

## Fat Wife 231

### Chapter 231: Buying Pastries

"Aunt, just go ahead and choose. I know how to make clothes of different styles. Don't worry," Qiao Mei said to Xia Fang.

Xia Fang did not reject the gesture anymore. She chose a few comfortable plain-colored fabrics and a few bright-colored ones for Qiao Mei. These were currently the most fashionable ones in the capital.

Qiao Mei should dress up and look pretty at her age. If not, did she want to wait until she was in her 70s or 80s to wear such pretty clothes?

After buying the fabrics, Xia Fang brought Qiao Mei to buy some fruits and pastries. She was concerned that Qiao Mei was usually home alone when she was at work. If Qiao Mei got hungry and felt too embarrassed to ask for help, went out to buy food and then ran into Qian'e and her family of lunatics, that would be a disaster.

She thought that it would be good to buy some pastries so that there was always something to eat at home.

Qiao Mei hurriedly pulled at Xia Fang and said, "Aunt, I don't really eat pastries. Let's not buy any."

These must not be real pastries, they must be made of gold. A catty of pastries actually costs 20 to 30 dollars. How many families can afford this?

Although Xia Fang was the chief physician of a large hospital, she drew a fixed salary, as did Xiang Jin, her husband. Xiang Jin did not have much of a future in the army and was just waiting to retire.

They also had a son who was studying in the south and was not married yet. It may seem that Xia Fang's family was very rich, but in fact, they did not have much savings. They just fared slightly better than ordinary families.

"Mei Mei, look at this. This cream pastry is very delicious!" Xia Fang said as she pointed at the pastry.

“No, I don’t like cream,” Qiao Mei said.

“Then what about this one with meat floss?”

“No, no. Who knows what meat that is.”

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“What about this? This bread is the shop’s signature item. Look at this.”

“Who knows if the flour is good or not!”

Whatever Xia Fang said, Qiao Mei would condemn the item. The shop assistant did not know what to say and could only look at them awkwardly.

Xia Fang did not get angry. She knew that Qiao Mei was actually concerned for her, but she still wanted to buy some. No matter what, she could not let Qiao Mei suffer.

“Then I’ll decide. I’m going to buy this bread because I like it,” Xia Fang said helplessly.

“Aunt, if you like it, I can make it for you! I know how to make it!” When Qiao Mei saw that Xia Fang really intended to buy the bread, she wanted to grab Xia Fang and leave.

The shop assistant could not take it anymore and said, “Our pastry chefs are all top-notch pastry chefs from overseas. Do you know how to make pastries?”

“Hey, how can you talk like that!” Xia Fang said angrily as she looked at the shop assistant.

Before Qiao Mei could even react, Xia Fang already got angry. She hated it when people criticized the kids from her family.

Seeing Xia Fang's strong reaction, the shop assistant quickly looked down and stopped talking, knowing that this was not a person who could be bullied.

"Hey, say something. This shop has been open in the capital for a long time. Is this how they teach you to treat their customers?" Xia Fang said.

It was obvious to the shop assistant that Xia Fang was a local from the capital when she said that she knew how long the shop had been open for. Moreover, this shop was quite high-end. The fact that Xia Fang could come here often proved that she had the spending power.

The shop assistant had thought that these two critical people were just ignorant passers-by and did not expect to offend someone of a certain status.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry. What's happening with the two guests?" the shop manager said, running over from the back of the shop.

"I want to know how you choose your shop staff, and how they are allowed to criticize your customers. After all, this shop had been open for so long and I'm also a member here. I don't know how you expect us to come back if you treat us this way," Xia Fang said angrily.

Xia Fang was not lying when she said that she was a member of this shop. In the past, Xia Zhe did not like to eat rice and only liked the bread from this shop, so she would shop here every few days. Of course, Xia Mao was the one who paid for all the purchases.

Upon hearing that she was an old-time customer, the shop manager became even more respectful.

"I'm really sorry. This shop assistant is new and hasn't learned the ropes yet. I hope you don't mind. Let me know which pastry you wanted just now. Please tell me and I'll wrap it all up for you as compensation, if that's alright with you?" the shop manager said.

Qiao Mei was a little surprised to hear this. This shop manager seemed to be quite good at doing business and must be quite capable to be able to manage such a big shop.

#### Chapter 232: Buying an Oven

“Do you think we’re hard up for your pastries? Get your shop assistant to apologize, or I’ll cancel my membership.” Xia Fang took out her membership card from her pocket and slapped it on the table.

When the shop manager saw that the membership number on the card was 26, his attitude became even better.

The current membership numbers were already in the tens of thousands. Any customer with the membership number below 100 was a very long-time customer who patronized the shop when it first opened. The shop could not afford to lose repeat customers like them.

The shop manager gave the shop assistant a kick and whispered angrily, “Hurry up and apologize! Otherwise, don’t even think about working here anymore!”

The shop assistant looked down and said respectfully, “I... I’m sorry. I spoke without thinking. I’m sorry, it’s my fault. I hope the two of you won’t be angry anymore.”

After that, Xia Fang did not make things difficult for the shop assistant anymore. She took her card and turned to leave with Qiao Mei.

The shop manager caught up with her and said, “This is the cake that you were looking at just now. Please take it as the shop’s gift to you to compensate for your experience. Of course, I know that it’s not much, but I hope you won’t be angry with the shop assistant anymore and don’t take it to heart.”

Seeing that the shop manager’s attitude was so good, Xia Fang did not say anything else. She took the cake and left.

Qiao Mei followed closely behind Xia Fang and smiled to herself happily. Given how gentle Xia Fang usually behaved, she did not expect Xia Fang to have such a side to her.

Xia Fang saw Qiao Mei snickering and asked curiously, "What are you laughing at?"

"Oh me, I'm laughing at the fact that Aunt also has such a side," Qiao Mei said laughingly.

Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei in embarrassment and said, "That's because someone bullied you. That won't do. I can't let anyone bully you!"

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"Aunt, let's not be angry with them anymore. Come, let's go somewhere else to take a look." Qiao Mei pulled Xia Fang to the home furnishing section.

Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei, thinking that given this child was so obedient and also knew how to make clothes and bake cakes, she must have done the hard farm work in the countryside as well. Yet, after she came to the city, she did not take advantage of anyone and did not covet everything she saw.

It seemed that Qiao Qiang had taught this child well.

"Aunt, can we buy an oven?" Qiao Mei looked closely at the oven in front of her.

"Do you really know how to bake cakes?" Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei in surprise.

She had thought that Qiao Mei was just joking and did not expect her to really know how to bake cakes.

"Yes I do. When I was in the county city previously, I watched how people make those big cakes. They're not as exquisite as the ones in the capital, but the logic should be quite similar." Qiao Mei checked out the buttons on the oven seriously.

"My grandfather even got me an earth kiln at home and told me how to use it and how it worked," Qiao Mei said earnestly as she looked at Xia Fang.

Xia Fang decided to buy it since the child liked it, but when she looked at the price, she realized that it cost 600 dollars.

It was really not cheap, but since Qiao Mei liked it, she would still buy it!

The two of them then walked around and bought all the ingredients for the cake. As for the oven, the department store would send someone to deliver and install it at their house.

For such valuable items, the department store would provide for delivery and installation.

After they reached home, Qiao Mei went into the kitchen and started getting busy without even taking a drink or resting.

She began to ferment the dough, make the cream and prepare the other ingredients.

Since they had already bought everything, she definitely had to show off her skills. Otherwise, Aunt would have bought the oven for nothing.

It did not take long for the oven to be delivered to the house and the workers installed it quickly.

She decided to make a simple cake for Aunt first as it was the easiest. Then, she would make the cream cake and meat floss bread that they saw in the shop today.

Xia Fang wanted to help out, but she did not know what to do, so she just carefully wiped the oven interior clean.

After all, Qiao Mei would also be eating the food that was being prepared. She was pregnant, and needed to be careful about what she ate.

Xia Fang's eyes widened when she saw Qiao Mei turn ordinary egg whites into cream. It seemed that Qiao Mei really knew what she was doing.

Qiao Mei smiled at Xia Fang and said, "Aunt, I really know how to do this. Go and rest in the living room for a while. I'll be done soon."

As she finished making a few batches, the entire corridor and passageway was filled with the fragrance of cakes.

Qiao Mei took a piece of cake for Xia Fang to try. After taking a bite, Xia Fang's eyes widened.

"This is too delicious!" Xia Fang said in surprise.

### Chapter 233: Distributing Cake

"And it's so much cheaper than the ones at the department store!" Qiao Mei said.

Xia Fang looked at the ingredients in the kitchen and did some calculations. One catty of eggs was only about one dollar and the flour was only a few cents. After adding the sugar, oil and other ingredients, the total cost was probably around three dollars.

The cost of making so many cakes was at most five dollars, but the shop sold the cakes at such a high price. No wonder Qiao Mei stopped her from buying the cakes.

Qiao Mei thought that if she opened a cake shop in the capital, it should be much more profitable than going back to the countryside to grow bean sprouts. Growing bean sprouts was a tiring and time-consuming business, and there would be times when the harvest was not good. It was different making cakes. The raw materials could all be bought off the shelves, and she just had to make them.

Moreover, it was more profitable than selling bean sprouts.

Qiao Mei started thinking about the cost of opening a shop in the capital.

Xia Fang suddenly looked at Qiao Mei and asked, "Mei Mei, what do you plan to do after this?"

“Huh? After this?” Qiao Mei looked at Xia Fang in confusion.

“Yes, meaning in the future. I suppose you will become a military spouse,” Xia Fang said.

“Definitely. Besides, Xia Zhe also wants me to become a military spouse and stay with him in the army,” Qiao Mei said excitedly.

However, Xia Fang was filled with worry. She became a little unhappy to hear Qiao Mei say so firmly that she wanted to become a military spouse.

Qiao Mei did not understand why Aunt looked so ill at ease when she talked about being a military spouse.

“Mei Mei, I’ve also been a military spouse for a period of time before. It’s a very tough thing to do. You may be in the mountains or by the sea, or even on an island. Do you want to follow him even though you have to take care of a child as well?” Xia Fang said worriedly.

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It was then that Qiao Mei understood Xia Fang’s worry and she said with a smile, “I’m not afraid of hardship. Our village is also in the mountains. To go to town, we have to walk a distance of 15 kilometers on the mountain roads, and further if we go to the county city. Moreover, the natural environment there is rough. When we go out in winter, the cold can freeze off our ears!”

“Well, it... it’s not as tough as that...” Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei with some heartache.

She did not expect Qiao Mei to have gone through such a tough life when she was young. These were things that she could not imagine. Even when she followed Xiang Jin as a military spouse, her life was not as tough as what Qiao Me described .



Xia Fang suddenly felt that there was nothing bad about having a daughter-in-law from the countryside. Girls in the city did not suffer much from a young age. What city girls saw as hardships were not hardships in the eyes of village girls. The village girls would just see that as part of life and deal with it.

Moreover, Qiao Mei was sensible and had a good heart and a sense of propriety. She had been taught well by Qiao Qiang and did not behave like an uneducated boor at all.

It turned out that Xia Fang had also thought that only a young lady from a big family in the capital was worthy of her Xia Zhe. Now, it seemed that Xia Zhe was the lucky one to be able to find a wife like Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei silently packed the rest of the cakes into boxes and put them into her backpack. "Aunt, let's go and distribute the cakes to the others. There's so many that we won't be able to finish them. Let's share with everyone!"

Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei, feeling gratified that the girl knew the ways of the world as well.

She had heard from her neighbors about what happened to Qiao Mei in the courtyard yesterday. The neighbors said that Qiao Mei was smart enough to see through the schemes of Qian'e and her mother, and managed to protect Xia Zhe's reputation.

This young lady was really smart. Their Xia Zhe was really lucky.

Xia Fang brought Qiao Mei to visit every household in the compound to express her gratitude. She also introduced Qiao Mei as her niece-in-law to everyone, confirming Qiao Mei's status in her family.

Qiao Mei's baking skills received praise from everyone. A few people even expressed interest to learn from her.

Qiao Mei's smile froze on her face. It was starting to look like she would have no time to rest during this period of time, given the number of women who told her that they wanted to learn how to bake cakes.

Xia Fang saw the awkwardness on Qiao Mei's face and rejected everyone upfront. "Since our Mei Mei is pregnant, she can't be too tired. She needs to rest well."

Everyone understood what Xia Fang meant. Furthermore, if anything really happened to the baby, they would not be able to bear the consequences as well.

They all knew the kind of person Xia Fang was. She may look like a friendly person, but in reality, if someone really provoked her, even an immortal from the heavens could not save the person.

She could not even be bothered to respect the hospital director, let alone a few neighbors. They all thought that it would be better not to agitate her.

Everyone gave up on the idea of going to Xia Fang's house to pick up some culinary skills.

#### Chapter 234: Drawing a Map

After returning home, Qiao Mei was so tired that she sat on the sofa and did not want to move.

After keeping her keys, Xia Fang said to Qiao Mei, "Mei Mei, there is an art to getting along with the neighbors. You don't have to treat them well just because they have helped you. They really only just want to watch the fun. Besides, the neighbors only spoke up for you because Qian'e and her mother had offended them previously."

"If you give them attention and agree to whatever they say now, then they will think that you're easy to bully and come asking you for other things next time. Just remember their kindness and stand up for them when they need your help next time," Xia Fang said as she sat down beside Qiao Mei.

"If you help them with everything now, they will feel like they are allowed to give you unsolicited advice on your family matters in the future," Xia Fang exhorted Qiao Mei earnestly.

Qiao Mei nodded thoughtfully. She recalled that in her other life, there was a young couple who lived next door. The other neighbors wanted their help with everything and they found it hard to reject the

requests because they wanted to be neighborly. After a while, the neighbors became even more demanding and started to ask them for more things.

There were many such neighbors around. She understood what Xia Fang meant and nodded.

“If you remember the auntie in floral clothes you saw yesterday, she likes to borrow things the most. She will borrow onions from you today, salt from you tomorrow, and two eggs from you the day after tomorrow. After that, she’ll borrow physical objects and then she won’t return them to you at all. How are you going to ask for them back since they’re all just really small things, that’s when it will become difficult to get your things back.”

“Ah! You mean such a person exists! How can she have the cheek to borrow something every day?” Qiao Mei asked in surprise.

“Not only that, she even laughed at others. That auntie even bragged often about how much money she had saved,” Xia Fang said.

“At first, her son and daughter-in-law felt embarrassed, but as time passed and they heard from the auntie how much money she had saved, they actually felt that it was quite a good deal and stopped being concerned about it.”

“There’s also the family downstairs. They often look for their neighbors to repair things that are broken at their house. That’s fine, but they don’t even bother to say thank you after that. Then they would complain that the repair work was not up to mark and that the people who helped out should not have bothered if they are not skillful. Yet, the next time the thing is broken, they still look to the same people for help.”

“There’s also the Zhang family from the unit next door. They have five boys and they can’t afford to feed them, so they let the children go around to other people’s houses to ask for food. Seeing that they’re just children, the neighbors are too embarrassed not to let them in. As time passes, these children will come on time at mealtimes. It is really unbearable.”

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After saying all that, Xia Fang sighed and said, "Just you wait and see. After we give them the cake today, they'll dare to come over for their meals tomorrow."

Qiao Mei's eyes widened in disbelief. There were really all kinds of people in the world.

"How old are these children?" Qiao Mei asked.

"The oldest is twelve years old and the youngest is four years old. They must be eating at someone's house at this hour. The family doesn't care about these children's meals at all," Xia Fang said.

When Qiao Mei heard this, she was so scared that she did not know what to do. She liked children and had four younger siblings at home, but she did not think that she could handle these children.

"I'm definitely going to go shopping and not stay at home tomorrow. I can't let them grab hold of me," Qiao Mei said fearfully.

Taking care of someone else's children was a very difficult task. It was fine if the children were sensible and obedient, but if the children were unreasonable brats, the carer could not beat them nor scold them. Otherwise, it would become the carer's fault.

That would really be very infuriating.

"Do you know the way? Will you get lost?" Xia Fang asked worriedly.

Qiao Mei took the paper and pen beside her and drew a map on it. She studied in the capital in her other life. Even though she had not been to all the areas and there might be some deviations in the map she drew, the general route should be correct.

"How did you know this?" Xia Fang looked at Qiao Mei's map in surprise. The route she drew was quite accurate.

"Ah... I... I bought the newspaper. I saw it in the newspaper," Qiao Mei said with a smile.

Xia Fang was a little surprised when she saw the words written on the hand drawn map. She remembered that the information she received previously stated that Qiao Mei had never gone to school and did not have much of an education.

However, looking at the handwriting on the paper, although the words were not very good-looking, they did have some character to them.

#### Chapter 235: I Want to Study

Xia Fang looked at the paper in her hand carefully and asked Qiao Mei, "You know how to write?"

When Qiao Mei married Xia Zhe, even though the Xia family were not informed about it earlier, they had done a detailed investigation on her after that. The fact that Qiao Mei did not go to school had really troubled the Xia family when they first knew.

However, Xia Zhe had already married her. Xia Zhe's elder brother, Xia Wen, then said that he would be the tutor for Xia Zhe's child in the worst case scenario. Xia Wen was a university professor in the capital and a mild-mannered man who was well-liked by his students.

In the end, this issue was dropped as the family believed that a child brought up by Qiao Qiang would not have a bad character. Coupled with Xia Zhe's insistence, everyone let him have his way.

"I've never gone to school, but my grandfather taught me at home. My grandfather studied in a private school in the past," Qiao Mei said.

"Oh I see." Xia Fang was relieved. Qiao Qiang's educational level was similar to that of the old master of the Xia family, so that would mean that Qiao Mei had some basic academic education.

"Have you thought about what I asked you before? About your plans for the future?" Xia Fang asked.

Qiao Mei lowered her head in deep thought. Qiao Mei had thought carefully about what Xia Fang told her the last time, but she still preferred to be by Xia Zhe's side. However, she did feel that the child should not have to follow her.

Xia Fang hesitated for a while before saying, "Actually, my suggestion would still be that you don't become a military spouse. It would be best if you want to stay in the capital. After all, it would be helpful for the children's education and it also won't be so tough on you."

Qiao Mei looked at Xia Fang and nodded. She knew how difficult it was for Xia Fang to say all these. After all, Xia Fang was only an aunt and not her mother-in-law and she was crossing a line by saying all these. However, Qiao Mei knew that Xia Fang really had her well-being at heart.

No one would want to separate a newly wedded young couple and ask the bride to live with her in-laws alone and take care of the children on her own. However, Qiao Mei understood that the suggestion was for her own good.

Even Qiao Mei's own mother, Li Gui, would not have such foresight.

"Thank you, Aunt. I'll think about it carefully. You're right, I have to think about the child too," Qiao Mei said to Xia Fang with a smile.

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Xia Fang was relieved to hear that Qiao Mei understood what she meant and did not misunderstand her intentions.

"Then tell me what you have in mind. Let me see if I can help you?" Xia Fang said.

"I want to study," Qiao Mei said excitedly.

Study?

Xia Fang did not expect that. She thought that Qiao Mei would want to find a job so that she would be able to earn money to supplement the family income.

She did not expect Qiao Mei to want to go to school. For a moment, she did not know what to say.

With Qiao Mei's good culinary skills, if she were to become a baker, she could definitely become an outstanding pastry chef after a few years. Once she was ready, they would be able to recommend her to go to a big hotel and get her a job that was easy and not tiring, doing something that she liked.

Or she could work in places like restaurants, clothing factories, or the supply and marketing cooperative. These were also very good workplaces. Although one could not get rich working at these places, one need not worry about covering basic expenses.

"Then which school do you want to go to and what do you want to learn?" Xia Fang asked.

"I want to go to high school." Qiao Mei looked at Xia Fang firmly.

Qiao Mei did not dare to say that she wanted to go to university. Although during this period in time, it was already possible for people to enter university by way of an "admission recommendation".

"If you want to go to high school, you might as well go to university," Xia Fang said.

With the Xia family's ability, it was not an issue for them to recommend her for admission. It was not that difficult to put up an admission recommendation these days. Factories, villages and public institutions could all put up recommendations for their people to go to the university. Students were accepted not for their academic qualifications, but rather for their class backgrounds.

However, Qiao Mei did not want to be this type of university student. She looked at the dates and knew that the college entrance examination would resume in a few years. By then, she would be able to enter university in a proper manner.

There was nothing wrong with being accepted into university on the basis of class background. However, she just thought that if she was known to be part of the first batch of university students who

entered by passing the college entrance examination, it would be a badge of honor and make a world of difference to her reputation.

It was said that after the college entrance examination was reinstated, everyone who sat for the examination made it into university, so long as they had been to school before. Therefore, she thought that it would be safer to have a high school education.

That policy was still hearsay at the moment. She was concerned about not being able to take the examination if there were any changes, so having a high school education first would still be safer. It meant that, no matter what happened, she could still apply to take the examination later.

#### Chapter 236: Going Out

“Aunt, I just want to have a high school education. I want to see if I can study,” Qiao Mei said.

Xia Fang thought that Qiao Mei really just wanted some form of academic certificate and said confidently, “That’s easy. When I have a day off, I’ll go to the school nearby and tell them to put your name on the list!”

Qiao Mei smiled and said, “Aunt is the best! Thank you, Aunt!”

So, the feeling of not having to take an examination is so good.

Xia Fang smiled at Qiao Mei, amused by how such a small thing could make her so happy.

Qiao Mei knew that it would definitely be a good thing to improve herself. This way, it would address the issue that the Xia family was so concerned about. Having a good educational level would also be better for the children. When the time came, she need not have to worry about the future for Xia Zhe’s children.

That would allay one of the Xia family’s worries.



She would write to the Xia family about this when she was free, so that they would feel at ease.

During this era, studying was a useless endeavor for ordinary people. Studying did not guarantee one a job at a good workplace, and it also cost money. When one reached an age when one could earn money, their family would straightaway ask them to go to work.

It was possible to find a workplace by way of an introduction, otherwise the children in a family could take their parents' place at the workplace when the parents got old.

In the afternoon, Qiao Mei had a lot of free time, so she drew many clothing designs for Xia Fang to choose from. At night, she quickly made a simple long shirt dress that looked both dignified and age-appropriate.

Xia Fang liked it so much that she could not bear to put it down. It made her look particularly elegant.

It made her aware that Qiao Mei made really beautiful clothes and her designs were very unique. She thought that not only could Qiao Mei be a pastry chef, but she could also work at a clothing factory.

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Xia Zhe was really lucky to have found such a good wife. It looked like they would have good days ahead.

There was no need to think about which workplace was suitable for Qiao Mei for the moment. The main thing was for her to give birth to the baby safely first and they could think about everything else later.

Early the next morning, Qiao Mei and Xia Fang went out for a walk. As soon as they went downstairs, they saw five to six children glaring at them in the courtyard.

Their gazes were like those of hungry wolf cubs, making Qiao Mei's hair stand on end.

These children knew that Xia Fang was not to be trifled with, so they were waiting for her to leave before looking for Qiao Mei!

After all, this was what Qian'e had done previously. These children knew they could follow suit.

Qiao Mei quickly followed Xia Fang out of the apartment complex. As soon as she stepped out, she felt relieved. These children did not look like they were easy to deal with.

Xia Fang stuffed 50 dollars into Qiao Mei's hand and said, "Go shopping in the department store today. It's a hot day, so don't stay outdoors for too long. I'll be back as soon as I get off work tonight."

"Aunt, I have my own money! You don't need to give me any!" Qiao Mei quickly rejected Xia Fang.

"Keep your own money and spend it slowly. This is from me, just take it. I'm in a hurry to go to work, so I'd better get going." With that, Xia Fang went off to work.

Qiao Mei took the bus to the nearest antique market.

The antiques now were probably very cheap and not marked up to very high prices yet. If she could keep a few of them over the years, she would be rich in the future!

Only rich families would be interested in these things. Ordinary families would treat such things as worthless and sell them away. This allowed many people to pick up valuable items for next to nothing.

Qiao Mei wanted to be one of those people who picked up something valuable for next to nothing.

At this time, the works of famous local artists were not popular. People did not cherish them and felt that imported works were the best and that these old items were useless.

People who did not know their stuff would sell them for one to two dollars. Qiao Mei wanted to find shops like these so that she could get good bargains at dirt cheap prices!

As she explored the area, Qiao Mei saw an old house that looked as if it had been there for a long time. She imagined that there would probably be something valuable inside, so she could not resist going in to take a look.

She crossed the threshold and pushed the door open. The creaking sound made by the door was like an old man's groan, detailing its age.

The house was very big and filled with many things. There were all kinds of shelves at the side with many old items on them. This place looked more like a supply and marketing cooperative selling worthless junk rather than an antique shop.

#### Chapter 237: Visiting the Antique City

Even though the shop was big, there were no employees except for a middle-aged man behind the counter.

Qiao Mei did not hear the man speak even after she had been in the shop for a while. He did not solicit business like what people did at the other shops.

The shopkeeper imagined that a young lady would not know much about antiques and likely found the items interesting without knowing anything about the value. He focused on wiping his beloved grasshopper cage and did not pay any attention to Qiao Mei at all.

Qiao Mei did not mind at all. She was just here to take a look. Besides, many things were broken and tattered and there was nothing that attracted her.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," Qiao Mei said as she looked at the things on the shelf.

Upon hearing the sound, the shopkeeper looked up at Qiao Mei and said, "Oh my, little girl. What's the matter, are you looking down on my things?"

Qiao Mei finally heard the man speak. She smiled and said, "No, I don't look down on them. I just feel that everything looks the same and there's nothing interesting. There's nothing good.."

At this point, the shopkeeper became unhappy. He stood up and walked out from behind the counter and said, "Look at these things of mine, and tell me which ones you don't think are good."

Qiao Mei pointed at the calligraphy and paintings hanging on the wall and said, "These calligraphy and paintings are all new and don't have any history to them. They don't look like they have any heritage value."

"Also, these chinaware look like they were all made in recent years. They look so rough and of inferior quality."

"This one is passable, but it has cracks and is very difficult to maintain. I think we can forget it."

"This... this... and this..."

Qiao Mei gave him her comments about almost everything in the shop and was basically spot on in her observations.

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The shopkeeper had looked down on her in the beginning, but now he admired this young lady a little. It was not an easy thing for her to be able to appraise these old items at such a young age.

"You have fairly good taste. I don't put the good stuff here. It would be a waste to put them here," said the shopkeeper.

Qiao Mei looked at the shopkeeper. She thought he had a weird temper and found him very interesting. What a fascinating person.

"That's not true.. Look at the bangle behind your counter. The color and transparency are both not bad. It's of good quality," Qiao Mei said as she pointed at the shelf behind the counter.

“You have good taste. This jade bangle is indeed a valuable thing. Can you afford it?” the shopkeeper said.

When Qiao Mei heard this, she felt that he was looking down on her and was a little unhappy.

“If you can show me something really good, then I can afford it,” Qiao Mei said boldly.

She was not spouting nonsense without any basis. Before she left the house, she had put all her money in her bag. She had come out today with the intention to buy antiques.

Although jadeite seemed very valuable, its price would stay the same even after the economic boom in the future. Unless it was imperial green jade of good color and transparency, she did not intend to consider the jade bangle.

“This one is 100 dollars,” said the shopkeeper.

“So it’s 100 dollars. I want to know if you have anything better, much much better than this.” Qiao Mei looked at him earnestly.

The shopkeeper sized up Qiao Mei carefully. She really looked like she was a serious buyer.

He took out an exquisite yellow rosewood jewelry box from the cabinet behind him and opened it carefully. Inside the box was a set of tian-tsui hairpin and earrings with kingfisher feather inlays.

It immediately piqued Qiao Mei’s interest. Such craftsmanship was really rare as it was only nobles and high-ranking officials who could afford such jewelry in the past. After that era, it became even rarer.

They were all very difficult objects to maintain.

“How much is this?” Qiao Mei asked excitedly.

“This is really expensive. Do you really want to buy it?” the shopkeeper asked.

“Just tell me how much it is,” Qiao Mei said.

“It will cost you 800 dollars,” the shopkeeper said.

She thought that 800 dollars was not considered too expensive, so she decided to buy it. Then she wondered if there was anything better.

It was said that every shop had its own treasure that was worth a lot of money and she wondered if this shop had any. She did not believe that an item which cost 800 dollars was the most valuable item in the shop.

It seemed that this shop owner was still unwilling to take out his treasure and she needed to continue asking for it.

Qiao Mei slowly closed the box and said, “I’ll buy it. Do you have anything better?”

#### Chapter 238: A Set of Jewelry

This is not good enough? Then what is considered good?

The shopkeeper looked at Qiao Mei indignantly. He could not believe that this little girl could afford anything that cost a sky-high price and decided to show off to this unsophisticated girl today.

The shopkeeper took out a box carved with butterflies from under the counter. The box looked very crudely made.

The box was not light either. It contained a set of jewelry comprising a bangle, a necklace, earrings, a ring and hairpins.

It was a complete set of jewelry and the quality looked extraordinary. Although the set of jewelry was made recently and had no historical value, it would become really valuable once it was kept for a few decades.

She thought that it would be quite nice to buy the set for Aunt. The jadestone and precious gems used in the jewelry were of good quality. Even if they were not antiques, it would still give a noble air to whoever wearing them.

“Mister, one look and I can tell that it’s something from recent years. It’s so new that it’s not even from the same era as that bangle,” Qiao Mei said.

During this era, no one paid much attention to antiques and literary playthings. They all felt that anything with beautiful workmanship was good enough when in fact, the most valuable things were those that had experienced the passage of time.

The shop owner looked at Qiao Mei in confusion and said, “This is the jewelry that someone ordered from me. After that, she didn’t want it anymore. A lot of manpower and resources went into the making of this set of jewelry and I’m amazed you don’t like it.”

It was not that Qiao Mei did not like it, but it was far too different from the antiques she had imagined. She thought that she would be able to find something exceptional, but the items in front of her were only good enough to give to Aunt as a present.

“How much is this?” Qiao Mei asked.

Qiao Mei thought that if the set was more than twice as expensive as the earlier bangle, she would have to think about it carefully.

Qiao Mei picked up the bright green bangle from the box. Under the sunlight, it looked even more translucent and warm, and it even made the sunlight seem dim compared to its shine.

Qiao Mei suddenly felt that the energy flow in her body became much faster than usual, which surprised her. The golden energy wrapped around her body and quickly flowed to Qiao Mei’s hand.

After circling the bangle twice, the energy returned to Qiao Mei's body. Qiao Mei felt that her body had undergone a change. It seemed to have become cooler than before and her essence, energy and spirit felt better.

It was currently the hottest month of the year and people on the streets were drenched in sweat from the heat of the sun. Qiao Mei had also walked over from the bus stop in the same way.

When she first entered the house, she was covered in sweat. The house was not ventilated and it was very stuffy. Now that she was wearing this bangle, she actually started feeling cool.

It appeared that this bangle had some form of spirituality which was helpful to her. No matter how much it cost, she had to buy it.

"This, this..."

"Who asked you to take it out! This is mine!" Before the shopkeeper could finish speaking, he was stopped by someone outside.

Two people suddenly rushed in from the entrance of the shop. When the shopkeeper saw who it was, he smiled so fawningly that the flesh on his face seemed meshed together.

It seemed that these two people were not to be trifled with, and they must come from well-to-do backgrounds. Otherwise, the shopkeeper would not behave like this.

It was only then that Qiao Mei had a clear look and realized that it was two women who came in. One woman was thin and tall, with a temperament that seemed gentle and refined. The other woman was slightly shorter and appeared to be arrogant and willful.

"What right do you have to say that it's yours?" Qiao Mei questioned.

The woman did not bother to listen to Qiao Mei. She moved forward and pulled the bangle on Qiao Mei's hand as if she was determined to take it off.



Qiao Mei frowned and said, "Let go."

"Are you going to remove it or not? If you don't, I will do it!" the woman said as she pointed at Qiao Mei.

It had taken Qiao Mei some effort to put on the bangle, so it would not be not an easy task to remove it. If Qiao Mei did not want to take it off, it would definitely be difficult for others to do so.

"I'm telling you! Don't come over! I'm a pregnant woman!" Qiao Mei said as she flung the woman's hand away.

Upon hearing that Qiao Mei was pregnant, the other three people in the shop did not dare to make any rash move.

The woman stared at Qiao Mei's stomach and then at Qiao Mei's face with a mocking smile.

"You already have a child at such a young age? Don't tell me you got yourself into trouble?" the woman said mockingly.

The other woman accompanying her did not say anything or mock Qiao Mei. She just watched quietly from the side.

Chapter 239: Buying Everything

Qiao Mei did not bother to argue with such a person. She pointed at the rest of the jewelry in the box and said to the shopkeeper, "Please wrap these up and let me know how much it is."

The name of the arrogant and domineering woman was Qi Ling.

Qi Ling went forward and closed the box. "This is mine. You take that off."

Qiao Mei looked at the woman in front of her impatiently and said, "Who are you? Did you order this?"

Qiao Mei turned to the shopkeeper with a questioning look.

The shopkeeper hurriedly shook his head and said, "No, no, she didn't order this."

Qiao Mei turned to look at Qi Ling again.

"He said you didn't order it. Let go," Qiao Mei said with a frown.

When Qi Ling heard this, she panicked and shouted at Qiao Mei, "This is the jewelry my sister ordered! I'm here to collect the goods today!"

The shopkeeper started sweating when he heard that.

Such orders were not allowed nowadays, but people did it in private, just like the black market in the village. However, these were all things done under the table so no one would speak about it in public like that.

"No! Absolutely not! We don't accept orders!" The shopkeeper hurriedly denied it.

"You! The two of you!" Qi Ling pointed at Qiao Mei and the shopkeeper, so angry that she could not speak.

"Do you believe that I can make sure that your shop can't continue operating!" Qi Ling said as she pointed at the shopkeeper.

People who could open a shop on this street were capable in their own way. Without some connections, one would not be able to achieve anything.

The shopkeeper was not scared of Qi Ling's threat at all. In the beginning, he had just found Qi Ling troublesome and was afraid that she would wreck the things in his shop. He had thought it was better to avoid unnecessary trouble.

"Ling Ling, stop fooling around here." The woman who had kept silent stepped forward to stop Qi Ling.

She was He Mei. She had some free time today and was just accompanying Qi Ling to this place.

Qi Ling pointed at the box and asked, "How much is this?"

"Oh this, I'm not selling it," the shopkeeper said nonchalantly as he sat in the rocking chair behind the counter.

"Hey! You! You clearly wanted to sell it to her just now! Now you say you're not selling it!" The anger that Qi Ling just managed to suppress threatened to flare up again.

He Mei said amiably, "Old sir, just name your price. We really like it too."

The shopkeeper was appeased by He Mei's polite tone and said casually, "It's 1,500 dollars."

"What do you mean by 1,500! We agreed on 1,000 back then. How can you suddenly change your mind!" Qi Ling roared.

Qiao Mei rubbed her ears impatiently. Qi Ling's voice was really ear-piercing.

"Alright, 1,500 dollars. I'll take it." Qiao Mei quickly opened her bag and took out 2,300 dollars. She did not even care about negotiating the price and just wanted to leave this place quickly.

"Including the items from before, the total is 2,300 yuan. Come, check if the amount is correct," Qiao Mei said as she looked at the shopkeeper.

The shopkeeper was a little surprised. He had just made a casual remark and did not expect this little girl to have money.

Qi Ling stood rooted to the ground in a daze. She had only brought 1,200 dollars with her when she came out. She did not expect the items to be so expensive, so she could not afford the asking price, and now she could only stand there and watch.

The Qi family looked rich from the outside but was actually not, and they needed to cozy up to the He family. Everyone in the family had to come together to pool the amount of 1,000 dollars, so it would be impossible for Qi Ling to go home and get another 1,000 dollars.

"I'm sorry, Sister Xiao Mei. I had wanted to buy it for your birthday gift. Take a look around this place and see if there is anything else you like!" Qi Ling said as she held He Mei's hand.

Only then did Qiao Mei understand that Qi Ling had intended it as a big gift for someone.

It was already considered luxurious to buy a birthday present costing a few hundred dollars, but she had intended to give a present worth thousands. They did not seem to be relatives, so she must be trying to curry favor with the other woman.

The shopkeeper looked at the two of them with scorn in his eyes.

He Mei was so angry that her face turned green, but she still had to maintain her grace and not let others see her embarrassment.

When Qi Ling saw that He Mei was angry and refused to speak, Qi Ling thought that she was sulking because she did not manage to get the set of jewelry.

"What's your name!" Qi Ling said.

Chapter 240: Exposed

Anyone in the capital who could afford to spend 2,000 dollars at one go must not be from an unknown family. She wondered why she had never seen this person before.

“Qiao Mei.” She was not afraid that these two people would come looking for her, so she told them her name.

It would have been better if she did not tell them, but once she did, He Mei became suspicious.

Her name was Qiao Mei and she was pregnant. It was too coincidental.

“Your name is Qiao Mei? Who is Xia Zhe to you?” He Mei asked in disbelief.

Oh, she even knew Xia Zhe. Alright, this must be another one of her man’s romantic debts.

“He’s my husband. Do you know him?” Qiao Mei smiled innocently after saying that.

He Mei said mildly, “My grandfather and his grandfather used to be comrades-in-arms. Our fathers are also good friends, so I do know him.”

“Oh, I see.” Qiao Mei packed her things and prepared to leave.

Qi Ling did not know about the grudge between the two of them, and Qiao Mei was even more unaware. Qi Ling felt that since they knew each other, Qiao Mei should be able to let her have the set of jewelry so that she did not have to go home empty-handed.

Qi Ling went forward and said to Qiao Mei, “Since you know each other, why not let Sister Xiao Mei have this set of jewelry. It’s her birthday today.”

He Mei was already angry, but she did not expect Qi Ling to make things even more awkward. How could she ask Xia Zhe’s wife for jewelry?

He Mei held on to Qi Ling's arm while smiling at Qiao Mei. She seemed to be keeping quiet, but she was actually warning Qi Ling and looking at Qiao Mei at the same time.

Qiao Mei could tell that this He Mei was not someone easy to get along with. She was good at pretenses.

"How much would you give me for it?" Qiao Mei looked at Qi Ling and said nonchalantly.

Qi Ling was so silly that she really thought that Qiao Mei was going to give in to He Mei. She said to Qiao Mei, "How about we split this gift between us. I'll give you 1,000 dollars, that means I pay a bigger share and you don't lose much. We'll then give the jewelry to Sister Xiao Mei."

Qiao Mei asked in a confused manner, "What do you mean by I don't lose much?"

Qi Ling thought that Qiao Mei was a fool so she said excitedly to Qiao Mei, "That's right, we all know one another. Today is Sister Xiao Mei's birthday so you should get her a gift too. You bought this set for 1,500 dollars and now I'm giving you 1,000 dollars. Do you think you're losing out?"

Qiao Mei did not know what to say as she watched Qi Ling explain herself. It seemed that Qi Ling was the real fool.

As Qiao Mei did not say anything, Qi Ling did not know what Qiao Mei was thinking. She only knew that she must give He Mei a nice gift today, otherwise she would not be able to explain herself when she got home.

Qiao Mei really could not take it anymore. This Qi Ling was too clingy and unreasonable. She leaned against the counter and almost fell asleep as she listened to Qi Ling talk about what to do next.

"Hey! Are you listening to me or not!" Qi Ling stomped her feet in anger.

She pointed at Qiao Mei and said, "Haven't you heard of the He family! There are so many people who want to celebrate Sister Xiao Mei's birthday with her, you're the only person who doesn't know how to cherish the chance! If not for your husband being..."

“Wait, who is your husband?”

Qiao Mei said without looking up, “Xia Zhe.”

Qi Ling’s eyes widened. She had heard about Xia Zhe’s marriage and thought that he married He Mei. It was no secret that He Mei had been waiting for Xia Zhe to return.

However, just as she wanted to congratulate He Mei, she realized that the bride was not He Mei but someone else. She did not expect the person to be this woman here.

Qi Ling’s eyes widened as she looked back and forth between Qiao Mei and He Mei. In the end, she could not help but ask, “Sister Xiao Mei, is it him?”

He Mei frowned and did not say anything. However, Qiao Mei’s interest was piqued when she heard what Qi Ling said. So this person really had some form of relationship with Xia Zhe, and it was really a romantic debt.

At He Mei’s age, she was considered one of the oldest single women within the prominent families. However, the He family was rich and powerful, so no one dared to say anything about her. They only gossiped behind her back.

Qi Ling’s father had instructed Qi Ling not to introduce boyfriends to He Mei, otherwise it could be disastrous. Everyone knew that He Mei was waiting for Xia Zhe.

Now that Xia Zhe was already married, Qi Ling thought that if she were to introduce a boyfriend to He Mei now and succeeded in doing that, she would be able to become even closer to the He family!

Qi Ling shook He Mei’s arm and asked, “Am I right, Sister Xiao Mei!”

He Mei stood there in silence.