

RTAMM 131

Chapter 131: Sister-in-Law

Elder Lee must have heard about Qiao Nan's situation from Zhu Baoguo, hence he specially went to the Qiao family's residence today.

With Elder Lee's words just now, unless she decided to quit school on her own accord, even if her father had to work his guts out, he would have to let her continue with her studies regardless of what excuses her mother came up with.

At least there was one thing Qiao Nan was sure of.

Even if she had a conflict with Qiao Zijin one day and either of them had to quit school, she would not be the one who would be forced to quit school.

“...”

“...”

Qiao Dongliang was too happy that he was in complete bewilderment. On the other hand, Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin were so furious that they were in shock, particularly Qiao Zijin who had turned green from anger.

After the merry-making today, everyone now knew that Qiao Dongliang had a capable daughter who came in first in the middle school exams, and her name was Qiao Nan. Nobody remembered Qiao Zijin, the elder daughter of the Qiao family.

“Mom, I don't feel well, so I won't be going to work today!” Nobody knew if her father would use her hard-earned money on Qiao Nan in the future.

She changed her mind in an instant and no longer wanted to quit her studies to work.

If she did not study, all the savings would be used on Qiao Nan. She could not take it lying down. Since her father wanted her to stay with the family and would take in a husband for her, everything

in the Qiao family belonged to her and had nothing to do with Qiao Nan. She had no right to use her money!

Why should she work while Qiao Nan spent the money they earned? “Mom, I find it boring to work, so I don’t want to work anymore. Should I just resign today?”

“Fine.” Ding Jiayi agreed without much thought. “I have said long ago that you are still young, and the most important thing is to study hard. It is too tiring to work.”

“No!” Qiao Dongliang’s face darkened. “How could you pamper your child to this extent? One should not give up halfway. Zijin, since you have started to work, why would you want to stop working now? Zijin, according to your nominal age, you are already eighteen years old this year and could already apply for your identity card. Why are you still so unreliable? Nan Nan is younger than you by two years. Don’t you find it shameful for me to tell you to learn from her? Regarding what happened at the beginning of this year, although I kept quiet, it doesn’t mean what your mom and you did were right. I just couldn’t be bothered to lecture both of you. I have no idea where your mom got your school fees from. Did she tell you? Why would you waste all her efforts? You have been working for the past two months, and the pay could at least help cover half of the school fees. You could help lighten your mom’s load in this way, but why don’t you think in behalf of your mom?”

“Don’t reprimand Zijin. She cares a lot about me. She said that when she receives her pay, she will get me a gift. We have an agreement. I will be in charge of Zijin, and you are in charge of Nan Nan. You have no right to lecture her or take her matters into your hand. I will take care of Zijin. She is very good to me. Everything that I have done is of my own accord. I am more than willing to work my guts out for her. From the way you lectured Zijin, I don’t think Qiao Nan is any better!” Ding Jiayi was displeased; she defended Zijin and sided with her.

“What’s wrong with Nan Nan? She can enroll in The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China, but she decided to go to Ping Cheng High School to lighten my load. She even managed to get a scholarship. Isn’t that good enough? At the very least, she did not squander all the money we had at home!” Qiao Dongliang laughed coldly. “Fine. Since you are willing, I won’t say anything and won’t meddle anymore. I only have one question for you. Where did you get Zijin’s school fees from at the start of the year?”

“Why do you have to care where I get it from? I did not steal, rob, or go against the law. You just have to look after your Qiao Nan.” A flash of panic could be seen in Ding Jiayi’s eyes. She did not give a direct answer to Qiao Dongliang’s question. “Alright, it’s not early. I have to work to earn money for Zijin’s school fees for this semester. Will this do? Zijin, if you don’t feel well, you should take a break today. You do not have to worry about working. You are still a student. The

most important thing is to study hard. Don't listen to what your dad said. If you don't feel like going, just resign. No matter what, Mom will find a way to obtain your school fees. I won't let you owe school fees."

"Alright, I will listen to Mom." With Ding Jiayi's backing, Qiao Zijin really decided not to go. She turned and headed to her room to sleep in.

"Obtain?" Qiao Nan puzzled over Ding Jiayi's choice of words. She could not help but feel uneasy at this word.

It was similar to the uneasy feeling she had when her mother spent all the money they had at home and asked Elder Lee to pull strings for her.

Qiao Nan narrowed her eyes. "Mom, where did you 'obtain' sister's school fees for this semester?"

"You don't have to care!" Ding Jiayi did not even tell Qiao Dongliang when he asked her, so how could she possibly tell Qiao Nan. She wrung the water off the towel, wiped her face slovenly, and left without eating her breakfast.

"Dad, I can't help but worry at the way Mom puts it. My sister is in The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China. The school fee is higher than other high schools. Where could Mom obtain the school fees from?" Qiao Nan walked to stand by Qiao Dongliang.

Qiao Dongliang pushed out his bicycle; he was in a hurry to get to work. "Don't worry. Your mom is a grown-up. It would be alright. Nan Nan, I am going off to work. You stay at home."

Qiao Dongliang did not know that Qiao Nan knew Ding Jiayi better than him. Never would he have imagined that the issue with Qiao Zijin's school fees would cause an upheaval at home. When the problem finally arose, the Qiao family was going through the most difficult times and was faced with the biggest challenge. It was one disaster after another for the Qiao family, and it almost became the last straw that broke the camel's back.

Over at the Zhai family's residence, Zhai Sheng's father was rubbing his forehead. He could not sleep a wink last night, and he was woken up early in the morning by the din outside. "Which house created such a ruckus?"

“Who else could it be if not the young lady who always comes to our house to study?” Zhai Hua bit on an apple, her eyes staring at the newspapers.

“What happened?”

“The young lady came in first in the middle school exams; the Lee family celebrated her good results. I heard that the good-for-nothing grandson of the Zhu family had changed for the better under her influence and done well in the exams.” Even though Zhai Hua rarely went out when she was in the quad, nothing in the quad could escape her eyes.

“Are you referring to the maternal grandson from the Lee family, Zhu Baoguo, who always engages in fights?” Zhai Sheng’s father had some impression of Zhu Baoguo. “No wonder it is bustling with noise and excitement. It’s just that they celebrated it too early. If they are in high school and have such results, then it would be worth the celebrations.” But no one can deny the fact that the young lady had done pretty well.

It seemed like the young lady who always dropped by their house to use the storeroom was serious about studying; she was not scheming or up to no good. “Where is Zhai Sheng?”

“Where else could he be? Dad, Zhai Sheng is already twenty-one years old, yet he stays in the army all day long. When could he get a sister-in-law for me? Dad, don’t you want to have a grandchild?” Her brother had grown up in the army, but there was no woman in the army.

Recently, Zhai Hua heard that man and man could... Anyway, she was anxious. Her brother must not be led astray!

But Zhai Hua could only keep her thoughts to herself. To the men in the Zhai family, the army was a solemn and sacred place.

Chapter 132: Scholarship

“He is only twenty-one years old, still young.” Zhai Sheng’s father said, not lifting his head. He might have said it casually now, but four years later when Zhai Sheng was twenty-five years old and still without a girlfriend, he was not as calm as now.

On the other hand, the results Elder Lee had gotten were very much accurate.

When Qiao Nan went to the school to get her results slip, she saw a bright red banner at the school gate. It read “Congratulations to our student, Qiao Nan, for coming in the first place in the province for middle school exams!”

“Teacher Lee,” Qiao Nan greeted politely when she saw her Chinese teacher.

Teacher Lee looked at her beloved pupil, her visage turning red and green similar to those blended colors on a palette. Qiao Nan was perplexed. “Teacher Lee, do you feel unwell today? Would you like to go back to rest?”

Since middle school exams were over, teachers of the secondary three classes had basically finished their classes and could take a break. It would be fine even if Teacher Lee did not go to school.

“My body is perfectly fine. It is my heart that feels uncomfortable,” Teacher Lee said angrily. “Do you know where the two marks were deducted from?”

“...” Qiao Nan twitched her lips. “I could roughly guess.”

“You...” Teacher Lee was exasperated. “Forget it, forget it. As compared to last semester when you scored zero marks, having two marks deducted this time around could be considered a good improvement. You did not embarrass me.” Teacher Lee plastered a bitter smile on her face.

Apart from Teacher Lee’s Chinese subject, Qiao Nan scored full marks for the remaining subjects.

If it was other students, there would be nothing wrong about the scores. However, it was unusual in Qiao Nan’s case.

Qiao Nan had the perfect score for her essay, but she lost two marks in the memorization component. The loss of these two marks was just like slicing off Teacher Lee’s flesh. Teacher Lee could neither be proud nor angry at Qiao Nan.

Still, Teacher Lee felt slightly comforted by the look of envy in other teachers’ eyes.

The top scorer in the province was her own student. All secondary three teachers' pay would be doubled. During the Lunar New Year, they would also receive more bonus than usual.

Certainly, the teachers were not really after the increment and bonus. As a teacher, it was rare for them to have students coming in first in the whole province for the middle school exams.

This was sheer luck!

One could imagine how delighted the teachers of secondary three class one must be to see Qiao Nan.

"Hurry along." Teacher Lee patted Qiao Nan on the shoulder and walked into the classroom with her.

Teacher Chen who was already in the classroom was beaming. "I believed all of you must have seen the banner at the school gate when you reached the school. First, let's give a round of applause to Qiao Nan. Qiao Nan not only made the secondary three class one proud but also became the pride of Ping Cheng Junior High School. Let's give her a round of applause!"

The classroom resonated with thunderous sounds of applause.

She was the top scorer in the province. If others knew they were once classmates with her, everyone would be so envious of them.

Every student in the class clapped loudly, with the exception of Zhao Yu who clapped half-heartedly.

"Alright. Everyone should have a look at your results and compare it to the cutoff point for high schools last year. All of you should carefully consider which school you would like to enroll in. When you go back home, you can discuss with your parents before filling in the application form." Teacher Chen asked the students to pass down the required documents.

When the students received their results, it was the joy of some and the sorrow of others. Some students did fairly well, whereas other students did not do well.

“Qiao Nan, come with me to the office.” After distributing the documents, Teacher Chen asked Qiao Nan to go to the office. “Have you thought it through? Did you discuss with your parents?”

“We had a discussion and my dad agreed to it.” Qiao Nan filled in her desired high school in front of Teacher Chen.

Teacher Chen was relieved that he succeeded in persuading Qiao Nan to study at Ping Cheng High School.

The principal of Ping Cheng High School had specially asked Teacher Chen to make sure that Qiao Nan would study in Ping Cheng High School by all means. She could bring up any requests; the school would try to accede to her requests as long as it was within their means.

After getting the instructions from the management, Teacher Chen also did his best to help Qiao Nan fight for more favorable terms.

After all, since the chat with Qiao Nan last time, Teacher Chen knew that the Qiao family’s financial situation was not very good, and it would be very stressful for the parents to finance two children through school.

Teacher Chen did not wish to see Qiao Nan, who had great potential to do well, to quit school because of the financial situation at home. It would be such a pity.

After knowing about Qiao Nan’s problems, Teacher Chen tried to fight for the best terms for Qiao Nan.

“Qiao Nan, you came in first in the province this time. The school is proud of you. This is a reward from our school. It is not much, only one hundred yuan. But since you decided to go to Ping Cheng High School, they have a reward for you too; it is two hundred yuan.”

Teacher Chen took out two envelopes and passed them to Qiao Nan. The two envelopes contained the reward that Ping Cheng Junior High School and Ping Cheng High School had for Qiao Nan.

“As for what you mentioned earlier, I have notified the management. As long as you study at Ping Cheng High School, you would be exempted from paying three years of tuition and incidental fees. Nevertheless, you would have to settle your own meals since the school would not cover for them. In addition, if you maintain your standard when you go to high school, the school will grant you a

scholarship every semester. But then you would no longer have one hundred or two hundred yuan of reward. Do you understand?"

"Don't worry, Teacher Chen. I understand. This arrangement is pretty good." Qiao Nan smiled. Actually, she was really pleased with the arrangement. It was only 1993 now. It was unlike the 21st century where a hundred yuan would be used up in no time.

This three hundred yuan was enough to cover her school fees for one to two years. Besides, the school had exempted her from paying tuition and incidental fees. She could save up the three hundred yuan and the money from her scholarship for her college fees.

"Qiao Nan, I am proud of you!" Teacher Chen was slightly agitated. If Qiao Nan was not a female student, Teacher Chen would have given her a hug.

Even though Teacher Chen treated Qiao Nan like his own daughter, she was, after all, a young lady now. It would be inappropriate to do that.

"Don't say that. It was all because Teacher Chen and the other teachers had taught me well."

"You are usually quiet in class, but you are good at pleasing people. Alright, go back home. Remember to keep the money properly. Don't lose it."

"Thank you for your help, Teacher Chen." Qiao Nan bowed to Teacher Chen, expressing her heartfelt gratitude. Afterward, she took the three hundred yuan that the school rewarded her and left.

"Well, is our top scorer of the quad back? Nan Nan, do you have time during the summer break? Can you tutor our Juan Er so that she can come in the first place in middle school exams as well?"

One of the aunties from the quad saw Qiao Nan on her way back from school. She had the envious look in her eyes, and she sounded jealous when she spoke to Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan smiled lightly, shook her head, and walked towards her house.

Chapter 133: Blessing and Misfortune Go Hand in Hand

“Pey, what is there to be complacent about? It’s just clinching the top place in the middle school examination. You should come in first again in your high school examination and attend the best universities in our country—Tsinghua University and Peking University,” the auntie who was rejected spoke harshly.

Although she sounded like sour grapes, she really hoped that Qiao Nan could tutor her grandson. It had to be free of charge and on a voluntary basis.

Qiao Nan did not seem to mind the auntie’s reaction. Having finalized the matters pertaining to high school admission, Qiao Nan was elated. She was waiting for Qiao Dongliang to come home so that she could break the good news to him.

Never did she know that the saying ‘Blessing and misfortune comes in turn’ would come true.

Qiao Nan’s good mood only lasted for less than half a day before she heard the bad news.

“Qiao Nan, is your mom not at home?” Qiao Dongliang’s colleague ran to the Qiao’s residence in a fluster. He did not manage to find Ding Jiayi and only saw Qiao Zijin and Qiao Nan at home.

Since Qiao Dongliang mentioned in his department today about his younger daughter coming in first in the middle school examination, the colleague unconsciously called out Qiao Nan’s name first when he spoke.

“My mom is working. What is the matter?” Qiao Nan was stunned. “Are you looking for my mom for anything urgent? Should I bring you to my mom’s working place?”

“Something happened your dad!”

“My dad?”

“What happened to my dad?” Qiao Zijin jumped at the news.

“When your dad was delivering something, he was hit by someone’s car. He’s in the hospital now.”

“!” Both Qiao Zijin and Qiao Nan were scared stiff. Qiao Zijin’s eyes became wet and drops of tears rolled down her face. “Then... then, is my dad alright? He... he didn’t die right, did he?”

“Shush, what nonsense are you talking about?!” Qiao Nan gave Qiao Zijin a stare. “Is my dad’s injury serious? Is it because he needs surgery, so my mom must be present to sign the papers? I will bring you to look for my mom now.” As she thought about it, Qiao Nan secretly brought along the 300 yuan she received today in case of emergencies.

“Yes, he really needs surgery. Your mom must be present to sign the papers.” The colleague did not expect Qiao Nan to react so quickly given her young age, and she knew so much. On the contrary, Qiao Zijin, who was older than her by two years, was scared to tears and did not know anything else.

Qiao Nan found Ding Jiayi with lightning speed. Then, the three of them, mother and daughters, rushed to the hospital.

“Are you all the patient’s relatives?” Seeing that Ding Jiayi and the rest was finally here, the doctor came up to them and said in a displeased tone. “Do you know that every second you delay will reduce the survival rate of the injured?!”

“Sorry, Doctor. We are terribly sorry. How is my dad now?” Qiao Nan apologized again and again.

“Your dad’s condition is not too good. His waist was injured. We are giving him checkups to find out the specific situation. We can determine the treatment plan afterward. However, your dad’s injury is too serious. He definitely needs surgery, so there is a need for his family members to be around. Additionally, you will need to prepare the money.”

“This... How much money is required?” Ding Jiayi’s voice trembled. She was scared out of her wits.

When Qiao Nan brought someone to inform her earlier that Qiao Dongliang had been knocked down by a car, Ding Jiayi was already so scared that she nearly lost her soul.

Hearing that Qiao Dongliang was so seriously injured now, Ding Jiayi was totally at a loss.

“Mom, how... Will anything happen to Dad? If he needs surgery, our family—do we still have money?” Qiao Zijin was crying pitifully, her eyes all red.

Ding Jiayi also started wiping her tears. “How could we have any money?”

“Mom, this really won’t do. Use my tuition fees for Dad’s treatment first.” Qiao Zijin sniffed.

Ding Jiayi did not know whether to laugh or cry. “Your tuition fees don’t amount to much. Your dad’s surgery expenses on the other hand... If I knew this would happen, I would not have...” No one knew this would happen to Old Qiao.

“Uncle, you said that my dad was knocked down by a car. Where is the driver?” Qiao Nan took a deep breath and told herself not to panic. If she panicked at this juncture, there would be no hope for her dad who was on the sick bed.

“Don’t even mention it. The driver left his car and ran off once he saw someone was knocked down!” Old Qiao was too unlucky. Her daughter just came in first at the middle school examination. While she needed a lot of money for her subsequent education, Old Qiao had to meet with this incident. What would happen to his family in the future?

“...” When she heard about this outcome, Qiao Nan nearly failed to hang on and almost fainted.

The driver actually left the car and ran off. That would mean she could not even find the perpetrator to seek compensation for her father.

“Your family...” Seeing the mother and daughters trio looked stupefied, the colleague knitted his brows. “Why are you in a daze? Is money more important than life? Old Qiao has been working for so long; you should have some savings. Quickly withdraw the money to pay for the medical expenses first. As long as he is still around, the money can be earned back.”

Hearing the colleague’s words, Ding Jiayi covered her face, crouching on the floor. She started crying loudly.

“Mom, what should we do?” Qiao Zijin also regretted. Now that her father was seriously injured, the family did not even have the money to treat him.

If she knew this would happen, she... she would not have studied at The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China.

No one would have thought that her father would meet with such an accident.

“What do you mean? Do you still want to continue with the treatment?” The doctor’s patience was running out.

As a doctor, he had seen a lot of such situations. However, the hospital also required money for its operations. Doctors like him also needed to survive. Without money, there was nothing to talk about. Otherwise, the hospital would not be able to continue operating.

“Yes, we have money.” Qiao Nan took out the scholarship. “I will pay for my dad first. If it is not enough, we will compensate for it later. Doctor, you must save my dad!”

Seeing the considerable amount of money in Qiao Nan’s hands, Ding Jiayi stood up, rushed over, and gave her a slap. “You’re a white-eyed wolf! Your dad was so good to you, but you actually hid all the money and refused to take them out. Do you want to watch your dad die?!”

“Sister-in-law, what are you doing?” The colleague tried to shield Qiao Nan from the blow but he was a step too late. That slap fell right on Qiao Nan’s face, half of it swelling immediately. Ding Jiayi had obviously used much of her strength.

The colleague was angered by this situation. “Qiao Nan did not wish for Old Qiao to meet with such an incident. Furthermore, is Qiao Nan the only one who is concerned about Old Qiao who is in the hospital for treatment? What other savings does your family have? Quickly take them out!”

Although the colleague was curious why Qiao Nan, who was just a child, had so much money, he was unhappy that Ding Jiayi was behaving like a block of wood. Qiao Dongliang was already so seriously injured, but Ding Jiayi could not do anything properly except for crying and hitting others.

“Uncle, you do not need to ask my mom anymore. She has used up all the savings in my family for my sister’s education. I got this money from the teacher just now; it is my scholarship. I will pay for my dad first and we will talk later.” After saying this coldly, Qiao Nan took back the scholarship from Ding Jiayi’s hands and handed it over.

Chapter 134: Aggravating Situations

“Although the tuition fees for The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China are expensive, it is not ridiculously expensive, is it?” The colleague looked at Ding Jiayi in disbelief. “Don’t tell me that you all bought Qiao Zijin a place at The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China?”

All the family savings were spent for the sake of one daughter. There was not a single cent left. Was Qiao Zijin the only one in the Qiao family?

In his opinion, this type of situation was too ridiculous.

He found it hard to accept the fact that something so serious had happened to Qiao Dongliang, but the only person who could provide the money was actually Qiao Nan, who was just a child. Qiao Nan took out the scholarship she earned with her capability. It was unflattering, and she also had to endure Ding Jiayi’s slap on top of that.

At that moment, the colleague felt that Qiao Dongliang’s family was strange and abnormal.

In short, Qiao Dongliang’s spouse was not reliable in accomplishing any major tasks when situations called for it. She could not be compared to her child, Qiao Nan. No wonder Qiao Nan could attain the top place during the middle school examination.

Just as Qiao Nan handed over the three hundred yuan, Qiao Dongliang’s medical results were out. “The patient’s hip suffers a comminuted fracture. Most critically, his spleen is ruptured and needs surgery urgently. Have your family members prepared the money?”

“How... how much money?” Ding Jiayi’s legs were wobbly. She was under the false assumption that Qiao Dongliang’s condition was very good. She was now so scared that her face turned pale, and she could barely stand. The colleague had to hold her by the side.

“Pay a thousand yuan first. You could pay the rest later if it is not enough.”

“One... One thousand?” Ding Jiayi was further stupefied by the amount.

Given the family’s situation, not to mention a thousand yuan, she could not even take out a hundred yuan now.

“What should we do? Is Old Qiao going to die for sure?” Old Qiao, how could you leave the three of us mother and daughters?! Ding Jiayi squatted on the ground and patted her thighs as she began to cry.

“...” The colleague was speechless. “Sister-in-law, don’t be anxious. As mentioned, no matter how much more money your family has, you should take them all out now and pay as much as you can. This won’t do. I will think of a way. I will return to the factory and see if we can raise some money. The priority is to save Old Qiao’s life!”

Till now, Ding Jiayi had not even taken out a single cent. The colleague was also puzzled.

“Dad?” At this time, Qiao Dongliang was pushed out and arrangements were being made for him to enter the operating theater. Qiao Nan saw him and hurriedly walked over.

Qiao Dongliang’s clothes were a little torn, but what caught Qiao Nan’s eyes most were the numerous droplets of blood on Qiao Dongliang’s body.

Qiao Dongliang could still force his eyes open, looking confused and lifeless. He opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out.

“Dad, don’t worry, the doctor will definitely be able to cure you.”

“Sister-in-law, Old Qiao, this is?” The saying ‘When it rains, it pours’ was right. Suddenly, a group of people walked over. Ding Jiayi was so scared that she was shivering all over. “Sister-in-law, when you borrowed money from me at the beginning of the year, you clearly said that you will return it after two months. You see, it has been six months since then.”

“That’s right. Although the amount borrowed is not huge, we still need to survive, don’t we? If not for the sake of Old Qiao, we... What happened to Old Qiao, though?” The few people who came seemed to be of similar age as Qiao Dongliang. Their posture was prim and proper, and their eyes exuded an aura of ferocity and justice.

“All of you claimed that you were Old Qiao’s good buddies. Don’t you see the state Old Qiao is in now? I don’t even have the money to save his life; where can I get the money to return to you?” Ding Jiayi cried continuously. She sounded so miserable as if the whole world was bullying her. As

she was standing in the corridor of the hospital, her action was extremely glaring and attracted a lot of attention.

The group of people was furious when they heard Ding Jiayi's words, and their face turned pale.

Their families were not well-off as well. However, since they were good buddies with Qiao Dongliang, they were willing to part with whatever money available and lent it to Ding Jiayi, the wife of their good buddy.

She could not refuse to return what she borrowed!

There was clearly an agreement to return the money after two months, considering Qiao Dongliang only had temporary financial problems.

The old and young in their family could not go hungry after all. They had no choice but to come looking for the sister-in-law to ask for the money. Why did this become a fault of theirs?

"To all uncles, I am very sorry. I am my dad's younger daughter. My dad has been hit by a car and needs to undergo surgery immediately. Could you let the doctor push my dad into the operating theater first? As for the money that my mom borrowed from you, can you tell me what happened in detail?" Qiao Nan was having a headache. She hated her mother, Ding Jiayi, even more than before.

Her mother clearly had so many things she could do. Why did she only do the wrong things instead of the good ones?

Borrowing money... Her mother actually borrowed money. Additionally, she seemed to have loaned it from her father's former comrades!

Qiao Nan was aware that although Qiao Dongliang missed his former comrades, he was unwilling to stay in contact with them since he left the army. He had a knot in his heart as he was no longer an army officer but these people still were.

Most importantly, Qiao Dongliang did not want them to know how poor his life was after leaving the army. This concerned his pride as a man.

Now, Ding Jiayi not only looked for them but also seemed to have asked them to lend her money. Qiao Nan did not know what to say anymore.

Typically, it was not appropriate to tell these matters to a child. However, Ding Jiayi was unreasonable and refused to pay them back. The few uncles had no choice but to roughly tell Qiao Nan what happened.

After listening to them, Qiao Nan immediately understood what happened.

She had felt strange that her mother could gather the money for Qiao Zijin's tuition fees within such a short time span of two days. Qiao Zijin was studying in The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China, and the tuition fees for one semester was not cheap. Hence, her mother borrowed money from others.

Furthermore, when Qiao Nan calculated, the money Ding Jiayi borrowed was much more than Qiao Zijin's tuition fees!

"Your name is Nan Nan, right? Nan Nan, it is not that we are heartless. We also did not know that Old Qiao would meet an incident. Your family is facing such a situation. Reasonably, we should not demand money at this inopportune time, but we also have kids. We need to pay their school fees, feed the elderly at home, and send them to the hospital if they are unwell!"

"I know... I know all that. The problem indeed lies with my family. We will definitely return the owed money to you. Can... can you give me a few more days? There are still two months before the school reopens. If any of your family needs money urgently, please let me know. When I have money, I will return it to you first. Will that do?"

At the end of her speech, Qiao Nan's eyes were red. "Who has a pen and paper? I will note down the debts first. What my mom owed must be returned to you in full, not one cent less."

Tears rolled down Qiao Nan's fair and smooth face. She looked much more pitiful than Ding Jiayi who cried miserably and loudly earlier.

Qiao Nan was only crying quietly. Her voice was a little hoarse, but neither did she complain nor lose her temper. She tried her best to ask these former comrades of Qiao Dongliang in a polite manner. Seeing her like this was really heart-wrenching.

The few comrades could not bear the sight of it. After all, Qiao Nan was just a kid.

Chapter 135: Futile Attempts in Seeking Help

Moreover, Qiao Nan was more reasonable than her mother. As one's elders, what else could they do but listen to the girl's plea? "Alright, Nan Nan, the few of us really do not want to make things difficult for you."

"Thank you." Qiao Nan bowed and apologized to the few military personnel in a serious manner. "Sorry to have caused you so much trouble. Really sorry."

Under Qiao Nan's appeasement, these people left despite still feeling indignant.

After they left, Ding Jiayi jumped with anxiety. "Wretched girl! As it is, we don't even have money for your dad's surgery, and you still want to pay them back. Do you want to let your dad die?!"

Ignoring Ding Jiayi, Qiao Nan walked toward the doctor solemnly. "Doctor, you must save my dad. The surgery must proceed. We have already paid a portion of the medical fees. It's true. This is the receipt from my payment just now. Please help operate my dad immediately. We will definitely pay all the remaining fees later."

The doctor saw that there was indeed a receipt of three hundred yuan in Qiao Nan's hand. "Sure."

"Doctor, my dad certainly needs a blood transfusion for his surgery. Can my sister and I donate some of our blood for my dad to use first?"

"Yes, that is fine." The doctor was momentarily stunned. He did not expect that the students nowadays knew so much.

"Sister, go with me to draw the blood." Qiao Nan pulled Qiao Zijin's hands as she left.

Qiao Zijin was frightened out of her wits. At this juncture, she could only abidingly follow Qiao Nan.

“Why don’t I go as well?” Ding Jiayi heard that if they donated blood, Qiao Dongliang’s medical expenses would probably lower a little. Regardless, she could not just sit here, waiting and doing nothing.

“Both of our blood types are probably the same as Dad’s. We also need to do a blood test before drawing blood. Mom, yours is different.” Qiao Nan shook her head. If Qiao Zijin’s and her blood types were not suitable, that would be a problem.

“No problem, draw my blood. If it cannot be used for your dad’s sake, we could just sell it directly. We need to gather as much money as possible now.” Ding Jiayi followed Qiao Nan to draw blood together.

When the nurse saw Ding Jiayi, she was surprised. “You are here again. It has been quite a while since you last came. You should be able to sell your blood again.”

“Mom, did you come here before?” Qiao Nan knitted her brows. “When was that?”

“No... there’s no such thing. Nurse, quickly draw our blood.” Ding Jiayi switched the topic, rolled up her sleeves in a familiar manner, and extended her arms to the nurse.

“Let’s do a blood test first. Did you eat anything on the way here?” The nurse went by the book and asked the necessary questions. Upon confirming that all three of them were eligible to donate blood, she first did the blood test on Qiao Zijin and Qiao Nan. “Alright, both of your blood types are the same as your dad’s. How much blood do we draw?”

“How much should we draw? Draw more!” Ding Jiayi was the first to express her opinion. “Nurse, please draw three hundred cc from my elder daughter and five hundred cc from my younger one. Your dad usually feeds you so well and so much, now is the time for you to repay him. Your sister’s health has not been good since young; drawing three hundred cc from her is not a small amount.”

“...” Hearing this, the nurse knitted her brows. “Stand up here to measure your weight.”

Without saying a word, Qiao Nan stood up on the scale to measure her weight.

Upon seeing Qiao Nan’s weight, the nurse immediately said, “With her height and weight combination, she could barely draw three hundred cc at once. You mentioned five hundred cc, didn’t you? Are you her biological mother?”

Ding Jiayi's face turned pale. She was slapped in the face and could only say embarrassingly, "Then... then, make it three hundred cc."

Upon the decision, the nurse proceeded to draw blood from the mother and daughters trio.

Qiao Nan actively moved the part of the hand used for drawing the blood, hoping to speed up the process.

After drawing three hundred cc of blood, Qiao Nan pulled down her sleeves. "Sister, stay back and see if anything else is needed here. Mom, go home immediately and take whatever cash is available at home."

"How much could there be?" Ding Jiayi was deep in thoughts as she frowned.

"No matter if it is a lot or not, you must bring all the money here!" This was not the first time Qiao Nan heard about this from Ding Jiayi's mouth. Qiao Nan was sick of hearing it. "As for the rest of the money, I will see if I can borrow some back."

With this sentence, Qiao Nan left the hospital with lightning speed and headed to the quad.

"Mom, what should we do?" Qiao Zijin held the arm from where the blood was drawn and looked at Ding Jiayi worriedly.

"She said she is going to borrow. She should be able to borrow some. Zijin, you stay here just in case anything crops up. I will go home first to bring whatever amount of money available. Regardless of how little it is, it is still better than nothing." In the end, both Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin followed Qiao Nan's instructions and went on separate ways.

When Qiao Nan returned to the quad, the first place she went to was the Lee family's residence.

When the guard saw Qiao Nan, he smiled. "Why are you here today? I heard you came in first in the middle school examination. Congratulations."

"Thank you." Qiao Nan managed to force a smile. "Is Grandpa Lee at home?"

“Elder Lee? Nope. He is out.”

“When will he be back?”

“Probably in a few days’ time. Why?”

Qiao Nan took a deep breath and then gave a long sigh. “Nothing. Sorry for disturbing you.”

Water from afar quenches not fire. Elder Lee was away. This meant that she would not be able to borrow any money here.

There was no hope in borrowing from the Lee family. Qiao Nan ran over to the Zhu family’s residence to look for Zhu Baoguo.

Qiao Nan knew the Zhu family’s situation was good. Elder Zhu doted on Zhu Baoguo and money was the only thing that can satisfy Baoguo. Therefore, Zhu Baoguo had a lot of spare money on hand. Otherwise, he could not have bought Qiao Nan such an expensive present during his last overseas holiday trip.

At this juncture, Qiao Nan did not care whether it was appropriate. Nothing was more important than her father’s life.

“Why is it you again?” Wang Yang saw Qiao Nan at the entrance of the Zhu family’s residence. His eyes turned solemn and he looked gloomy.

“I did not come here to look for you. I am looking for Baoguo.” Qiao Nan pursed her lips.

“Let me ask you, did you tell my uncle anything?” Wang Yang blocked Qiao Nan’s way and spoke in an unfriendly tone. “Don’t think that you can do anything you like because you have Zhai Sheng’s backing. To survive in the quad, you’d better open your eyes wide and see for yourself whom you can afford to offend and whom you can’t!”

“Then, is Brother Zhai someone you can afford to offend in the quad?” Qiao Nan sneered. “Where is Zhu Baoguo?” The Zhu family’s residence also seemed very quiet, and Qiao Nan felt very uneasy.

Wang Yang sneered. “Why are you looking for Zhu Baoguo? Zhu Baoguo fared well in his exams and volunteered to be brought out to have fun.”

“Then, do you have any way to contact Zhu Baoguo?!” Other than Elder Lee, Zhu Baoguo was the only person Qiao Nan could think of. If Zhu Baoguo was not around, Qiao Nan really did not know whom she should borrow such a huge sum of money from!

Wang Yang initially wanted to say no, but he suddenly had an idea when he saw Qiao Nan looking so anxious. “Do you want to look for Zhu Baoguo? Should I help you contact him?”

Chapter 136: Hoping for May–December Romance

“Really?” Qiao Nan’s eyes lit up. “Can you help me now—Wait, are you really so kind?” Wang Yang was not the type who would be kind to anyone.

“Believing it or not is up to you. Do you really want me to help you contact him?” Wang Yang snorted.

“Yes!” Qiao Nan knitted her brows. “When can you give me a reply?”

“You can wait. Even if I manage to contact Zhu Baoguo now, it would probably take some time for Zhu Baoguo to get back to you. You can go home and wait.”

“...” Qiao Nan clenched her fists. “Are you playing a prank on me?”

“Again, believing it or not is up to you.” With this, Wang Yang simply left.

When he was further away, Wang Yang turned his head back and gave Qiao Nan a glance. “Pey, what are you? Just take your time and wait! You won’t die of anxiety!”

Wang Yang was deliberately making fun of Qiao Nan. He saw that Qiao Nan was very anxious and purposely said that to delay her. Even if he could not do anything to Qiao Nan, it was good enough to make her feel disgusted. Well, Qiao Nan was the one who disgusted him first.

Wang Yang was happy, but Qiao Nan felt like she nearly lost all her hopes.

After Wang Yang left, she had the feeling that Wang Yang would not help her contact Zhu Baoguo. Even if she chased over to ask him for Zhu Baoguo's contact, Wang Yang would definitely not reveal it to her.

There was no one else in the Lee family's residence now, and Zhu Baoguo was also not at home. Besides, the Qiao family's situation was tantamount to having severed ties with their relatives. Since it was such a huge sum of money, who else could she request to borrow from? She could not possibly just let it be and leave her father to die.

For a moment, Qiao Nan panicked. Tears pooled in her eyes as she cried very miserably.

At this time, Zhai Sheng, who was resting in the army camp's office after training a batch of new recruits, heard the phone rang before he could take a sip of warm water.

Zhai Sheng drank his water as he picked up the phone. His voice sounded deep and resonant. "Hello."

"..."

There was no sound from the other end of the phone, and Zhai Sheng could hear a deeply suppressed breathing. When he heard a sob, Zhai Sheng tested and asked, "Qiao Nan?"

"Zhai... Brother Zhai..." Right after she called Brother Zhai, Qiao Nan broke down emotionally.

"Don't cry first. What happened?" Zhai Sheng put down his cup and sat up properly.

"My... my dad was hit by a car." Qiao Nan was crying till she could hardly talk, causing her speech to be intermittent. Fortunately, Zhai Sheng was good at listening and understood her.

“Your dad was hit by a car and is in the hospital now?” Knowing that Qiao Nan was definitely very emotional now, Zhai Sheng spoke for Qiao Nan. After he received a snuffled affirmative reply, he continued to ask, “Do you need a lot of money?”

It seemed that all of the Qiao family’s money had been spent on the elder daughter so that she could attend The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China.

Uncle Qiao was hit by a car and the surgery fees alone would be a major expense.

“Yes...” Qiao Nan bit her lips and did not want to cry. When she heard Zhai Sheng’s voice, she was not sure of the reason, but her tears could not stop falling—she simply could not stop crying.

“Which hospital?”

After Qiao Nan gave the name of the hospital, Zhai Sheng resumed, “Go to the hospital and wait first.”

Qiao Nan, who had been crying nonstop, had not regained her senses even after Zhai Sheng hanged up. Only after she heard the beeping sound coming from the other side did Qiao Nan proceed to hang up and passed 0.50 yuan to the phone owner.

“How’s it? Did you borrow any money? How much did you borrow?” When Qiao Nan reached the hospital, Ding Jiayi grabbed Qiao Nan’s shoulder and asked.

“Sister-in-law!” The colleague who was there earlier saw the situation and his expression changed. “Qiao Nan is just a child! Qiao Nan, don’t be anxious. Uncle went back to the factory to raise money just now. I have raised and paid two hundred yuan for you. There will be other ways. If there is not, we can ask the factory owner to lend us money and make a loan agreement or something.”

“Thank you, Uncle.” Qiao Nan gave a dry smile. “Uncle, please keep a watch here. I am leaving for a while.”

Qiao Nan was in a terrible mood. She was unwilling to see Ding Jiayi, this mother of hers, at this point in time.

Such a thing had happened in the family. Ding Jiayi—the mother—only knew to expect Qiao Nan—the younger daughter—to borrow the money needed for Qiao Dongliang’s surgery expenses. Ding Jiayi was probably the only mother who would do that in the whole world.

“Alright, don’t be too worried.” The colleague seemed understanding. Earlier, he felt odd that Qiao Nan was particularly calm. When he saw Qiao Nan’s eyes were obviously red and swollen from crying, he sighed.

Qiao Nan was not only good at her studies but also good in concealing her emotions. When she was worried and scared, she would rather hide and cry alone than do in front of others.

At the entrance of the hospital, Qiao Nan stood for quite a while until she saw a green military jeep arriving. Her eyes lit up and she went over.

However, the person who alighted from the jeep was not Zhai Sheng, but a stranger in military attire.

The soldier was stunned for a moment when she saw the young lady with tearful eyes. He went up to her and asked, “Are you Qiao Nan?”

“Yes.”

“That’s right. Officer Zhai sent me here. Take this envelope and keep it well.” The soldier took out a thick envelope and passed it to Qiao Nan. “Officer Zhai just received a mission, so he is unable to come. He asked you not to worry. If you have any other urgent matters, you can look for me if you can’t find Officer Zhai.”

“Thank you.” Qiao Nan bowed to the soldier. Qiao Nan could not remember how many bows she had made today, including those for embarrassment and gratitude. Other than this action, she did not know what else she could do.

“No, no need.” The soldier was in a fluster. There were so many burly men in the army camp that it was rare to be able to see a gentle lady. The soldier was feeling shy. He did not expect the beautiful young lady to be so polite. He received a bow just by helping Officer Zhai send her something.

The soldier’s face was red with embarrassment. “You... do you need my help for anything else?”

“There is no need. Sorry to have made you run this special trip. Thank you.” Qiao Nan held on tightly to the envelope in her hands because in it was the money for saving Qiao Dongliang’s life.

“If there is nothing else, then... then, I shall leave.” The more polite Qiao Nan was, the more awkward the soldier felt. After he boarded the green jeep and was driving halfway, he slapped his head angrily. “So stupid! How could I forget to ask for her name when it was such a good opportunity?”

He often complained about having no chance to come into contact with members of the opposite gender in the army camp. It was rare for him to meet with such a beautiful lady today, but he actually became dumb when he really did.

She was very beautiful but she looked a little young.

The soldier whose heart was moved was in a dilemma. He never thought about the relationship between his Officer Zhai—who was as cold-blooded as Yama, the King of Hell—and this young lady.

When the soldier saw Qiao Nan again many years later, he felt sore whenever he had to call her ‘sister-in-law’ courteously. His own officer was shameless enough to be in a May–December romantic relationship!

Chapter 137: Pay Us Back

After Qiao Nan took the money, she followed the doctor’s earlier instructions and paid a thousand yuan. She initially wanted to keep the remaining sum of money with her. However, at the thought of her mother’s character, she gritted her teeth and decided to look for the group of Qiao Dongliang’s former comrades who came earlier.

These people really seemed to be in need of money. They did not leave Ping Cheng as they had not gotten back their money. Instead, they paid for two nights of accommodation at one of the hotels in Ping Cheng.

Fortunately, they were all old buddies and knew one another well. They also stayed under the same roof when they were in the army.

Hence, the few grown-up men only rented one room to share in order to save money.

When Qiao Nan found them with the address they had given to her earlier, she felt a little sad too.

She used to think that her mother was only unreasonable to her family members. Now, it seemed that she treated others similarly. She could only bully honest people!

“I’m so sorry. My mom had caused you much trouble.” Qiao Nan took out the money and returned it to each and every one of them according to the list of debts Ding Jiayi owed them.

At that juncture, tears welled up in the eyes of the few men when they received the money. They felt a little hesitant and guilty. “How is Old Qiao doing now?”

“I don’t know yet. But I believe my dad will be fine.” Qiao Nan shook her head forthrightly. When she received the money from Brother Zhai, she dared not look for her mother at all.

Given the family’s current situation, even if her father was fine, her mother would think of all means to grab hold of whatever money available as a precautionary measure.

“Why don’t...” Someone gritted his teeth and wanted to give the money he just received back to Qiao Nan.

They were having difficulties, but it was worse for Old Qiao.

At the thought of Qiao Dongliang, who was lying on the hospital bed and just being pushed into the operating theater, the few comrades did not feel good.

The comrades were most concerned about how Old Qiao’s younger daughter managed to come up with such a large sum of money within such a short time. The sister-in-law obviously said the family had no money, and they definitely needed a lot of money for Old Qiao’s surgery.

“There is no need. I have already paid my dad’s surgery fees. I know uncles are on very good terms with my dad. If you are not in need of money, you will not come and ask us to pay you back. It’s

only right to return what we owe. Don't worry. Although I am very young, my dad was a soldier. The money came from decent sources. There is no problem."

"Aye..." One of the uncles gave a faint sigh. "Since you said this, we will keep the money."

"Younger daughter, how is sister-in-law?" When one of the comrades recalled the unreasonable behavior of Ding Jiayi earlier, he felt extremely bad.

In the past—when Old Qiao was still in contact with them—their first impression, when they met Ding Jiayi, was that she was a quiet, educated and civilized person. They were so envious that Old Qiao could marry such a good wife.

Just how many years had it been since then? Sister-in-law had changed from an educated, cultured and quiet lady to be someone no different from an uncivilized village woman.

Even the younger daughter knew that they came to ask for the money since they had no other means. How could sister-in-law be so unreasonable?

Although sister-in-law had lived to this age, she was not as understanding as her younger daughter. She had really wasted her life.

"Uncle, I am really sorry. I apologize to you on behalf of my mom. She was most probably too nervous and lost her senses because my dad suddenly met with such an accident." Qiao Nan took a deep breath as she tried to find an excuse for Ding Jiayi.

"Younger daughter, we won't say too much." They were not idiots. Whether Ding Jiayi's earlier behavior was due to being cornered or a display of her true self, everyone was able to tell.

Nevertheless, they pitied Qiao Nan. Ding Jiayi was the biological mother of Qiao Nan. Qiao Nan had to put in a few good words for her mother and could not possibly join them in scolding her own mother.

"Uncle must be in a hurry. I will not stay for too long." Knowing that these people were really in need of money, Qiao Nan did not want them to waste money on accommodation expense.

If they canceled the room now, the rent for the second night of accommodation onward could at least be refunded.

Qiao Nan's considerate nature was hard to come by; these people also did not need to put up a false front. True enough, they canceled the room and took back the money for the next two nights. With the money in hand, they transferred it home as soon as possible.

After settling this matter, Qiao Nan rushed back to the hospital immediately. "How... how's my dad's surgery?"

"Where have you been? You're so late!" Ding Jiayi was like a furious lioness. The hair on her body stood up and she could not wait to rush up to Qiao Nan and slap her face despite it was already swollen on one side.

"Sister-in-law!" The colleague had widened his horizons today. He never thought that Old Qiao would have such an unreasonable wife.

Was the younger daughter picked up from the streets, or did Old Qiao give birth to her with another woman? Why was she treating Qiao Nan with such an attitude?

Wasn't Qiao Nan the top student in the middle school examination? She also ranked first in the whole province!

"Qiao Nan, you're still a child. Your dad's surgery fees could not be rushed. We will just cough up as much as we can now." The colleague had not forgotten that Qiao Nan had left earlier to gather money for Qiao Dongliang's surgery expenses.

At the thought of this, the colleague was totally speechless.

As an adult, Ding Jiayi could not even cough up a thousand yuan for Qiao Dongliang's surgery. How much capability did Qiao Nan, who was only a child, have?

For the sake of Qiao Dongliang, Qiao Nan had been so busy. She was such a filial child, but Ding Jiayi seemed to be blind to all these. Besides being blind, was she also heartless?

“Thank you, Uncle. I have paid my dad’s surgery fees.” Qiao Nan glanced at Ding Jiayi coldly, and then looked at the colleague with much gratitude.

“Paid? Is it already paid for? That’s a thousand yuan!” The colleague was shocked. Qiao Nan really managed to get a thousand yuan. That’s impossible!

“That’s great! There is hope for Dad!” When Qiao Zijin heard that, she happily revealed a smile. Qiao Nan’s eyes turned solemn at the sight of this.

Even an outsider expressed their worries when they heard she managed to get a thousand yuan all of a sudden. Only her mother and Qiao Zijin were happily laughing.

The colleague was utterly disappointed with this hopeless sister-in-law. So, he pulled Qiao Nan to one side. “The one thousand yuan... Where did you get it from? Is it alright? Your dad is already injured; he can’t afford to take any more blows. Money is lifeless, people are alive. There will always be solutions to a problem. Your mom is out of line, but you also should not take on this burden alone and do anything foolish.”

A thousand yuan... It would not be easy to borrow this amount even if he tried to do so himself.

“Uncle, rest assured. The money came from decent sources. I borrowed from someone.” Qiao Nan’s heart warmed a little, and her expression was more relaxed.

“Whom did you borrow it from? Is the source reliable? Some money can be borrowed, some money shouldn’t.”

“Uncle, all of my family belongings are in the hands of my mom. Do you think I will be able to borrow the money that shouldn’t be borrowed?” Even if she borrowed from loan sharks, they would also request for collateral.

Chapter 138: Shameless Schemes

Besides, she was still a kid; she could not enter that kind of places even if she wanted to.

“Oh, that’s good.” After making sure that Qiao Nan did not do anything foolish, the colleague sighed, not knowing what else to do.

What a mess the Qiao family was.

Their mother and elder sister did not behave like they were supposed to be, whereas the youngest in the family had to worry for the adults. What had the world come to?

“They are out!” The door to the operating theatre opened right then.

“Doctor, how is our Old Qiao?” Ding Jiayi rushed up to the doctor with red, puffy eyes.

“Is my dad alright?”

“Don’t worry, the surgery was a success. However, the patient had been knocked down by a car, and some symptoms would not appear right away. In the next twenty-four hours, you have to monitor the patient’s conditions closely. If there is any situation, you must notify the doctor immediately.” The doctor heaved a sigh of relief. They were tired from the surgery as well.

“Thank you, Doctor. Thank you very much.” Ding Jiayi cried with joy. She finally said something reasonable. “Old Qiao, nothing must happen to you. In the future, don’t give us such a scare anymore.” Ding Jiayi stood by his bed and pushed him into the ward with the nurses.

Qiao Dongliang was no longer in a critical condition. Ding Jiayi finally came to her senses and started to express gratitude to the people who helped her today. “Old Qiao got into an accident. Thank you very much for helping us today. If not for all of you and the people at the factory, a mere woman like me would not know what to do.”

The colleague twitched his lips. “Sister-in-law, I did not do much. It is Old Qiao who is lucky enough to have such a good daughter. She saved his life. Even if I am around, it’s difficult to say what will happen to Old Qiao without her.”

Ding Jiayi felt embarrassed at the colleague’s words. Qiao Zijin also turned green at his words.

They knew that the daughter whom they praised for saving Qiao Dongliang’s life was Qiao Nan.

As Qiao Dongliang's elder daughter, there was nothing she could help with. On top of that, she was embarrassed by the colleagues' words. Qiao Zijin's face stiffened in an instant.

Ding Jiayi patted Qiao Zijin lightly to calm her down. She plastered a fake smile on her face and said, "Qiao Nan, you must be tired running around to get the money for your dad's surgery. Why don't you go back to have a rest? Your sister will look after your dad for the next twenty-four hours. You can take turns with your sister after you are rested. Now that this happened to your dad, we do not have any money at home. I have to work to earn as much as possible. After all, when your dad is discharged, there would still be a lot of expenses."

"Qiao Nan, your mom is right. You must be tired from running around all day. You should go back to have a rest and come back tomorrow." The colleague relaxed his demeanor. Ding Jiayi finally said something sensible.

"Okay." Qiao Nan was tired to the bones at the moment. She could easily fall asleep if she closed her eyes.

Qiao Nan did not make life difficult for herself. She went back home and fell asleep right away.

After Qiao Nan left, Qiao Dongliang's colleague did not stay behind. He went back to the factory and updated the other colleagues about Qiao Dongliang's conditions.

Qiao Zijin who had to stay behind was displeased. "Mom, Dad got into an accident, and I am tensed up the whole day as well. I didn't even get to have my meals and have lost some weight now." Why was it that Qiao Nan could rest while she had to stay behind to do manual work?

"You know nothing!" Ding Jiayi lightly tapped on Qiao Zijin's forehead. "Didn't you complain to me that your dad only has eyes for Qiao Nan and doesn't care about you, the elder daughter? Now is the chance to put up a good show. Think about it. Since your dad has gotten into an accident, he must be frightened as well. If the first person he sees when he wakes up is you, and you are the only one who keeps vigil by his bedside, what do you think your dad would think? By then, your dad will realize who, between the two daughters, is filial and really cares for him."

Qiao Nan had already settled the biggest problem. Qiao Zijin only had to keep vigil by his bedside and Qiao Dongliang would have a good impression of her. Ding Jiayi had arranged an easy task that came with great benefit for Qiao Zijin.

Nobody would have known that given the situation just now, Ding Jiayi's sudden show of care and concern for Qiao Nan was actually part of her devious schemes.

"Mom, you are so clever!" Qiao Zijin was unschooled in the ways of the world, and Ding Jiayi knew better than her. But she understood immediately what her mother meant. "Mom, don't worry, you should go ahead to work. I will look after Dad. Nothing will go wrong. I promise when Dad wakes up, the first person that he sees will be me. It has to be me."

"I have absolute faith in you. Remember the doctor's words and keep vigil by your dad's side. If any situation arises, call for the nurses and doctors immediately. There should be some money left from the money that Qiao Nan gave the hospital." In other words, they no longer had to worry about Old Qiao's hospital fees.

"Mom, where did Qiao Nan get so much money from? Do we still have money at home? Or did Dad entrust her with the money?" Qiao Zijin frowned.

Since a young age till now, she had never had a hundred yuan before, let alone a thousand yuan.

"Impossible." Ding Jiayi shook her head. "Your dad has kept a tight rein on the money ever since we spent all the money to send you to The High School Affiliated to Renmin University of China. He wouldn't let me keep the money, let alone entrusting it to Qiao Nan. Besides, I know very well how much your dad earned. If he could save up one thousand yuan in a year's time apart from the expenses at home, then our savings would have been more than five thousand yuan."

Since they had confirmed that Qiao Nan did not get the money from the family, Ding Jiayi was not the least bit interested in where she managed to get such a huge sum of money.

"Qiao Nan borrowed one thousand yuan. How do we repay them in the future?"

"How do we repay them? Whoever borrowed it will have to repay the money. You do not have to bother." Ding Jiayi touched Qiao Zijin's head. "You just have to look after your dad. I have to go to work."

Qiao Zijin smiled to herself while she saw Ding Jiayi left the hospital. "That's right. Whoever borrowed it will have to repay the money. I am going to see how Qiao Nan will come up with the money to study at high school."

One thousand yuan was such a huge sum of money. She did not believe that Qiao Nan's debtors would allow her to take her time to repay the money.

Her mom borrowed less than a hundred yuan for her school fees from her father's comrades. Today, they all crowded around her mother to ask for their money. Now that Qiao Nan borrowed one thousand yuan, her debtors must be anxious to get back the money. Qiao Zijin was in for a good show.

Qiao Nan who fell asleep at Qiao family residence had no idea of the devious schemes that Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin had been plotting.

When she finally woke up, the sun had already set.

She was drenched in sweat and smelled terrible. She had no choice but to use some water from the well to wipe herself, had a change of clothes, and left for the hospital.

Chapter 139: Zhai Sheng Arrived in Time

By the time Qiao Nan tidied up the house, boiled a pot of plain porridge and brought it with her to the hospital, it was already night time.

Qiao Nan stepped into the ward and saw Qiao Zijin bent over Qiao Dongliang's bedside in a deep sleep. She did not see Ding Jiayi in the ward.

Qiao Nan put down the porridge and walked to Qiao Dongliang's bedside. She had yet to say a word before she was startled by a figure suddenly appearing behind her.

"Don't be scared, it is me." Zhai Sheng put one hand around Qiao Nan's waist while the other covered her mouth lest she let out a sound out of shock and woke others up.

"Brother Zhai?" Qiao Nan put her heart at rest when she heard the familiar sound of Brother Zhai. "Didn't you mention that you have something on?"

"I have completed the mission," Zhai Sheng said calmly. "How is Uncle Qiao now?"

“The doctor said he has to be under observation for twenty-four hours.”

“Just the two of you?” Zhai Sheng frowned when he noticed that other than the two teenagers, there were no adults around to take care of the injured Qiao Dongliang.

Qiao Nan pulled the corner of her lips. “My mom might have been held up by some matters. But Brother Zhai, you finally have some time off from the army, why don’t you go back home to rest? I have to thank you for helping me today. If not for you, my dad would not be able to go for the surgery.”

Qiao Nan was very grateful for Zhai Sheng’s help and sending someone to give her the money in time.

Zhai Sheng practically helped save her father’s life.

“Uncle Qiao does not look too good.” Zhai Sheng’s eyes darkened. He let go of Qiao Nan and walked to Qiao Dongliang’s bedside. “Call for the nurses and doctors now.”

Qiao Nan was in a panic. She did not have the time to look at her father. She quickly dashed out to call for help.

The doctor and nurses came right away. The doctor checked on Qiao Dongliang and exclaimed. “Why is the patient’s blood pressure so high? Didn’t I instruct the family members to look after the patient and that they should notify us immediately if anything happens to the patient? Hurry, send him to the operating room!”

When the doctor and nurses were about to push Qiao Dongliang out of the ward, Qiao Zijin fell off the bed and woke up. “What happened?”

“What happened? Didn’t Mom ask you to look after Dad? Why didn’t you know that something is wrong with Dad? And you even fell asleep!” Qiao Nan stared at Qiao Zijin coldly, exasperated at her.

“What’s wrong with Dad?!” Qiao Zijin was wide awake when she heard there was something wrong with Qiao Dongliang. “Where is Dad?”

“He was just being pushed into the operating room.” Qiao Nan was angry and frustrated at Qiao Zijin.

Because of her mother’s attitude toward Qiao Zijin and her, Qiao Nan did not wish to think about those pointless problems they had. However, Qiao Zijin’s behavior today just tipped her over the edge. She felt indignant and wronged. She did not understand why she would have to bear all these sufferings!

In terms of results, she had better results than Qiao Zijin since a young age; in terms of abilities, she had been helping her mother with the household chores since young. On the other hand, Qiao Zijin had been leading a pampered life similar to that of a young lady’s from an influential family in ancient times.

As for her, she had been helping her mother with the housework, cared for her mother, and wanted to share her burden.

She was better than Qiao Zijin in every aspect, yet her mother only liked Qiao Zijin and was biased toward her. Why was her fate worse than someone whom they had taken in from the streets?!

What was so good about Qiao Zijin that her mother only had eyes for Qiao Zijin and disregarded her totally?! Her mother even gave all the simple, good and easy tasks to Qiao Zijin!

Ding Jiayi sent Qiao Nan home to rest while Qiao Zijin stayed at the hospital to take care of their father. Qiao Zijin only knew of the reason behind her mother’s actions after Ding Jiayi told her about it. On the contrary, Qiao Nan had already known why her mother would make such arrangements.

If not for the fact that Qiao Nan had been tired to the bones and could not be bothered to argue with Ding Jiayi, she would not have been so submissive to her.

Her father was her biological father after all. No matter how she disliked her mother and Qiao Zijin, she could not change the fact that they were related by blood. It was just her luck to have such a mother. What choice did she have?!

Nevertheless, Qiao Dongliang was still in critical condition this time, yet Qiao Zijin behaved so irresponsibly and fell asleep. She did not notice his condition and notify the doctor right away. Qiao

Nan was enraged by her behavior. "Let me tell you, if anything happens to Dad, I will never let you off!"

"Why would you be angry at me? It was unintentional. You must be having a good time going back to sleep. I was being treated as free labor here. I wouldn't want anything to happen to Dad as well, I... I..." Qiao Zijin was angry and scared. Her father was fine minutes ago. She only took a short nap. Why would he be unwell all of a sudden?

Right then, Qiao Zijin's stomach gave a loud and abrupt grumble.

Qiao Zijin blushed. "I am hungry. Do you have anything to eat?"

"You still have the mood to eat?" Qiao Nan laughed mockingly. She took the porridge she brought and pushed it toward Zhai Sheng. "Brother Zhai, since you rushed all the way here, you must not have eaten anything. Don't stand on ceremony with me. It is just plain porridge. Please make do with it and have some."

Qiao Nan had prepared the porridge for Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Zijin.

But now that all these happened, Qiao Nan would rather throw it away than give it to Qiao Zijin. As her father just went into the operating room, he would not be able to take in any food for a while.

"You..." Qiao Zijin was starved. She was angry at Qiao Nan and had almost wanted to reach out to snatch the porridge. It was then did she realize that there was another person in the ward, a stranger.

Qiao Zijin lifted her head and looked at Zhai Sheng. Though he had a cold expression on his face, he was very good-looking. Qiao Zijin looked at the chiseled face and blushed.

The man standing in front of her was very tall. Qiao Zijin thought to herself that she could only reach up to his shoulder.

Most importantly, Zhai Sheng had an aura of righteousness about him, making people felt safe around him. This quality made women felt a sense of security and wanted to depend on him.

Seeing the besotted look on Qiao Zijin's face, Qiao Nan and Zhai Sheng pulled a long face, carrying the same expression on their faces.

Zhai Sheng kept his silence. Still, he was being very cooperative and opened the vacuum flask, gulping down the porridge in it.

In fact, Zhai Sheng was really hungry.

After receiving Qiao Nan's phone call, he had wanted to bring her the money himself. But at that time, he had a mission to complete. He had to instruct his subordinate to pass the money to Qiao Nan.

He knew Qiao Nan's mother was not dependable. Thus, he completed his mission as soon as possible and rushed off to the hospital in Ping Cheng where Qiao Dongliang stayed in. He did not even have the time to have a sip of water.

If this happened to other people, they would have been exhausted. But Zhai Sheng was a soldier; he had an iron will. He did not display any hint of discomfort, and no one could tell that he had not had any meals or water for the whole day. On top of that, he had just completed an intensive mission.

When Zhai Sheng found out what kind of person Qiao Zijin was, he also did not wish for Qiao Nan to waste her efforts on Qiao Zijin, so he gladly finished all the porridge.

Besides, Qiao Nan might be young, but the porridge was very tasty. She would make a good wife when she grew up.

Chapter 140: Itch

"Nan Nan, there... there is someone here. Why didn't you tell me sooner? How are you? I am Nan Nan's elder sister." Qiao Zijin blushed and introduced herself to Zhai Sheng, waiting for him to make a self-introduction.

"Are you crazy!?" Qiao Nan looked upward and sighed. She turned and ran toward the operating room.

Qiao Zijin was beyond hope. She would be angered to death if she stayed in the same room with her.

Once Qiao Nan left, Zhai Sheng also turned to walk out. Although he did not run, people would have to run to catch up with him due to his long legs and wide steps. It was the case for Qiao Zijin.

Zhai Sheng was only a step behind Qiao Nan. He stood by her side and said, "Don't worry, Uncle Qiao would be alright."

"Yes, definitely. Nothing will happen to my dad." Qiao Nan stared at the operating room, praying fervently inside her heart.

Zhai Sheng stood silently beside Qiao Nan, giving her moral support. Qiao Zijin, who ran out, was furious when she saw the scene in front of her. She gritted her teeth. How dare Qiao Nan berated her for being crazy just now!

Their father was in a critical condition, fighting for his life in the operating room, yet Qiao Nan had the mood to fool around with men. Who exactly was this man, though? How did Qiao Nan know him? Why had she never seen him before?

"Nan Nan, where is Mom?"

"Not even you have an idea, so how could I?" Qiao Nan did not bother to look at Qiao Zijin. She had no time to care about them, be it Ding Jiayi or Qiao Zijin.

There was a saying that goes 'A bad thing never dies'. Even if her mother did not turn up, nothing would have happened to her.

Qiao Nan's words were very harsh. Qiao Zijin had no idea how to continue the conversation. There was a tension around them, trapping Qiao Zijin's words in her throat.

Consequently, the three of them stood at the entrance to the operating room in silence. The dead silence was scary and stifling. Qiao Nan and Qiao Zijin could not help but shudder.

It was summer, but Qiao Nan felt the chills up her spine as if being assailed by piercing cold winds. She was so cold that she had goosebumps all over her body. Qiao Zijin felt the same way as well.

Qiao Nan's teeth were about to chatter from the cold. Just when she decided to wrap her arms around herself, she felt something heavy on her shoulder and warmth seeping through her in the next instant. She had another piece of clothing on her.

"?" Qiao Nan looked at the piece of clothing and looked toward Zhai Sheng.

"It might stink with perspiration. Bear with it for a while." Zhai Sheng who was always calm and composed looked somewhat embarrassed. He was worried that Qiao Nan might find his clothes, which was stunk with perspiration, unbearable. He had been drenched in sweat from training new soldiers today and also had a mission to complete afterward. His shirt was drenched for the whole day.

"Thank you." Qiao Nan was shivering from the cold minutes ago, but warmth surrounded her now. This piece of clothing not only warmed her body, but she was also touched by his gestures.

Qiao Nan had tried umpteen times to console herself that despite having a biased and unreasonable mother, there were still many people around her who were reasonable. Her mother did not care for her, so why should she be affected by her mother's attitude toward her?

Zhai Sheng grew more uneasy at Qiao Nan's heartfelt gratitude. Was the clothing really that smelly?

Zhai Sheng had been used to the smell of perspiration, so he could not tell whether there was any smell.

Zhai Sheng might not have spent a lot of time together with Qiao Nan, but she always smelled very clean. He found it very soothing.

The smell of perspiration on his clothes might leave a smell on Qiao Nan who smelled nice and clean. At the thought of that, Zhai Sheng could not help feeling an indescribable itchy sensation all over his body and in his heart. It seemed like he could feel the itchy sensation all the way to his bones.

When Zhai Sheng was on a mission, he could stay still for an hour without blinking. Contrariwise, he could not bear this itchy sensation and wanted to scratch it away. However, he could not identify where exactly to scratch.

Zhai Sheng leaned closer to Qiao Nan unknowingly.

It was only when Zhai Sheng breathed in the clean, crispy smell—like the warm and gentle spring breeze—coming from Qiao Nan did the itchy sensation subside.

Zhai Sheng could take in the clean smell of Qiao Nan, and she could also feel the warmth radiating from him due to their close proximity.

Qiao Nan began to feel uncomfortable. She wanted to take a few steps back, but she was worried it might be too obvious and caused Zhai Sheng to misunderstand that she disliked him.

Qiao Nan, who remained in the same position for an hour, felt numb. By then, Qiao Dongliang's second surgery had finally ended.

The slightly awkward and ambiguous atmosphere was gone in an instant. Qiao Nan hurried forward. "Doctor, how is my dad?"

"Luckily, he was sent for surgery in time. Otherwise, it would be very dangerous for him. Let me repeat myself. The family members must take extra care to stay vigilant and look after the patient for twenty-four hours. This can never happen again." The doctor was angered by their negligence.

It was initially the patient's family who was careless. If the patient passed away because of this, the doctors were the ones who would bear the brunt of it.

"I am sorry, it was our fault. Thank you very much for saving my dad, Doctor. Thank you, thank you very much." Qiao Nan kept on thanking the doctors.

Zhai Sheng frowned and stood behind Qiao Nan. The doctor, who was about to continue with his lecture, stiffened and paused momentarily. "All of you had better take extra care of the patient."

"Doctor, it was not this young lady who looked after the patient." The nurse had sharp eyes. She could tell that Qiao Nan was not the one who stayed behind to look after the patient. In fact, the one who looked after the patient was the young lady who stood at the corner and dared not join them.

The doctor's complexion turned green when he realized he had scolded the wrong person. "Where is your parent?" Why did the parent leave the children to take care of the patient?

Qiao Zijin was still in shock due to the doctor's lecture. After all, it was her fault for not being vigilant. When the doctor asked about Ding Jiayi, she dared not go forward to answer.

"My... my mom might be busy. My dad had to undergo surgery, and the surgical fee is not a small sum." Qiao Nan could not be bothered to explain in details for Ding Jiayi.

"..." The doctor twitched the corner of his lips. He had nothing to say to that.

This patient was knocked down by a car and was in a serious condition. Yet, there was no adult with him. What was wrong with this family? Apart from the patient's wife, was there no other adult?

"Alright, you must be careful this time. The patient would only be out of critical condition after twenty-four hours. After that, his condition would stabilize."

"Thank you, Doctor. We will take note of it." Qiao Nan accompanied Qiao Dongliang back to the ward. She finally heaved a sigh of relief. "Brother Zhai, thank you very much for all that you have done today. It is already nine now, why don't you go back to have a rest?"

Judging from the not-very-pungent smell of Zhai Sheng, Qiao Nan knew that he came looking for her as soon as he was free. It was likely he did not have time to go back home at all.

"Can you cope by yourself?" Zhai Sheng looked at Qiao Nan with a questioning look in his eyes. "Don't worry about me. When I am on missions, it is normal to go without sleep for two to three days."