

RTAMM 221

Chapter 221: Zhai Sheng's Pettiness

"If you don't remember this properly and give yourself away in front of Instructor Zhai, then you will really end up like Xu Tingting."

Upon hearing what Qiao Nan said, Tang Mengran and Zheng Lingling opened their eyes widely, fearful that they would miss a step and embarrass themselves in front of Instructor Zhai later.

"Qiao Nan, thank you so much. If not for you, I don't know what to do." At the sight of her now-properly-folded blanket, Tang Mengran gave out a huge sigh of relief.

Qiao Nan tugged the corners of her mouth, smiling. "I've also touched all parts of your blanket from inside out and outside in. So, when you cover yourself with the blanket while sleeping later, will you also have the feeling that I'm lying beside you, hugging you?"

"Eew..." Tang Mengran shivered and could not picture that scene in her mind. "Qiao Nan, stop it. I admit that I'm wrong... Will that do?"

If Qiao Nan hugged her to sleep every day, could she still fall asleep!

At this juncture, Fang Fang was sitting on her own bed. Her eyes shimmered as she suddenly asked, "The new Instructor Zhai who came today called Qiao Nan's name. Qiao Nan, if Instructor Zhou did not leave, who do you think he would call? Whose blanket would he fold?"

"Of course it's Qiao Nan." Tang Mengran answered with certainty as she drank her water.

"Qiao Nan, what do you think Instructor Zhou was thinking? And why did Instructor Zhai also call your name?" What Tang Mengran described earlier was a woman's perspective toward a man. Then, what about the way a man saw a woman? Wouldn't it certainly be the same?

Based on her observation, sometimes, a man's thoughts were even more obscene than that of a woman.

Zheng Lingling was stunned. “Fang Fang, what are you trying to say?” Why did she feel that Fang Fang seemed to be implying something?

“Fang Fang, are you saying that both Instructor Zhou and Instructor Zhai... Is that possible?” Today was the first time Instructor Zhai met Qiao Nan. Love at first sight? Were you writing a novel?

“Sister, they look upon me as their younger sister!” Qiao Nan’s face bloomed in red. First, it was Tang Mengran. Now, it was Fang Fang. Did they have a grudge against her?

“Both see you as their younger sister. Wait, let me think.” Tao Zhenqin narrowed her eyes and stroked her chin. “You know Instructor Zhou, so he sees you as his younger sister. Instructor Zhou also looks upon you as his sister. In that case, both of you already know each other? Damn, Qiao Nan, you know the two of them? Don’t tell me that these two instructors came to our class all because of you!”

“It’s impossible that they came for me. I didn’t do anything.” Qiao Nan was so depressed that she felt like knocking her head against the wall. The relations being described were getting messier as the conversation continued. “Instructor Zhai is my neighbor.”

“That’s your childhood sweetheart!” Oh my god, what a shocking insider news!

“It’s not childhood sweethearts. Although we stay relatively close to each other, I did not come into contact with Instructor Zhai previously. We only started to interact with each other about a year ago.” Qiao Nan rubbed her face, trying to make her expression more natural. “The instructors that came to our school should have been arranged by the army. Instructor Zhai and Instructor Zhou did not have a choice. Anyway, enough said. When Instructor Zhai patrols the rooms later, don’t talk nonsense. Otherwise, the consequences will be most undesirable!”

He Yun smiled. “Qiao Nan, don’t take this to heart. Don’t get angry. We’re just joking. Of course we know it’s impossible. We will not spread this type of private gossip around. If we do that in front of Instructor Zhai, aren’t we courting death?”

Fang Fang pushed up the spectacles on the bridge of her nose. Was that really impossible?

“The instructor is coming!” Tao Zhenqin signaled for them to quiet down. The six young ladies who were earlier slumped all over the bed immediately stood up in a humble and respectful manner with both hands at their side, the midline of their thighs.

Zhai Sheng walked into Qiao Nan's dormitory without any expression. This was really the female dormitory after all. It was clean and tidy unlike the ones in the army that were always permeated with the smell of sweat.

When he confirmed that Qiao Nan seemed to have put on a little more weight from the last time he saw her, his expression looked more at ease.

Zhai Sheng was a guy. He knew exactly what Zhou Jun was thinking of.

At the sight of Qiao Nan's blanket that was folded by him, the cold and sharp look in Zhai Sheng's eyes also softened.

Even if it was only a form of indirect intimate contact, he would not allow another man to do it.

Of course, he had to fold the blanket of his wife-to-be. He would never let other guys touch any of it.

Toward his own territory, Zhai Sheng had a strong sense of territorial ownership.

In stark contrast with Zhai Sheng who had a strong sense of territorial ownership, Zhou Jun, who had been thrown back into the army by Zhai Sheng to complete a difficult mission, felt extremely depressed at this moment. Zhai Sheng would become his brother-in-law if he married Qiao Nan in the future.

However, his future brother-in-law was making things difficult for him and affecting his plan to woo his wife-to-be. How could he resolve this?

After Zhai Sheng had done a round of inspection, he said, "Pass."

"Phew..." The few young ladies could not help breathing a sigh of relief when they heard that.

"Next dormitory." Zhai Sheng's inspections were quick. He was not particularly strict too.

It was fortunate that, in order to leave a good impression on Zhai Sheng, the girls had put in considerable effort in folding the blankets properly. It might not meet all of the criteria, but they were of an acceptable standard.

With this, Zhai Sheng easily completed the mission of the blanket-folding training.

In the end, Zhai Sheng only touched the blanket of one person, Qiao Nan's.

While most of the people were happy to have passed the inspection by Zhai Sheng, only two of them noticed this. One was Fang Fang, and the other was Zhu Baoguo.

As a result, during the whole military training period, Zhu Baoguo did not look very happy. Instructor Zhou had left but Instructor Zhai, who was more formidable and threatening, came. Although they were threatening, Zhu Baoguo did not know exactly what kind of threat these two instructors posed to him even after he thought for a long time.

He was not at opposing ends with these two instructors, and neither was there any conflict of interest. Why did he have such thoughts, then?

Regardless, it was fortunate that the military training would only last two weeks.

After two weeks, be it Instructor Zhou or Instructor Zhai, both would be gone. Thereafter, Xiao Qiao would probably not see these two people again. It was different for him. He was Xiao Qiao's deskmate, and the two of them would be studying together for three years. If he was lucky, they might also attend the same university!

"The military training finally ended. Otherwise, I'm going to die. I can go home tomorrow. When I'm home, I must eat something good to supplement my health. I've grown thinner!" He Yun pinched her tiny arms as her heart ached for the few pounds of meat that was lost.

"It was tough but also fortunate." Tang Mengran buried her face in the blanket. "At the thought of not being able to see the suave Instructor Zhai from tomorrow onward... Oh, I can't bear to let it go!"

Chapter 222: Fallen into the Garbage Dump

“Right, aren’t you all curious why Instructor Zhai left in such a hurry?” Zheng Lingling asked with a face full of question marks. “All the other classes are holding farewell gatherings for their respective instructors. Our class is the only exception. It’s just one night—no, just one hour, but Instructor Zhai was unable to spare us the time. He had to leave immediately after the training session ended. Why is this happening? Why didn’t the other instructors do that?”

“The instructors from other classes are not as good looking as ours too.” Tang Mengran replied as a matter of fact.

Zheng Lingling’s face turned black. “Can you please don’t be like Xu Tingting, always acting like you’re love-struck? Is there a connection between good-looking and being tied up? If Instructor Zhai was really that busy, why must he come and be our instructor? There’re a lot of people in the army. They could just send someone else here, couldn’t they? Was there a need to send Instructor Zhou here when he’s busy? He’s sent back eventually and Instructor Zhai came in his stead anyway.”

“Why do you care about this? Regardless, we’re the ones who benefited. If they sent another instructor who’s not so busy, they’re certainly not going to be as good-looking as the two instructors we had. Aiyah, we’re only high school students. These deep and complicated problems are not meant for us. Alright. While they’re having farewell parties, we’ll take the chance to recharge ourselves. I really wish tomorrow will come soon so that I can go home.” Tang Mengran kicked her legs. There’s nothing better than going home now.

Everyone was already tired out. The military training had finally ended. They felt more relaxed and were dozing off. When Tang Mengran, the little muddle-head, interrupted Zheng Lingling, everyone’s thoughts deviated toward that of Tang Mengran. They fell asleep soon after.

Fang Fang was the only one who was still thinking about what Zheng Lingling said the second before she fell asleep. Zheng Lingling’s words made sense. But why...

“Bye, see you on the weekend.”

“Please.”

After two weeks of military training, almost everyone became tanned and lost some weight.

According to her usual routine, Qiao Nan put the books that she wanted to bring home for the week in her schoolbag. When she reached the quad, she went to the residence of the Zhai family instead

of heading home directly. She would place the items in the Zhai's residence and then go there again to revise the next day, lest Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin disturbed her.

However, this evening seemed to be particularly quiet. It was like the calm before a storm, sinister and mysterious.

Just as she reached the quad, Qiao Nan felt strange, as if someone was hiding at a dark place, watching her.

Qiao Nan halted her steps and turned to look around. There was no one else on the empty path. Was she wrong and being paranoid?

"Zhu Baoguo, is that you? Hurry and come out. If I catch you, don't blame me for adding more to your homework!" Qiao Nan raised her voice. Initially, Zhu Baoguo was supposed to go home together with her. However, he was not in a good mood. He looked quite unhappy and left first.

Qiao Nan was not a 'real' child. Hence, she certainly would not take such matters to heart.

However, at this moment, she suddenly felt that someone seemed to be tailing her. The first person Qiao Nan could think of was Zhu Baoguo.

Every time Qiao Nan threatened Zhu Baoguo with more homework, it always worked. This time, however, Qiao Nan did not sense any slightest movement from her surrounding after saying that. "Am I really being paranoid?" Qiao Nan scratched her head. Could it be that she had been tortured by the few dormitory mates till she had a mental breakdown?

Tang Mengran imagined things every day, and Fang Fang was like Sherlock Holmes, watching her and Brother Zhai's every move. It nearly caused her to believe that Brother Zhai had a thing for her.

Great, she was almost suffering from paranoia now. She actually felt that someone was tailing her.

She had neither money nor beauty. Anyone following her would be wasting their time.

Shaking her head vigorously, Qiao Nan dispelled all these messy thoughts from her mind. She had been badly influenced.

With such thoughts in mind, Qiao Nan's steps quickened.

What Qiao Nan did not know was that just as she left, someone ran out from the corner of the back alley. "Eh, where's the wretched girl? Where did she go in the blink of an eye? Where is she hiding?"

Ding Jiayi was looking everywhere for Qiao Nan's whereabouts, but Qiao Nan was nowhere to be seen.

Facing this situation, Ding Jiayi was furious.

Ding Jiayi eventually failed to resist Qiao Zijin's cajoling and decided to tail Qiao Nan so that she could find out where her 'headquarter' was.

Qiao Zijin and Ding Jiayi discussed this at length. They knew that Qiao Nan was very careful and meticulous. Furthermore, Qiao Nan had long been guarding against them. Hence, they would certainly not succeed in finding the Qiao Nan's 'headquarter' if they simply tailed her.

Qiao Zijin thought for a long time and finally found a way.

In the past, they always tailed Qiao Nan from home and lost her every time. Qiao Nan was most guarded when she was at home. Therefore, when Qiao Nan was not at home, that would be the time she would let her guard down.

As such, Qiao Zijin's idea was to ambush Qiao Nan on her way home from school and tail her thereafter.

Qiao Zijin guessed that the 'headquarter' Qiao Nan used to keep the books would not be too far away from home. As long as they started to tail Qiao Nan from the second part of her journey, Ding Jiayi would definitely be able to find something.

True enough, Ding Jiayi discovered an irregularity.

Qiao Nan had clearly reached the quad, but she did not go home and took another path instead.

It was only at this juncture that Ding Jiayi realized that Qiao Nan had been doing things right under her nose. Qiao Nan had been going around in circles but did not leave quad!

“This wretched girl, who did she learn all these from? She’s so cunning. Did she find out just now?” Ding Jiayi was stuck at where she was, and she was getting anxious. Just as she followed Qiao Nan to the quad, Qiao Nan halted her steps and turned to look. Ding Jiayi was so scared that she panicked and fell into a small valley, straight into a rubbish dump.

The time Qiao Nan waited before she made a move again was the time Ding Jiayi was forced to squat in the smelly garbage dump.

At this moment, Ding Jiayi was stinking from the smell. It was so smelly that even a beggar would despise her.

Just when Ding Jiayi thought that she had failed in her mission again and had to do it again, Qiao Nan appeared!

Ding Jiayi had no choice but to squat in the garbage dump again. This time, she stared at Qiao Nan without blinking. She only dared to come out after confirming where Qiao Nan was headed to.

“So smelly!” Ding Jiayi turned pale as she nearly fainted from the garbage smell. She then looked carefully at the yards around her. “That wretched girl must have entered one of these yards. Hmm, this is...”

Ding Jiayi carefully observed and suddenly realized that this was near the place where Qiao Nan saved the life of Zhu Baoguo.

Chapter 223: The Teachings of Father Qiao

It was only at this moment that Ding Jiayi finally knew why Qiao Nan was so lucky to have saved Zhu Baoguo. After all, Qiao Nan’s ‘headquarter’ was in this area!

After she remembered the few families who stayed in the area, Ding Jiayi was then willing to give up and head home.

“What happened to you? Did you fall into the latrine pit?” Qiao Dongliang could not stand the smell on Ding Jiayi when she got home.

In the past, although Ding Jiayi was not a clean freak, she was still quite particular about hygiene. Hence, Qiao Dongliang never expected that he would one day see Ding Jiayi in such a sloppy and unbearable state. The smell on Ding Jiayi nearly made Qiao Dongliang vomit.

Ding Jiayi was full of embarrassment. “Am I really that smelly? While I was walking, I accidentally tripped and fell into the garbage dump. Let me clean myself up first.” In fact, Ding Jiayi could not stand the smell on her body too.

On the way back, Ding Jiayi was selective in her route and only dared to take the path after confirming that it was isolated. She was afraid of bumping into someone she knew and letting them see her in such a dire state.

“Hurry and go.” Qiao Dongliang knitted his brows. He did not even ask Ding Jiayi how her leg was, whether it hurt or if she needed to apply any medication oil.

Ever since the police report was lodged, the relationship between Qiao Dongliang and Ding Jiayi drifted further apart. Since then, Qiao Dongliang had not gone into Ding Jiayi’s bedroom, and neither had he shown any concern for Ding Jiayi. Their relationship was worse than that between neighbors.

When Qiao Dongliang saw the neighbors, he would have a smile on his face as he greeted them courteously. But when it came to Ding Jiayi, he had nothing much to talk to her about. Just as what happened, he was extremely cold when he spoke to her.

“Dad.” Qiao Nan came out from her bedroom. “I think I heard Mom coming back.”

“Yes, she’s back.” At the mention of Ding Jiayi, Qiao Dongliang’s voice was indifferent. It was as if his heart was still. Nevertheless, his eyes shimmered with fatherly love when he looked at Qiao Nan. “Nan Nan, has it been tough on you during the two weeks’ military training? Do you feel tired? I think you look skinnier now.”

“I’m fine. It’s nothing once we are used to it. It was certainly not comparable to Dad’s training when you were in the army.” Qiao Nan sat beside Qiao Dongliang smilingly. “Dad, do you know who our Instructor was?”

“Who?” Qiao Dongliang was patiently chatting with Qiao Nan. He was very concerned about Qiao Nan’s situation at school.

“Zhou Jun. Brother Zhou!”

“Isn’t he a company commander?” Qiao Dongliang knitted his brows. The army would not send a company commander to provide military training for high school students. Zhou Jun, that child, must have made use of his authority to request for it. In that case, was Zhou Jun there for the sake of Nan Nan?

“Yes, so he only gave us training for one day before he was summoned back to the army. He must be really busy as a company commander.” However, after the company commander left, a regiment commander came... Wasn’t regiment commander busier than company commander?

“Summoned back?” That was impossible.

Zhou Jun must have made the necessary arrangements before he became Qiao Nan’s instructor at her school. Why was he summoned back to the army during the training?

“Do you know why he went back to the army?”

“I don’t know.”

“After Zhou Jun left, did another instructor replace him? Was that instructor good? Was he fierce?” Since Nan Nan was the reason that Zhou Jun went to the school, he would definitely take better care of Nan Nan during the training. However, the instructor that came thereafter might not do so.

After all, Qiao Dongliang’s heart ached for his younger daughter who had to suffer during the military training.

“Brother Zhou left, but Brother Zhai came.”

“...” Qiao Dongliang’s eyes turned stiff. “Zhai... Why do I feel more confused now after listening to your words?”

Had he been retired from the army for too long? The situation in the army had changed greatly. They did not even go by the books now, did they?

“I was confused too. All the other classes held farewell parties for their respective instructors yesterday but my class didn’t. Immediately after the military training ended, Brother Zhai left for the army in a hurry.” Brother Zhai was so busy in the army. In fact, they could have arranged for someone else to come.

“Maybe... maybe something urgent cropped up in the army.” Qiao Dongliang did not say this from his heart. He felt strange. Something was amiss.

Zhou Jun must have come for Nan Nan. He had his mind set on Nan Nan. What about Zhai Sheng?

Given the status of Zhai Sheng’s family, and that he was the most promising child in the family, he would not waste his time to provide military training for the students. Even if there was a lack of manpower in the army, Zhai Sheng did not have to waste his time to carry out the mundane task. Moreover, based on what Qiao Nan said, Zhai Sheng left in such a hurry after the training.

Besides, Zhai Sheng conducted training for Nan Nan’s class, not other classes. This...

No, he must be over thinking.

“Nan Nan, you’re back.” Qiao Zijin, who stepped into the house at this moment, had a flash of slyness in her eyes. Qiao Nan was back. She wondered if her mother managed to find out where Qiao Nan’s ‘headquarter’ was.

“Dad, the weather is very hot recently. Nan Nan, did you get heatstroke during the military training?”

Qiao Zijin behaved intimately as she sat beside Qiao Nan. She even reached out her arms to hold Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan had goosebumps immediately. “Dad, I’ll get you a cup of water.”

When Qiao Nan finished pouring a cup of water for Qiao Dongliang, she sat beside him as she was unwilling to sit with Qiao Zijin.

Qiao Dongliang pretended having seen nothing. He continued to ask, “Nan Nan, are you happy at school? Do you get along well with your classmates? Most of the kids nowadays are pampered, yet you’re so down-to-earth. You’ll probably not mutter a word even if you’re bullied. I heard that Baoguo is studying with you. If anyone bullies you, don’t be scared. Look for Baoguo. He’ll help you settle it.”

“Shouldn’t I look for the teachers instead?” Qiao Nan blinked her eyes.

“There’s no use looking for the teacher. It’s more effective to seek Baoguo’s help.” Qiao Dongliang blushed. It was not easy to discipline the kids nowadays. The more the adults deterred them, the more they wanted to do it. Therefore, the person would bully Nan Nan more in consequence were Nan Nan to tell the teacher.

On the contrary, if Nan Nan told Zhu Baoguo, Zhu Baoguo would definitely help Nan Nan teach them a lesson.

Zhu Baoguo had the backing of the Zhu family. Even if he fought with others and created trouble at school, the school would not do anything to him.

The kids should settle their own matters. When those people knew how powerful Zhu Baoguo was, they would certainly not dare to bully Nan Nan again.

Qiao Nan leaned on Qiao Dongliang’s arms as she covered her mouth and laughed. “Dad, do you think it’s a good idea to teach me this?”

“There’s nothing bad about it. No matter what, you can’t let anyone bully you!” Qiao Dongliang said resolutely. Who didn’t dote on their own child? As Nan Nan’s father, he must spare more thoughts for Nan Nan. In fact, if Nan Nan was a son, he would have more things to impart to her.

Chapter 224: The Zhai Family Was Targeted

At the sight of the affection between the filial Qiao Nan and the fatherly Qiao Dongliang, Qiao Zijin felt that she stood out like a sore thumb and could only act as the backdrop for the two of them. She was hardly able to maintain her smile.

“Dad, you must have a lot to talk to Nan Nan about. I’ll look for Mom.” When she started studying in high school a year ago, her father didn’t seem so concerned about her. He did not ask her if she had been bullied in the school or if she was happy.

Her father was too biased!

When Qiao Zijin said she wanted to look for Ding Jiayi, Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Nan did not have much reaction. They continued to chat normally.

Qiao Zijin stood up and walked toward Ding Jiayi’s bedroom. On the way, she paused and turned her head, staring at Qiao Dongliang. When she saw Qiao Dongliang chatting happily with Qiao Nan and ignoring her, she gritted her teeth in fury.

Since her father only regarded Qiao Nan as his daughter, it would be his wishful thinking if he wanted to get a single cent from her in his old age. She would only support her mother, if there was a need to do so, that was.

In a few years’ time, she wanted to see if she or Qiao Nan could let their ‘respective’ parent lead a better life!

Qiao Nan had better not be complacent too. Soon, she would teach her a lesson!

It was only when Qiao Zijin entered Ding Jiayi’s bedroom, softly closing the door afterward, that Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Nan, whose backs had been stiff, relaxed a little.

At the sight of Qiao Dongliang having the same reaction as her, Qiao Nan was stunned. She pondered and said, “Dad, you most likely don’t really know Sister’s character. How should I put it? She’s quite petty. In other words, she bears grudges and seeks revenge for the slightest grievance. Regarding your behavior just now, she will definitely take it to heart. In the future...”

In her previous life, her parents only had Qiao Zijin in their hearts, but she did not see Qiao Zijin being especially filial to her father.

In this life, her father's attitude toward Qiao Zijin had changed drastically. Hence, she believed that Qiao Zijin would hate her father.

“What will happen in the future? Will she not be filial to or support me? Raising a child for the sake of supporting me in my old age...” Qiao Dongliang sighed. He perked up when he looked at Qiao Nan. “Even if your sister doesn't care about me anymore, Nan Nan, will you ignore me too because Dad did not value you that much in the past and allowed you to be bullied by your mother and sister?”

“I won't.” Qiao Nan shook her head. Whether it was before or after her rebirth, she had never thought of leaving her parents in the lurch.

They were the ones who gave her life and allowed her to come to this world. She had to repay them for giving birth to her and raising her up. However, she would not blindly obey her parents like what she did in her previous life; she would not sacrifice herself and her life.

She would not leave them in the lurch. Nevertheless, she had her own plans as to how she would support them.

“That's good,” Qiao Dongliang said, consoled. He still had his younger daughter even if the elder daughter did not care about him.

“Dad, are you not angry about what I told you about Sister? Shouldn't you help her explain that she's not that kind of person—that she is initially good-natured but have been spoiled by Mom?”

After all, she was prepared to be retorted by her father when she gave him such advice.

Qiao Dongliang rubbed Qiao Nan's head, smiling bitterly. He did not reply to Qiao Nan.

These words were often in Qiao Dongliang's mind in the past. He had always hoped that his thoughts were real. However, he was aware that this was also his way of comforting himself.

His elder daughter, Qiao Zijin, had not only been spoiled by Ding Jiayi but was also a character he was not able to grasp and understand as a father.

“Don’t worry. Dad will not make you angry because of your sister anymore.”

“Dad, what happened to you?” This did not seem like what her father would say. She had thought that her father would not give up on Qiao Zijin until the moment of his death.

“Nothing. It’s just that I have to figure out certain things eventually. Let it go, let it go. When you lose, you gain. Many times, you need to give and take. Ultimately, this family does not belong to me alone. Your sister has your mom. Nan Nan, you only have me, your dad.” If even he was not willing to stand on Nan Nan’s side, Nan Nan would be too pitiful.

“Alright, don’t think so much. We’re going to have our meal soon.” Qiao Dongliang smiled and stopped discussing it deeply. He did not want Qiao Nan to feel burdened.

“Yes.”

When the conversation between Qiao Nan and Qiao Dongliang ended, Qiao Zijin had just started her conversation with Ding Jiayi. “Mom, how’s it going? Did you find out where Qiao Nan hid her things?” With today’s ambush, surely Qiao Nan could not have escaped, could she?

“Don’t talk about it.” At the mention of this, Ding Jiayi could not help recalling the smell of garbage on her. She turned pale and lost her appetite for dinner.

“Why, you lost her?!” Her mother was so useless. She could not even handle such a small matter!

At the sight of Qiao Zijin’s face turning stiff and being angry, Ding Jiayi quickly added, “Alright, don’t be angry. I probably know where it is.”

Ding Jiayi took out a piece of paper with the names of some families written on it. “I lost Qiao Nan in this area. I guessed she must have hidden her things in one of these places.” As to which family it was, she was not certain.

“We already found out about this place today. If we keep a close watch, in two weeks’ time, we’ll definitely know which family it is!”

“We don’t have to wait for two weeks!” Qiao Zijin narrowed her eyes. “It must be this family!”

“The Zhai family? Impossible! Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, can’t possibly know someone from the Zhai family. She even hid her things there. It’s impossible.” Ding Jiayi was agitated. “Zijin, Mom knows that you’re anxious, but you need to make sense. It can’t be this family.”

The status of the Zhai family was higher than that of both the Li family and the Zhu family. They had the highest status in the whole quad. They were like the sun that she had been looking up to, the moon that was high up in the sky.

How could Qiao Nan, this wretched girl, have any connection with the Zhai family?

“Mom, the Zhai family?” Were they so powerful? Why didn’t she know anything about that!

“Have you forgotten that we have a chief of the army staying in the quad?!” Ding Jiayi showed her thumb. In the past, she only hoped for Qiao Dongliang to become the battalion commander. The position of a chief, not to mention this life, in her next life and even the life after, she felt that it was impossible for Qiao Dongliang to attain that level of seniority.

“It’s that Zhai family?!” Qiao Zijin was shocked, her eyes flashing with hesitation.

Could it be a coincidence? But what if it was really the Zhai family?

“Mom, you may not know this. On the day Dad had his surgery, and while you were working overtime, a man came looking for Dad at the hospital. I don’t know him, but Qiao Nan does. Qiao Nan called him Brother Zhai.” The surname Zhai was very unique. She had only heard it once from Qiao Nan. Thereafter, she had not heard anyone with that surname again.

Chapter 225: She Must Have Stolen It

“So you’re saying that Qiao Nan has been keeping all her items in the residence of the Zhai family?” Ding Jiayi was stunned. “Qiao Nan, that stupid girl, her mouth seems to have been sealed by a needle. She doesn’t even know how to properly greet others when she sees them. How’s it possible that she got to know someone from the Zhai family? Impossible!”

Even if the highly-regarded Zhai family was approachable, they would only accept a smart and intelligent child such as Qiao Zijin. How could they be on good terms with Qiao Nan?

“Mom, do you think Dad or Grandpa have any relation with the Zhai family? Maybe Qiao Nan found out about this and simply went to fawn on them?” If that was the case, it would not do. The Qiao family bore the surname Qiao, and so did she. If her grandpa had left this opportunity for them, Qiao Nan should not be the only one who benefited from it.

“How is that possible? This is the Zhai family, not the Lee family. Even when the Lee family sees the Zhai family, they have to courteously greet the old chief of the army. If your grandpa was so capable and knew such a prominent figure, would your dad lose his army job when we gave birth to Qiao Nan?” How she wished she had such a capable and powerful father-in-law. Too bad she didn’t!

“So formidable?” Qiao Zijin was shocked by Ding Jiayi’s admiration and inferiority complex toward the Zhai family.

Could the young man who bears the surname of Zhai, the one she met previously, be related to the formidable Zhai family?

If that was indeed the case, then she had missed an opportunity to become Cinderella!

Impossible. Mom was right. Qiao Nan was not eloquent and did not know how to get along with people. She would not be so fortunate as to get to know that kind of family.

Moreover, she only heard Qiao Nan calling that young man Brother Zhai. She was not even sure which ‘Zhai’ word it was. It could have been a word that sounded similar.

“Mom, I’ll keep a close watch on Qiao Nan tomorrow! It’s around this area right?!”

“Yes, it’s definitely around this area. Qiao Nan gets up early. It’s been hard on you at school. Are you sure you can wake up so early? Don’t tire yourself out. If you can’t, let Mom do it.”

“Mom, don’t look down on me. If Qiao Nan can wake up early, why can’t I? Don’t worry. There won’t be any problem this time!” Qiao Zijin narrowed her eyes and revealed a scheming smile. This time, her name would not be Qiao Zijin if she could not catch Qiao Nan!

“Really?”

“Yes, Mom. Just wait and see.”

This evening, Qiao Zijin stood up as soon as she finished her meal. “Dad, it’s been so tiring these few days at school. It’s late. I’ll be going to bed early.”

“It’s still so early. Are you not going to watch the TV?” It’s only slightly past seven o’clock, and Zijin was already going to sleep. Was the sun going to rise from the west tomorrow?

“No, I’ll sleep early today and wake up earlier tomorrow. I have to put in more effort and study hard too so that I can progress. An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening. I must make use of the morning time. Good night, Dad, Mom. Good night, Nan Nan.” My ‘dearest’ sister, see you again tomorrow morning.

Qiao Dongliang looked at Qiao Zijin strangely. “What’s with Zijin today?”

“Isn’t that good?” Ding Jiayi replied smilingly. “I’ll go and wash the dishes.”

“Nan Nan, what do you think?”

“...” Qiao Nan frowned. Did Qiao Zijin take the wrong medicine today?

Qiao Nan accompanied Qiao Dongliang until about eight o’clock before returning to her bedroom.

At half past six in the morning the next day, Qiao Nan woke up as usual. She brushed her teeth and washed her face, preparing to head to the Zhai’s residence.

“Nan Nan, you’re awake too?” Qiao Dongliang had just come back from his morning exercise. He was delighted to see his younger daughter.

“Too?” Qiao Nan looked at Qiao Dongliang curiously. “Did Sister wake up earlier than me today?” In the Qiao family, the only person her father would use the word ‘too’ on was Qiao Zijin.

“Yes, I think your sister was going to meet someone at the library. She couldn’t afford to be late, so she woke up earlier than you and left the house ten minutes ago.” It seemed that his elder daughter had made some progress and was keen on learning now. However, Qiao Dongliang was not as excited as he used to be.

“Ten minutes ago? What time does the library open?” Qiao Nan was sullen. The earliest opening for public places was at eight o’clock in the morning.

“Not sure. Let your sister do as she wishes. Are you going out to study now?”

“Yes, Dad. Have you taken your breakfast? Shall I prepare for you?”

“No need.” Qiao Dongliang shook his hands. “Here’s the fritter I bought for you. Bring it along and eat it.” Qiao Dongliang did not need Qiao Nan to prepare his breakfast. On the contrary, he bought breakfast back for her instead.

“Thanks, Dad. I’ll be leaving first, then.”

Qiao Nan hugged her schoolbag and headed toward the Zhai’s residence with the fritter in her mouth. As soon as Qiao Nan appeared in the small alley, Qiao Zijin, who picked the best spot and had been hiding there since, kept her eyes on Qiao Nan. She would not allow herself to miss anything.

When Qiao Zijin stopped in front of the back door of the Zhai’s residence, Qiao Zijin’s heart flipped. Wasn’t this the Zhai family?

Keys... Qiao Nan actually had the keys to the back door of the Zhai’s residence?!

As Qiao Zijin watched her open the door with the keys before entering the house, she was stupefied. She totally could not understand what was happening before her eyes.

There was not much interaction between the Zhai family and the Qiao family. They didn’t have any blood relations as well. Why would Qiao Nan have the keys to the residence of the Zhai family? Moreover, it was the key to the back door.

“Dad, I’m back.” In the evening, when Qiao Nan reached home, she realized that Qiao Zijin was already back.

“Nan Nan, you’re back. I’ve boiled some water for you. Pour some for yourself.”

“Thanks, Dad.” Qiao Nan had been very thirsty. She simply gulped down two cups of water. The Zhai residence was the best place to read, but there was no place to get water. The bottle of water that Qiao Nan brought with her was finished before noon.

It was still tolerable during wintertime, but summertime was pure torture.

Qiao Zijin, who was sitting near the television, was not watching the show at all. She was secretly looking at Qiao Nan. She discovered that Qiao Nan was very thirsty as if she had not had a single drop of water for the entire day. Qiao Zijin paused and thought.

Qiao Nan had been in the Zhai’s residence for the whole day. Would they be so petty as to not give her any water?

“Zijin, I’m back.” Ding Jiayi, who came back from work, placed the keys on the table and wiped away the sweat on her forehead with her sleeves.

“Mom, you’re back!” Qiao Zijin’s eyes lit up. She wasted no time to pull Ding Jiayi to the bedroom. “Mom, I have something to tell you!” When they were in the room, Qiao Zijin told Ding Jiayi everything she saw in the morning. She also told Ding Jiayi about what she had just observed at home. “Mom, what do you think is happening?”

Ding Jiayi’s mouth was so dry that it was almost torn, but she instantly perked up when she heard Qiao Zijin’s words. “Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, was too daring. She dared to beard the lion in its den. It looks like there’s really a thief in the family!!!”

Ding Jiayi did not sound ashamed. Contrariwise, she seemed to have a sense of excitement.

Chapter 226: Not Taking the Rap

“Thief? Mom, what do you mean?”

“Think about it. If Qiao Nan was given the key by the Zhai family, why did the Zhai family not give her the key to the front door, but the key to the back door instead? If Qiao Nan enters the Zhai’s residence with the permission of the Zhai family, why can’t Qiao Nan have a drink at their house? I suppose the Zhai family does not know that Qiao Nan has been going to their house. Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, must have found the keys and has been sneaking into their house every day since. If the Zhai family knows about this, do you think they will let us off? This wretched girl, she is determined to create havoc and drag us down with her! If the Zhai family wants to settle scores with us, won’t the four of us be sued by them?”

Initially, Ding Jiayi had been excited that she had seized upon the chinks in Qiao Nan’s armor. But when she thought of how powerful the Zhai family was, Ding Jiayi’s face turned ashen.

The people from the Zhai family could easily make life worse than hell for them. Ding Jiayi had to keep this a secret for Qiao Nan. Nobody must find out about her secret place.

“Zijin, listen to me. Let’s put a stop to this matter. I will deal with Qiao Nan, but we can never let others know that Qiao Nan stole the key to the Zhai’s residence and has been sneaking into their house every day since. Otherwise, that will be the end of the Qiao family. We will never be able to stay in the quad!”

At first, Qiao Zijin had a big fright. She did not expect that the consequences would be so serious. But then, her eyes blinked brightly. She had thought of a brilliant method. “Mom, don’t be afraid. Listen to me, tomorrow you will...”

“Is it feasible? Forget it. We must not take the risk. We can’t afford to offend the Zhai family!” Ding Jiayi shook her head. She had dared to create a din in front of Old Qiao, but she did not dare to be unruly in front of the Zhai family.

She was not that daring!

Her knees might go weak on her when she faced the people from the Zhai family.

“Mom, you have to do it. I believe you can do it. Mom, think about it again. Ever since Dad reported to the police, what have the neighbors’ impressions of you been? We are so disgraced from that incident. However, if this matter is handled properly, you can rebuild your reputation in the quad, and you will be able to hold your head up high again. You must let everyone in the quad know that Qiao Nan is indeed suspicious. The reason why you took the three hundred yuan from Qiao

Nan was for her sake. You were afraid that Qiao Nan would learn the wrong way and act rashly. The people in the entire quad will understand that you are a kind mother to Qiao Nan. Mom, this is a good opportunity!”

Qiao Zijin tried her best to convince Ding Jiayi. “Mom, I know that the Zhai family will be at home tomorrow. Tomorrow is the best chance. Mom, don’t worry. As long as you follow what I said, rest assured that they will not find faults with us. Even if they are really furious, their target will be Qiao Nan, and they will know that you are a loving mother with good intentions. Mom, you can’t hesitate. If you do not do this now, Qiao Nan’s secrets will be discovered sooner or later. By that time, things will go out of control. The entire Qiao family will be shamed and we will not be able to stay in the quad anymore!”

Qiao Zijin was anxious as well.

She was really worried that Qiao Nan would drag them down with her.

She no longer cared if she could tarnish Qiao Nan’s reputation tomorrow. The most important thing was that the Qiao family could not afford to offend the Zhai family.

The Zhai family was powerful and influential. They were very established in Ping Cheng.

Qiao Zijin had to make plans for her future. If she wanted to marry well and be successful, she could not afford to offend the Zhai family. If someone with a good background in Ping Cheng took a liking to her and wanted to marry her, after knowing that the Qiao family had offended the Zhai family in the past, they might be fearful of Zhai family’s power and status and decided against marrying her.

She could not sacrifice her happiness for her heartless sister, Qiao Nan. She was not worth it at all!

“Mom! Don’t hesitate anymore. If this is discovered by others, it will not take long before everyone in Ping Cheng knows that we have a thief in our house and that I am the sister of the said thief. Qiao Nan is careless and foolish. She even dared to offend the Zhai family. Mom, I don’t want to be dragged down by Qiao Nan. I don’t want to end up having to leave the quad and Ping Cheng. Mom!!”

Ding Jiayi was flustered and out of her wits at Qiao Zijin’s constant coaxing. In the end, she gritted her teeth and said, “Qiao Nan created troubles for herself. There is no reason for our family to suffer with her. Zijin, rest assured. Mom will never let Qiao Nan ruin you.”

“Mom, although Qiao Nan’s English is good, could she possibly earn three hundred yuan with only a few days of hard work? Mom, do you think that the three hundred yuan Qiao Nan had...” It was no wonder that Qiao Nan refused her suggestion when Qiao Zijin said that she wanted to take up the translation job as well. The money could have been stolen as well. It was not Qiao Nan’s hard-earned money!

“Don’t bring it up. I have the same sentiments too. This wretched girl, I can’t wait to take a knife and chop off both her hands. Why must she steal? She is so shameless!”

“Mom, you have to be composed. Do not give yourself away in front of Qiao Nan later. You must not let Dad find out about your plan. Dad is biased toward Qiao Nan. He is confounded, unable to distinguish right from wrong, and he would side with her. He may even take the rap for Qiao Nan and blame it on us as well. Besides, Qiao Nan is very smart. If she notices anything amiss, she will make arrangements in advance. We may end up being her scapegoats.” Qiao Zijin took a deep breath and calmed herself down.

This time, it was Qiao Nan who did herself in. She had nothing to do with it.

From tomorrow onward, everyone would only remember that Qiao Zijin, the elder daughter of the Qiao family, had good character and good looks, whereas Qiao Nan would be remembered as the shame and blemish in their family and the quad.

“She will not dare to do that!” Ding Jiayi widened her eyes, baring her teeth.

“Qiao Nan has not been close with both of us. We don’t know what things she is capable of doing in order to protect herself. There’s the saying that goes ‘Every man for himself’, isn’t there? Qiao Nan did not think about our interests when she did all these. Anyway, we must be careful, lest Qiao Nan finds out about our plan.”

If Qiao Nan noticed anything amiss and destroyed all the evidence, all their efforts would be wasted.

“You are right. Since she dared to do those sneaky things, it goes to show that she is heartless and no longer treats us as her family or consider our interests. We must be careful.”

“We must not let her push all the blame to us.” Ding Jiayi sighed in exasperation. She must stay composed and calm.

She must not let Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, pushed the blame onto both of them, particularly Zijin!

“When the truth is out tomorrow, I shall see what your dad has to say. In order to side with that wretched girl, your dad had let me down and he also wanted to... It’s time to give your dad a lesson. We must let him know Qiao Nan’s true colors. Right now, your dad is muddleheaded. He can’t tell who his family is and who the outsider is. He is so foolish!”

“Mom, don’t be angry. Dad believes in Qiao Nan as she is good at coaxing him. Qiao Nan is very smart. She may be quiet and nerdy, but she can easily manipulate Dad with her words. When Dad realizes the truth, he will know who is genuinely good to him in this family. By that time, Dad will reunite with you. Mom, don’t be foolish then as you will only push Dad toward Qiao Nan otherwise. I finally realized that though Qiao Nan is a person with few words, she is good at coaxing people. Look at what happened when Dad was hospitalized. Qiao Nan always waited on Dad diligently. She’s doing a ‘good job’ at putting up pretenses.”

“Mom, we are different from her. We are true to Dad, but because we regard Dad as our closest relative and care for Dad, we show our most genuine side to him. At times, we will lose our temper at him. On the other hand, Qiao Nan waits on him and says words that make him happy. Naturally, Dad will prefer Qiao Nan since Dad likes people to be nice to him. We can do it as well. Qiao Nan is no match for both of us. Dad has sacrificed a lot for this family. I don’t want to see Dad being cheated by Qiao Nan, for him to make sacrifices for her sake. When the truth is out tomorrow, Dad may find it difficult to part with Qiao Nan and may want to bear the responsibility in her stead.”

When tomorrow came, where Qiao Nan was disgraced and had her reputation tarnished, she would never allow her father to defend or side with Qiao Nan.

Both her father and mother were hers. Qiao Nan could not fight for their love!

“That’s right. Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, will be the death of me. Your dad has a heart of gold. He has the impression that children will be filial to their parents just like how the parents doted on their children. Forget it. I will not bear grudges against your dad. He is confused, I am not. When your dad sees Qiao Nan’s true colors, I will accept him as long as he apologizes to me. In the future, I

will never bring up this matter again. But what will happen to Qiao Nan?” Ding Jiayi breathed a sigh of relief and sounded as if she was very forgiving toward Qiao Dongliang.

Qiao Zijin pursed her lips. “Mom, Qiao Nan brings so much harm to our family, yet you are still concerned about her?”

“I am not concerned about the wretched girl. She has been plaguing our family for sixteen years. Why will I be concerned about her? I am afraid that after tomorrow, we may not be able to sever all ties with her and she will continue to stay with us, dragging our family down for a lifetime. After her secret is exposed, as long as she still stays in the family, it will be a blemish to us.” She was worried that if things were blown up, they might not be able to cut all ties with Qiao Nan.

“Mom... Do you want to cut your ties with Qiao Nan? According to the law, it is not feasible.” Since the last time when Qiao Dongliang called the police, Qiao Zijin had been reading up on legal knowledge at school, lest she be treated like fools by others. She even tried to find ways to deal with Qiao Nan.

“What should we do, then?” The law was so unreasonable!

“There is a way. Qiao Nan is already sixteen years old. It is not possible to sever ties with her, but you no longer need to care for Qiao Nan. Since Qiao Nan is already sixteen years old, she can start working. It will not be considered as illegal child labor. In other words, she can work to support herself. You have fulfilled your obligation to support Qiao Nan. Now, it’s her turn to support you.” Qiao Zijin had done her homework. She had some knowledge about one’s legal rights.

“Zijin, when did you study law?”

“Last time when Dad called the police, Mom was at a disadvantage while Qiao Nan had the upper hand. If I don’t read up, Mom may be bullied by Qiao Nan, the unfilial daughter, again. So I have been spending my time in the library after school to read up on legal knowledge. Mom, I heard that a lawyer can earn lots of money. I think I will be a lawyer in the future. I am quite talented in this domain!”

Qiao Zijin smiled confidently. Initially, she had only wanted to learn more so that she would not be fooled by Qiao Nan. On top of that, she wanted to find ways to deal with her. However, she ended up finding herself a career, a good career that could earn her lots of money.

“Very good. My daughter will definitely have a bright future. You will be a lawyer and earn lots of money. Mom has no other wishes but for you to support me.” Ding Jiayi grabbed at Qiao Zijin’s hands and had a big smile on her face.

“Mom, don’t worry. When I start to work, the monthly allowance I give you will be twice of Dad’s! He has himself to blame for siding with Qiao Nan instead of me. It’s Mom who has good foresight.” Qiao Zijin sounded as if she had obtained her law degree and had become a barrister who earned lots of money.

Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin painted a beautiful picture. When it was time for dinner, Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Nan noticed that both mother and daughter had a bright smile on their faces.

Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Nan stared at each other. They were troubled by what happened recently at home, but why were the mother and daughter full of mirth?

Qiao Dongliang frowned. “Nan Nan, have more of the food.” He and Nan Nan paid no attention to Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin.

As long as both of them did not make too many troubles, he would turn a blind eye toward what they did.

“Dad, you must eat more too.” Qiao Nan had never cared about Ding Jiayi’s and Qiao Zijin’s affairs. In one simple sentence, as long as they did not plot against her, she would not care what they were up to.

Unfortunately, in this family, if her mother and Qiao Zijin stood to gain, it usually meant that Qiao Nan was the one who had to suffer.

To put it bluntly, her mother and Qiao Zijin were downright unreasonable. Aside from bullying her and taking advantage of her, they were always at their wit’s end when faced with external challenges.

This was what annoyed Qiao Nan the most.

If it was not for the fact that Qiao Zijin and her mother had no abilities to survive by themselves in the society and were only good at bullying her, these two women would not be like leeches in the two lifetimes, hanging onto her and refusing to let go.

“Mom, you should eat more.” Qiao Zijin curled the corner of her lips, a cunning look in her eyes. She would not fight with Qiao Nan tonight. Qiao Nan could do whatever she wanted and act however filial she was to her father tonight.

Chapter 228: There Must Be Something Strange When Things Were Abnormal

From tomorrow onward, she no longer needed to fight. Her father would belong to her alone. Qiao Nan would not get her father’s care and attention anymore!

“Let’s dig in.” Ding Jiayi had the same mentality as Qiao Zijin. The last one standing was the winner. Qiao Nan might be putting up pretenses, but it would not last long.

“Nan Nan, have you slept?” When it was around eight o’clock, Qiao Dongliang knocked on the door of Qiao Nan’s room.

“Not yet.” Qiao Nan opened the door. “Dad, why are you not sleeping?”

“Nan Nan, do you think that your mom and Zijin were acting strangely today? After pondering for a long while, I cannot pinpoint what exactly was strange with their behavior. Nan Nan, will you laugh at me for being so paranoid?” Strange, it was too strange.

“No.” Qiao Nan shook her head: “I have the same sentiments as well. Ever since a year ago when Mom asked me to drop out of school, which I refused, and Dad was supportive of me, I have rarely seen Mom with a smile on her face. Yet today, Mom seemed to be very happy. In fact, this is her happiest day in the past year. She was smiling all the while. As far as our family’s situation is concerned, what is worthy of Mom’s happiness?” When her mother and Zijin were in high spirits, it usually meant that she would be suffering.

Despite spending half a day pondering, Qiao Nan had no idea what her mother and Qiao Zijin could have been happy about. They did not take any advantage of her either.

“Yes, that’s it. Your mom and your sister were all smiles today. Your Mom... I can’t be bothered to say. Nan Nan, you must pay more attention. I will keep a lookout for you as well.” Qiao Dongliang had not wanted to say this. No daughter should have to guard against one’s mother as if her mother was a thief.

But if Qiao Dongliang did not remind Qiao Nan, he was worried that she would fall into Ding Jiayi's traps.

Qiao Nan smiled. "Dad, don't worry. We are not close at all. I suppose that will not change for a lifetime."

Since her father had advised her to be on guard against her mother, it seemed that her father had given up on her mother as well.

She was glad that her father did not have the mentality that parents always had good intentions, and for her to practice filial piety foolishly.

"Well, it's good that you know what you are doing." Touching the soft hair on top of Qiao Nan's head, Qiao Dongliang smiled and said, "Alright, you should sleep now. I won't disturb you and go to rest as well."

"Good night, Dad."

"Good night."

"Zijin, do we have to do this?" Ding Jiayi, who leaned against the door and was listening to their conversation, looked at Qiao Zijin helplessly.

"Be quiet, don't talk. Dad seems to have come out of Qiao Nan's room. Fortunately, Dad only went in for five minutes. I suppose they did not say much. They have not discovered what we are going to do tomorrow." Qiao Zijin smiled.

"Since both of us have not said anything, how can your dad and Qiao Nan know about it? Alright, it's getting late. You should go back to your room to sleep. As for tomorrow, I will help you settle it." Ding Jiayi patted Qiao Zijin on the shoulder, urging her to go to sleep.

"Mom, why don't I sleep here tonight? I will share a bed with you here." Qiao Zijin hugged Ding Jiayi's arm. Both Qiao Nan and her father were very smart.

What if her father suspected something and decided to share a room with Ding Jiayi? By then, her mother might be coaxed by her father to abandon their plans tomorrow. Worst, she might spill the beans about their plans. If that happened, what should she do?

She had to sleep with her mother to assure that her mother would not change her mind.

“No, you should go back to your room.” Ding Jiayi usually liked to be close and affectionate with Qiao Zijin, yet she refused adamantly this time. “Be good, go to sleep.”

“Mom, are you waiting for Dad to come back to you? Is that why you won’t let me accompany you?” Qiao Zijin pulled a long face. Her mother was weak and useless. She might make harsh comments, but in fact, she felt otherwise. She would give in to Qiao Dongliang’s coaxing easily.

“This is the adults’ affairs. You are still a child and should not meddle in it. Don’t you wish that I will make up with your dad? The reason why I am at loggerheads with your dad is all because of Qiao Nan!” Ding Jiayi hated it. Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, was not her daughter at all. She was, in fact, her creditor in her previous life. In her current life, Qiao Nan was determined to make life difficult for her.

Ding Jiayi knew that Qiao Dongliang was still angry with her and that he would not share a room with her at night. But he might have a change of heart.

In case Qiao Dongliang wanted to share a room with her, it would be awkward to have the elder daughter sleeping by their side. Besides, it would also be too embarrassing to send her daughter back to her room by then.

Ding Jiayi was a traditional Chinese woman. She still longed to spend the rest of her life with her husband.

No matter how much they quarreled, Ding Jiayi had no wish to separate from Qiao Dongliang. She hoped that they would get back together soon.

“...” Qiao Zijin pursed her lips, expressing her unhappiness. But she gave a smile and said, “Alright, I will listen to you. I will go back to my room to sleep.”

Since her father deliberately went to chat with Qiao Nan in her room, he must be guarding against her and her mother. Given this situation, her father would not share the room with her mother

tonight. As long as her father did not go back to the room to share a bed with her mother, her mother would not be softhearted. She would not tell Qiao Dongliang about their plans.

After she was sure of this, Qiao Zijin had nothing much to worry about. She returned to her room, covered herself with a thin blanket, and went to sleep. She needed to have a good night sleep for the full-scale drama tomorrow!

On the morning of the weekend, Qiao Zijin unusually woke up very early. Unlike yesterday, Qiao Zijin did not go out but stayed at home to read her books instead. "Good morning, Nan Nan."

"Well... good morning." Qiao Nan twitched the corner of her mouth. Had Qiao Zijin taken the wrong medicine or had chicken blood? Qiao Nan thought to herself. What was it that she had missed out on? What was it that she had not thought of?

"Dad has bought breakfast and has put it on the table. You can help yourself." Hurry up to eat and leave.

"Oh." The breakfast had been placed on the dining table. Qiao Nan looked at Qiao Zijin with suspicions. It was obvious that Qiao Zijin was acting strangely, but she had no idea what she was up to.

"Dad, did my sister tell you anything? She was smiling at me early in the morning. I am getting the goosebumps. Where is Mom?" Whenever Qiao Zijin was up to no good, she would always leave it to her mother to do the evil deeds while she stayed behind the scene, acting as the military adviser and commander who gave orders and advice to her mother.

Since Qiao Nan had no idea what was going on with Qiao Zijin, she decided to work on Ding Jiayi instead.

"Your mom got up very early today. She goes off to work early in the morning. I bought the breakfast and your sister helped me lay it out on the table." Qiao Dongliang also felt that Qiao Zijin, the elder daughter, was being abnormal today.

She had never liked to do housework as it was akin to taking her life. Hence, she would never take the initiative to help out.

Chapter 229: Who Was in A Hurry?

At the thought of this sentence, Qiao Dongliang pressed his thin lips into a line, sizing Qiao Zijin up. "Zijin, why are you so diligent today? I remember that you hate to do housework."

"Dad, you've thought too highly of me. You are the one who bought the breakfast. All I did is set the table, nothing more. If you make me wash the dishes, I will definitely not do it. Dad, you know I hate getting my hands wet." Qiao Zijin bit her lips and schooled her expression.

"Is that so?" Qiao Dongliang did not believe her, and neither did Qiao Nan.

Ding Jiayi might not have been treated like a queen in the Qiao family, but Qiao Zijin was definitely the princess in the Qiao family. She not only refused to do household chores but also lazed around whenever she had the chance.

Based on Qiao Zijin's temper and selfish character, even for a chore as simple as getting a bowl and chopsticks, albeit not tired, she would rather sit and rest, waiting for other people in the family to get the things ready for her. It was impossible for her to help out.

"I merely helped set the table. Dad, Nan Nan, you're exaggerating. If I knew that you would react in this way, I would not have helped out at all. In the future, don't expect me to help out again." Qiao Zijin grunted. "Your reaction seems to say that I never help out with any chores when I am at home. I am the one who set the tableware. Qiao Nan, you can't use them. Go get yourself a new set of cutlery!"

That miserable wretch! She had already helped set the tableware, yet Qiao Nan was still so suspicious of her.

Being good to Qiao Nan brought her nothing but humiliation to herself!

Besides, it was Qiao Nan who owed her. Hence, Qiao Nan should be good to her, not the other way round.

"Fine, I will take it myself." Qiao Nan smiled. She would rather take the time to do the chores by herself than being served by Qiao Zijin.

Qiao Nan did not dare to use the tableware set by Qiao Zijin, but she enjoyed the hearty breakfast that Qiao Dongliang bought.

Qiao Zijin, who sat by the side with a book in her hand, could not stand Qiao Nan. What was wrong with Qiao Nan? It was only a simple breakfast, but why did Qiao Nan take her own sweet time to finish them? She made it seem like she was very well-mannered.

To Qiao Zijin, Qiao Nan took a very long time to chew every bite.

“Sister, why are you staring at me? Are you hungry? Would like to have more of the breakfast? Since there are more than enough, you can help yourself.” Qiao Zijin would look at Qiao Nan from time to time, making her very uncomfortable.

“I am not staring at you! Besides, if you did not look at me, how would you know I was watching you? Qiao Nan, why were you peeking at me?!” Qiao Zijin refused to admit that she was staring at Qiao Nan.

“Enough, it’s still early in the morning.” Qiao Dongliang had a headache. “Nan Nan, take your time to eat. Have more of the food. Here’s your water bottle. I have filled it up for you.” Qiao Dongliang knew that Qiao Nan had the habit of bringing a water bottle with her when she went out to read her books.

Therefore, Qiao Dongliang would help Qiao Nan cool the water in advance. Since he was free today, he helped Qiao Nan fill the bottle with water so that Qiao Nan could save some time.

“Thank you, Dad.” After taking the water bottle, Qiao Nan finished the last bite of the deep-fried dough sticks and wiped her mouth.

As soon as Qiao Nan stood up, Qiao Zijin’s eyes lit up instantly. Worried that Qiao Nan and Qiao Dongliang might find her suspicious, Qiao Zijin covered her face with her book.

Qiao Nan looked at Qiao Dongliang and lifted her chin. What was wrong with Qiao Zijin today?

Qiao Dongliang shook his head. He had no idea what was wrong with Qiao Zijin as well. But he paid no attention to her.

“Dad, I will go out now.” Qiao Nan ignored Qiao Zijin. She was only worried that her unusual behavior was directed at her.

“Okay, don’t stay out too late.”

Qiao Nan went out with the bottle that had been filled with water by Qiao Dongliang.

After Qiao Nan was gone for less than a minute, Qiao Zijin threw her book and ran out after her.

Qiao Zijin had just run out of the Qiao’s residence when she was stopped by Qiao Nan who walked out from behind the wall. If not for Qiao Nan intercepting her, Qiao Zijin would have run straight to the Zhai’s residence. “Sister, what do you want?” Qiao Zijin had not given up yet and now she wanted to stalk her?

No wonder she felt that Qiao Zijin could not wait for her to go out today. Did Qiao Zijin act in this way because she wanted to know where she hid the book and the money so she could get her hands on the three hundred yuan?

“I, uh... I did not do anything.” Qiao Zijin smiled awkwardly. Fortunately, Qiao Nan appeared early. Otherwise, she would have run straight to the Zhai’s residence.

If this was the case, she would definitely be discovered by Qiao Nan.

“Didn’t I tell you that I am going out today as well? I have told Dad about it. Are you the only one who can go out during the weekend? Am I not allowed to do so as well?” Qiao Zijin bluffed and acted as if she did nothing wrong.

“No.” Qiao Nan crossed her hands on her chest. “You seem to be in a hurry. You must have an appointment with someone. Are you in a rush? If so, then you can make a move first.”

“That’s right. I am really in a hurry. I am worried that you will be in my way. I shall go first, then.” Qiao Zijin snorted. She knew that Qiao Nan was going to the Zhai’s residence. She was not afraid to go first.

Now that she knew where Qiao Nan was heading to, there was no need for Qiao Zijin to follow Qiao Nan. She could make her way to the Zhai’s residence by herself.

Regardless, Qiao Zijin would be more assured if she could trail after Qiao Nan all the way to the Zhai's residence.

In order not to arouse Qiao Nan's suspicions, Qiao Zijin left right then without any slight hesitation. She even ran to make it seem like she was in a hurry.

The more Qiao Zijin acted in contrast to her usual ways, the more suspicious Qiao Nan was.

Qiao Zijin also behaved in a similar way when she ganged up with her mother to steal her money last time. This time seemed to be no different.

Back then, her mother went out to work early in the morning, and the way Qiao Zijin acted was unlike her usual self. She helped her father go out for a walk and rehabilitate. She even asked Qiao Nan to help her send their father back home.

Qiao Nan pondered for a while and changed her direction. Instead of going to the Zhai's residence straight away, she decided to make a stopover at another place before going to the Zhai's residence.

"Ding Jiayi, are you mistaken? Nan Nan is a good child. She will never do the things that you said. You should not think too much. It is getting late. I must go back to wash the clothes." Four middle-aged women gathered around the corner near the back door of the Zhai's residence, having a conversation.

Three women make a market, not to mention four women.

Among the four women, one of them was Ding Jiayi. The other three were people from the quad. What was so special about the three of them was that they were gossipmongers. They liked to gossip about the neighborhood.

"That's right. It has been half an hour. I have to go back."

"Don't go yet!" Ding Jiayi was so anxious that her face turned red. "All of you should know that Nan Nan is very capable."

Chapter 230: The Appearance of 'Qiao Nan'

"It's rare to have a capable child in our family. I'm afraid that Nan Nan will go astray. All of you watched Nan Nan grow up. You have to join me in helping Nan Nan this time. If I have been over thinking, that'll be great. But if it's true, I..."

"The combined exam scores of the children in your families can't be compared to my Nan Nan's. If Nan Nan becomes successful in the future, she may be able to help your children. Nan Nan calls all of you aunties. You have to help her, please."

When Ding Jiayi said this, she easily garnered many votes of hate for Qiao Nan.

In the eyes of a woman, the husband of other people may be better, but her own child will always be the best.

Even if Qiao Nan was different from the rest and set a good example for their children, who would be happy to hear other parents talk bad about their child in such a way? What did Ding Jiayi mean when she said that the combined scores of their children could not be compared to that of Qiao Nan?

What's so great about that!

Qiao Nan was a girl and would be married off in the future. Their children were all boys!

They wanted to see if Qiao Nan was really that outstanding or if it was just a pretense! Perhaps she was, in actual fact, a messy and lousy person.

"Hahaha, what Ding Jiayi said is right. Qiao Nan calls us aunties. If it's a misunderstanding, we will not take it to heart. However, if this matter is true, we can't just watch Qiao Nan go astray. One must know that a child who steals a needle will eventually become a grown-up that steals money. We have to start teaching children strictly from a young age. It doesn't matter if they don't do well in their studies. Most importantly, they need to be a morally upright person. If my child only has good grades but pilfers or does unethical things, I'll kill her!"

“Yes, yes. Ding Jiayi, if this is true, don’t hesitate to teach Qiao Nan a proper lesson just because she is good in her studies. As her biological mother, you have to discipline her. Let her experience pain and fear now so that she won’t dare to do such disgraceful things again. If you indulge her today, you don’t know what Qiao Nan will become in the future.”

“Yes, it’s useless to do well in one’s studies only. One needs to know how to be an upright person as well!”

Because of Ding Jiayi’s words, the three neighbors now changed their minds and wanted Ding Jiayi to teach Qiao Nan a painful lesson.

It was for the sake of their children. If they were to compare their children’s academic performance with Qiao Nan’s, the combined scores of their children were indeed worse than that of Qiao Nan. Nevertheless, character-wise, their children were definitely more outstanding. It would be worth it then!

“Don’t worry. Nan Nan is like a piece of meat from my body. I’m afraid that I will soften my stance and can’t bring myself to discipline her. That’s why I wanted you to come along to stop her from going astray. First, if I’m being paranoid, you have to be my witness to prove that Nan Nan is actually a good child. Second, if Nan Nan has really gone astray, you have to remind me not to be soft on her.” Ding Jiayi sneered. These three women were so mean. Their children were not capable, yet they yearned for the same for other people’s children so that they would look better. Shameless.

“Don’t worry. We will definitely remind you!”

“Okay, we’re all neighbors and stay in the same quad. Don’t mention it.”

“Most importantly, we’re doing this for Nan Nan’s sake. Nan Nan will be very embarrassed today. But when she changes for the better, she’ll understand why we did it. She’ll know that we have her good intentions at heart.”

Although Ding Jiayi was the one who invited them, upon hearing their words, one had to admit that these three women were too shameless. They had the cheek to say all that.

On the surface, Ding Jiayi’s face was filled with smiles of gratitude. “Of course that’s right. Nan Nan will definitely remember the three of you and will be grateful to you in the future.”

“Uh, Ding Jiayi. Isn’t that your elder daughter, Qiao Zijin? It’s not Nan Nan, though?” One of the women who bore the surname Ma, Mrs. Ma, saw the young lady who appeared in the small alley. As she fixed her eyes on the lady, she saw that this was the elder daughter of the Qiao family, not the younger one. “Ding Jiayi, have you been mistaken? Is Qiao Zijin the one you’re referring to and not Nan Nan?”

Everyone in the quad knew that Ding Jiayi favored the elder daughter. She treated Qiao Zijin like a treasure but treated Nan Nan like a piece of grass.

It was possible that Ding Jiayi put all the blame of the elder daughter’s wrongdoings on the younger one.

“I won’t be mistaken.” Ding Jiayi’s expression changed. Why did Zijin come over instead of staying at home? It didn’t matter that Zijin came, but where was Qiao Nan, that wretched girl?

Thereafter, Ding Jiayi did not need to explain further. Qiao Zijin appeared again and even found a place to hide. At the sight of this, Mrs. Ma and the rest felt ridiculous. “Ding Jiayi, Qiao Zijin is...”

“...” Ding Jiayi sighed. Zijin was too anxious. She had already told her that she would handle the matter, but Zijin just had to be so anxious to see it herself. “Zijin is the elder sister. Naturally, she is concerned about Nan Nan and also takes good care of her. I guess she must have found out about Nan Nan’s situation and was worried, so...”

“Oh, I see.”

“Shh, don’t talk. Someone is here.”

It was early in the morning and the back alley was very quiet. Hence, the sound of the approaching footsteps was particularly clear.

Upon hearing the footsteps, the five women in the alley had their eyes wide open. They were staring at the direction where the sound was coming from, following which the five of them saw a young lady in a dress and a straw hat.

The straw hat was oversized and the hat hole was gigantic. The young lady had her head down. Therefore, they could not see clearly how she looked like. However, her slim and tender figure

resembled that of Qiao Nan. Moreover, the dress the young lady was wearing was the one that Ding Jiayi bought for Qiao Zijin. How could Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin not recognize this dress?

She had finally appeared!

Qiao Zijin, who was hiding by the side, knitted her brows. When Qiao Nan left the house today, she did not wear this straw hat.

Could it be that after she left, Qiao Nan went back home and took the hat as she was afraid of the heat from the sun?

Looking at the time, Qiao Nan did reach here a little later than expected. This explanation thus made sense.

“This is Nan Nan?” Mrs. Ma asked suspiciously.

“Yes, it must be her. I bought this dress for Zi... for Nan Nan. I won’t get it wrong!” She would still recognize Qiao Nan even if she was wearing a hat. She gave birth to Qiao Nan. Even if Qiao Nan changed her skin, she would still recognize her, not to mention that she was only wearing a hat at the moment.

“See for yourself. This wretched... Nan Nan actually walked toward the Zhai’s residence!”