

Fat Wife 401

Chapter 401: Dropping All Pretenses

Xia Zhe brought over a stool and placed it opposite all the men from the Xia family. Qiao Mei sat down slowly as all the men looked on solemnly.

Qiao Mei smiled innocently and said, "Everyone, don't be so nervous."

Seeing that Qiao Mei had not been frightened by the ordeal, they all felt a sense of relief.

Xia Wen blurted out, "It scared me half to death! I almost wanted to ask the security guards to rush over!"

After learning about the situation at home, he rushed back to his own house to get all his savings, which amounted to 500 dollars. He was about to go to the school to try and get an advance of a few months' salary when the phone rang. When he realized it was He Ning calling, he broke out in a cold sweat.

"He Ning told me that he had come to look for you. He said that since you still had some ginseng, he decided to come and talk to you personally. Then he said we should all go home now, and I was so frightened that my legs went weak," Xia Wen said as he wiped the thin layer of sweat on his head.

The fact that there was another 100-year-old ginseng was not scary at all. The most terrifying thing was that Qiao Mei was alone at home, and He Ning had simply swaggered over to look for her.

Who knew what that lunatic He Ning could say or do to Qiao Mei.

If he threatened or intimidated Qiao Mei, it would at most cause her some mental stress. However, if he really wanted to hurt her, she would probably not be able to get out of it alive.

When everyone received He Ning's call, they quickly put down what they were doing and rushed home. Qiao Mei's safety was more important to them than the money.

They knew that He Ning was not crazy enough to hurt Qiao Mei directly as he still needed to negotiate with her. If anything should happen to her, he would not be able to get what he wanted.

Along the way, Xia Zhe felt as if his heart was being cut by a knife. All he could think of was the worst-case scenario, and even though he kept telling himself that nothing bad would happen, he could not calm down at all. Now that he could see that Qiao Mei was fine, he heaved a big sigh of relief.

Xia Zhe held on to Qiao Mei's hand tightly and did not dare to let go for a moment. No one minded his action.

"Do you still have another 100-year-old ginseng?" Xia Mao asked.

"No, I don't. I was just pretending. However, I don't know if my grandfather managed to dig up any new ones after I left home," Qiao Mei replied.

"Then did you agree to sell other ginseng to him?" Xia Wen asked.

"What are all these questions that you are asking? Xiao Mei, tell us everything that happened from the beginning to the end," Xia Jun said to Qiao Mei.

Qiao Mei nodded and told them in detail about how He Ning came by and what he said. She also recounted her conversation with He Ning word for word.

After she finished, the entire living room was very quiet. The Qiao Mei who was sitting in front of them now did not seem to be the Qiao Mei they knew.

Qiao Mei had also planned to lay her cards on the table with the Xia family and drop all her pretenses. To gain the recognition of the family, she must make them recognize her value and ability. Only then would they respect her.

Everyone in the Xia family felt as if they were getting to know Qiao Mei all over again.

Qiao Mei did not do anything stunning today, but she was calm, brave and clear-headed enough that He Ning was unable to take advantage of her. She even took back control of the situation and put it into the hands of the Xia family. It was really not an easy thing to do for an 18-year-old girl who had grown up in the mountain village.

Such knowledge and composure were rare traits even among the daughters of other wealthy families in the capital.

He Ning was someone who had spent many years in the world of politics and had taken down many people. Many people had fallen easily in He Ning's traps and were tricked into giving up their wealth, and even their lives.

However, not only did Qiao Mei not get tricked by He Ning, but she even took control of the situation and made He Ning agree to her arrangements. This was not just about being clear-headed anymore. Among the younger generation of the Xia family, only Xia Zhe and Xia Wen were able to do this. Even Xia He did not have that level of tenacity.

Moreover, Qiao Mei put the Xia family first in everything and wanted to respect the Xia family's wishes regarding the matter of the ginseng. This gesture was a pleasant surprise for them.

It was not as if Qiao Mei did not know the value of a 100-year-old ginseng. Before she came to the capital, she might not have known that it was that valuable, but after exchanging one for the Cao family's part of the house, she should have fully understood it by now.

He Ning had made a very tempting offer to her. As long as it was something she wanted, there was nothing that He Ning could not do. Usually, no one would be able to resist this kind of temptation.

However, Qiao Mei had remained unmoved.

Chapter 402: Raising Money

The sense of doubt that had been in Xia Jun's heart for many years also finally cleared up at this moment. He realized that there was nothing wrong with letting his children and grandchildren find their

own marriage partners. It was his three sons who were blind! Look at how Xia Zhe managed to find such a good wife!

At this moment, the other women of the Xia family arrived home in a rush.

They did not receive any calls from He Ning, but had received notifications to come home while they were still on their way to raise the money.

As soon as Xia He entered, she took out an envelope and placed it on the table. "This is all my savings from all these years. I should still be able to borrow some more money. See if it's enough."

Xia He actually did not have good relationships with people at home and at her workplace. She was also not sure if she would be able to borrow any money from anyone.

Xia He came from a good family, had a good figure, was beautiful and capable, and had a slightly cold personality. People around her actually did not like her very much. At this moment, there were probably many more people who wanted to watch her go through the ordeal rather than help her.

Liu Fen looked at everyone with an embarrassed expression and took out 2,000 dollars. When she reached her parents' house, she had been chased out by them. They said that a few of her nephews were going to get married this year and the family did not have any money left. Her sisters-in-law even asked her for money. She had to hold on to her bag desperately to keep it safe. This was all the money she had at home.

Xu Lan took out 1,000 dollars and placed it on the table. "I borrowed this amount from a few colleagues. I'll go and get the rest of the money we have at home."

Xu Lan went upstairs and took out a mahogany box containing 20,000 dollars.

Xia Mao was earning a good salary of more than 200 dollars a month, and he also had good benefits at the workplace. Usually, all his benefits were more than enough to subsidize the family's expenses. Xia Mao did not socialize much and even when he did, it was usually other people who paid for him, so he was able to save all his money. This box contained his life savings.

Xu Lan hugged the box and sighed. It had not been easy for them to save up this amount through the years, but now she was going to lose everything because of Zhou Hua!

However, no matter how much her heart ached, she still had to take it out. It was more important to save the family first.

Xu Lan had just reached the door when she paused to think for a moment. Then, she turned back and took out all the gold and silver jewelry she kept at home. She felt that she should be able to exchange them for some money.

When Xu Lan went downstairs, she saw that Xia Fang had also arrived and placed down 10,000 dollars on the table. Xia Fang had been promoted to chief physician in the hospital during the past two years, and she had a very good salary and other benefits.

Xu Lan looked at all the money placed on the table and thought that it looked to be enough. She wondered if the old master had 10,000 to 20,000 dollars to spare? No one knew about the old master's financial situation. He did not socialize or spend money often, but he was always very willing to help his old comrades and often sent money to them. Perhaps the old master did not have any money left. It was something that nobody could tell.

Xu Lan suddenly saw Qiao Mei holding a cloth bag and remembered that Xia Zhe had given Qiao Mei 2,000 dollars alongside all his other gifts to her! Then there was also the amount of 2,000 dollars that Xia He had given her to compensate her for her jewelry. That meant that Qiao Mei had 4,000 dollars.

This cloth bag was not big and did not seem to hold much money inside. Would she bear to take out all her money?

As for Tan Jing, Xu Lan did not hold any hopes. She was thankful so long as Tan Jing did not come home to ask her for money. She knew that her eldest son did not have an easy life.

Seeing that everyone was here, Qiao Mei opened the small cloth bag in her hand. As she opened it, she said, "I originally planned to give this to Xia Zhe to keep for emergencies, so I didn't think of it at the first instance."

Qiao Mei placed the opened cloth bag on the table. It contained the 20-year-old ginseng as well as a small piece of ginseng root. The ginseng root was from a king of ginseng that was more than 1,000 years old! However, the Xia family members did not have any medical training and would not be able to tell how potent it was, so she did not want to scare them.

All the women of the Xia family were stunned by what they saw. However, they wondered where they could find a buyer at such short notice?

“This ginseng is not money. It can’t help to make up the 50,000 dollars,” Liu Fen said anxiously.

Xia Wen told them in detail about what happened between Qiao Mei and He Ning this afternoon.

After Xu Lan heard everything, she looked at Qiao Mei with a meaningful look in her eyes. She now found this villager daughter-in-law much more pleasing to the eye.

“This ginseng is 20 years old. I don’t know how old this ginseng root is. My grandfather had asked me to keep it for Xia Zhe,” Qiao Mei said.

Qiao Mei was unwilling to say much about the ginseng root. It would scare people to talk about a thousand-year-old ginseng root. However, the main issue was that Qiao Qiang did not know about this yet and might not be able to corroborate her story when asked.

Chapter 403: I Don’t Lack Anything

Xia Wen immediately asked, “Then is this ginseng root something rare and potent?”

Qiao Mei paused for a moment before saying, “I don’t know either. My grandfather just asked me to bring it along, so I did.”

Xia Wen looked at her and smiled without saying anything. He knew that this young girl was not telling the truth. She was someone who was able to recognize a 100-year-old ginseng, so this ginseng root must be something more valuable than a 100-year-old ginseng.

Xia Wen looked at Xia Zhe but did not speak.

“Are we going to sell this ginseng to He Ning?” Xu Lan asked as she pointed at the 20-year-old ginseng.

“We need to discuss it further.” Xia Mao brought all the men upstairs, and asked Qiao Mei along.

After all, this ginseng belonged to Qiao Mei and she also had the right to decide how to deal with it.

The eyes of all the women downstairs followed Qiao Mei up the stairs. Other than Eldest Aunt, no other women in the family had ever participated in family discussions held in the Xia family’s study.

Liu Fen was the only one who did not care. She had no interest in participating in such matters at all. She was a person who only wanted to take care of the family and to leave all other decisions to the men. She only wanted to look after household matters.

Now that it seemed like the issue was almost resolved, Liu Fen happily ran into the kitchen to cook.

“Xiao He! Come and help! There are too many people at home today and I can’t cope!” Liu Fen shouted.

Xia He looked at Liu Fen busying herself in the kitchen and smiled. Maybe it was not too bad to live a life like how Liu Fen did.

“Let’s just prepare the ingredients. Then when Qiao Mei comes down, she can do the cooking straight away. Let’s not waste the ingredients given that she makes such delicious food. It’s so rare that everyone is gathered together,” Xia He asked.

Liu Fen had tasted Qiao Mei’s cooking before. It was indeed more delicious than what the two of them could make. Moreover, Liu Fen’s cooking skills were on a level that was comparable to Xia He’s. The food she made could only be described as being edible.

"I just don't know if the food is made by Qiao Mei or Xiao Zhe. You have to talk to your younger brother. How can a grown man enter the kitchen? Which other man in the Xia family helps out in the kitchen?" Liu Fen said as she held Xia He's hand.

"Alright, Second Aunt-in-law, I'll talk to him when I'm free," Xia He said vaguely. Whether or not she talked to him later was another matter for another day.

Tan Jing sat in the living room and looked at the empty corridor in a daze. Everyone had gone out today to raise money to help the family. She was the only one who did nothing.

She had not managed to save much money herself. No, it could be said that she did not manage to save even a single cent. Every month, she had to ask Xia Wen for money to subsidize the expenses of her maternal family, and it had been like this for so many years. When she telephoned her maternal family today, they told her they did not have a single cent to spare.

When she first married into the family, she did not feel much pressure. She knew that the Xia family was a wealthy and prestigious family and they would not mind that she could not contribute much as her meager contributions would not make any difference to them. When Qiao Mei joined the family, she thought that Qiao Mei would be in the same situation as both of them came from humble backgrounds.

In the end, she did not expect Qiao Mei to be able to solve the Xia family's problem singlehandedly.

When she saw the relaxed smile on Xia Wen's face earlier, she found it especially glaring. Things were not supposed to be like this.

In the study, everyone kept quiet. Xia Wen helped Xia Jun to sit on a chair slowly.

Xia Jun looked at Qiao Mei kindly and asked, "Mei Mei, tell grandfather the truth. Tell me what you want. Whatever the He family can do for you, so can our Xia family."

Qiao Mei had prepared all these ginsengs for Xia Zhe. Now that she was contributing them to share the family's burden and solve their problem, they did not want to take this gesture for granted and wanted to treat her well.

Qiao Mei shook her head and said, "I'm thinking about going back to the village soon. I've been away for quite a long time and I want to go back to see my grandfather. In the future, I still have to stay at home and take care of the children. I want to keep an eye on the children when they are young, so I don't really want to go out to work. As for money... I still have a lot of ginsengs back at home."

All the men in the room fell silent.

Initially, they all thought that Xia Zhe had married a villager wife because he wanted a hardworking woman to take care of his family. They did not expect this girl to be actually richer than all of them...

Xia Jun nodded to indicate that he understood what Qiao Mei meant. He turned around and discussed with the rest about how to best use the ginseng.

It was definitely a worthy trade if it meant that they could use it to exchange for He Ning's agreement not to cause trouble for them anymore.

He Ning was not a scary person, but he was very difficult to deal with and was willing to do things that would cause trouble for others. The Xia family members were dutiful people who only did what they needed to do and were unwilling to participate in other things. They preferred to have a peaceful and quiet life.

Although He Ning had not done anything that would rock the Xia family's foundation, it was still very annoying to them.

Chapter 404: Paying a Visit Personally

Based on what the Xia family members knew about He Ning, he would not give up until he got what he wanted. At this moment, they did not know what else he would do to get his hand on this ginseng. It was not a bad idea to use this ginseng to exchange for a peaceful time. It would be a good deal for them.

They agreed to do it that way.

Xia Wen sighed and said, "Would it make us look like we're easily bullied?"

He Ning had already attacked them three times and created a big fuss each time. Yet, in the end, they were going to use the ginseng to “make peace” with him. Those who did not know better would think that they were afraid of the He family.

Xia Jun laughed loudly and said, “Xiao Wen, his life is in our hands. Who do you think is the weaker one?”

Xiao Wen paused and thought that it made sense. If Qiao Mei did not give him the ginseng, he would not have long to live.

They also did not intend to give him the ginseng for free. Their price for it was 100,000 dollars, with the additional condition of leaving the Xia family alone in the future.

The transaction would be fair and just and there was no such thing as to who was weaker. However, this ginseng was a consumable item. At this moment, they were taking what each of them needed and it was mutually beneficial, but what about the next time?

Would He Ning do the same thing again?

The Xia family truly did not lack anything. If there was a next time, it could only be He Ning coming to beg the Xia family again.

“Mei Mei, come here. Tell grandfather the truth. How many ginseng do you have left? Do you still have any more 100-year-old ginseng?” Xia Jun asked.

He wanted the information so that he knew how to approach any future negotiations with He Ning. He did not want to reach any settlement that Qiao Mei would not be able to fulfill, as that would be like playing a trick on He Ning. If He Ning was angered enough to go all out to destroy the Xia family, it was not something that they could handle.

Qiao Mei blinked. Well... she could not say that she could actually have as much as she wanted.

“My grandfather has a big box that he uses to specially store ginseng. He treasures that box very much, so I don’t know how many ginsengs there are inside. But there should still be a few 100-year-old ginsengs. When I left back then, I saw him take one out of a bunch of them,” Qiao Mei said.

The Xia family fell silent again...

Was it really that easy to find 100-year-old ginsengs?

“Then when your grandfather is feeling better and comes over to the capital, I’ll ask him myself,” Xia Jun said.

Not long after that, the doorbell downstairs rang. It was He Ning and a stranger at the door.

Xia Jun asked Qiao Mei to put away the ginseng root and went downstairs with the 20-year-old ginseng.

At the moment, he was only going to use this small ginseng to negotiate with He Ning. However, he still did not know how to thank Qiao Mei for the ginseng.

Qiao Mei carefully put away the remaining ginseng root. When Xia Wen saw what she did, he smiled again. If this young girl did not know the value of the ginseng root, why would she treasure it so much?

Qiao Mei pretended not to see Xia Wen looking at her and quietly absorbed one-third of the energy from the 20-year-old ginseng. She definitely could not give such a good ginseng to He Ning.

She had already intended to sell this ginseng so that she would have money for emergencies, thus it did not matter who she sold it to and how much energy it contained.

However, if it was going to be sold to He Ning, then there was no need to give him any additional benefits.

Xia Wen personally went to open the door to let He Ning and the stranger in. All the womenfolk of the Xia family went upstairs to avoid the visitors while Qiao Mei went to the kitchen to cook. She did not want to eat the food made by Liu Fen and Xia He.

When Qiao Mei entered the kitchen, she realized that the two women had very strong self-awareness and had prepared all the ingredients for her so that she could just proceed to do the cooking. Given that Liu Fen had gone to the market this morning, there was even a fish among the ingredients. The fish was already cleaned and gutted and ready to be cooked.

Liu Fen and Xia He had nothing else to do and went upstairs as well, leaving Qiao Mei alone in the kitchen.

In the main living area, Xia Wen took out the cloth bag containing the ginseng and placed it on the table. He Ning asked the man beside him to take a look.

“This is ginseng that’s about 20 years old. The quality is also much better than ordinary ginseng,” the man said.

“You must be Senior Huo,” Xia Wen said with a smile.

Huo Gao looked at Xia Wen in surprise. He did not think that there were still people among the younger generation who remembered him. Ever since he went into the He family’s employment and became He Ning’s doctor, he had retired from active work for many years and had not had any other patients.

“Very few young people remember me,” Huo Gao said with a smile.

“Senior Huo’s name is so well-known. Please don’t be so humble,” Xia Wen said.

After the two men exchanged a few pleasantries, He Ning spoke slowly, “Why is it only 20 years?”

Chapter 405: Asking for Flowers and Plants

“Xia Zhe’s wife said that you didn’t specify the age of the ginseng you want and there were no other details. This is all we have to offer,” Xia Mao said.

Sitting in the Xia residence, He Ning’s headache eased a lot. He could smell the same fragrance from earlier.

After his visit in the morning, he had a splitting headache half an hour after leaving the Xia family’s house. Now that he was sitting inside the house, his headache had eased a great deal. It seemed that the Xia family really had some form of treasure in their house.

He Ning looked closely at the Xia family’s corridor, balcony, corners and backyard. Although there were flowers and plants placed at all these places, they were the same types he had in his house before and were just ordinary plants. Could these plants here be some form of mutated versions?

“20 years is too short,” He Ning said with a frown.

“But you also heard from Senior Huo that the value of this ginseng is much higher than what’s available on the market,” Xia Wen said.

He Ning glanced at Huo Gao, who nodded and said, “Indeed, it’s even better that those 50-year-old ones in the market.”

He Ning urgently needed ginseng to save his life at the moment. If it was really good ginseng, he would have to take it even if it was only a 20-year-old ginseng. From what the Xia family said, they seemed to have better ones in their possession.

“What’s the price?” He Ning asked directly.

“It’s 100,000 dollars, plus you have to leave the Xia family alone in the future,” Xia Wen said.

Xia Wen and He Ning used to be classmates and were considered to be peers. Although they never really got along, Xia Wen was the person most suitable to conduct this negotiation.

He Ning was still too junior to speak with Xia Jun.

“I see... You want to ensure peace for your entire family for a lifetime with just one ginseng...” He Ning said as he gently tapped his knee with his fingertips.

Seeing this, Xia Wen leaned back on the sofa and spread his hands out. “In that case, if you’re not satisfied, then forget it. After all, your whole lifetime is not very long.”

He Ning raised his head and gave Xia Wen a fierce look. This was the reason why he had never liked Xia Wen since he was young. Everyone said that Xia Wen was a perfect gentleman, but in reality, he was the one with the sharp tongue and evil heart.

“The amount of 100,000 dollars is not a problem, but to tie my hands for your entire lifetime... This won’t do. If you come and find trouble with me, do I then have to endure it? Besides, you’re only giving me a 20-year-old ginseng,” He Ning said.

“Our Xia family does not attack others,” Xia Wen said.

He Ning smiled and said, “People change.”

He had yet to welcome Xia Zhe into his fold, so he was not going to let the Xia family off so easily. He did not want to give in on this matter.

“For 20 years then,” Xia Wen said.

He Ning shook his head and said, “One year.”

The two of them started a heated argument on this, but He Ning soon felt powerless. There was a strong fragrance coming from the kitchen and the smell of braised fish was so overpowering that everyone in the house felt a little hungry.

He Ning did not even dare to speak casually, afraid that he would drool if he opened his mouth.

Ever since He Ning fell sick, he had not had a proper meal as he found the taste of medicinal cuisine to be terrible. The smell of braised fish currently wafting from the kitchen was a fragrance he had never encountered before. It really smelled very delicious.

“Let’s not argue anymore and just make it three years. I believe what you have in mind is also three years,” He Ning said.

Xia Wen nodded straightaway, but he could also tell that He Ning was acting strangely. It was not as if he had not negotiated with He Ning before. He Ning had always been very unyielding and would never back down, but he was being a lot more amenable right now.

It struck Xia Wen that he should invite He Ning home for any negotiations in the future, and particularly during mealtimes. If he could get Qiao Mei to cook at the same moment as the negotiation, he would get twice the result with half the effort!

The two families agreed to a three-year agreement, that they would not make life difficult for each other for three years. Even if someone begged He Ning to hurt the Xia family, he could not do anything, not even if it was the Cao family who asked him.

They had heard that the Cao family was left with nothing except their jobs. The Cao family probably hated the Xia family the most now. It was said that the old man from the Cao family even secretly erected a memorial tablet for Xia Jun and would burn three incense sticks in front of it every day. It was a really despicable thing to do.

The Cao family found a new residence that was too small for them and it was overcrowded.

After the negotiations, He Ning looked like he had no intention of getting up to leave. He asked Huo Gao to go to the car to get the money, then he pretended to look at the flowers on the balcony and said, “These flowers in your house look quite good.”

Xia Wen suddenly smiled brightly and replied, “They’re definitely very good compared to yours!”

He Ning rolled his eyes at Xia Wen. He did not understand why this guy must always diss him.

“Since you also know that I don’t have much experience in growing flowers and that they don’t grow well at my house, why not give me these few pots,” He Ning said.

Xia Wen looked at He Ning strangely. Were these few pots of flowers very special? There was nothing special about them. These were just ordinary flowers and plants.

Chapter 406: Staying for a Meal

“What exactly are these flowers that manage to catch your eye?” Xia Wen walked over and carefully looked at the pots of flowers. These were all common flowers that one could find everywhere, the type that anyone could grow by simply watering them every day. Xu Lan was usually not at home, so she would not have any flowers and plants that needed a lot of care.

He Ning was well-known in the capital for not being able to keep flowers and plants alive. He was as fussy about flowers as he was about people, so it was strange that he was interested in these ordinary flowers and plants.

“Hmph, these few pots are azaleas, those few pots are peonies, and these are jasmine and those are bush lilies. Are you able to recognize what kind of flowers they are?” He Ning looked at Xia Wen mockingly.

Xia Wen did not take it to heart. He really did not understand such things. He knew that the jasmine was only newly bought last month to replace the previous pot of flowers that died. However, now that he observed the flowers and plants carefully, they looked to be growing much better than before.

Was it Second Aunt-in-law or Third Aunt-in-law who took such good care of these flowers? After all, they often came over so it must be due to their efforts.

“Then... look at this...” Before Xia Wen could finish speaking, Qiao Mei walked out of the kitchen with a plate of fish.

“Dinner is ready. Everyone, come and eat!” As she spoke, Qiao Mei turned towards the balcony and blinked. Xia Wen immediately understood what she meant.

Actually, she had finished cooking a while ago. She knew that He Ning had designs on the flowers and plants at home, so she was just waiting for Xia Wen to speak before she came out to serve dinner.

She already knew about He Ning using floral fragrance to treat his illness. In the morning, He Ning had reacted strangely when he was at the door. At first, she did not pay much attention to it, but now that she saw He Ning being especially interested in the flowers at their house, she understood why.

It was because Qiao Mei had a special fragrance on her body.

Previously, Qiao Mei did not even know that there was such a smell on her. It was only after Xia Zhe talked about it every day and even licked and bit her non-stop yesterday that she knew.

He Ning thought that the smell was the fragrance of flowers and that was why he wanted to take away all the flowers in their house. However, the source of the smell was actually Qiao Mei, so it was useless even if he emptied the house of all the plants. Qiao Mei felt angry and upset every time she thought about how He Ning had ruined the courtyard house, so she did not want He Ning to have an easy time.

It was not impossible for him to take all the flowers if he wanted, but he had to pay a price for that. He could not take them for free.

As Qiao Mei brought out all the dishes, she asked Xia Wen, "Elder brother, are you talking about the flowers at home? I also took a fancy to them a couple of days ago. Mother promised to let me move them over to the courtyard house after the repairs are done."

"Ah, then these flowers are yours. It's not for me to make the decision on this matter," Xia Wen said as he glanced at He Ning.

He did not believe what Qiao Mei said about Xu Lan giving the flowers to her. Xu Lan had not even said more than three sentences to Qiao Mei in the past few days, so he was very sure they did not speak about the flowers.

Besides, he knew Xu Lan's temper very well. Previously, Xu Lan had made it very clear that she did not like Qiao Mei. It was not possible for her to have suddenly accepted Qiao Mei and even given her gifts.

Could there be something special about these flowers? Qiao Mei was not a petty person. There must be some kind of secret if she did not want to give away a few pots of ordinary flowers.

He Ning sat at one end of the dining table silently. He took his seat in such a natural manner that the Xia family was stunned.

When Huo Gao came in with the money bag, he was so shocked to see it that he accidentally dropped the money bag on the ground. The bag containing 100,000 dollars in cash was very heavy.

When Qiao Mei brought out the last dish from the kitchen, she was also stunned to see He Ning sitting at the table. She thought that this He Ning was really thick-skinned.

"I wonder if Miss Qiao will be willing to sell those flowers? I like those flowers very much," He Ning said to Qiao Mei with a smile.

"I'm not willing to sell. If the price is too low, I'll feel that it's a loss to me. If the price is too high, someone may lodge a report against me. It's really not worth the efforts, so I'm not selling," Qiao Mei said.

The market price of these few pots of ordinary flowers was less than 10 dollars in total. If Qiao Mei asked He Ning for more than 100 dollars, he may get someone to report her and say that the Xia family was indirectly taking bribes. If that happened, it would be difficult for anyone of them to get out of it.

"Then what do you want?" He Ning asked.

He could tell that Qiao Mei was willing to do a sale, but since she did not want money, then what did she want? Did she want something else or did she have something that she needed done?

Qiao Mei smiled at He Ning. It was just so easy to communicate with smart people. He knew what she wanted based on just a few words from her. It was something to be expected of the scheming Third Master He.

Chapter 407: I Want Food Stamps

“I want food stamps,” Qiao Mei said as she placed down the bowls and chopsticks.

Xia Zhe quietly tugged at the corner of Qiao Mei’s sleeves and said, “I have those.”

He felt a little uncomfortable seeing He Ning and Qiao Mei having a conversation. Moreover, he knew that Qiao Mei was a little money-grubber and he could already feel her eyes about to light up if they continued with this topic.

“Those you have are not even enough to feed yourself!” Qiao Mei gave him a look, telling him not to interrupt her.

When Xia Wen heard this, he almost laughed out loud. It was still acceptable if anyone should say that he did not have enough food stamps. However, to say that Xia Zhe did not have enough food stamps was treating He Ning like a fool who would believe that.

Xia Zhe had more than enough food stamps to feed the entire Xia family. However, he understood that Qiao Mei was plotting against He Ning and held back his jealousy as he sat at one side without saying anything.

“I don’t want ordinary food stamps. I want the national food stamps from the years 53 to 55 in all kinds of denominations. I want them in equal bundles and I want new ones. Let’s say... 100 sets. I won’t take advantage of you. I’ll exchange local food stamps worth 1,000 catties with you. Let’s consider the difference of 20 catties to be your discount,” Qiao Mei said.

Looking at Xia Zhe next to her, Qiao Mei asked, “Do you have food stamps worth 1,000 catties?”

Qiao Mei suddenly remembered that it was actually illegal to buy and sell food stamps in private, but exchanges were allowed. Of course, no one would use national food stamps to exchange for local food stamps. If someone was willing to do that, he would be called a fool.

Xia Zhe's work took him away from home all year round. The food stamps they used at home were mainly Xia Mao's food stamps. Xia Zhe had no use for his food stamps over the years and had saved them up.

"No problem," Xia Zhe nodded and said.

He Ning frowned and looked at Qiao Mei. He really could not understand why she would make such a ridiculous request. It was not as if the Xia family could not give her what she wanted, so why did she ask him for it? Moreover, she even wanted to use local food stamps worth 1,000 catties to exchange for national food stamps worth 980 catties. Did Qiao Mei not know that she was making a loss?

She even specified the years of issuance and wanted brand new ones. What kind of requirements were these?

Moreover, it was not as if national food stamps could get more food than local food stamps. What was the use of exchanging for them?

To He Ning, it was not a big problem except for the part that Qiao Mei wanted brand new food stamps. This was the difficult part because he would need to send someone to go to a special warehouse to find them.

Could it be that the Xia family was setting a trap for him?

He Ning sized Qiao Mei up suspiciously.

After Qiao Mei finished setting the table, she sat down and said, "I only have this request. You can take the flowers away when you bring the food stamps."

Qiao Mei had no intention of setting a trap for He Ning. These food stamps would be worth between 30,000 to 80,000 dollars per set in the future. If they were brand new, they would be worth more, and the value would just continue to increase every year. After all, these were rare items that could not be reproduced.

“Don’t tell anyone about the exchange of food stamps,” Qiao Mei added.

Actually, if the Xia family wanted to gather these food stamps, they would definitely be able to obtain a lot as well. However, when people eventually realized the value of these food stamps in the future, they would talk about it. By then, people might say that the Xia family was in possession of the country’s resources and that would not sound good. Furthermore, these 100 sets would eventually be worth tens of millions of dollars in the future.

If He Ning was the one who handled this matter, even if someone found out about it later, the matter would fall squarely on He Ning’s shoulder. It would have nothing to do with the Xia family.

After some consideration, He Ning agreed to Qiao Mei’s request. From what Qiao Mei said, there was nothing inappropriate about her request, so he decided to tentatively agree.

Qiao Mei happily took a separate portion of the dishes upstairs to eat with the womenfolk of the Xia family.

During this era, many families had different dining areas for the menfolk and womenfolk to eat separately, especially when there were visitors in the house. Moreover, they had a particularly unlikable guest today who refused to leave even when he should.

Huo Gao found himself in a very awkward position. He did not know whether to sit or stand or to go elsewhere. He was so embarrassed that his ears turned red.

Should he sit at the table? He did not dare to do so.

He knew all about He Ning’s plans and that He Ning would not be easily restrained by this three-year agreement. He Ning would definitely think of all kinds of methods to secretly create trouble for the Xia family.

He was also there when He Mei and He Ning made their plans. They spoke freely in front of him and had never hidden anything from him. He knew very well what He Ning was going to do to the Xia family next.

Despite what He Ning had planned, he still had the cheek to dine at the same table as the Xia family.

This was not just being thick-skinned anymore, this was simply being totally shameless!

Chapter 408: Good Culinary Skills

He Ning beckoned to Huo Gao and said, "Put the money to one side, then come and have dinner."

He Ning was behaving like he was the master of this house. He went about it so naturally that even Xia Wen was too embarrassed to criticize him and could only feel awkward.

Even Xia Mao found it difficult to say anything, being an elder. Moreover, in the past, Xia Jun and Old Master He could be considered to know each other quite well. He felt a tinge of regret as he thought of Old Master He. Back in the days, he was a very wise and capable person. Unfortunately, his health was poor and he passed away early. Without their father around to bring them up properly, his sons had all grown up with questionable morals.

Gradually, the He family and the Xia family became strangers.

Feeling embarrassed, Huo Gao walked over and greeted the Xia family members before sitting down next to He Ning.

It was only when Xia Jun asked everyone to dig in that they all lifted their chopsticks. Then, it was as if a whirlwind had swept past the dining table. The Xia family members were all from the military, so they had a habit of eating fast. They ramped up their speed intentionally at this moment.

He Ning had only finished half a bowl of rice when all the Xia family members finished eating and put down their chopsticks.

He Ning looked at his surroundings and put down his chopsticks with some regret. No matter how thick-skinned he was, he could not bring himself to continue eating while so many people from the Xia family were staring at him.

“Mmm, this is really some culinary skills,” He Ning said as he took out a handkerchief and wiped the corners of his mouth.

Xia Zhe looked at He Ning proudly and said, “You’re welcome.”

He Ning looked at Xia Zhe and said, “Actually, my family’s Xiao Mei has better culinary skills.”

Huo Gao glanced sideways at He Ning and wondered how he could say something like that against his conscience. One time, He Mei had almost poisoned her dog to death when she cooked at home.

He Ning might not know it, but Xia Zhe had actually tasted He Mei’s cooking. One time, He Mei had made a lot of food for Xia Zhe but it was not during a private meeting between the two of them. He Mei knew that Xia Zhe did not want to see her, so she brought the food to the camp for Xia Zhe and his comrades to eat together.

At that time, no one knew that the food was made by He Mei. They thought that the enemy had sent spies to infiltrate the camp and they scolded the cookhouse staff for it.

Later on, when the cookhouse staff said aggrievedly that the food was from the He family’s He Mei, everyone suppressed their anger and stopped talking about the matter. No one wanted to offend the He family over a meal.

That day, everyone had no choice but to starve for the entire day. The entire troop still remembered the incident till this day.

“Oh? I see. If it’s so delicious, you should eat more then,” Xia Zhe said while holding back his laughter.

When He Ning saw how Xia Zhe answered him, he knew that he did not manage to fool Xia Zhe and the joke was on him instead. He thought that when he returned home, he should really find a professional chef to teach He Mei so that she could learn how to cook well. Her culinary skills should not be too far off from Qiao Mei’s. Otherwise, when Xia Zhe and He Mei got married in the future, it might affect their relationship.

He Ning had never planned to give up on making Xia Zhe the son-in-law of the He family. As long as He Ning wanted to do something, he would never give up halfway.

As for Qiao Mei... after she got a divorce, she could go to his place to replace the cook at his house and make medicinal cuisine for him every day. He felt that this was really a good idea, one that would kill two birds with one stone.

At the thought of this, He Ning's mood improved and he left the Xia family with a smile.

As Xia Wen watched He Ning leave, he frowned and said, "He must be up to something since he's smiling so widely. He Ning doesn't give up on anything."

Xia Wen also knew that the three-year agreement was only a temporary measure. The agreement was not enough to hold He Ning back and prevent him from attacking the Xia family. At most, he would just avoid brazen attacks that directly targeted the Xia family.

If the He family had such intentions, so did the Xia family.

The Xia family also did not intend to let He Ning off just like that. They had yet to settle scores with him with regard to the earlier incidents, so they had no intention of sitting back and leaving it. After getting bitten by a vicious dog, even if they did not want to beat the dog to death, they would have to punish it and teach it a lesson. How could they let the vicious dog go home in perfect condition?

Otherwise, the Xia family could forget about staying in the capital. They would become a joke in the eyes of others and be laughed at before their backs.

"How's the situation over there?" Xia Mao asked.

"Eldest Aunt is on her way back. She'll be here soon," Xia Wen said.

Xia Mao looked at the big bag of money from He Ning and said, "Xia Zhe, take half of the money and give it to your wife, then send the other half back to the He family. Tell your wife that we'll owe her 50,000 dollars first and we'll give it to her later."

“Yes, I understand,” Xia Zhe said.

Chapter 409: Something Wrong With the Money

The ginseng was sold for 100,000 dollars and this amount of money belonged to Qiao Mei. However, Zhou Hua would not tell them where she kept the 50,000 dollars she took from He Ning. Although it was Zhou Hua who took the money, the family would have to pay it back on her behalf if she refused to do it. They could not let this matter taint the Xia family’s reputation and make them seem like people who default on their debts.

Once Zhou Hua revealed the whereabouts of the 50,000 dollars, they would retrieve it and give it to Qiao Mei. The money did not belong to the Xia family. Their part of the payment was the three-year agreement.

Xia Zhe carried the money bag upstairs. The women of the Xia family had not finished their meal yet, but when they saw the big bag of money, they immediately lost interest in the food.

They had never seen so much money in their lives.

An amount of 100,000 dollars was not something that any ordinary family could ever have. Many families would never see so much money in their lives.

“Wow, Mei Mei. You’re the richest person in the family now. When I have time, you must also bring me into the mountains to dig for ginseng!” Xia He said as she laughed.

“Sure, come and look for me when you’re free.” Qiao Mei agreed readily.

Tan Jing took a look at the money bag and then turned away with much difficulty. She stared fixedly at her rice bowl. Qiao Mei was clearly only a villager...

Qiao Mei counted the money happily. As she counted, she felt that something was wrong, as if she had forgotten something.

“What’s wrong? Is there a problem?” Xia Zhe looked at Qiao Mei in puzzlement.

Xia Zhe’s attention was always on Qiao Mei and he could even notice the slightest change in her expression.

They had already checked the authenticity of the money in the bag. Out of trust for He Ning, they did not check on the amount. They thought that even if there was any shortfall, it would not be too much, probably in the range of tens of dollars.

Qiao Mei did not answer Xia Zhe and quickly ran to the window instead. Seeing that He Ning had not gone far, she opened the window and shouted, “Wait a minute!”

Qiao Mei’s sweet voice was easily recognizable. He Ning raised his head to look at Qiao Mei on the second floor.

“Come back! I have something to tell you!” With that, Qiao Mei closed the window and ran downstairs with the money bag.

Xia Zhe followed closely behind, not knowing what Qiao Mei wanted to do. The other women in the family were also confused by what was happening and stood in the corridor on the second floor to watch the commotion.

He Ning walked back leisurely and asked, “What’s the matter?”

“There’s something wrong with your money,” Qiao Mei said.

The Xia family was stunned. He Ning was also confused and did not know what was wrong. He turned to look at Huo Gao.

“I’ve counted the money. It’s definitely real, and the amount is correct,” Huo Gao said.

He was not the one who prepared the money, but he did not want to look bad. He was a person who cared about his reputation.

“I’m not talking about the authenticity or the quantity. I want new money, not old money,” Qiao Mei said.

He Ning looked at Qiao Mei helplessly. Was she trying to torture him?

“And not just any new money. I want specific banknotes.” Qiao Mei took out pen and paper and wrote down the denominations that she wanted.

Currently, the currency that was in circulation was the country’s third version. Among these, there were a few denominations that would see their values appreciating in the future and becoming very valuable. The real value of an amount of money could be very different after taking into account the denominations it was made up of. An amount of 100,000 dollars consisting of varied denominations might only be worth a little more than 100,000 dollars after 50 years. However, if the currency was changed to the designated denominations she wanted, the future value might even become 10 million dollars.

She had learned this piece of information in her other life from a friend who was a collector. He had told her that even an old dime could be worth 70,000 to 80,000 dollars!

He Ning took the list from Qiao Mei with a smile. He thought that Qiao Mei was just deliberately making things difficult for him, that after what he had done to the Xia family back then, Qiao Mei was using this opportunity to take revenge.

However, she was using such a small matter as a method of taking revenge? She was really just a village girl. Her methods were so childish.

“Alright, I understand,” He Ning said. This was not a difficult task for him. He could just send someone to get it done.

“Do you have any other requests?” He Ning asked.

Qiao Mei thought for a moment and said, "You can just deduct 50,000 dollars from the 100,000 dollars so that I don't have to send it back to you. I only want brand new currency. The banknotes must be in their original bundles. Don't cut the currency straps."

Banknotes in the original bundles with running serial numbers and the bank's exclusive currency straps around the notes would be even more valuable.

After a few decades, if He Ning found out that he had helped Qiao Mei earn nearly ten million dollars, would he feel distressed?

The Xia family members looked on as Qiao Mei talked to He Ning. They did not know what Qiao Mei was planning, but she must have her reasons for doing all these.

"Alright," He Ning said and turned to leave. However, he did not pick up the money that was on the ground. He could do the exchange tomorrow. Otherwise, it was such a hassle to keep moving the money around.

Chapter 410: Backbone

Back at the nursery, Huo Gao went to brew the medicine personally.

"If you're worried about security, you can get an iron cage to keep the ginseng. Don't lock it in your safe again," Huo Gao instructed as he brewed the medicine.

He Ning rubbed his stomach and agreed in a casual manner.

He thought about the meal he had at the Xia family's house. He had a craving for the food again, it was as if he could never have enough of it.

It had been a long time since he felt this way. The medicinal cuisine he ate at home tasted terrible. If it was not for someone supervising him at mealtimes, he would not eat any of it at all.

In addition, his medicine was very bitter, so he was never in the mood to eat anything and never felt hungry.

He did not expect to suddenly develop an appetite now and felt that it must have something to do with the meal that Qiao Mei made. Could it be that someone with good culinary skills could treat his illness?

“Little Uncle! Did you manage to get the ginseng?” He Mei rushed into the courtyard and asked He Ning excitedly.

“Yes I did,” He Ning said.

“That’s great! Little Uncle, then you will feel much better soon!” He Mei said agitatedly.

He Ning was the backbone of the He family. If anything should happen to him, the He family’s prestige would definitely be affected. Her father had said so, and so did everyone else. She also knew that without He Ning, she would definitely not be able to marry Xia Zhe. Therefore, she truly hoped that He Ning would stay healthy and be able to live a long life.

“Little Uncle, the men are ready. When do we start?” He Mei asked.

He Ning was stunned for a moment. Huo Gao, who was preparing the herbs, was also stunned and quickly stole a glance at He Ning. He also wanted to know exactly how shameless and ruthless He Ning could be. He Ning had only just eaten the food made by that person and now he was able to break up her family.

In any case, anyone else with a conscience would not be able to do it.

If not for the fact that the He family and the Huo family were old friends and he had known He Ning since they were young, he would not have become friends with He Ning.

After a moment of silence, He Ning said to He Mei, “Get rid of those people you found. If needed, use money to dismiss them.”

He Mei was shocked. Why was he going back on his word?

“Why! Little Uncle, didn’t we agree on this!” He Mei screamed.

The ear-piercing sound made He Ning very unhappy. He frowned and stared at He Mei.

He Mei immediately lowered her head and hunched her shoulders. She whispered, “I’m sorry, Little Uncle... I didn’t mean to be so loud. I was just a little surprised.”

He Ning closed his eyes and ignored her.

“I’ll go and get them to leave now.” He Mei dawdled as she made her way out of the house.

He Ning suddenly opened his eyes and looked at He Mei intently. “Wait.”

“Little Uncle, have you changed your mind?” He Mei looked at He Ning, hoping to be pleasantly surprised.

The displeasure on He Ning’s face became even more obvious. He said sternly, “You’d better not play any tricks behind my back. Get rid of all the people you found. You must not carry out the plan. Don’t even dare to give me any excuse.”

“Don’t ruin my plans, or else...” Before He Ning could finish, He Mei already understood what he meant.

He Mei had never seen He Ning speak to her in such a harsh manner as she was usually the most favored person in the family. She was so frightened that her face turned pale and she could not even speak properly.

“I... I’ll go now... Going now. I definitely won’t let them go and look for Qiao Mei!” He Mei hurriedly ran out to put a stop to their original plan.

They had the same goal, and that was to break up Xia Zhe and Qiao Mei.

There were many ways to do it and there was no need to take action now.

Previously, He Ning had asked He Mei to find a few men to find an opportunity to take a few photos together with Qiao Mei. There was no need to capture Qiao Mei. They just needed to isolate Qiao Mei and take a few photos with her while she was alone.

These men were told to approach Qiao Mei and talk to her, and then to take photos of the entire encounter. No one would know exactly what they were talking about but the photos would show a man and a woman behaving in an ambiguous manner. When the time came, Qiao Mei would definitely have a hard time explaining herself.

They wanted to create an impression that Qiao Mei had improper relationships with many men. When they released the photos in public, Qiao Mei's reputation would be tarnished and the Xia family would become a laughingstock. After that, the Xia family would most likely ask Qiao Mei to leave for the sake of their reputation.