

RTAMM 231

Chapter 231: Caught Red-Handed

“Very few people in the quad interact with the Zhai family. The same goes for our Qiao family. Why did Nan Nan go to the Zhai’s residence?” This time, she was not being cruel. Qiao Nan was the one who courted her own death. Of all the families, why did she steal the house keys of the Zhai family? She had even stolen their money.

Qiao Nan was not the only person in the family. There were the three of them too.

She would not let Qiao Nan ruin the rest of the family. Qiao Nan should be responsible for her own wrongdoing. Whether it was death or imprisonment, she had to pay this debt on her own!

“Nan Nan. This... Is this true?” Mrs. Ma was stunned. If Ding Jiayi said that she was Nan Nan, then she must be Nan Nan. Furthermore, she also remembered that Nan Nan had this dress.

Nan Nan was good in her studies. In addition, whenever Nan Nan saw them, she would greet them politely with a smile. She did not expect that Nan Nan would turn out to be a person who stole and did unethical things. Was the saying ‘you don’t judge a man by his looks’ referring to people like Qiao Nan?

When the young lady reached the back door of the Zhai’s residence and took out the keys, Ding Jiayi dashed forward in her direction in large steps before the lady could even open the door. “You wretched girl! Of all things, why did you have to pick up the bad habit of stealing? You even dared to steal other people’s keys. Why do you want to enter the house? To steal things? Don’t you know that burglary is illegal? Do you want to go to jail? You’re an embarrassment to all of us. Do you want to destroy the Qiao family? I know that your grades have always been good. You have high standards and yearn for good things in life. But you have to think about the constraints Dad and Mom face. You’ve studied for years. Do you only know how to yearn for things that are beyond your reach?”

“Mom...” Qiao Zijin followed suit and rushed forward. When she looked up, her dark almond-shaped eyes were already full of tears. “Nan Nan, why did you do this? If you want anything, you should tell Dad and Mom. If you really want it, even if it’s hard, as they dote on you, they will definitely think of ways to satisfy you. I’m your elder sister. It doesn’t matter if I suffer and give in to you. If you like it, I can give in to you. But why did you do such an embarrassing thing? Of all

things, why do you have to be a thief? You're too disappointing. Why can't you change this bad habit of yours? Mom is so good to you. She became your scapegoat previously. Nan Nan, do you still have a conscience!"

When she said this, tears were rolling down Qiao Zijin's face like a downpour. She looked like her heart was aching painfully. "Nan Nan, I'm your sister. I can help you if you have any problems, but I can't hide this matter for you anymore. Nan Nan, you're too disappointing!"

"Sigh, Nan Nan, we don't want to scold you. You're a high school student. Why do you have to do such a shameless thing? Look at how sad your mom and sister are. They're so concerned about you. As a person, it's useless to be good in your studies. A person must be morally upright. You must learn how to be a person before you can do well as a person. It's too shameless to steal."

"Exactly. Did you take a look at what place this is? It's the Zhai's residence! The consequence of stealing from the Zhai family is worse than stealing from other families. If you steal from others, you may be jailed for one year. If you steal from the Zhai family, you may remain in prison for life. Fortunately, our family's Ming Ming is not like you. Although his grades are poor, he doesn't steal from others."

"Nan Nan, you're just a young lady. I don't know how to chide you. Hurry, return the keys and tell us clearly what you have stolen. We watched you grow up and will not leave you in the lurch. We'll then bring you to the Zhai family to pay them back whatever they have lost. At that time, you should kneel before them and admit your mistakes. They will definitely forgive you. As for us, the uncles and aunties in the quad, we will also forgive you and treat you the same as before."

Those who said these words could not even believe themselves.

Nan Nan turned out to be a person who stole from others. It was obviously not possible for them to view Qiao Nan the way they did before.

The Mrs. Ma trio was infamous in the quad for being a chatterbox. They argued nosily and fiercely, voices loud. When the three of them were talking, it was like the radio broadcast in the quad. Everyone could hear them.

Ding Jiayi had a reason for picking the three of them.

Hence, when the five women scolded in an overwhelming manner, everyone in the quad rushed over within five minutes. They wanted to find out about the situation as soon as they heard the ruffle.

Furthermore, the five of them had clearly described the situation. The smartest child with the best academic performance in the quad had stolen something!

This was shocking big news. It attracted more attention than the time when Qiao Nan was the provincial top scorer in the middle school examination. People were more curious and concerned about this.

Soon after, people swarmed to the scene. “What happened, what happened? What exactly happened? What did Qiao Nan do?”

“I just heard that Qiao Nan has stolen something from a family. How’s that possible? Qiao Nan looked like an obedient and sensible child.”

“Haha. I’ve said before. What’s the use of doing well in the studies? We don’t have such a bad egg in our quad.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. I don’t believe that Qiao Nan will steal from others. This could be a misunderstanding.”

Amongst those who came to watch the show, some believed what they heard and started to go along with the commotion, whereas others who were more cleared-minded were not immediately blinded and bewitched by the rumors.

Ding Jiayi was extremely nervous. She heard most of what was discussed amongst these people.

When she heard that so many people believed Qiao Nan and doubted her, she gritted her teeth. With tearful eyes, she patted her thighs and simply sat on the ground. “Nan Nan, you’re a wretched girl. You’re too heartless. Your parents wake up early and sleep late so that we can earn more money for the family. Don’t you know that we do this to support both your sister’s and your college education? Your sister’s grades are not as good as yours. You’re the only hope in our family. Why do you have to do something that let down Dad and Mom? If I knew that you would go astray even after studying for some many years, I would rather throw the money into the drain than let you study.”

“Tell me, what is it that you want that Dad and Mom can’t give you, and you have to resort to such shameful deed? Because of you, all of us including your sister have to suffer. During the vacation, you have two pieces of new clothes. What about your sister? Did she get anything? Steal? Your dad used to be a soldier. His duty was to catch thieves. Now, you have become a thief yourself. If your dad was still a soldier, did you want him to catch you? By doing this, aren’t you piercing a knife directly into Dad’s and Mom’s hearts?”

Chapter 232: Nothing Was Lost

“Mom, don’t cry, please. I believe Nan Nan did the wrong thing in a moment of folly. As long as we can guide her properly, she’ll definitely change for the better. Nan Nan is just a child. It’s not possible for her to have three hundred yuan. I didn’t expect Nan Nan to actually... I’m the one who’s at fault. Nan Nan has changed so much but I didn’t notice it. I should have shown more concern for Nan Nan. If I had cared more for Nan Nan, she would not have gone astray and done such a shameful thing. Mom, I’m the one at fault. You can’t blame it all on Nan Nan. Blame me if you want to. I didn’t fulfill my responsibility as the elder sister. Nan Nan, don’t worry. No matter what happens, I’ll be there for you. I’ll go with you to admit your mistake and apologize to the Zhai family. If they’re unwilling to let you off and insist on suing you till you go to jail, I... I’ll go with you!”

“Unexpectedly, the elder daughter of the Qiao family is such a good lady?”

“I agree. Clearly, the younger daughter is the one at fault, but the elder one is willing to accompany her to go to jail. Such an elder sister is hard to come by.”

“That being said, the thief is Qiao Nan. You can’t possibly let Qiao Zijin be jailed as well. Do the regulations in the country allow this?”

“Crap. It’s certainly not allowed. Whoever committed the deed has to be responsible for it.”

Instantly, Qiao Nan’s image as an outstanding student and obedient girl collapsed terribly. It was replaced by the beautiful story of Qiao Zijin, an elder sister who continued to give support and care to Qiao Nan, her young sister, despite the latter’s wrongdoings.

Not long ago, the Qiao family lodged a police report. The scandal about Ding Jiayi, the shameless mother who took Qiao Nan’s money, had transformed into another story: Qiao Nan was, in fact, the one who was light-fingered and stole others’ money. As Ding Jiayi was suspicious, she took the

money from Qiao Nan while she tried to investigate the matter. Truly, she had the loving heart of a mother and had good intentions for her child.

The exasperating thing was that Qiao Nan dared to call the police when the money she had stolen was lost. The pot called the kettle black. She was tremendously daring. Was Qiao Nan's heart so wicked that she had become so lawless and fearless?

The most shocking and scary matter to the people in the quad was that Qiao Nan was courting for death by stealing from the Zhai family of all families.

If the Zhai family insisted that Qiao Nan take responsibility for her action, Qiao Nan would be jailed for life!

As such, within a short span of ten minutes, Qiao Nan's previous beautiful and legendary reputation became a pile of smelly dog poop that was despised by everyone. Anyone who saw Qiao Nan could not wait to cover their nose and take another route to avoid her. They were unwilling to come into contact with her at all.

At the sight of her plan going so smoothly, Qiao Zijin, who was squatting on the ground and hugging Ding Jiayi, could not help burying her head in Ding Jiayi's shoulders.

It appeared that Qiao Zijin was too saddened by Qiao Nan's self-abandoning behavior. She was crying uncontrollably as if she was in so much pain that she had to bury her face in Ding Jiayi's shoulders.

Ding Jiayi was the only one who knew that Qiao Zijin was, in fact, laughing, not crying.

The plan went very smoothly. The entire blame of having offended the Zhai family had been pushed to Qiao Nan. Most importantly, the poor reputations of Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin for the year were finally gone.

Qiao Zijin could not help laughing as she felt elated. She had to bury her face in Ding Jiayi's shoulders to prevent others from seeing her laugh.

At this juncture, Ding Jiayi could clearly feel that the sound of Qiao Zijin's breathing was different. Her breathing was due to laughter, not a sad cry. Ding Jiayi knew that very well.

“Aye, why did this happen in our quad? It’s really bad. When the time comes, there will be a criminal in our quad.”

“Tsk tsk tsk, Qiao Nan is so bad. Who’s going to tell the Zhai family about this and ask them to check what has been lost?”

“Three hundred yuan. That’s crazy. If the money belongs to others, don’t mention it being three hundred yuan, I don’t even dare to take three cents or thirty cents. If my child dares to take three cents from others, I’ll chop his hands off directly!”

“She took home three hundred yuan. She must have stolen more than that. This is really too...”

“Someone has gone to inform the Zhai family. Qiao Dongliang just had an accident and was hospitalized recently. The family must have spent a lot. With today’s matter, the Qiao family is going to collapse because of Qiao Nan. Which family can hold their heads high again with such a child? Qiao Dongliang and Ding Jiayi must have sinned to have given birth to such a daughter!”

“What’s the matter? Why is everyone crowding at our back door?” Mother Zhai, Miao Jing, knitted her brows when she saw a noisy bunch of people. She did not look happy. “What exactly happened?”

“Madam Zhai, don’t you know? This young lady is called Qiao Nan. She’s the younger daughter of the Qiao family. We don’t know where she got the keys to your house from, but she has been secretly entering your house to steal things! Madam Zhai, you should quickly inspect your house carefully and find out how much money or valuables have been lost.” Mrs. Ma went forward enthusiastically to clarify the matter.

“What? Stealing things?” When she heard these words, Miao Jing pulled a long face. She detested thieves. Furthermore, this thief was a young lady. “I don’t think it’s possible. We didn’t lose anything or money.”

Although the young lady who stole things was shameless, she could not malign her.

“It can’t be wrong. Her biological mother and sister said that. Which mother and sister will malign their daughter and sister? Are they still humans? They will be beasts if they do so. So, this matter can’t be wrong. Madam Zhai, you’re always not at home and nobody keeps a watch on your

premises. We initially thought that such a thing will not happen as people in the quad have a high sense of self-awareness. Nobody knew that this would occur. Most likely, you have not discovered the things and money that are lost. Why don't you go in and check?" After saying so much, could she be considered as having helped the Zhai family and thus, gained their favor?

In the future, she could tell her friends that she knew the chief of the army's wife well—that she had come into close contact with her.

Most importantly, she had helped her catch the thief who stole their money!

"No, we didn't lose any money." Miao Jing shook her head with certainty. How could she not know whether her house had lost things or money?

It was because the members of the Zhai family were hardly at home. Miao Jing usually followed her husband to wherever he went. In addition, her two children were always in the army. The Zhai family did not have the habit of keeping their money at home.

As to whether any items in the house had been stolen, how would Miao Jing, who had been staying there for a few decades, not be able to tell?

"But..." At this juncture, Mrs. Ma did not know what to say. She was speechless.

Madam Zhai was so certain that no money had been lost, so what else could she say? Could she be clearer than the chief's wife about the situation in the Zhai family?

"Ding Jiayi, this is a matter pertaining to the Qiao family. We, outsiders, are definitely in no position to know about this. Speak about it yourself." Mrs. Ma had no choice but to push Ding Jiayi out.

Chapter 233: Damn, Who's Qiao Nan?

Ding Jiayi pursed her lips. It was impossible that the Zhai family did not lose any money. Did the chief of the army's wife get it wrong?

“Mom...” Qiao Zijin secretly tugged at Ding Jiayi’s clothes. It was useless if only the people in the quad believed that Qiao Zijin stole the money. The chief’s wife who was the victim had to believe and confirm it. Otherwise, Qiao Nan would definitely get away with it sooner or later.

To convict Qiao Nan of a crime, there had to be both physical evidence and witness.

She had cried so hard that her eyes were sore. She did not want all her hard efforts to be in vain.

Ding Jiayi took a deep breath and asked Qiao Zijin to stay calm and not panic. “Madam, my younger daughter has stolen from your family. I apologize to you on her behalf. I don’t know exactly what’s happening too but she has the key to your back door and has been going to your house. Our family is not close to your family. Madam, do you know my younger daughter?” Toward the end of her speech, Ding Jiayi tried to probe.

Although she had the feeling that the key in Qiao Nan’s hands was not obtained through legitimate ways, but what if it was?

“I don’t know her!” Miao Jing said with disdain. Many in the quad wished to get close to Miao Jing. However, Miao Jing never subjected to such behavior. It was useless for others to curry favor with her.

“!”

“!”

Hearing this reply, Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin were elated. True enough, the Zhai family did not know Qiao Nan. Since they did not know her, she must have stolen the key from them. Otherwise, did she pick it up from the streets? Even if she had done so, she should have returned the back door key to the Zhai family instead of secretly entering their house many times. It did not make sense.

Most importantly, where did the three hundred yuan in Qiao Nan’s hands come from?

“Madam, I’m the one who’s at fault. I didn’t fulfill the duty of teaching my child properly and as a result, she did such a shameful thing. She has the key to your back door. I... I’m really sorry. I’ll definitely ask her to kneel down and kowtow to you for her wrongdoings. I hope that Madam will not take issue with her as she’s still very young. No matter how much she has stolen, we will pay you back. Even if we have to sell everything in the house, we will pay you back the money.”

These words had already been prepared by Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin. Regardless of how unreasonable Ding Jiayi was, she dared not be a rogue in front of the chief of the army's wife.

Qiao Zijin had told Ding Jiayi before. Given the Zhai family's wealth and status, they were not lacking any money. Hence, they would not need them to pay them back. But if Ding Jiayi could put the words nicely, she would be able to leave a good impression on the Zhai family members.

"You, wretched... Qiao Nan, hurry and return the key to the Zhai's residence!" Ding Jiayi pulled 'Qiao Nan' strongly and snatched the key from her hands to return to Miao Jing. "Apologies, Madam. We're really sorry."

Miao Jing, who had been alerted to come over for this, was still confused. She understood what was happening, but she was certain that she did not lose any money or belonging.

Miao Jing was skeptical as she took the key and looked at it. Without much emotion, she then returned the key to Ding Jiayi. "This key does not belong to our family. It can't open our back door."

She had nearly believed that such a daring young lady, who became a thief at such a young age, existed in this world. It was a misunderstanding after all.

"What? This key does not belong to your house? That's impossible. Madam, did you get it wrong? Can you take a look at it again? This key definitely belongs to you!" Ding Jiayi did not believe it as she stuffed the key back into Miao Jing's hands as if she was more certain of it than Miao Jing.

"No." Miao Jing was unwilling to waste her time on Ding Jiayi. She returned the key to Ding Jiayi.

"I'm sure. This key does not belong to us. If you don't believe it, try opening the door with it."

"Okay, I'll try to open it!" She was sure that Qiao Nan went to the Zhai's residence that day. Qiao Nan definitely had the key to the back door of the Zhai's residence. It must be that the chief of the army's wife did not recognize her own house key as she was not home often.

Ding Jiayi disbelievingly took the key as she pushed 'Qiao Nan' away to open the lock on the back door of the Zhai's residence.

When she successfully inserted the key into the keyhole, she smiled. She had said that this key belonged to the Zhai family, but the chief of the army's wife would not admit it.

However, when Ding Jiayi tried to turn the key to open the lock, she was stuck. Although the key was inserted into the keyhole, it could not be turned. Everyone had the experience of opening a lock. With this situation, Ding Jiayi immediately knew that, indeed, this was not the key to the back door of the house.

But, why?

“Impossible!” Ding Jiayi, who turned pale, tried twisting and turning the keys with more strength as she continuously shouted out her disbelief.

“Mom, did you not have your meal? Is that why you don't have the strength? Let me open it!” Qiao Zijin pushed Ding Jiayi away swiftly and took over the key. “Eh? Why can't I open it? This is impossible!”

“Qiao Nan, did you take the wrong key? Where did you hide the key to the back door of the Zhai's residence? Hurry and take it out. If you admit your wrongdoings early and apologize to them, we'll all forgive you. But if you refuse to admit it, none of us will help you anymore.” She was certain that Qiao Nan did not take the correct key out.

Otherwise, it was impossible that she could not open the door.

Having said that, in fear of 'Qiao Nan' not abiding and refusing to hand over the key, Qiao Zijin simply reached out and searched her body in hopes of finding the real key that 'Qiao Nan' was hiding with her.

Unexpectedly, under the orders of Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin, 'Qiao Nan', who had been silent all this while despite being scolded and 'spat at' by others, reacted just as Qiao Zijin reached out to search her body.

'Qiao Nan' unhappily and impatiently reached out her hands to push Qiao Zijin away with all her might. Qiao Zijin was caught off-guard and fell hard onto the ground. The back of her hands was scratched, bleeding.

“Zijin!” Ding Jiayi ran over to Qiao Zijin’s side anxiously. When she saw that Qiao Zijin’s hands were hurt and bleeding, she shouted furiously, “Qiao Nan, you refused to admit that you’ve stolen from others. Now, you even pushed your sister. Do you want to die?!”

“Damn, are you crazy? Really a bunch of mad people. Who is Qiao Nan? You all dare to search my body so casually? Who are you all? You’re really crazy! Go home and take your medicine!” The young lady who was accused lifted her head and started scolding. At the sight of her face, she was a stranger to the people in the quad.

Ding Jiayi, who nearly hit the lady, was stunned. She was startled as she stared at the young lady before her. “You... you’re not Qiao Nan. Who are you? Where’s Qiao Nan? Where did you hide Qiao Nan?”

“Crap. Of course I’m not Qiao Nan. Why would I know who Qiao Nan is? I want to ask you. Why did you hold onto me, keep calling me Qiao Nan, and give me a scolding? Which family are you from? Which family will allow such crazy people to be released from the mental hospital to cause harm to others in broad daylight? If anything happens, will you be responsible? Who’s going to pay for this?”

Chapter 234: Where the Hell Did You Go?

The young lady’s face turned stiff and she pushed Ding Jiayi with all her might.

At this moment, no one would blame the young lady for being rude to or throwing her temper at Ding Jiayi, who was her elder. After all, no one in the world would talk nicely to a stranger who had just loudly called them a thief.

Most importantly, because of Ding Jiayi, many people were crowding around the young lady, accusing her of being a thief and saying that she was immoral. They wanted to send her to jail.

Even an adult with a good temper would not talk nicely and would be driven mad in the face of such an encounter, not to mention a child.

“You... Who are you? Why are you wearing my sister’s dress? Did my sister find out anything and purposely get you to come and cover up for her?” Qiao Zijin quickly held on to Ding Jiayi as her eyes flashed with panic.

No. Obviously, this person was not Qiao Nan. Then, where did Qiao Nan go?

“Your family is crazy. First, you accused me of being a thief. Now, you said that the dress I’m wearing belongs to your sister. Who do you take me for? A beggar? You surrounded and scolded me. What do you mean by this? Are the adults trying to bully a child like me? Do you believe me when I tell you I will report this to the police? Sending me to jail? Your brains are full of crap. I’m the one who should be calling the police!” Zhu Yan was so furious that she was snorting like a calf.

“Moreover, who’s the one who pushed me?!” At the thought of being pushed earlier, Zhu Yan’s face turned black. These women were tremendously daring to dare to push her. Even her parents had never lifted a finger on her since she was young.

“No, we didn’t push you. It’s her!” Seeing that Zhu Yan was so bad-tempered and not a person to be trifled with, Mrs. Ma and the trio simply pushed the blame to Ding Jiayi.

Ding Jiayi’s face was awkward. “This young lady, I’m really sorry. I... I didn’t do it on purpose. My younger daughter has a dress that’s exactly the same as yours. Your figure also resembles that of her. I have mistaken you for my younger daughter. I didn’t do it on purpose.” She did not expect that such a coincidence existed in this world.

She would not be so stupid as to hit other people’s child. Wouldn’t she be getting herself into trouble?

“What do you mean by not doing it on purpose? You wanted to discipline your daughter, but you didn’t even verify whether you’re scolding the right person. Will the matter be settled just because you said sorry? If you kill someone in the future and then tell the police ‘Sorry, I have mistaken him for the wrong person. Hence, I killed the wrong person. I didn’t do it on purpose.’ Do you think the police will let you off and not pursue this? If that’s the case, then does that mean you will get away scot-free after killing someone? You hope that the matter will rest by explaining that you mistook me for someone. No way! Which family are you from? I’ll definitely tell my parents about this. This is the first time that I’ve been pushed, scolded, and accused of being a thief in my life. Damn, did I steal any money from you?!”

Zhu Yan became angrier as she spoke, “You said that I’m a thief. I say that you’re robbers. You actually dared to snatch my house keys. This won’t do. I’m going to report to the police. If I lose anything in my house, you all must have stolen it!!!”

Qiao Zijin was in a state of shock and panic. She did not understand why things turned out this way. “You... don’t misunderstand us. We really mistook you for someone else. We didn’t snatch your keys. Here, take it back!”

The key in her hands was like a hot potato. Qiao Zijin could not wait to throw it away.

Hence, she immediately returned it to Zhu Yan. “Sorry, we’re really sorry. We didn’t do it on purpose. We mistook you for someone else. You heard what we said earlier. It’s a fact that we have an insensible sister in our family who seemed to have done something shameful and wrong. We accidentally mistook you for her as we’re very worried about her. We don’t harbor any malicious intent toward you. Sorry, I’m really sorry.”

Qiao Zijin bowed to Zhu Yan umpteen times. Her head was going to be dizzy and she looked like a bootlicker.

The police had already come to the Qiao family once. If Zhu Yan was not willing to relent and insisted to accuse them of street robbery, Qiao Zijin knew that they would definitely have to make a trip to the police station.

When that time came, it would be hard to justify themselves even if they wanted to push all the responsibilities to Qiao Nan.

Regardless of how ‘concerned’ they were about Qiao Nan, their next-of-kin, there was no reason to point at other people’s nose and scold them before verifying who that person was.

Basically, Qiao Zijin and Ding Jiayi were the ones who should be the most guilty-conscientious. They wanted to frame Qiao Nan so badly. As soon as they saw someone who resembled Qiao Nan, they were elated beyond reasoning. With nary a care, they simply nabbed the person and insisted that she was Qiao Nan. They then smeared the person constantly as if they were throwing basins of dirty water onto her.

Qiao Zijin and Ding Jiayi did not have a good reason for such behavior.

Their attitudes did not seem like they cared about Qiao Nan. Rather, it was as if they wanted to convict Qiao Nan of a crime.

“It’s so early in the morning. Why is there a commotion?” Behind the noisy crowd came Qiao Nan’s voice. Qiao Nan knitted her brows as she walked curiously into the crowd. “Uncle, what’s happening? Did anything happen?”

Just as that person wanted to tell Qiao Nan what happened, he saw that the person who posed the question was Qiao Nan. The fire of gossip in his heart was instantly extinguished. The person whom they had been talking about was here!

At the sight of Qiao Nan wearing the same dress as Zhu Yan, he finally understood why Zhu Yan had been mistaken as Qiao Nan.

The strange thing was that although Zhu Yan was wearing the exact same dress as Qiao Nan, Ding Jiayi was Qiao Nan’s biological mother.

How could Ding Jiayi not be able to recognize her own daughter just because other people’s child was wearing the same dress? Was this kind of mother acceptable?

“Uh, Mom, why are you here? Didn’t Sister say that you left for work early this morning? Sister, didn’t you tell me that you are meeting your classmate? What are the two of you doing here?” When someone saw that Qiao Nan was here, the impenetrable crowd made way and created a path for her.

As soon as the path appeared, Qiao Nan, of course, saw Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin, whose faces were flustered and in panic.

At the embarrassing sight of Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin, Qiao Nan’s eyes turned cold. She didn’t feel any pity for them. There was obviously a problem with these two women today. They wanted to harm her again!

“Where the hell did you go?!” At the sight of Qiao Nan, the temper of Ding Jiayi, who was in dire straits, rose. Many people who were present could not help but frown directly at what she said.

Even Mrs. Ma, who was unwilling to see Qiao Nan perform better than her child in the studies, looked unhappy.

Chapter 235: Faking an Accident for Extortion

“Ding Jiayi, why did you say that? There’s nothing wrong with Nan Nan. Why did you have to scold her? Didn’t you suspect her previously? Judging by the current situation, you are just being paranoid. Nan Nan is such a good child. Fortunately, now, everyone knows that this is just a misunderstanding. Otherwise, such a good child like Nan Nan will definitely be wronged by you!”

“Exactly. The first thing you did when you saw her was asking her, ‘Where the hell did you go’. Ding Jiayi, Nan Nan didn’t do anything to provoke you.” On the contrary, Ding Jiayi was the one who created a big mess today.

The magnitude of the fuss Ding Jiayi had kicked up and the amount of sympathy and acknowledgment she had received earlier was equivalent to the amount of displeasure now. Many were rolling their eyes at her.

It was early in the morning and everyone was busy. They wasted their time for work to watch a full-scale drama. In the end, it was all a misunderstanding, and Ding Jiayi had mistaken the person for her daughter. Qiao Nan stole things? Was there any evidence?

Moreover, Ding Jiayi was Qiao Nan’s biological mother. Yet, she had to cheek to say all these.

“You... don’t be misled by Qiao Nan. How could this be a misunderstanding?” Ding Jiayi was anxious. She had clearly succeeded. How had she mistaken who she saw? Moreover, Qiao Nan just came.

“Nan Nan, tell me honestly. Did you do it on purpose? To purposely make a fool of Mom? Did you already know that Mom suspected you, so you planned all these? Nan Nan, you’re so disappointing. We did this because we’re worried about you. We don’t want you to go astray and beyond redemption. How could you malign and embarrass Mom in return? Where is this young lady from? Do you know her?” Qiao Zijin gritted her teeth. She did not believe that such a coincidence existed.

Since this woman was not part of the Zhai family and was not holding the key to the Zhai’s residence, why did she go to the back door and ‘pretended’ that she was going to open it?

If the woman had not carried out this action that caused the misunderstanding, both of them would not have possibly mistaken her for Qiao Nan.

This was obviously a trap set up by Qiao Nan. Qiao Nan purposely wanted to harm her mother and her. Why was Qiao Nan so heartless? She was her biological sister and Mom was her biological mother! Had Qiao Nan's conscience been eaten by a dog? How could she bear to frame her next-of-kin in such a manner?

“Yes, that must be what happened. This young lady, why can't you learn to be good? Did you both collude with each other? Qiao Nan, I know you dislike me as your mother. No matter how much you hate me, you shouldn't join forces with outsiders to frame me! I'm concerned about you. It's for your own good. How could you repay me like that?!”

After hearing what Qiao Zijin said, Ding Jiayi also reacted accordingly.

Qiao Nan, this wretched girl, was born to jinx her. She wanted to stage a big play for Qiao Nan, but she did not expect that Qiao Nan had arranged an even bigger one for her!

“This mother-daughter pair, do you have holes in your brain? Wrong. I should say that this mother-daughter trio joined forces to bully an outsider like me. Yes, I'm not someone from the quad. I'm just making this trip to visit my relative and you have to create so much trouble. Oh, I know. You're faking an accident to claim compensation from me! You're so shameless. A family of three that faked an accident to get money. An adult bringing two children to accuse me of being a thief. Now, you say that I'm pretending and acting. I'm going to report to the police. I must do so. Next, you'll definitely seek compensation from me!” Zhu Yan jumped. She had not met people who were so unreasonable. They sounded bold and righteous although they were in the wrong.

“Young lady, don't be anxious. You said you're here to visit your relative. What's your name and who is your relative?” Miao Jing's temple was throbbing. She wanted to turn away and leave so that she could ignore this ridiculous matter.

However, she was the wife of the chief of the army and the Zhai family was the model family of the quad. She could not wash her hands off this matter.

“My surname is Zhu. My name is Zhu Yan. My elder grandpa stays in this quad.” Based on what Zhu Yan said, many guessed the family she was related to.

“You're a relative of the Zhu family. Then, you're on Qiao Nan's side!” Qiao Zijin was red with anger. At the thought of her apologizing to Zhu Yan like a bootlicker earlier, Qiao Zijin wished that she could turn back the time.

Zhu Yan's eyes turned stiff and her temper rose. She lifted her foot and kicked Qiao Zijin's knee. "Do you know how to speak like a human?! If you don't, scram!"

"Is your grandpa Zhu Ziming, and your elder grandpa Zhu Zicheng?" Miao Jing asked.

"Yes."

"This is really a misunderstanding. Elder Zhu's younger brother migrated to Shen Zhen about ten years ago and has not come back for many years. This is the first time this child came back to the quad." Miao Jing's expression softened. Who would be happy if others created such a din at the entrance of their house? Fortunately, this was certainly a misunderstanding.

"Yes, I've never seen this young lady before."

"Me too."

"That being said, this lady's accent is different from ours."

A young lady who came back to visit her relative after ten years could collude with Qiao Nan to bluff Qiao Zijin and Ding Jiayi? What nonsense!

Most critical of all, Ding Jiayi did not recognize Zhu Yan but said with certainty that Zhu Yan was Qiao Nan. She even accused Zhu Yan of stealing things from the Zhai family and insisted for Qiao Nan to apologize and compensate the Zhai family. It was too suspicious.

Everyone remembered that when Miao Jing came out, she had already said more than once that the Zhai family did not lose any money or belonging. Ding Jiayi's attitude that insisted Qiao Nan had stolen something left many pondering deeply.

"Ding Jiayi, don't create any more troubles. We're all very busy. Nan Nan is such a good child, yet you went as far as saying that she's a thief. When the police come, we will know what the truth in your heart is. Are you still not done with your nonsense? Are you trying to take revenge on Nan Nan? Is there a mother like you? Stealing your daughter's money was not enough, and now you resort to this. I've been neighbors with you so many years, but I couldn't tell that you're such a person." Mrs. Ma was unhappy.

After so much fuss, Ding Jiayi was a big swindler!

Thinking of how she had vowed with conviction to the wife of the chief of the army that Qiao Nan had stolen the Zhai family's belongings, Mrs. Ma's face turned red with embarrassment.

"I mean, why do Ding Jiayi's earlier words sound strange? If you're really concerned about Nan Nan and afraid that Nan Nan would go astray, why didn't you ask Nan Nan quietly and tail her yourself to confirm the fact of the matter? Why did you have to drag us along and request us to help persuade Nan Nan? This is a conflict that could be resolved internally. Why did you have to involve the outsiders? If this matter is spread to others, how will that benefit you? How's Nan Nan going to face other people?"

"Exactly. Ding Jiayi, what were you trying to do exactly by dragging the three of us here?"

Chapter 236: Truly Shameless

The Mrs. Ma trio was infamous in the quad for their big mouths. Nevertheless, they were also famous for being shrewd.

They felt strange about today's matter. The trio did not need to know the reason why Ding Jiayi did this. They only needed to confirm that there was something odd about Ding Jiayi.

The three witnesses that she invited had turned against her. Ding Jiayi was completely embarrassed.

After hearing the words of the trio, Qiao Nan's face turned sullen instantly. "So, Mom, you said that you're leaving for work early this morning, but in actual fact, you're coming here to catch a thief. Moreover, the thief you wanted to catch is me. You even brought along three witnesses. Mom, you're really so loving to me and have my good intentions at heart."

If she had been caught red-handed by her mother and the trio when she used the key to open and enter the back door of the Zhai's residence, then her reputation in the quad would be thoroughly ruined.

Possibly, in a few days' time, the whole Ping Cheng would receive some news that the top scorer in the middle school examination this year was actually a thief!

Her mother and Qiao Zijin painstakingly plotted this. They really wanted to destroy her!

“Qiao Nan, don’t slander us. She’s a relative of the Zhu family. You’re so close to Zhu Baoguo, yet you refuse to admit that you’re here to malign Mom. Qiao Nan, search your conscience before saying those words!” If Zhu Yan was not connected with Qiao Nan, and Qiao Nan had nothing to do with today’s matter, and thus, Qiao Nan did not harm her mother and her, then she would chop off her head and let Qiao Nan sit on it like a stool. Qiao Nan definitely did it on purpose!

“Sister, you said that I wronged Mom. Okay, tell me. How did I malign her?” Qiao Nan crossed her arms and looked at Qiao Zijin coldly.

Yes, Zhu Yan’s appearance was arranged by her. So what?

If Qiao Zijin and her mother did not harbor any ill intentions, they would not have embarrassed themselves.

“Do you dare to say that Zhu Yan is not someone you staged to make Mom misunderstand you? Nan Nan, you’re already sixteen years old. You can’t continue to be so willful. Mom did so much for your sake. How could you collude with others to harm Mom?!” Qiao Zijin’s mouth stung as she gave an ambiguous explanation.

“What did I do that made Mom misunderstand?”

“You asked Zhu Yan to wear the same dress as you so that Mom will mistake her for you!”

“Sister, your words are ridiculous and amusing. Which mother recognizes the daughter by the dress and not the face? Any young lady who wears this dress is Mom’s daughter, then? Mom is so concerned about me. So concerned about me that I want to cry. She’s so concerned about me to the extent that she didn’t even look at my face and only looked at my dress. Sister, do you think that I should be touched?”

“You...” Qiao Zijin was dumbfounded and could not respond.

It was not easy for them to catch the chink in Qiao Nan’s armor. As victory was within reach, the excited Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin were so carried away with it that they rushed to the person

standing at the back door of the Zhai's residence without even looking at her face. They were so certain that she was Qiao Nan.

"I just heard the word 'thief'. So, Mom took me as the thief and came to catch me red-handed? You wanted to catch the thief and see what she stole. Mom, did you call out my name even before taking a proper look at the person? Judging by the situation, you seem to wish that I was really the thief. Am I wrong?"

"You..." Ding Jiayi was interrogated by Qiao Nan in front of so many people and yet, she was speechless. She was extremely embarrassed, her face turning dark instantly. "Do you dare to say that you did not steal anything?"

"No, I didn't!" The reply was firm and swift.

"Then, where did your three hundred yuan come from?!"

"As I said before, I took on a job and earned it."

"Who are you kidding? You're just a child. What kind of job allowed you to earn three hundred yuan in such a short time? Do you still refuse to admit that you had stolen it?!"

"Then, did any family lose any belonging or money? If I had indeed stolen from someone, where did I steal it from?" Qiao Nan was both amused and angry. Her mother's skills in being shameless had improved again.

"I..." Ding Jiayi wanted to say the Zhai family, but Miao Jing had said many times that the Zhai family did not lose anything. Ding Jiayi was thus unable to do that. "How will I know which family you had stolen from? I have wanted to ask you. Confess honestly, which family did you steal from? If you don't give a proper explanation today and admit your mistake with a proper attitude, I don't believe that I, as your mother, can't discipline you properly!"

"Having said so much, you only want me to admit that I'm a thief, don't you? Mom, are you really my biological mother? You're trying to destroy me completely!" Qiao Nan's eyes were red. She was so depressed that she felt like crying. She wanted to throw a temper and hit someone.

She did not mind that her mother favored Qiao Zijin more and ignored her. It was fine that she ignored her as she felt happier and less troubled that way.

However, her mother should have more shame and conscience. Her mother could even bring herself to accuse her of being a thief. Was she crazy?

“Alright, it’s your family affair now. We know that it’s a misunderstanding. Since this is a domestic affair, I hope that you can settle it at home. But I want to say something. This parent, there’s indeed a problem with what you said. As a mother, when you suspected that your child has a behavioral problem, you wanted to find out if she has indeed done something wrong. Nevertheless, you should be more adamant in proving her innocence and believing that she has not done it. There’s something wrong with your attitude.” Miao Jing said patiently.

The mother was muddle-headed and the elder sister was brainless. The younger one was so pitiful but had no choice since she was born into this family.

This kind of messy family was troublesome. Fortunately, her family did not have any connection with them.

“No, Madam, listen to me. That’s not the case.” Ding Jiayi’s face turned pale. She could easily deal with everyone’s accusations but could not tolerate what Miao Jing just said. “Madam, there’s a problem with this child. She’s just a child but managed to earn three hundred yuan during the two-month vacation period. Who will believe this?”

“You don’t believe that I earned it, but you took away my money anyway. Within less than a day, you took the money that I ‘stole’ and bought two new dresses for my elder sister!” Qiao Nan was wearing a sarcastic smile, her eyes full of disbelief. Didn’t her mother think that she was being ridiculous when she said that?

“That... Didn’t I return the money to you? In the end, the dresses went to you. Aren’t you wearing it now?!” Ding Jiayi did not concede defeat.

“It’s my dad’s decision to return the dresses to me!!”

“Alright. Go away, go away.” The more Miao Jing listened, the more her head ached. What kind of people was this? The family situation was so messy. Leave soon, lest they pricked her eyes and worsened her mood.

She maintained the same stance. Settle your own domestic affairs at home. Don't linger at her doorstep to air the grievances and fight it out.

Because of Ding Jiayi's random harassment and absurd reasoning, Miao Jing had a terrible impression of the Qiao family.

"Key! There's still the key!" Qiao Zijin's eyes, which were tearing with anxiety, suddenly lit up.

Chapter 237: Qiao Nan Was in Utter Despair

"Yes, the key... There's still the key! How could I have forgotten?" Seeing that things were about to fail, Ding Jiayi patted her thigh and rushed toward Qiao Nan aggressively. "Hand the key over!"

As she had mistaken the person earlier, the key in Zhu Yan's hands could not open the back door of the Zhai's residence. But now that Qiao Nan had appeared, she should have the key with her. She was certain that the place Qiao Nan went to was the Zhai's residence and that she had the key to the house.

"What are you doing? Are you prepared to fight after maligning someone?" Judging that the situation was amiss, Zhu Yan moved forward to shield Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan was someone her cousin requested her to protect. If Qiao Nan was bullied before her eyes, she would not be able to face anyone in the future.

"It's none of your business!" Qiao Zijin wrapped her arms around Zhu Yan so that she would not obstruct Ding Jiayi from searching Qiao Nan's body.

Zhu Yan was Zhu Baoguo's cousin. With Zhu Baoguo's temper, coupled with Zhu Yan's earlier behavior, who would believe that she was a gentle and lovely young lady?

Zhu Yan sneered and twisted Qiao Zijin's arms strongly. She threw Qiao Zijin over the shoulder and slammed her on the floor hard, making Qiao Zijin completely confused.

Although Zhu Yan was quick in her action, she was not quicker than Ding Jiayi who wanted to harm Qiao Nan wholeheartedly. Ding Jiayi grabbed Qiao Nan's hands. She wanted to search Qiao Nan's hands, but she was using so much strength that she could possibly tear Qiao Nan's clothes.

The summer clothing was so thin. It had just a layer with a few pockets.

Ding Jiayi did not need to search. With such strength, she only needed to grab and shake Qiao Nan a few times before she heard a key falling to the ground.

Ding Jiayi pushed away Qiao Nan swiftly. Her eyes were as bright as the bulb. She picked up the key and said, "See, I told you this wretched girl is dishonest and light-fingered. She stole the key of the Zhai family and kept coming to the house. Madam, you have to believe me. You must have lost some money or belonging. I'm her mother. Do I need to tell such lies? I will not benefit from this."

The bystanders were speechless. They wondered what Ding Jiayi would gain if Qiao Nan was proven a thief. Why was Ding Jiayi so happy when she found a key from Qiao Nan's body which might prove that Qiao Nan was a thief?

The key that Ding Jiayi had been talking about had appeared. The people in the quad were confused. Did Qiao Nan steal it or not?

"Can I take a look?" Miao Jing pursed her lips as her mouth formed a straight line.

"Madam, look at it carefully." Ding Jiayi passed the key to Miao Jing eagerly.

Qiao Nan's face drooped and she looked gloomy. She was utterly despaired at Ding Jiayi's attitude to destroy her by all means. She felt even more despaired about the presence of this key.

This key belonged to the Zhai family. Brother Zhai gave it to her personally but he was not around. If she said that Brother Zhai was the one who gave it to her, would anyone believe her? She was only afraid that when Mother Zhai recognized the key, she would be the first person that the latter would not believe.

Qiao Nan smiled bitterly. No matter how hard she tried, her life was like a coffee table that was full of cups of bitter tea.

With the fuss today, she was fearful that her reputation as a thief would spread to everyone she knew very soon.

Her mother had succeeded. Qiao Zijin did it again. She successfully ruined her second life!

“This key... certainly belongs to our family.” Miao Jing confirmed it. Then, she knitted her brows as she looked in disbelief at Qiao Nan, who looked so fair-skinned and obedient. This young lady was really a thief. Although the mother was a troublemaker, the child did not seem any better.

Miao Jing’s confirmation was like thunder striking across the ground. It shocked everyone.

“See, as I’ve said before, this wretched, uh... my younger daughter is dishonest with money. As a mother, I have no choice but to do this. I don’t wish to do this. After everyone knows about this, please keep a close watch on my younger daughter in the future in case she commits further wrongdoings. I also have her best interests at heart!” Ding Jiayi tried hard to hold back her smile, but the twinkle of joy in her eyes could not hide the happiness and elation in her heart.

“Mom...” Qiao Zijin was also happy, but she displayed a more mature behavior than Ding Jiayi. She not only did not laugh but cried out instead, “Nan Nan, you... you’re really disappointing. Mom and I were hoping that we have been thinking too much and that this is not real. You... how could you...”

“Hey, the two of you, don’t go overboard. Why do you keep bullying someone? Are the three of you really from the same family?” Zhu Yan, who was not very clear of the situation, did not believe Qiao Nan, but she believed her cousin, Zhu Baoguo.

Particularly, when she saw that Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin’s behavior and words were extremely hurting, Zhu Yan nearly stood on Qiao Nan’s side. “So what if the key belongs to the Zhai family? Didn’t this auntie mention earlier that the Zhai family did not lose anything? Just because the key is in Qiao Nan’s hands, does it mean that she had stolen it? Are you saying that none of you had ever picked things up from the streets before? Does that mean whoever picks something up is considered to have stolen it?”

“This key... Did you pick it up somewhere?” Miao Jing heard Zhu Yan’s words and felt that it made sense. But this key...

“Qiao Nan, we’ll give you one more chance. Tell us honestly, where did you get this key from? What did you do at the Zhai’s residence?!” Ding Jiayi was bold and righteous now. She felt more confident and straightened her posture.

“Does it matter?” Qiao Nan looked coldly at Ding Jiayi. Maybe she had been wrong. She had long known about her mother’s character and Qiao Zijin’s personality. She should have left the family and lived alone.

Qiao Zijin’s reminder was correct. She was only sixteen years old. Even if she wanted to live alone, it would not be allowed given that she did not have a guardian.

She had the capability and ability to earn money to support herself. So why should she be burdened by this mother and elder sister all the time?

Last time. This would really be the last time. She would not let these two women have the chance to harm her again.

Qiao Nan knew that once she was being labeled as a thief, she might not be able to attend Ping Cheng High School anymore. None of the schools would be willing to accept a thief as a student. Ping Cheng High School also needed to maintain their reputation.

Even if she did not study at Ping Cheng High School and transferred to other schools in other cities, with the black mark against her, her future would also be affected, not to mention the troublesome registration fees and endless expenses.

“Qiao Zijin, congratulations. You have fulfilled your wish. From today onward, you will have a younger sister who was once a thief. You also have a mother who stole her daughter’s money to buy clothes for you. Qiao Zijin, this time, you’ll be proud. You’re going to make a big splash.”

Chapter 238: Whose Key Was That?

“Don’t worry. As long as someone in Ping Cheng remembers that Qiao Nan, me, is a thief. There will always be someone who remembers what kind of sister you, Qiao Zijin, are and the kind of mother we have!”

She would like to find out whether Qiao Zijin's tarnished reputation would still grant the latter her wish to marry into a rich and powerful family like she did in her previous life and lead an easy life as a wealthy man's wife with everything provided for her!

Qiao Zijin's face turned pale. She was so scared that she gasped a mouth of cold air. What Qiao Nan was saying was that she would drag her reputation down along with hers so that she would also not have a good life in the future.

Qiao Nan's thievery was not a glorious matter. It was very shameful. However, Ding Jiayi, despite suspecting that Qiao Nan had stolen money, stole Qiao Nan's money and bought new clothes for Qiao Zijin. Was this considered a dog-eat-dog situation?

Even if Ding Jiayi gave a hundred reasons to justify her actions, no one would believe her.

Her biological mother's and sister's reputations had been damaged. It was only at this moment that Qiao Zijin realized that two out of her four family members were deemed as light-fingered thieves with immoral characters. In the future, if others knew about her family situation, what kind of impression would they have of her?

Although she had successfully ruined Qiao Nan's reputation, at the same time, she seemed to have dragged her own future down!

Qiao Zijin's face turned pale upon realizing the gravity of the matter. At the sight of this, Qiao Nan smiled revengefully. They were bounded together for good or ill. Qiao Zijin was already a high school student, but she actually didn't understand this. It was ridiculous!

Great. Although her life was ruined, Qiao Zijin could also forget about leading a good life. They would perish together!

Qiao Zijin, who finally understood, fully regretted her actions. However, as it was, it would be too late to change her stance.

Qiao Zijin shivered. She felt as if she was in hell, in desperation and despair.

"Hey, what's happening? Is the back door of our house so popular?" Zhai Hua, who had been watching the 'good show' for some time, slowly sauntered over as she yawned. "Nan Nan, you're here. Did you come to read books again?"

“?” Miao Jing, who had wanted to ask Zhai Hua if she had been sleeping and awakened by the noise, was stunned when she heard Zhai Hua greeting Qiao Nan in such a friendly tone. “Hua Hua, do you know Qiao Nan?”

“Yes, I do.” Zhai Hua nodded her head, then she walked over to Qiao Nan and held the latter’s arm.

The members of the Zhai family were mostly tall. Although Zhai Hua was a lady, she was about 1.7 meters’ tall. Qiao Nan was only 1.6 meters’ tall. Hence, it was quite funny when the two of them stood together. “Mom, Nan Nan is my sister.”

Qiao Nan, who was hugged in the arms of Zhai Hua, turned stiff. Then, she asked hesitatingly, “Sister Zhai Hua?”

How did Sister Zhai Hua know her? Did Brother Zhai mention to her?

Zhai Hua rubbed Qiao Nan’s head. She discovered that Qiao Nan’s hair felt great to the touch as it was silky and soft. It was more wonderful than touching the soft toy from America that someone gave to her. “What’s wrong? We’ve not seen each other for more than a month and you don’t recognize this sister anymore? I even passed you the key to my back door to lend you a place to study. Fortunately, you’re capable. I heard that you are the top scorer in the middle school examination. You didn’t make me lose my face. Lending you a place was the right choice.”

Zhai Hua was rubbing Qiao Nan’s head so hard that the latter swayed from side to side, her focus lost. Why did Sister Zhai Hua have the same habit as Brother Zhai? Both loved to rub people’s head. They were truly siblings.

“Hua Hua, did you give Qiao Nan this key? Qiao Nan... Qiao Nan came to our house to study? Why?” Miao Jing did not understand. “When did this happen? Why didn’t I know? Why did you ask her to study at our house? Isn’t it more convenient for her to study at her own house?”

“Mom, this situation is quite complicated. If you really want to know, ask her.” Zhai Hua could not be bothered to greet Ding Jiayi. She simply used ‘her’ to address Ding Jiayi rudely.

Ding Jiayi’s face turned stiff. “What does this have to do with me?” Qiao Nan really did not steal the key and it was given to her by a member of the Zhai family?

How did this happen?

Zhai Hua sneered. She was standing by the side earlier. Obviously, she saw and heard everything.

It was no wonder that the bad-tempered and aloof Zhai Sheng was willing to interfere in this matter. Qiao Nan, this young lady, was really too pitiful to have such a mother. “I heard that a mother sold all the textbooks of her daughter who was going to sit for the middle school examination. The mother also refused to let the daughter continue with her studies and forced her to find a job instead. The daughter had no choice but to buy a set of secondhand textbooks from the thrift shop. She was afraid that the books would be sold away again. At that time, she was squatting and crying anxiously at that corner over here and I bumped into her. Anyway, we don’t really use our storeroom, so I lent it to her.”

Zhai Hua knew the whole story well.

Initially, Zhai Hua had thought that Qiao Nan was exaggerating. But when she saw Ding Jiayi’s behavior today, Zhai Hua only felt that Qiao Nan’s description had been too lenient on Ding Jiayi.

“I heard about this matter too.”

When Zhai Hua said that, someone immediately reacted. “At that time, I was still thinking. Since Nan Nan’s grades were so good, how could Old Qiao possibly let her quit school? Thereafter, Nan Nan continued to study and even made it to high school. I thought I had heard it wrong.”

“I heard about it too. At that time, Ding Jiayi tried to find out which factory was recruiting, didn’t she? She clearly said that she wanted her daughter to experience life and take up a vacation job.”

“Vacation job? When she asked about it, the vacation had already ended.”

Truly, a man should never do anything that was beyond his conscience. The past happening from a year ago was now brought up by someone.

Upon hearing the discussion, Ding Jiayi, who had never felt that she was in the wrong, turned purplish red. She was so embarrassed that she wanted to cover her face. Similarly, Qiao Zijin was so ashamed that she simply hid behind Ding Jiayi’s back to cover her face.

“Was there such a matter?” Her daughter had poked her nose into this and Miao Jing’s attitude became more serious. “You really gave Qiao Nan this key?” After all, this happened more than a year ago, so why wasn’t she aware of it at all?

“Mom, it’s real, as real as authentic pearls. If you don’t believe me, ask Dad. Nan Nan has been borrowing our place to study. Both Zhai Sheng and I know about this. Dad even praised Nan Nan when he heard that she was the top scorer of the middle school examination,” Zhai Hua said. Except for the fact that she was not the one who gave Qiao Nan the key, the rest of her words were absolutely true.

“Your Dad knows about this?” This time, Miao Jing had nothing to doubt about. If Zhai Hua was lying, she would not bring up her father. She did not have the bravery to do so. If Father Zhai was aware of this matter and even silently approved of it, then Miao Jing, who had always put her husband first, would not object to this.

However...

There was a flash of doubt in Miao Jing’s eyes. The key clearly did not belong to Zhai Hua?! It should be Zhai Sheng’s?!

Chapter 239: I Will Return the Key

“Mom, the matter has been clarified. You can pass the key back to Nan Nan.” Zhai Hua looked at Miao Jing pleadingly. This was truly her dearest mother. Nothing could escape her eyes.

“Since this is the case... You’re Qiao Nan, right? You can continue to keep the key. If there’s a need, you can still come to our house to study.” Miao Jing seemingly agreed to pass the key to Qiao Nan, but she gave Zhai Hua a look of warning, hinting that she would have a private talk with her later.

If Zhai Hua could not give her a satisfactory explanation, she would deal with her accordingly!

Qiao Nan, who was frozen to the bones as if she was in an ice house, only began to feel some warmth like an autumn tiger when she had the key in her hands again.

“You... you all... did you all make a mistake?” Qiao Zijin’s face looked pale at one moment and red on another. She could not believe that Qiao Nan had such connections with the most powerful family, the Zhai family, in the quad. Furthermore, she was able to obtain a key from the offspring of the Zhai family.

That was such a great honor!

In other words, if Qiao Nan encountered any problems in the future, judging by the relationship, the Zhai family would definitely help her.

The Zhai family had a chief of the army, which was a very senior government post in China. If her family could be good friends with the Zhai family, there was nothing for her to be worried about or fearful of anymore. She could effortlessly find a rich and powerful man among those who would be queuing to marry her.

When the time came, she would be the one choosing her partner and not the other way round!

Wasn’t this the kind of assurance that Qiao Zijin had long been yearning and working hard for?

However, the Lee family ignored her. The Zhu family was not within her reach. Why was it that Qiao Nan could have the best of everything? It was so unfair!

Now, it was not only the Lee family and the Zhu family that Qiao Nan had close connections with but also the Zhai family, the most powerful family in the quad.

Qiao Zijin could clearly imagine how quick the news of the relationship between Qiao Nan and the Zhai family would be spread in the quad. When the time came, Qiao Nan would be highly regarded, gaining the attention and praise of many without the need for her to do anything!

“I handed the key to Nan Nan personally. Do you think I will get this wrong? You’re so strange. Aren’t you Nan Nan’s biological sister? You know now that this is a misunderstanding. Nan Nan did not steal the key, and neither did she steal anything else. She has a morally upright character. Instead of being happy for her, you seem very disappointed that she did not do anything wrong!”

Zhai Hua narrowed her eyes and spoke in an unhappy tone.

“That’s right. It’s just a misunderstanding. It’s good that this matter has been clarified. Nan Nan, this child. Why didn’t you explain this earlier?” Mrs. Ma walked over to Nan Nan’s side. But at the thought of Ding Jiayi’s behavior, she did not continue to question Nan Nan. “I’ve mentioned before that Nan Nan is such a good child. How can it be possible for her to do such a shameful thing? It must be a misunderstanding.”

“That’s right, we watched Nan Nan grow up. How can we not know her temperament? Don’t be a busybody and spread false rumors. Nan Nan is such a good kid.”

With lightning speed, the three women who spoke the loudest earlier changed their stance. They immediately reprimanded those who joined the commotion and emphasized repeatedly that they already knew and said that Nan Nan was a good child. They were full of hindsight.

Mrs. Ma, particularly, stood beside Qiao Nan and intimately wrapped one of her arms on Qiao Nan’s shoulder, as if she was protecting Qiao Nan. It was as though she was Qiao Nan’s biological mother and Ding Jiayi was the outsider who kicked up such a shameful fuss.

Qiao Nan moved her shoulders to distance herself from Mrs. Ma. She then sighed and passed the key back to Zhai Hua. “Sister Zhai Hua, help me... It’s best for me to return this key to your family. It’s not appropriate for me to keep it anymore.”

“Why?” Zhai Hua understood that Qiao Nan had wanted to seek her help to return this key to Zhai Sheng.

At the thought of Zhai Sheng’s temper, Zhai Hua could not wait to throw this hot potato back to Qiao Nan. Even if Qiao Nan wanted to return it, she should do it herself. Otherwise, what if Zhai Sheng took revenge on her because he thought that she had bullied Qiao Nan? She was innocent!

Qiao Nan sneered and stared straight at Ding Jiayi. “Sister Zhai Hua, what do you think?”

“?” Zhai Hua blinked her eyes as she was momentarily puzzled.

“If I don’t return the key to you today, I will not be the only person who has the key to your house next time.” Her mother and Qiao Zijin were willing to do anything unscrupulous to achieve their aims. Beside her, many people in the quad had witnessed their behavior today.

For the sake of three hundred yuan, her mother and Qiao Zijin painstakingly plotted and tailed her to the Zhai's residence to malign her for being a thief.

There was now a humongous cake, the Zhai family, before them. Would they not be tempted by it?

She was able to take good care of the key without any issue for the past one year because her mother and Qiao Zijin did not know the existence of this key.

Now that they were aware of it, they would definitely find ways and means to obtain it, just like what they did for the three hundred yuan. Even if they could not get a hold of the original key, they would definitely find a chance to steal it and make a duplicate.

To prevent this matter from becoming more embarrassing such that she would not be able to face Zhai Sheng, the best way to avoid this was to return the key to the Zhai family.

That stare of Qiao Nan was not a hint. She was being explicit about the reason.

When Ding Jiayi's face turned crimson, those who were smarter understood what Qiao Nan meant.

Zhai Hua took the key without further hesitation and said, "You're right. I'll keep the key." Zhai Sheng should be able to accept this reason without faulting her. However, Qiao Nan, this young lady, was really pitiful.

"Okay." Miao Jing nodded her head. If not for the sake of giving her daughter face, she was definitely reluctant to pass her house key to an outsider. Fortunately, this young lady knew what to do and took the initiative to return the key.

They had gotten the key back. Most likely, they would not have anything to do with this young lady in the future.

Miao Jing was clear that she would not want to encounter a similar situation in her life again. Moreover, she was not willing to let Zhai Hua be too close to this young lady. If she provoked the young lady's mother, she would be courting trouble for the Zhai family.

"Auntie Zhai, Sister Zhai Hua, I have returned the key to you. It's not appropriate to continue keeping my belongings at the Zhai's residence. I'll bring them away."

“Sure.” Before Zhai Hua could say a word, Miao Jing replied.

At this juncture, Miao Jing just hoped that this young lady could move her belongings away from the Zhai’s residence all at once so that she needed not to make a second trip.

“Mom...” Zhai Hua was having a headache. Her mother now disliked this young lady. But why?

Chapter 240: Extraordinarily Generous

“Hua Hua, please help.” Miao Jing did not wait for Zhai Hua’s reaction. Anyway, she had already decided and would not change her mind. This young lady was not related to their family anyway. Did it matter whether she liked or disliked her?

Zhai Hua tugged the corners of her lips. She then opened the back door and led the way for Qiao Nan.

When she saw the back door of the Zhai’s residence opened, Qiao Zijin gritted her teeth and moved forward with a smiling face. She behaved as if she had completely forgotten what just happened. “Nan Nan, you must have put away many items at the Zhai’s residence. I’ll help you move them.”

“Wait.” Qiao Nan blocked Qiao Zijin from entering. “This is the residence of the Zhai family, not the Qiao family. It’s not convenient for you to go in. If you want to help, sure, wait at the doorstep. After I bring out the items, I’ll pass them to you. You can help me carry them home, then. There’s no need for you to go in!”

Qiao Nan was petty now. This was the residence of the Zhai family and not the Qiao family. Although she was not in the position to have the final say, the more Qiao Zijin wished to enter the house, the more she would not allow her to do so.

“Why does it have to be so troublesome? Can’t we just go in together?” Qiao Zijin’s face was pale with anger.

Zhu Yan laughed. “So shameless. Qiao Nan has already said that this is not your house. Do you think you can enter it as you wish? Besides, don’t compare yourself to Qiao Nan. Qiao Nan has the key to the Zhai’s residence. Can you compare yourself to her?”

Zhu Yan held on to Qiao Zijin. “Qiao Nan, go in and take the books. I’ll keep a watch on her.”

“Alright, sorry for the trouble.” Qiao Nan nodded. She then entered the Zhai’s residence and began to pack her books.

Zhai Hua followed her into the storeroom to help. But when she saw that Qiao Nan had so many belongings, she felt that it would be an arduous task to move them all. “There’re too many books. You’ll need to make a few trips. I remember that you have stored many secondary textbooks here. Since you’re already in high school, you won’t need them anymore. It’ll be cumbersome to move them. Leave those books that you don’t need for the time being here and take away only those that you need.” It would not be convenient for Qiao Nan to study at their house anymore.

“You can come again to take the rest of the books when it’s convenient.”

Qiao Nan smiled bitterly. “Auntie Zhai won’t be happy.”

Qiao Nan had sensed Miao Jing’s dislike for her. This was also one of the reasons Qiao Nan wanted to return the key and move away her belongings.

“My mom, she... she’s actually very nice. Don’t think too much.” Zhai Hua sounded like a stuck cassette and nearly could not continue. “There won’t be an issue. Trust me. Leave these books here and take away those that you need.” Otherwise, she really did not know how to explain to Zhai Sheng.

“By the way, there’s something that I need to discuss with you.” Zhai Hua said as she moved toward Qiao Nan and began to help her.

“Sister Zhai Hua, feel free to tell me directly. I have not even thanked you for your help just now. If not for you, most probably, I would never be able to clear my name.”

“What I want to say is that... don’t talk about me in front of Zhai Sheng.”

“Why?” Zhai Hua was the one who helped her. Why couldn’t she do so?

“Anyway, in short, don’t say anything.” If Qiao Nan told him, given Zhai Sheng’s intelligence, he would definitely give her a bashing.

Qiao Nan did not know that, as soon as Miao Jing was alerted of the commotion, Zhai Hua had followed Miao Jing to the scene as she heard Qiao Nan’s name being mentioned. As such, she had seen how Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin bullied Qiao Nan and smeared her name right from the beginning. She only went forward to help Qiao Nan clarify the matter at the end.

Zhai Hua heard about Qiao Nan and the latter’s family situation through Zhai Sheng, and Zhai Sheng heard about it from Qiao Nan.

It was a rare occasion that she could come into contact with the concerned party. Zhai Hua had to spend more effort to observe whether what she and Zhai Sheng heard was true or if someone deliberately made it up to gain sympathy.

Of course, the outcome of the observation was that Qiao Nan was more pitiful than what Zhai Sheng had described her to be. Her biological mother was worse than a stepmother.

Nevertheless, Zhai Hua was also guilty because of this.

If she had come forward to the rescue earlier, Qiao Nan would not have suffered so much. Zhai Hua could remember vividly the look of utter despair on Qiao Nan’s face. When she saw Qiao Nan then, she was not sure why, but she could not help feeling sad. She nearly cried.

Zhai Hua was able to understand fully how desperate and despaired Qiao Nan felt at that moment.

At the thought that Zhai Sheng cared so much for Qiao Nan, Zhai Hua felt so guilty that she did not have the face to see Zhai Sheng, her biological younger brother, anymore.

“Okay.” Qiao Nan nodded her head abidingly. “These are the things that I need for now. Sister Zhai Hua, help me carry some. I should be able to finish moving them in one trip. Right, Sister Zhai Hua, Brother Zhai lent this book to me. I’ll place it here. Remember to help me return it to Brother Zhai.” The three hundred yuan that Qiao Nan earned was placed in between the pages of this book.

As she was unable to return the full 1,800 yuan to Zhai Sheng at one go, Qiao Nan could only pay Zhai Sheng back in small installments.

“Sure, you can count on me.” Zhai Hua patted her chest and then lifted up most of the books. “Let’s go.”

There were a few people lingering at the entrance of the Zhai’s residence. They watched Zhai Hua and Qiao Nan came out, carrying a pile of books each.

Someone was pleased as he said, “Ding Jiayi, when did Nan Nan take things from the Zhai’s residence? Clearly, she sent things to the house.”

Ding Jiayi’s face turned red. She was so embarrassed that she did not know what to say. She just wished that she could cover her face and dig a hole to bury herself in. She wanted to save some of her face, but she seemed to have fully disgraced herself with the fuss today.

Zhai Hua walked in large strides and stopped in front of Qiao Zijin, who was held on tightly by Zhu Yan. She then passed the books to Qiao Zijin. “Aren’t you helping Qiao Nan move the belongings? These are Nan Nan’s books. Take them.”

“Aiyoh...” Qiao Zijin was caught off guard as she was forced to take over the books. She was weighed down by the heavy books and fell backward. The stack of books slammed right onto her. The most terrible thing was that Qiao Zijin was wearing a dress today. Her skirt lifted when she fell back and her thigh was directly exposed.

A few people who were coincidentally standing at the ‘right’ positions saw Qiao Zijin’s small ***.

“Zijin!” Ding Jiayi ran over anxiously to hold on to Qiao Zijin’s dress.

“Hua Hua.” Miao Jing gave Zhai Hua a stern look. Even if the members of the Qiao family was capricious and had character problems, the Zhai family should not take issue with the Qiao family, and neither should they take sides and do something distasteful.

“I didn’t do it on purpose.” Zhai Hua sounded impatient as she frowned.

Clearly, Qiao Zijin was the one who said she wanted to help. It was only a few books. How heavy could it be? Qiao Zijin had so little strength and simply dropped the books.

She was not so petty to use such a mean method although she wanted to help Qiao Nan.

“No, no issue. Yes, I’m the one in the wrong. I didn’t receive the books properly. You can’t blame Sister Zhai Hua.” After Qiao Zijin was helped up by Ding Jiayi, she put in good words for Zhai Hua in an understanding manner. “Auntie Zhai, please don’t blame Sister Zhai Hua.”