk to Deputy Commander Zheng first. If the matter is not handled well, then you should come and look for me. Do you understand?” Xia Zhe looked at the cookhouse squad leader sternly.

The cookhouse squad leader nodded intently to indicate his understanding and said seriously, “Yes! We will not make this kind of mistake again!”

“Alright, you can go back and help with the water. We’ll talk about the punishment later. Let’s wait until this entire matter is resolved.” Xia Zhe waved his hand to signal to the cookhouse squad leader that he could leave.

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Zhuang Hua suddenly called out to the cookhouse squad leader and said, “Hey! Brother, you owe me a favor. If there’s meat in the future, remember to think of me!”

The cookhouse squad leader had thought he was going to be held back for something serious. He smiled good-naturedly and said, “Hahaha, don’t worry, it’s just a small matter. I’ll remember it!”

“Sure! No problem!” Zhuang Hua said with a smile.

After the cookhouse squad leader left, Zhuang Hua was still lost in his own thoughts of being able to get more meat to eat in the future and did not see Xia Zhe’s disdainful gaze at all.

“Good-for-nothing...” Xia Zhe muttered softly and shook his head.

“What did you say?” Zhuang Hua thought that Xia Zhe had said something important.

“Nothing, you’re done listening to the gossip. Shouldn’t you go back?” Xia Zhe looked at Zhuang Hua resignedly and said.

Zhuang Hua pretended not to hear him and looked around the room, not daring to look at Xia Zhe. He was worried that he would be chased out of the tent if they locked eyes.

Zhuang Hua knew that Zheng Yuan would definitely come by in a while. There was no way he would miss out on such juicy gossip. At least two-thirds of the women in their troops liked Xia Zhe, the other one-third being either already married or engaged to be married.

Zheng Yuan’s father had long wanted Xia Zhe and Zheng Yuan to get married, but no one had expected Xia Zhe to secretly submit the report on his marriage plans and to even already have a child. When Zheng Yuan’s father found out about the matter, it was too late for him to do anything. He had no choice but to approve it.

“About that... I still want to stay for a while,” Zhuang Hua said to Xia Zhe with a grin.

Xia Zhe rolled his eyes and ignored Zhuang Hua, choosing to focus on the rest of his work at hand. He expected Qiao Mei to be back soon and he still had to go and take a look at the situation there. As for Zheng Yuan, he decided to talk to her tomorrow. It was not convenient to meet her so late at night.

“Have you stayed long enough?” Xia Zhe looked at the sleepy Zhuang Hua and asked.

“Me? I’ll be leaving in a while. What’s the hurry!” Zhuang Hua said as he looked at Xia Zhe.

Chapter 197: Familiar Work Is Done With Ease

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

Qiao Mei led the soldiers all the way to the small stream. It was already so dark that they could not even see their own fingers in front of them, and the direction was not so clear. However, depending on the guidance of the plants, Qiao Mei easily found the path she took during the day.

“Sister-in-law, you’re amazing. It’s so dark but you still know the way even though you have only taken the route once. It’s such a pity that you didn’t join the army,” the soldier said to Qiao Mei.

Along the way, Qiao Mei did not hesitate in her instructions. Although the distance was not far, even a soldier like himself could not see the road ahead clearly. However, Qiao Mei could still accurately pinpoint the exact location. To him, that was not an easy task to do.

“No, no. I only remember the general direction. It’s your driving skills that’s good,” Qiao Mei said.

When the soldier heard Qiao Mei praising him, he felt embarrassed and quickly went about making arrangements for the other soldiers to start carrying and loading the water. He assured her that they would work hard and go back quickly.

“Everyone, get out of the vehicle! Take the water in an orderly manner! Let’s do this quickly!” the cookhouse deputy squad leader shouted.

Qiao Mei was about to get down as well when she was stopped by one of the soldiers. The soldier hastily said, “Sister-in-law, don’t come down. You must be tired. Let us do it!”

“That’s right, that’s right! There’s still us!”

“That’s right, sister-in-law! Just sit in the truck!”

Everyone persuaded Qiao Mei to relax and rest in the truck as they carried out their work.

Qiao Mei could not turn down their kindness and could only watch obediently as the soldiers busied themselves. As she sat in the truck, she got lost in her thoughts about all the things that had happened.

“Sister-in-law, thank you,” the cookhouse deputy squad leader said as he stood outside the truck window.

“Huh? Why are you thanking me?” Qiao Mei looked at him in confusion.

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“If it weren’t for you helping us solve such a big problem, we wouldn’t know what to do about the soldiers’ rations tomorrow morning. Although we don’t know what kind of punishment the cookhouse team will receive, you’ve still done us a huge favor. Thank you so much.” The cookhouse deputy squad leader saluted Qiao Mei to express his gratitude.

Qiao Mei hurriedly waved her hand and said, “Please don’t stand on ceremony. We’re family. Don’t stand on ceremony. It’s what I should do.”

The cookhouse deputy squad leader smiled and nodded as he said, “Alright, then we’ll cook something delicious for sister-in-law tomorrow! I’ll go and help with the water now!”

“Go, go!” Qiao Mei smiled and waved her hand.

Qiao Mei stared blankly at the busy soldiers.. She wondered how Xia Zhe was managing the situation at the camp and whether he went to look for that woman, Zheng Yuan.?Why did Zheng Yuan try to frame her time and time again?

The more she thought about it, the more frustrated she became. Qiao Mei shook her head and muttered softly, “Forget it, forget it, don’t think about it anymore...”

Xia Zhe indeed did not look for Zheng Yuan, but it did not stop her from looking for him. After Zheng Yuan returned to her tent, she quietly waited for Xia Zhe to come and look for her. However, two hours had already passed. Even if there was an interrogation, it would have been completed long ago.

Yet Xia Zhe had not come to look for her yet!

Zheng Yuan hit the tent cot angrily and the bed creaked noisily. Zheng Yuan did not understand why Xia Zhe ignored her and did not come to ask her about the matter. She had already done so much, did she need to go further with this?

Zheng Yuan felt indignant and ran angrily towards Xia Zhe's tent. However, before she could reach it, she heard the roar of vehicles.

The soldiers from the cookhouse who had gone to get water had returned to camp.

Zheng Yuan decided to head over to check on how things went. After all, this was her job. However, she did not expect to witness a scene that she did not want to see.

As soon as he heard the sound of vehicles, Xia Zhe rushed out of the tent anxiously and looked for Qiao Mei among them.

"I'm here!" Qiao Mei stuck her head out of a truck window and shouted.

Xia Zhe hurriedly ran over, opened the truck door and reached out to carry Qiao Mei down. His sweet gesture really made the others feel envious.

"Aiyoyo, this Commander Xia is way too gentle. Is this still our Commander Xia!"

"That's right! Is this still the impartial and cold-hearted Xia Zhe!"

"Hahahahaha..."

Although the soldiers teased Xia Zhe, they were actually all dying of envy inside.

Chapter 198: 198 The Attack

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

Qiao Mei buried her head in Xia Zhe's chest out of embarrassment. Xia Zhe tenderly supported Qiao Mei's waist with one hand and gently held Qiao Mei's head with the other hand.

"Go, go, go! Why are you making a fuss! Hurry up and get to work! Don't you want to rest!" Xia Zhe shouted as his ears turned red.

It was dark and no one could see Xia Zhe's expression or whether he was blushing. Only Qiao Mei knew that Xia Zhe's body temperature was ridiculously high.

Zheng Yuan decided to imprint this image in her heart. Their lovey-dovey behavior was like a sharp blade stabbing into Zheng Yuan's heart, repeatedly cutting open a wound that could not heal, torturing her forever.

"I should be the one in his arms. Why is it you?" Zheng Yuan muttered to herself.

Unacceptable! I can't accept this! Why is it Qiao Mei! Why is everyone full of praise for her! She's just a country bumpkin! How can someone who has never seen the world fight with me! Why is she the one beside Xia Zhe!

The anger in Zheng Yuan's heart had burned up the last shred of her rationality as she approached Qiao Mei step by step.

Xia Zhe still had to deal with the aftermath of the matter so he let Qiao Mei return to the tent first. He had not walked far when he saw Zheng Yuan running up to Qiao Mei.

"Qiao Mei! I want to kill you!" Zheng Yuan reached out to slap Qiao Mei.

"Qiao Mei!" Xia Zhe exclaimed.

Xia Zhe desperately ran back to Qiao Mei's side, but distance-wise, he was further away than Zheng Yuan. Qiao Mei looked in surprise at Zheng Yuan running towards her. Without much hesitation, she subconsciously reached out to push back with her backhand and managed to shove Zheng Yuan to the ground.

Her grandfather had taught her this skill for self-defense and she did not expect it to really come in handy.

Xia Zhe hurriedly pulled Qiao Mei into his arms and checked to see if she was injured.

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"Qiao Mei, how are you! Are you alright! Say something!" Xia Zhe looked at Qiao Mei anxiously.

Zhuang Hua did not expect to see such a dramatic scene when he brought his people to pick up the vehicles. He immediately sent someone to watch over Zheng Yuan and waited for Xia Zhe's instructions.

Qiao Mei looked at the overly nervous Xia Zhe and then at Zheng Yuan, who was struggling on the ground and roaring away.

Qiao Mei thought to herself, "Do I look like I'm not alright? Zheng Yuan is already lying on the ground. What else can be wrong with me?"

"I'm fine. You should take a look at her..." Qiao Mei said as she lowered her head and looked at Zheng Yuan.

Xia Zhe shielded Qiao Mei behind him. He did not expect Zheng Yuan to lose her composure like this. In his impression, Zheng Yuan had always been a well brought up young lady from a wealthy family and had never behaved out of line at all. She was a little spoiled, but after all, she had grown up in the army and been pampered since she was young. It was understandable that she had developed a slight temper.

However, Xia Zhe had never expected her to hit someone, what more to hit a pregnant woman who did not know how to fight back. Xia Zhe stared at Zheng Yuan and did not know what to say. The crazy woman who was still cursing away in front of him was no longer the same person he knew from before.

“You go in first. This is an army matter and I have to handle it,” Xia Zhe said to Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei nodded and went into the tent to take a rest. She believed that Xia Zhe would be able to handle this matter well and seek justice for her and their child. She was unable to say that she was not frightened by the scene just now. Her first reaction was to fight back though, which was all thanks to her grandfather’s years of education, and that reaction was what saved her and her baby.

“Grandfather... I miss you now...” Qiao Mei said as she sat on the bed and touched her belly.

Outside the tent, Xia Zhe asked Zhuang Hua to let go of Zheng Yuan. After all, she was the deputy battalion commander. Even if she had made a mistake, she should not be treated in this manner.

“Let her go,” Xia Zhe said.

“Let go? What if...” Zhuang Hua looked into Xia Zhe’s eyes and did not finish his sentence. He sighed and said, “Let go of her. The two of you can return to the team.”

Zheng Yuan got up in a sorry state and patted the dust off her body as she gave Xia Zhe a devastated look.

“Why are you treating me like this?” Zheng Yuan asked with tears in her eyes.

Zhuang Hua’s eyes widened. There was going to be drama. He knew what had always been on Zheng Yuan’s mind. Not only that, it would be more accurate to say that the entire troop knew that Zheng Yuan wanted to marry Xia Zhe and that Zheng Yuan’s father was also trying his best to make it happen.

However, no one expected Xia Zhe to settle his marriage on his own. Even though Zheng Yuan’s father and Xia Zhe’s father had discussed this matter before, it turned out useless in the end.

Chapter 199: Irrelevant

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

Xia Zhe was not completely unaware of Zheng Yuan's intentions. The Xia family and the Zheng family were both from the capital. Although the Zheng family was not very influential, the whole family had always been dutiful citizens. Zheng Yuan could be considered to have grown up together with Xia Zhe.

However, Xia Zhe had always treated Zheng Yuan like his younger sister. He took care of her in the way an older brother took care of his younger sister and he did not expect Zheng Yuan to misunderstand him.

"Zheng Yuan, calm down," Xia Zhe said to Zheng Yuan with a frown.

Tears welled up in Zheng Yuan's eyes and she could no longer suppress the love and grievances in her heart. She pointed at the tent and said, "Xia Zhe! What have you done to me for this woman!"

Xia Zhe shook his head and said, "She's my wife. It's my duty and obligation to protect her and it's what I need to do. You're just my subordinate and what I'm doing is my job."

Zheng Yuan's eyes were filled with disbelief when she heard that. "Subordinate? Am I just your subordinate?"

Zheng Yuan stared fixedly at Xia Zhe's face, afraid that she would miss any trace of Xia Zhe's feelings for her. Even a look of pity from him would be good enough for her, but Xia Zhe's face remained cold and emotionless.

"Xia Zhe, isn't that a bit harsh." Zhuang Hua could not help himself from saying.

It would have been better to call her a friend rather than use a word like subordinate. By putting it across like that, it would be like Zheng Yuan had nothing to do with them anymore and they would purely have a superior-subordinate relationship.

Xia Zhe thought about it and felt that it was better to make it clear. Being too kind in this situation would only cause Zheng Yuan to misunderstand again and cause more problems in the future.

“Is there any other type of relationship between us?” Xia Zhe asked.

Zhuang Hua, who had wanted to step in to advise Xia Zhe, also fell silent. He understood what Xia Zhe was trying to do, but he was afraid that Zheng Yuan would not be able to accept it and could not handle the situation well.

“We grew up together and risked our lives in the same troop together. My father even made an agreement with your father! Xia Zhe! You were supposed to marry me!” Zheng Yuan looked at Xia Zhe and shouted herself hoarse.

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Zhuang Hua and Xia Zhe were also childhood friends who grew up in the same compound. However, unlike Xia Zhe, he preferred to muddle along and did not have any grand ambitions. His family did not have any expectations of him either. Zheng Yuan and him could also be considered to be childhood friends, and he had never seen her like this before.

There were many boys in the military compound, but not many girls. Therefore, the adults paid special attention to Zheng Yuan and would give her a share of anything nice. As time passed, she became spoiled and domineering, but she had also always been aloof and had never lost her composure like this before.

“...I told your father before that I only see you as a sister. I’ve never had any other thoughts about you. Your father also knows this,” Xia Zhe said slowly.

Zheng Yuan’s eyes widened as if she had heard something ridiculous.

“Impossible! You must be lying to me! My father told me! You said you love me!” Zheng Yuan squatted down looking pained, with her hands clutching her head and muttering to herself.

“My father said that you would marry me. He even said that he had made an agreement with your father. Xia Zhe, you lied to me! You lied to me!” Zheng Yuan squatted and screamed in agony.

“Xia Zhe, that’s a little too much,” Zhuang Hua said as he looked at Xia Zhe.

Xia Zhe still had the same expression on his face and his eyes were filled with forbearance. He gave Zhuang Hua a look to ask him to bring Zheng Yuan away.

Zhuang Hua and Xia Zhe had a tacit understanding after so many years. Zhuang Hua immediately understood what Xia Zhe meant and sighed helplessly. He shook his head and said, “I really owe you...”

Zhuang Hua made his way slowly to Zheng Yuan’s side. He gently took the hand that Zheng Yuan was using to pull at her hair and slowly stroked the top of her head with his other hand.

“Zheng Yuan, calm down. Look at who I am,” Zhuang Hua said gently.

Zheng Yuan gradually calmed down and looked at Zhuang Hua as her tears flowed down unknowingly. She got on best with Zhuang Hua when they were kids in the military compound. When they were young, Zhuang Hua would always put aside all the delicious food for her.

“Zhuang Hua... Zhuang Hua...” Zheng Yuan looked at Zhuang Hua with tears in her eyes. She grabbed Zhuang Hua’s hands as if she saw her lifesaver.

Chapter 200: Pleading

Translator: Atlas Studios Editor: Atlas Studios

“I’m here,” Zhuang Hua responded gently.

“Zhuang Hua, I’m begging you. You get on best with Xia Zhe, am I right, so please help me talk to him. I really can’t leave him. He clearly agreed to marry me!” Zheng Yuan’s eyes were filled with anticipation and pleading. Her hands trembled as she held on to Zhuang Hua, afraid that he would not agree to help her.

The gentleness in Zhuang Hua’s eyes turned into pity and heartache. He did not expect Zheng Yuan to go to this extent for Xia Zhe. She had always been able to get whatever she wanted since she was young and had a smooth path in life. Now, she was begging him to help her hold on to Xia Zhe.

Zhuang Hua did not know what to say. On one hand was a brother who had grown up and gone through thick and thin together with him. On the other hand was a close childhood friend. Both of them were dear to him and it was a tough call. Zhuang Hua frowned and did not know what to do.

Zheng Yuan noticed that Zhuang Hua had kept quiet. Her trembling hands grabbed on tightly to Zhuang Hua and she begged him in a choked voice, "Zhuang Hua! I beg you! Can you help me! Please!"

Zhuang Hua looked into Zheng Yuan's eyes, and she looked back expectantly.

He had never seen Zheng Yuan like this, but there was nothing he could do. He said gently to Zheng Yuan, "Alright, I'll talk to him later. Get up and come with me first."

When Zheng Yuan heard Zhuang Hua asking her to leave with him, she hastily shook off his hand and backed away. She pointed at Zhuang Hua and Xia Zhe and said, "You're all in cahoots! You're all liars! Liars!"

"Zheng Yuan!" Zhuang Hua stood up and looked at Zheng Yuan. He extended his hand and said to her, "Can you come back with me and we can talk about the next steps later."

Zheng Yuan looked at Zhuang Hua and shook her head slowly. Her tears had already all dried up due to the wind and she no longer had the strength to cry anymore. She could not even shout anymore and could only look silently at the cold man in front of her.

"Xia Zhe, you do love me. Why can't you remember? Are you lying to me?" Zheng Yuan said hoarsely.

Xia Zhe shook his head. He did not know what to say seeing Zheng Yuan like this, but he saw what Zheng Yuan had done just now. She had almost harmed Qiao Mei and the child that Qiao Mei was carrying.

Based on this point alone, Xia Zhe did not want to tolerate her anymore nor could he tolerate her.

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“Zheng Yuan, go back. Stop lying to yourself,” Xia Zhe said coldly.

“I’m not leaving! Don’t even think about chasing me away!” Zheng Yuan said angrily.

“I won’t chase you away. I will tell the superiors everything that happened today. Everyone will get punished, including me. None of us will get away with it.” Xia Zhe looked at Zheng Yuan and continued, “I will also report what you did to my pregnant wife.”

Zhuang Hua looked at Xia Zhe in shock and said, “Xia Zhe, are you crazy! You’ll ruin Zheng Yuan’s career like this!”

“I know, but she has to pay the price for her mistakes,” Xia Zhe said as he looked at Zhuang Hua.

Zhuang Hua looked at the person in front of him in disbelief. Was this still the same Xia Zhe who had gone onto the battlefield with him? The Xia Zhe in front of him was too indifferent.

“Xia Zhe, think carefully. She’s...” Before Zhuang Hua could finish speaking, Xia Zhe interrupted him.

“I’ve thought about it very carefully. If you also have a wife and a child whom you love deeply and they almost died at the hands of others, what would you think?” Xia Zhe asked Zhuang Hua in return.

Zhuang Hua was speechless for a moment. What Xia Zhe said made sense. He had no right to exonerate Zheng Yuan, nor did he have any right to make Xia Zhe put away his feelings. He was just a bystander in this situation.

“Hahahahahaha. Xia Zhe, I want her to die! She will die together with the child inside her! This way, you’ll be able to marry me! When the time comes, you can marry me and bring me home! Hahahahahaha!” Zheng Yuan waved her arms wildly as she kept drawing something in the air. She looked like she was in a trance and starting to lose her mind.

Zhuang Hua grabbed Zheng Yuan and said distressedly, “Zheng Yuan, let’s go. Can you come with me?”

Zheng Yuan shook her head and looked around before her gaze landed on Xia Zhe.

“Xia Zhe, you’d better protect her for the rest of her life. I’ll see how long you can protect her. One day, I’ll let you have a taste of losing your loved one.” Zheng Yuan looked at Xia Zhe fiercely. She already understood that Xia Zhe would never come back to her, but she would never let Qiao Mei off!

She would take back whatever others took from her!