

RTAMM 301

Chapter 301: Teach With Own Examples

“What follows after?”

“What follows after? Nothing else is needed. As long as they know that I lead a better life than them, I do not need to do anything else and they will be so upset that they cannot have a good night’s sleep.”

Actually, Qiao Nan did not understand why there were people like her mother and Qiao Zijin in the world.

Both of them would be upset to know that she led a good life.

Therefore, Qiao Nan knew that to deal with these two people, there was no need for her to do anything. She only needed to have a good life and it would be more than enough.

There was no need to take the initiative to attack, deal with them, or scheme against Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin.

“Xiao Qiao, I realize that you are not a pushover. You have a lot of wits about you!” Initially, Zhu Baoguo did not understand, but after Qiao Nan’s explanation, he fully understood her meaning. “What you are doing is to nurture one’s strength and bide one’s time. You already have a plan to deal with your mom and sister, and it is the most labor-saving method.”

“Did you really think that I am foolish and easy to bully?” Qiao Nan smiled, but there was no hint of emotion in her eyes. “In the future, I must make money to buy my own house and my own car. But to buy these things, I will need the household register. Other than Mom, Dad is the only one who can use it. No matter how unreasonable Mom is, she will give my dad whatever he wants.”

“Xiao Qiao?” Zhu Baoguo sensed that Qiao Nan’s smile seemed to be laden with bitterness.

He hoped that Xiao Qiao could be self-reliant and be tougher, lest she be bullied by the two women who were as evil as witches. However, when he saw the tough side of hers, he could not help but feel a twinge of sadness.

Xiao Qiao used to be a simple and kind young lady who would not scheme against others, but she was forced to mature by her kin.

Zhu Baoguo was starting to harbor an immense hatred for Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin.

“What about your dad?”

“I am genuinely good to my dad.” But at the same time, she also had her plans. “Zhu Baoguo, you have to remember that if you are wronged, it is useless to create a fuss. Why do we say that the squeaky wheel gets the grease? If you don’t make a fuss, it goes to show that you are sensible. But you have to let everyone know that you have been wronged. Do you understand?”

Qiao Nan was reminded of how Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin conspired to get Qiao Dongliang to the hospital and all the money that he had with him. She seemed unaffected by what happened.

She had made up her mind long ago that as long as she had the ability to make money, she could be self-sufficient and rely on herself to finish college. She never had the mentality that the money her father earned was hers. Hence, she was not disappointed that Qiao Zijin cheated him of all his money.

Sure enough, when there was no expectation, there would be no disappointment.

“Alright, you should worry about yourself. You are the one who is too innocent, yet you accuse others of being simple-minded.” Knowing that Zhu Baoguo was concerned about her, Qiao Nan could not help but make a dab at Zhu Baoguo.

She was puzzled as well. Did she seem to be so weak and easily bullied?

She had been trained by her mother and sister to be scheming and crafty. Yet, in the eyes of Zhu Baoguo, she was still as innocent and simple as a piece of blank paper. Did he not know that she was actually retreating in order to advance?

In the Qiao family, her father was the head of the family, and he was on her side now.

As long as she had this trump card, when she entered college and buy a house and a car, there was no need for her to deal with her mother. It could save her a lot of trouble.

By the time her mother received the news, everything would have been settled. No matter how much of a fuss her mother kicked up, there was nothing she could do to her.

Qiao Nan knew better than anyone else that on that Thursday, her mother came to school to look for her because she could not find Qiao Dongliang. She was so desperate that she came to look for her instead.

Her mother and Qiao Zijin might be very arrogant and domineering, but they only behaved in such a manner since they knew Qiao Dongliang would not abandon them. This showed the significance Qiao Dongliang had as the head of the family.

Now that her father left with her, her mother and Qiao Zijin were like headless flies without any sense of direction. They panicked and were out of their wits.

After moving out with her father, not only did she regain some peace in her life, but most importantly, it was also tantamount to taking drastic measures against her mother and Qiao Zijin.

Therefore, when her mother knew that they had moved but had no idea where they had moved to, it was as if she had gone crazy. She dared to attack the police and was taken to the police station. In normal circumstances, don't even mention scratching the police, her mother was the kind of person who would take a detour when she saw the police.

"You are very formidable." Zhu Baoguo had nothing more to say. His worry was in vain as Xiao Qiao had it all planned out. Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin were unworthy opponents of Xiao Qiao. Xiao Qiao had these two women under her thumb.

After all, Uncle Qiao was the head of the Qiao family.

Qiao Nan closed the book and sighed. "It's no use being formidable. I may have used up all my tricks, but I still can't beat my mom. Her crazy acts will defeat the experienced master."

For instance, what happened recently on the parent-teacher conference day was unthinkable to her. She did not expect her mother to upset Qiao Dongliang further. She must have been out of her mind. She almost landed both Qiao Nan and herself in serious trouble.

It was a life and death struggle. She did not care that she would be in a dire situation. She was determined to create havoc for Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan was sure that if she had ended up being expelled from Ping Cheng High School, her father might have been angered to death and refused to see her mother for a few years or even for the rest of their lives.

Zhu Baoguo crossed one leg over the other and said casually, “Initially, I was troubled by Wang Yang’s matter. Whenever he was at the Zhu’s residence, I would be upset. I couldn’t wait to lose my temper at him so that Wang Yang would be disgraced and I could chase him out of the Zhu’s residence. But after hearing about your family’s situation, I realized that I am not in a hurry and not bothered anymore. One should retreat in order to advance. When I go back home next time, I will test and see if it works.”

Qiao Nan did not know that she had become the mentor of Zhu Baoguo. She had given him a lesson with her own examples.

Ever since then, whenever Wang Yang came to the Zhu’s residence, Zhu Baoguo would not lose his temper or utter a single word. He would just leave the Zhu’s residence quietly.

Initially, Wang Yang thought that Zhu Baoguo was also afraid of him and that he had admitted defeat.

Wang Yang was so happy that he was carried away by his excitement. Wang Yang stayed for a longer time in the Zhu’s residence, accompanying Elder Zhu and saying things to please him.

Initially, Elder Zhu felt gratified that Zhu Baoguo and Wang Yang could finally get along with each other. He had felt that Zhu Baoguo finally behaved like an elder brother and became sensible.

However, whenever Wang Yang stayed at the Zhu’s residence, Zhu Baoguo would not go home. He would rather idle around outside the house.

Chapter 302: Fallen into Her ‘Trap’

The longer Wang Yang stayed at the Zhu's residence, the later Zhu Baoguo would return home.

Unlike the previous two seasons that were warm and sunny, it was late autumn now. The days became shorter and it would be dark in the late afternoon. Elder Zhu was worried about Zhu Baoguo who stayed out all day.

In the end, Elder Zhu asked Zhu Baoguo the reason for not staying at home.

Zhu Baoguo said, "I don't like Wang Yang. I feel uncomfortable whenever I see Wang Yang. I will be reminded of what happened during the middle school examination, and that saddened me. I am disappointed that my loved ones will plot against me during such an important juncture. I want to forgive him, but I can't bring myself to do it. Grandpa, I know you like Wang Yang and you feel happy when you are with him. I want you to be happy. Hence, I can only stay outside and not go home. Grandpa, it's alright. I am fine as long as you are happy."

Wang Yang was in junior high school. His house was not far from the Zhu's residence. Most of the time, Wang Yang would usually drop by the Zhu's residence first before going home after his lessons.

Contrary to Wang Yang, Zhu Baoguo was in high school. He had to stay in the dormitory and would only be able to come back home every half a month. Besides, he could only stay for two nights before leaving for school again. As a result, Elder Zhu cherished the time that he had with Zhu Baoguo.

If Zhu Baoguo created a fuss, Elder Zhu would definitely reprimand him and tell him to act like the elder brother and give in to Wang Yang. But Zhu Baoguo did not make any complaints. Instead, he made compromises because of Elder Zhu. Although Elder Zhu was comforted by the fact that his grandson was sensible and considerate, his heart ached for him nevertheless.

To Elder Zhu who doted on his grandson, he could make do with it if he would still get to see Zhu Baoguo occasionally. However, he seldom got to chat with him nowadays. He missed his grandson dearly.

In the end, in order to be able to spend more time with Zhu Baoguo, Elder Zhu had a talk with Wang Yang. "Yang Yang, I know that you are very filial. You always accompany me and chat with me. This makes me very happy. But you should spend time with your paternal grandparents as well.

In the future, you can visit me every other weekend so that you will also have time for your paternal grandparents.”

Initially, Wang Yang was happy that Elder Zhu was concerned about him.

However, his paternal grandparents were close to him. He would rather spend more time with Elder Zhu.

Wang Yang thought hard about it and realized that Zhu Baoguo would not be around on the weekend that he visited the Zhu’s residence, and Zhu Baoguo would be back home from school during the weekend that he stayed at home.

Did it mean that he was Zhu Baoguo’s spare wheel? When Zhu Baoguo was around, his grandpa found him to be a nuisance and did not need his company. It was only when Zhu Baoguo was not around that his Grandpa enjoyed his company. Was that it?

Wang Yang, who was proud and arrogant and had always felt superior to Zhu Baoguo, believing that he was the most suitable heir of the Zhu family, was so angry that he had a slight fever that night.

Zhu Baoguo was over the moon when he knew that Wang Yang had fallen sick. He did not know that being a ‘coward’ and not clashing heads on with Wang Yang would have such unexpected results.

It was only then that Zhu Baoguo finally understood that although Qiao Nan would always behave as if she could do nothing about Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin, she was, in fact, waging a psychological war.

Whoever had the notion that Qiao Nan seemed like she was easily bullied would fall right into her trap.

Zhu Baoguo thought that Qiao Zijin and Ding Jiayi were the only ones who had fallen into Qiao Nan’s traps. He did not know that he was ‘tricked’ by her as well.

If not for Qiao Nan’s advice, he would not have had a change in his learning attitude and given his full attention to his studies. Thus, the Zhu family would not have been able to see the change in him in such a short period of time and realize his importance and value.

In fact, right at the beginning when Zhu Chengqi had a private chat with Qiao Nan, besides thanking Qiao Nan, he also asked her to help Zhu Baoguo change for the better.

Zhu Baoguo was completely fooled. As for Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin, although they seemed to have the upper hand, they themselves were, in fact, the ones who knew that life had changed drastically for them ever since Qiao Dongliang moved away. “Old Qiao, the winter solstice will be here in a few days’ time. Can you give me some money so that I can buy some delicious food to nourish Zijin? Recently, Zijin has been very serious in her studies and has lost a lot of weight. When you see her, you will definitely feel sad.”

Even though Ding Jiayi would still ask Qiao Dongliang for money, her attitude and tone were no longer as arrogant as before.

In the past, Ding Jiayi would take things for granted, assuming that Qiao Dongliang’s money belonged to her and she had the right to spend them. Now, Ding Jiayi would tread carefully when she asked Qiao Dongliang for money. She would try hard to please him, as she knew that if he was angered, he might not give her any money.

Qiao Dongliang’s temper was not as good as it was two years ago. “How much do you want?”

“I don’t ask for much. I only want to buy a chicken to make chicken soup for Zijin. What do you think?” Ding Jiayi did not dare to ask for more. She feared that she might anger him and she would end up with nothing.

After losing the job that she used to have, Ding Jiayi could not find a permanent job. She could only settle with temporary odd jobs.

These odd jobs were tedious and did not pay much. Ding Jiayi did not earn much after working hard for the whole day.

Qiao Zijin’s standard of living was affected as well. She had to make do with lesser money to spend.

Qiao Dongliang stopped doing whatever he was working on and frowned at Ding Jiayi. After a long while, he said, “You don’t know how to slaughter a chicken. I will drop by the Qiao’s house tomorrow and bring you the chicken.”

“Alright, I will be waiting for you tomorrow.” Ding Jiayi breathed a sigh of relief at successfully getting the chicken. She smiled reluctantly and went back to the Qiao’s house.

In the end, Ding Jiayi found out about the new place that Qiao Dongliang had moved to. He could not keep it from Ding Jiayi.

However, Ding Jiayi never once stepped into the courtyard house. It was not that she had the self-discipline, but it was Qiao Dongliang who forbade her to do so.

Ding Jiayi did not know what mistakes she had committed, but she knew Qiao Dongliang had been angry with her for the past half a year. Qiao Nan’s school did not seem to like her too as they had always been picking on her.

Nevertheless, she was more than pleased that they could stay in that house for free. It was good that they could save three years’ worth of rent!

Ding Jiayi was elated that they could stay at the house without paying rent. It did not occur to her to find out the reason as to why Ping Cheng High School disliked her so much. Instead, she obeyed Qiao Dongliang and did not enter the house. She feared that if she went against Qiao Dongliang’s words, Ping Cheng High School would take back the house, and Qiao Dongliang and Qiao Nan would not be able to have free lodging.

“Dad, has Mom gone back?” After Ding Jiayi left, Qiao Nan came out from the house. She did not want to argue with her mother.

“Yes.” Qiao Dongliang stopped whatever he was doing. “Nan Nan, Dad has ordered two chickens. I will slaughter them tomorrow. One is for your sister, and the other one is for you.”

“Dad, it’s been hard on you.” Qiao Nan smiled. She did not care about the chicken.

The next day, a small knock could be heard outside the house not long after Qiao Dongliang left the house.

“Dad, did you forget anything—it’s you?!”

Chapter 303: Qiao Nan Was Mad

Qiao Nan's eyes were full of surprise when she realized that it was Brother Zhai. "Brother Zhai, when did you come back? Come in, I will pour you some tea."

Upon seeing Zhai Sheng, Qiao Nan smiled brightly, her sparkling eyes forming an adorable crescent moon shape. She pulled at his sleeves naturally and led him into the house.

Zhai Sheng looked down and noticed that Qiao Nan's fair hands stood out against his tanned complexion. Her arms were slender and fair. She had delicate and smooth skin.

A faint smile formed on Zhai Sheng's lips. He shifted all the bags that he carried from his left hand to his right hand. He grabbed hold of Qiao Nan's soft and warm hand and walked side by side with her into the house.

"Brother Zhai, have a seat, I will pour you some water." Qiao Nan was focused on making him comfortable that she gave no response to what he did.

Zhai Sheng let go of her hand reluctantly. "There's no hurry." Then, he put the bags in his right hand on the ground. The bags were so heavy that they left several red marks on his rough palm.

However, in order to hold Qiao Nan's hands, Zhai Sheng did not mind the pain at all.

"Brother Zhai, have some hot water." After pouring the hot water for Brother Zhai, Qiao Nan realized belatedly that Zhai Sheng brought a lot of stuff with him and had left them on the floor. "Brother Zhai, that's too polite of you. Whenever you come here, you will bring so much stuff with you. It's winter solstice and the Lunar New Year is around the corner. Don't tell me that there isn't anyone at home, so you want me to prepare meals for you?"

In the past, Brother Zhai would not show his concern for her outright. Why did he do so openly now?

"Have you forgotten that you promised to cook me a table of food? Are you going back on your words?" Zhai Sheng felt pleasantly sweet while drinking the hot water poured by his 'young wife'.

“No.” Qiao Nan waved her hand. How could she possibly go back on her words? “Since I am treating you, I should be the one paying for the food. How can I ask you to bring the food?”

Zhai Sheng lifted his right hand and reached out toward Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan blinked her eyes in confusion. She stared at Zhai Sheng’s palm. What did he want her to do?

Zhai Sheng directed his gaze at Qiao Nan’s hand and then back at Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan raised her hand, not knowing what to do, and faced her palm toward Zhai Sheng’s own. Her hand was clean. There was no dirt on it.

Zhai Sheng laughed in exasperation. She was, after all, his ‘young wife’. She did not know what he meant with his gestures. It proved that Nan Nan did what she promised and maintained a distant relationship with the boys in her school.

It was good that Qiao Nan did not know all these. He was the most important man in Nan Nan’s life, and he would guide her step by step along the way.

“Give me your hand.”

“Alright.” Qiao Nan obediently placed her hand onto Zhai Sheng’s palm.

Zhai Sheng clasped her hand and pulled Qiao Nan along with him. “Come over here to have a seat.”

“Okay.” Qiao Nan nodded obediently. She sat so close to Zhai Sheng that their thighs were touching each other. After a summer break of sitting so close to Zhai Sheng, Qiao Nan had been accustomed to it. She no longer felt strange or awkward. “Brother Zhai, you can tell me directly if you want me to sit down. I am not a child, so there’s no need to hold hands.”

Zhai Sheng took a deep breath and resisted the impulse to pinch Qiao Nan’s face. Instead, he placed his palm on her head and pulled her into his embrace. “You are worse than a young child!”

While in his embrace, Qiao Nan smelled a faint sandalwood smell. It was pleasant and mesmerizing, making Qiao Nan dizzy. She clutched his clothes and asked, “Brother Zhai, did you raise a dog when you were a child?”

Otherwise, why did he have the habit of rubbing her head every time he saw her?

“Brother Zhai, shall I buy you a dog with a good pedigree when I have money in the future? What type of dog do you like?” When she grew up and started working, she did not want to be rubbed on the head by Brother Zhai.

Zhai Sheng’s dark eyes glinted, a dangerous look in his eyes. He tightened his vice-like grip around Qiao Nan’s waist while the other hand still rested on her head. He could feel Qiao Nan’s soft silky hair brushing against his fingers lightly. He liked the soft touch of her hair. “Do you mean that when you have money in the future, you will not be this close to me anymore?”

“Nan Nan, tell me. Are you thinking of having a boyfriend, and hence you are afraid that your boyfriend will be jealous?” There was a teasing note in his tone. He stopped brushing her hair, but rested his hand by her ear, lightly touching her soft and tender earlobe. They shared a sweet moment with each other.

Qiao Nan could not help but shiver, her ears turning red. She quickly covered her ears with her hand. “Brother Zhai, it’s itchy!”

Qiao Nan might be slow, but she could feel that she was too close to Zhai Sheng. Their distance had already surpassed that of a close friend. She pushed at Zhai Sheng’s chest, wanting to widen the distance between them. However, she was locked in Zhai Sheng’s tight grip. If he did not allow her, then she would not be able to move an inch.

“Nan Nan, you haven’t answered my question.” Zhai Sheng would not let her go unless he got her reply.

As a soldier, once he had a target in mind, he would only focus on the bull’s eye and never let his target escape from him.

Qiao Nan felt a mixture of anger and shyness. She yelled at Zhai Sheng, “There’s no boyfriend. Besides, there’s no man whom I find pleasing to the eye. Brother Zhai, I will keep my promise to you, but you must keep a check on yourself as well. You are different from me. I am still a student, and my top priority is my studies. I shouldn’t have a boyfriend at my age. As for you, you are not

young. You should find yourself a girlfriend or even settle down to have a family and kids. Brother Zhai, you are a soldier. You should know to keep a clear distinction between friends and families. You should be mindful of your status and behavior. When you have a girlfriend in the future, she will be mad if she sees us behaving in such a way!”

“Both of us are clear about you treating me as your younger sister, but your girlfriend doesn’t know about it. Anyway, if I am your girlfriend, and I know that you are so close with your younger sister, I will be jealous and angry. I will definitely break up with you. Brother Zhai, if you do this again, I will be mad!”

In fact, Qiao Nan’s words were meant for Zhai Sheng and herself.

“Brother Zhai, I am a blockhead. I like things to be strict and precise. Brother Zhai, you are a soldier. You always obey the rules in the army. You should apply this attitude to your life as well. What you are doing is very dangerous!”

Chapter 304: Would Not Marry Her

Qiao Nan’s loud yell left a dent on Zhai Sheng’s heart.

Zhai Sheng loosened his fingers that were at Qiao Nan’s waist, but he did not let go of her. “Nan Nan, I…”

It seemed that Qiao Nan was not totally clueless, but she did not know what was on his mind. If he confessed his feelings for her, would it make things simpler?

Once Zhai Sheng had decided on a target, he would not change his mind. Sooner or later, he would have to let Qiao Nan know about his feelings. He contemplated making known his feelings to Qiao Nan so that while he was in the army, he would not be distracted or worry that Qiao Nan might be interested in other boys at her school.

“Zhai Sheng, Nan Nan, are you around?” Zhai Hua came at the right time. She relieved them from the awkward atmosphere.

Qiao Nan gave Zhai Sheng a hard push and shifted to the side. “Sister Zhai Hua?”

Zhai Sheng was just about to confess when he was interrupted. His face turned black and he narrowed his eyes at Zhai Hua who came in from the doorway.

Zhai Hua could tell right away what her brother was up to. She trembled slightly and smiled in embarrassment. “Zhai Sheng, you are too fast. You did not bring everything that Mom told you to bring. I have to run after you to bring you the bags. You are so muddleheaded.”

“Well?” Zhai Sheng seemed to be responding to Zhai Hua’s words, but it also seemed like he was asking her a question. Zhai Hua could not help but have goosebumps.

She did not understand. She was his elder sister, and she was four years older than him. Why was it that she was so fearful of him? Should it not be the other way round?

“Nan Nan, I haven’t seen you for so long. Do you miss me?” Zhai Hua could not stand Zhai Sheng’s cold treatment. She turned to look at Qiao Nan whom she was on friendly terms with.

“Sister Zhai Hua, I miss you dearly. Have a seat.” Qiao Nan relaxed slightly. She schooled her expression and moved to the side, making space between her and Zhai Sheng so that Zhai Hua could have a seat between them.

Qiao Nan finally relaxed when Zhai Hua sat down between them. “Sister Zhai Hua, what brings you here? Why didn’t you come with Brother Zhai? It must have been tiring to carry these heavy bags here.”

Zhai Hua felt happy that Qiao Nan cared for her. “Sure enough, having a sister is so much better. A sister naturally will care for you.”

Zhai Hua slanted her eyes at Zhai Sheng. On the other hand, Zhai Sheng curled the corners of his lips and sneered, completely ignoring Zhai Hua.

“All these are from my mom. Nan Nan, tell me honestly. Did you run into my mom again?” She remembered that her mother did not really like Qiao Nan, and she disliked it when Zhai Hua mentioned about the latter. It had not been even half a year’s time since then, but her mother had changed her opinion of Nan Nan even though she had not brought up Nan Nan in front of her mother.

It was also impossible that Zhai Sheng, who stayed in the army all day long, had mentioned Qiao Nan to her mother. If he really had done that, her mother might have disliked Nan Nan even more.

“I ran into her recently.” She was reminded of the previous time when Miao Jing insisted that she made a request of her so that Miao Jing could repay her kindness. Could it be that it was due to that incident that Zhai Hua and Zhai Sheng brought bags of food to her house? It was all under their mother’s orders?

“I see.” Seeing that Qiao Nan did not elaborate further, Zhai Hua supposed that it was not a pleasant encounter. “Nan Nan, Zhai Sheng and I have something on, so we will go back first. We will visit you on another day, alright?”

“It’s okay. Both of you are very busy.” Qiao Nan quickly stood up to walk them to the door.

“Zhai Sheng, let’s go.” Zhai Hua kicked at Zhai Sheng, who was reluctant to move.

Zhai Sheng laughed and shot Zhai Hua a warning look. He stood up slowly and said, “You still owe me a meal. We will eat together next time. I prefer it to be quiet. I don’t like it when there are too many people around.”

“Sure, I will only invite you to the meal!” Sure enough, Qiao Nan, who was usually good at dealing with cunning people, was totally clueless when it came to Zhai Sheng. She let her guard down around him and agreed to his request without any hesitation.

“Okay.” Since Zhai Sheng had achieved his purpose, he left the courtyard house with Zhai Hua.

As soon as the brother and sister got into the car, both of them had a sullen expression on their faces.

“Zhai Sheng, what do you think you’re doing?” Zhai Hua put on an accusatory tone. “Qiao Nan is still very young. How could you do that! Besides, you should know the situation at home. Mom and Dad have always wanted you to marry Qiu Chenxi. Do you know how much trouble you will bring Qiao Nan with that behavior of yours?”

According to Zhai Hua, Qiao Nan was still very young. She might meet many other men in her life and find her real happiness among them.

Given Zhai Sheng's character, he would be dead set on Qiao Nan, leaving Qiao Nan with no other choice. As a result, she would not be able to search for her own happiness.

Zhai Hua was unhappy when she was reminded of the naive and innocent look that Qiao Nan had when she was with Zhai Sheng.

As a woman, Zhai Hua did not approve of Zhai Sheng's aggressive and domineering behavior.

There was another reason why Zhai Hua was so unhappy. Qiu Chenxi had taken a fancy to Zhai Sheng since a young age. When all of them played around back then, Qiu Chenxi would always play the role of Zhai Sheng's bride. Moreover, not only did Qiu Chenxi harbor such thoughts, but the Qiu family and the Zhai family had all agreed to this union.

As such, both families had been creating opportunities for the both of them to cultivate feelings for each other.

Zhai Sheng was at a suitable age to get married, and Qiu Chenxi would soon be graduating from college. The two families looked as if they were planning for their marriage.

Zhai Hua dragged her brother out from the Qiao house as the people from the Qiu family would visit their Zhai family with Qiu Chenxi to agree on a date.

No matter which girl her younger brother liked, Zhai Hua would give them her blessings, but on the premise that after making up his mind, Zhai Sheng must settle this issue with regards to Qiu Chenxi. Otherwise, he would be creating troubles for Qiao Nan.

"Don't worry, I won't marry Qiu Chenxi," Zhai Sheng said calmly.

"How can you be so sure?" According to her, it was very likely that they would get married. If not, she would not have been full of worry.

If she had not appeared in the nick of time, Zhai Sheng, the big black wolf, would have snatched away Nan Nan, the small innocent sheep by now!

Zhai Hua felt that Qiu Chenxi would be the source of their troubles. No matter what, Zhai Hua would take the side of reason. She would not help her brother. She had to fight for Qiao Nan's interests.

"Grandpa will be back today."

"Wow, I must hand it to you. You have managed to get Grandpa to act as your biggest trump card. No wonder you can say with confidence that the marriage will not work out. Have you already planned it in advance?!" Zhai Hua's eyes lit up. In the Zhai family, her father would only listen to Grandpa's words.

"Of course." Zhai Sheng leaned back on the car seat as Zhai Hua drove the car. "I have said that Nan Nan is the only one I like, the one I will marry. She may be young and does not understand the affairs of the heart, but I will not do anything that I am not supposed to do. I will not let Nan Nan suffer as well."

Chapter 305: The Adults' Affairs

"Since you have already made up your mind, I won't worry for you." Zhai Hua put her mind on driving. Grandpa did not like the Qiu family. As long as Grandpa was there, it was impossible for Zhai Sheng and Qiu Chenxi to be engaged.

By the time Zhai Hua and Zhai Sheng reached home, Qiu Chenxi's parents and Qiu Chenxi were getting ready to leave.

Father Qiu had an awkward smile on his face. "It's rare that Uncle Zhai is here. We will not disturb you any further. After Uncle Zhai has a good rest, we will visit again."

"Grandpa Zhai, I have been into Chinese chess recently. Next time, shall we have a game?" Qiu Chenxi, who wore a skirt, looked dignified and pretty, exuding the charm of a young lady. Anyone would find her to be very likable.

But there were always exceptions, and Grandpa Zhai was one of them.

Old Master Zhai was a veteran revolutionary who used to serve in the Red Army. He liked traditional things, and his favorite pastimes was to play chess. When he had nothing to do, he would get people to play a game of chess with him.

However, chess was not popular nowadays. The younger generation, particularly, were not good at chess.

Qiu Chenxi wanted to hit on what he liked. Once she had the approval of Old Master Zhai, it would be easy for her to be Old Master Zhai's granddaughter-in-law.

“No need.” Old Master Zhai smiled and said, “I have grown old, not as quick as before. I want to train my brain through playing chess lest I get dementia.”

Old Master Zhai was very accomplished in playing chess. His level of competence was almost that of the national players.

Those who had been playing chess regularly were not Old Master Zhai's opponents, not to mention Qiu Chenxi who only learned to play chess recently. She was no match for Old Master Zhai.

The older one was, the more one behaved like children.

Old Master Zhai might be old, but he refused to admit it. He liked to challenge himself. He would spend the whole day playing chess, improving on his skills. He had no wish to waste a few minutes of his time on novices like Qiu Chenxi.

If he were to play chess with Qiu Chenxi, one could not say for sure whether Qiu Chenxi was the one who spent time with him, or whether Old Master Zhai was the one who entertained her instead.

Qiu Chenxi's face turned red. Did Grandpa Zhai mean that it was too boring to play chess with her? That she was not a challenge worthy of him to come up with strategies against her?

“Chenxi, don't be mischievous. Although playing chess is Grandpa Zhai's hobby, he is very good at it. He does not have the time to entertain you. If you are free, you can stay by the side and learn from Grandpa Zhai and Zhai Sheng when they play chess. With your dilettantish skills, you can only serve tea and water for Grandpa Zhai.” Qiu Qin was truly a politician. Although his daughter was being ridiculed, he could still be all smiles at Old Master Zhai.

“Dad, you’re right. Youth knows no fear. I have made a fool of myself in front of Grandpa Zhai. There is so much to learn about Chinese chess. I will learn and improve my skills so as to be able to play with Grandpa Zhai. Right now, I will stand by the side and watch.” Qiu Chenxi curled the corners of her lips and smiled.

If so, she would get to spend more time with Brother Zhai.

She believed that as long as she hung around Grandpa Zhai every day, serving him water and food, he would grow to like her eventually.

“Chenxi, come over when you have time.” Miao Jing pursed her lips. Although she had a look of displeasure on her face, she still agreed to let Qiu Chenxi come to their house. Nevertheless, she wanted her to know that she could not come and go as she pleased.

Since she was not in any way related to them, it would not be appropriate for Qiu Chenxi to always spend time at the Zhai’s residence.

“Auntie Miao, I will get going. When I have time, I will definitely come over to accompany Grandpa Zhai.” Qiu Chenxi did not notice that Miao Jing was displeased. After all, Miao Jing had been very good to her and would like for her and Zhai Sheng to be together. Hence, it never occurred to Qiu Chenxi that there would be a day where Miao Jing would be dissatisfied with her.

Qi Minlan stood next to her husband and daughter. “Then, we will go first. Next time, we will discuss what we talked about previously.”

“Let’s talk about it later,” Zhai Yaohui said in reply.

“Brother Zhai, you are back!” Qiu Chenxi turned when she heard the sound of a car approaching. Zhai Sheng and Zhai Hua came back home in the same car.

Today, at the Zhai’s residence, Qiu Chenxi’s biggest regret was that she did not get to see Zhai Sheng. She did not expect to see him right before she left. Obviously, she was destined to be together with him!

“Grandpa, Dad, Mom,” Zhai Sheng greeted his family before politely acknowledging the guests. “Secretary Qiu, Madam Qiu.”

“Zhai Sheng is back.” As soon as he saw his beloved grandson, a big smile broke across Old Master Zhai’s wrinkled face. “Come here. Let Grandpa have a good look at you. Recently, did you have a lot of missions in the army? You haven’t visited Grandpa for a long time that I had to come here personally to see you. If you were still young, I would give you a good spanking.”

“We must serve the country wholeheartedly. Grandpa used to teach me one’s loyalty to the family and country and the delicate balance between them. I have remembered your words by heart.” Upon seeing Old Master Zhai, it was as if a spring breeze had swept across the barren winter land. Zhai Sheng’s love for his grandpa could be seen from his eyes. “Grandpa, let’s have a seat inside.”

“Let’s go. I shall have a good chat with my grandson.”

Old Master Zhai kept nodding. His eyes shone with excitement and said, “Zhai Sheng, I came prepared this time. You will suffer a crushing defeat and beg me for mercy!”

Zhai Yaohui and Miao Jing, who stood behind, stiffened at Old Master Zhai’s words. They had no idea whether they should smile or be angry.

“Goodbye.” Her father-in-law walked into the house with her son with no regards to the guests. However, Miao Jing could not possibly leave them to stand awkwardly in the doorway.

“There’s no need to send us out. We will make a move first.” Fortunately, the chauffeur from the Qiu family had driven the car to the front door. Qiu Qin opened the door for his wife and daughter and they got into the car.

When the car was driven out of the Zhai’s residence, Qiu Qin said coldly, “Why did Old Master Zhai come back at this time?”

“I have no idea.” At the mention of Old Master Zhai, Qi Minlan felt uncomfortable and her face stiffened.

“What’s wrong, Mom?” Qiu Chenxi sensed that Qi Minlan’s hands were cold. She asked out of concern, “Mom, are you not feeling well? Do you want to go to the hospital?”

“No need...”

“After seeing Old Master Zhai, I suppose your mom will feel uncomfortable everywhere. Most important of all, her heart will not be at ease,” Qiu Qin said bitterly.

“Old Qiu!” Qi Minlan sounded helpless. “It has been ages ago. Why would you bring up something that happened a long time ago? Aren’t you afraid that your daughter will laugh at you?”

“What do you mean? Is it something I don’t know of?” Qiu Chenxi knitted her brows. “Mom, what happened between you and Grandpa Zhai?”

Qi Minlan shot Qiu Qin a warning look. She then smiled and patted Qiu Chenxi’s hand. “That is the adults’ affairs. You don’t have to know.”

Chapter 306: Quarrel between Father and Daughter

“Will it affect my engagement with Brother Zhai?” Qiu Chenxi pursed her lips. “I seldom see Grandpa Zhai at the Zhai’s residence, but I have a feeling that Grandpa Zhai seems to dislike me. Why is that so?” She had spent so much time and effort to please Grandpa Zhai. Not even her own grandpa had ever been given as much time and concern.

If not for the fact that Grandpa Zhai was the grandfather of Brother Zhai, and that Brother Zhai was very filial to him, she would not have bothered herself with an old man.

Qiu Qin smiled meaningfully at her daughter’s question.

Although Old Master Zhai had retired since a long time ago and relinquished his authority at the Zhai’s residence to Zhai Yaohui, everyone in the Zhai family still held him in high esteem.

That was to say if Old Master Zhai disliked Chenxi, it would not merely affect the development between Zhai Sheng and Chenxi, but it would have a great impact instead.

“Mom?” Qiu Chenxi asked again when nobody gave her any reply. “Mom, will it have any influence?”

Qiu Qin leaned against the car seat and closed his eyes to rest. “Be it Old Master Zhai’s status in the Zhai family or Zhai Sheng’s respect for Old Master Zhai, his opinion will have a lot of impact on you. Chenxi, Zhai Sheng may be a good catch, but it will not be easy for you to marry him. Now that Old Master Zhai is back, I advise you to set your sights on others so as not to end up making futile efforts.”

“Dad, what are you talking about! Do you believe that I will tell Grandpa what you’ve said just now?!” Grandpa Zhai might call the shots in the Zhai family, but her own grandpa was not to be undermined in the Qiu family either.

In the Qiu family, other than herself, Old Master Qiu was the one who was most enthusiastic about her marrying Zhai Sheng.

“Chenxi, how could you speak to your dad in that way?” Qi Minlan gently pulled her daughter, reminding her to behave appropriately and not to use her grandpa against her father.

“I don’t mean it. It’s Dad who... Dad, I’ve liked Brother Zhai for so many years. In order to be deserving of such an outstanding person like Brother Zhai, I have spent a lot of effort to improve myself. Anyway, I will only marry Brother Zhai! Otherwise, I will never marry in this life!” Such an outstanding man belonged to Qiu Chenxi only.

“Are you getting married or not?” Qiu Qin glanced at Qiu Chenxi. “Chenxi, you are a young lady. You must have self-respect. You are different from... With your intelligence, you should be able to tell that Zhai Sheng’s attention is not on you. He was not at home when we reached, and when he returned, how was his attitude toward you? Even if you obtain the approval of Old Master Zhai, it is of no use. What you are doing now is putting the cart before the horse.”

Qiu Qin usually did not give any comment about his daughter’s affairs. Today, one look at Zhai Sheng’s expression, as a man, Qiu Qin could tell that Zhai Sheng was not interested in his daughter at all.

His daughter had lots of admirers. As long as they were willing, many outstanding young men would line up to marry his daughter.

“Chenxi, does Zhai Sheng not like you?” Qi Minlan was stunned. “I thought...” She had thought that her daughter was in the same situation as her back then—that everything was settled except for the approval of Old Master Zhai.

“Brother Zhai may not like me, but he doesn’t fancy others as well. You should know what kind of person Brother Zhai is. He doesn’t like anyone. He has his full attention on the army,” Qiu Chenxi said stubbornly.

However, as she was saying this, she was somehow reminded of the young lady whom Zhai Sheng brought to meet Lin Yuankang, the one who took her spot to become the last pupil of Lin Yuankang.

“Are you sure?” Qi Minlan asked in disbelief. “Zhai Sheng doesn’t like you, but he also doesn’t really care about any other girls either?” That would make a lot of difference.

“I’m sure of it. He doesn’t care for any other women. I think Brother Zhai does not understand the affairs of the heart. But it’s okay. Men should focus on their career. Mom, I’m pretty sure I like Brother Zhai and he is the person I am looking for.” Brother Zhai had taken no interest in anyone. After she married him, he would eventually fall in love with her and she would be the only woman whom he loved in his life.

Just the thought of it made Qiu Chenxi believe that she would be the happiest woman in the world by that time.

Her daughter had a dreamy and happy smile on her face, but Qi Minlan was not as optimistic. Back then, Zhai Yaohui was not such a cold person. There was no way that his son would be a blockhead that was slow to understand the affairs of the heart.

Other people around Zhai Sheng’s age had already been fathers, yet Zhai Sheng still did not understand the affairs of the heart.

Could it be that he was mature in other respects, hence he was slower in this area?

Seeing how Qi Minlan and Qiu Chenxi were in a discussion about how to please Old Master Zhai, Qiu Qin decided to close his eyes and shut his ears so that he would have some peace.

There was no such thing as not understanding love.

It was just that he had yet to meet a woman he liked.

Once a man met the right person, even if he was slow in the matters of hearts, he would immediately come to his senses and know what he should do even without someone to tell him.

The atmosphere of the Qiu family was not pleasant. The Zhai family was not having a good time as well.

Zhai Hua had just stopped the car, but the chauffeur had driven it out again.

“Mom, where are you going?” Zhai Hua who just washed her hands but had yet to dry them chased out after her.

“It is suffocating at home. I will go out and take a walk. I will be back soon.” With that, Miao Jing got in the car and closed the door, not casting another glance at her daughter. The chauffeur would drive her to where she wanted to go.

Zhai Hua ground her teeth at her mother’s behavior. If she allowed Qiu Chenxi to marry into their family as her sister-in-law, she would write her name upside down!

Zhai Hua shrugged the water off her hands and walked back into the house in exasperation.

Zhai Yaohui came out of the study room. He saw Zhai Hua and reprimanded her. “Look at you and your behavior. Don’t forget that you are also a young lady. Look at how other—”

“Look at how Chenxi conducts herself. She is gentle and quiet, soft-spoken and takes lady-like small steps. She is the daughter of a respectable family whereas I am a wild girl, is that right?” Zhai Hua was fuming with anger. “Dad, if you like Qiu Chenxi, you should take her in as your goddaughter. Why must you get Zhai Sheng involved as well and insist that he marries Chenxi? Both of our families have not been in contact for two to three years. I thought you have given up on the marriage. No wonder when I brought up the issue of Zhai Sheng’s relationship back then, you were not worried that he couldn’t get a wife. From the start, you intended to get him a wife that you like!”

“What do you mean by a wife that I like?!” Zhai Yaohui’s expression darkened, his voice turning serious.

“Isn’t that so?” Everyone might be scared of an angry Zhai Yaohui, but people in the Zhai family were not afraid of him. Zhai Hua laughed in frustration. “In our family, who else finds Qiu Chenxi to be a good future daughter-in-law besides you?”

Chapter 307: Shocking Schizophrenia Behavior

“Your mom—”

“Don’t bring up my mom! She has gone out. Dad, you must have noticed that whenever the Qiu family comes to our house, Mom will go outside to hide for a day. Dad, don’t tell me you haven’t noticed it? In fact, Mom doesn’t like the people from the Qiu family at all, and she doesn’t like Qiu Chenxi as well.”

“This... but your mom, she...” Zhai Yaohui knitted his eyebrows. Was it like what Zhai Hua had said? That Miao Jing did not like Qiu Chenxi?

To be honest, Zhai Hua was exasperated by Miao Jing’s attitude.

As her daughter, Zhai Hua could tell that her mother didn’t like Qiu Chenxi at all, and that she disliked everyone in the Qiu family. However, she never objected to the engagement between Zhai Sheng and Qiu Chenxi. On the contrary, she was very supportive of it, more so than anyone.

It had been going on for many years. Zhai Hua did not understand what was on her mother’s mind.

Since she disliked Qiu Chenxi, why did she agree to the engagement? Why did she torture herself like this?

“I can’t be bothered to explain to you. When it comes to the Qiu family, both of you act strangely.” Zhai Hua sighed. It was worrying to have such parents. They were lovey-dovey, but when it came to the Qiu family, tension would arise between the two of them.

Her mother spent more time with her father than with her children.

Her mother would always accompany her father everywhere he went, but there would be times when her mother would act strangely and stay outside by herself for the whole day. More often than not, it was usually when the Qiu family came to visit them.

Zhai Hua rubbed her forehead in exasperation. She did not know what to do with such complicated and contradictory parents.

Someone knocked on the door.

Qiao Nan, who was busy tidying at home, heard sounds at the door. She straightened and realized that her back was aching from her work. She wiped her perspiration and thought to herself that today must be a special day. She sure had a lot of visitors. "Excuse me. May I know who it is at the door?"

"I..."

A faint sound could be heard from the other side of the door. It was the voice of a woman. But she could not tell who it was from her voice. Qiao Nan shot a disdainful look at the door. The visitor's reply was not indicative of who she was at all.

Since it was broad daylight and it might be her neighbors, Qiao Nan went to open the door. "You... Auntie Miao?"

Qiao Nan was stunned. "Is it..." Could it be that when Brother Zhai and Sister Zhai Hua left just now, they had forgotten to bring their stuff with them and so Auntie Miao made the trip herself?

Qiao Nan was stopped mid-sentence as Miao Jing strode into the house, not bothering to acknowledge Qiao Nan nor giving Qiao Nan any chance to stop her.

By the time Qiao Nan came to her senses, Miao Jing had already sat down in the house.

Qiao Nan was left with no choice. She closed the door and returned to her house. She poured a cup of tea for Miao Jing. "Auntie Miao, what brings you here?"

“Am I not welcome?” Miao Jing took a sip of the tea and looked around the house. “The environment is quite good. Besides the quad, one can’t find a better courtyard house other than this in Ping Cheng.”

Qiao Nan sat down and there was an uneasy silence. Did Auntie Miao come all the way just to look at her house?

“I am lucky that the school is very good to me.”

“Yes, you are lucky, but you need to be outstanding enough as well. Otherwise, which school will have so many houses to lend to their students? Besides, not even the teachers may have such privileges.” Miao Jing made a pertinent comment about Qiao Nan’s abilities. Qiao Nan was worthy of using their Zhai’s storeroom for the past one year.

“Others may be good to you, but it is useless if you are unworthy of it.” Qiao Nan gave a humble, but not arrogant, reply.

“Yes, that’s right. Others may be good to you, but it is useless if you are unworthy of it.” Miao Jing, who kept a straight face, slumped in the chair when she heard what Qiao Nan said. It was as if her life had been sucked out of her. She leaned back against the chair, looking listless. Gone was her dignified and noble aura.

Qiao Nan was stunned at the transformation of Miao Jing. It was as if she had changed into another person.

“Don’t be so surprised. Before I married Zhai Yaohui, I was a country girl who was uneducated and illiterate.” Since she was uneducated, she did not know the rules and propriety either. Back then, she would run around barefoot in the neighborhood like a hoyden.

“Your generation is really fortunate. You don’t have to go through the days where you have to work on the fields. But you will not have those beautiful memories that we have. Do you know that when it’s spring and it’s time to plant rice seedlings, we will go barefoot onto the soft and sticky mud field? One can feel the fine mud being squeezed through their toes. That feeling is amazing!” While Miao Jing reminisced about her childhood memories, she no longer carried the burden of being the wife of the chief. Her eyes shone with excitement instead. She was just like a child who gesticulated with her arms and feet, simply enjoying the moment.

She was vastly different from the Miao Jing Qiao Nan saw for the 'first time' at the quad. Previously, there was an air of indifference and aloofness about her. She was dignified and lady-like, but distant and detached. It was as if they were two separate individuals.

If not for the fact that Miao Jing was sound and clear-minded, Qiao Nan would have thought that she had schizophrenia.

Qiao Nan sat by her side and listened to her recounting her childhood memories. Two hours passed in a blink of an eye.

After talking for a long time, Miao Jing felt thirsty. She drank a big mouthful of the tea that had turned cold and said in slight contempt, "The tea does not taste good."

Qiao Nan smiled bitterly. "Auntie Miao, our tea certainly can't compare with the tea at the Zhai's residence." What was Auntie Miao's purpose in coming here today?

Miao Jing turned serious. She straightened her back, tucked down her chin, and leveled her gaze. Then, she stood up gracefully and slowly, taking on a dignified posture that was befitting of the wife of the chief. "Since you do not have good tea at home, you must not puff yourself up at your own cost."

Qiao Nan curled her lips and laughed.

When did she puff herself up at her own cost? Besides, no one invited Auntie Miao over today. And most importantly, why did she come to her house today?

The key had already been returned to her. If Auntie Miao wanted to 'repay her kindness', was telling her about her childhood memories be considered as repaying her kindness?

It was so odd.

In the end, why was she here today?

"Alright, you don't have to walk me to the door. Since you do not have good tea, I will not mind if you serve me water the next time I am here." With that, Miao Jing walked out of the house in her high heels.

Qiao Nan stared blankly as Miao Jing left the house. She gaped in shock, panic flashed in her eyes. Did she mean that she would be coming over again?

Furthermore, Miao Jing said that she would not mind if she served her water. It was so exasperating of her to have said that.

Chapter 308: Negative Outlook

What was it with today?

“Nan Nan... oh, why is the door open?” Qiao Dongliang, who had a slaughtered chicken in his hand, pushed the door and realized that it was ajar. “Nan Nan, why didn’t you close the door? Was someone here just now?”

“Dad, you are finally back!” Qiao Nan was so scared that she rushed forward and grabbed the arm of Qiao Dongliang.

“What’s wrong? Why are so pale? Did you have a fright? Who came just now?” Qiao Dongliang sensed that Qiao Nan was acting strangely. He threw the chicken aside and took a closer look at Qiao Nan.

“No, nothing in particular.” Qiao Nan smiled awkwardly. She could not possibly say that she saw Auntie Miao, who had schizophrenia, and had a big fright. However, was there anything wrong with Auntie Miao? Should she tell Brother Zhai and Sister Zhai Hua when she saw them? “Dad, why did you throw the chicken aside? Is that the chicken you bought to prepare tonics for me?”

“That’s right. Both you and your sister will have one each. That’s because you gave me a big fright just now.” Qiao Dongliang picked up the chicken quickly. “I will wash it and prepare a stew for you. I bought a spring chicken for your sister, but yours is an old hen.”

“Is Mom okay with that?” Qiao Nan smiled when she heard the difference. Though they were all chickens, the price of the old hen was much more expensive than the spring chicken.

“It’s my money. It has nothing to do with her.” Qiao Dongliang snorted without care. “Why are there so many things at home?”

“Brother Zhai and Sister Zhai Hua came over just now. These are from them.”

“I see. Nan Nan, you are too...” Qiao Dongliang was about to nag at Qiao Nan for being so insensible. They owed Zhai Sheng a huge sum of money. Now that he was back from the army, they should be the one who gave Zhai Sheng gifts. How could they possibly accept gifts from Zhai Sheng?

But on second thought, Zhai Sheng was an adult whereas Nan Nan was still a child. Nan Nan must have found it difficult to reject his kind intentions.

Given Zhai Sheng’s domineering aura, even if Qiao Dongliang was present at the time, he might not be able to refuse his gifts either. He had no rights to nag at Nan Nan.

“No wonder the door is left ajar. Still, you are quite close with Zhai Sheng, yet why is it that you seemed to be scared out of your wits? Was it because you rejected his gifts and Zhai Sheng became unhappy?” Qiao Dongliang sighed. It was unreasonable of them to accept his gifts. But if they did not accept them, Zhai Sheng would be unhappy. It was difficult to please all parties.

Zhai Sheng had taken the blame for his mother unknowingly.

“Dad, no matter what, Brother Zhai has brought the things here. Let’s prepare the chicken stew.” Qiao Nan said a silent apology to Zhai Sheng. Since it was his mother who was to be blamed, it was not too much to ask of Zhai Sheng, her son, to take the blame for her.

“Okay, since you have good culinary skills, just prepare the stew according to your preferences.”

“Alright.”

Qiao Nan began to prepare her chicken stew. On the other hand, Miao Jing had returned home before lunch.

“Mom?” Zhai Hua was shocked at seeing her mother back home for lunch. “Y-you are back?” She was back much earlier today. It was so unlike her mother to come back home at such an early time. In the past, she would only be home around nighttime.

“I am hungry, so I came back home.” Miao Jing smiled when she saw her daughter. She looked at everyone in the house, except for one person.

Zhai Yaohui was treated as if he was transparent. Though he felt bitter, he did not think much about it. He was too careless to notice that something was amiss. “Since you are hungry, sit down and have your lunch.”

Since Old Master Zhai was back, he would take the center seat that faced the south. Zhai Yaohui would take the seat on his left, while Zhai Hua and Zhai Sheng would take the seats on the right. Usually, Miao Jing would sit next to Zhai Yaohui, but today, she instructed the nanny to put her rice bowl next to Zhai Sheng, and so she sat down next to her son.

As soon as Miao Jing sat down, everyone at the dining table was stunned.

Old Master Zhai blinked and laughed. He knew that something was wrong.

“Why do all of you keep staring at me? You can’t fill your stomach by looking at me. Let’s eat.” Miao Jing shot her children an angry look. She could not nag at her father-in-law, but she could reprimand her children.

“Mom, let’s eat. Today’s meat is very delicious.” Zhai Hua smiled. She tried to please her mother by putting some food into her bowl. As long as her mother was happy, nothing else mattered.

Miao Jing ate the vegetables that Zhai Hua got for her.

“You see, Mom. Since Zhai Sheng doesn’t like Qiu Chenxi, and as it is only one-sided and wishful thinking of the two families, why don’t we call it off?” Zhai Hua felt that Miao Jing seemed different from usual and thus decided to approach the subject now, hoping to cancel the engagement with Qiu Chenxi there and then.

“No!” Miao Jing turned serious. There was no room for discussion for this matter alone.

“This won’t do!” Old Master Zhai said in a loud voice. He objected to what Miao Jing said. “I won’t agree to this. My grandson cannot marry the lady from the Qiu family. Zhai Sheng has to marry someone he likes!”

Seeing that Old Master Zhai was riled up, Miao Jing softened her tone. “Dad, this time, the party concerned has the surname of Qiu, not Qi. As expected, there’s a difference between the way you

treat your grandson and your son. It is no wonder that the elders often say that grandparents dote on their grandchildren.”

“Miao Jing.” Zhai Yaohui raised his voice, his expression turning grim.

When Miao Jing noticed that Zhai Yaohui was unhappy, she was afraid and wanted to pacify him.

But when she thought of what Qiao Nan’s words, she bit on her lips and refused to say anything.

Old Master Zhai raised his voice and yelled at his son. “Who are you yelling at? Why would you be angry toward Miao Miao? She is right. But in my opinion, there is no difference whether one is from the Qiu family or from the Qi family. Both of them won’t do. It’s my freedom to dote on my grandson alone. What’s wrong with that? If you are unhappy, you can settle it with me!”

“Dad.” Zhai Yaohui felt awkward. There was nothing he could do with his father. “This is between Miao Jing and me.”

“I am referring to the issue between you and me!”

The three elders were at each other’s necks. Zhai Hua and Zhai Sheng stared speechlessly at each other. From what her mother said inadvertently just now, there was more to this than met the eye.

After the meal, Zhai Hua pulled Zhai Sheng to the study room. “If you are serious about Nan Nan, Mom will be a big problem to you. You should know what Mom likes about Qiu Chenxi. If you do not deal with this, when you start going out with Nan Nan, both of you will have a difficult time. By that time, it’s either Nan Nan or Mom who will be hurt.”

“Nan Nan is a good girl. As long as Mom gets to spend more time with her, she will accept her.” Zhai Sheng had full confidence in Qiao Nan.

“What if things go wrong?” It was a fact that Qiao Nan was born in such a family. There was nothing they could do about it.

Her mother preferred Zhai Sheng to be with ladies who came from families as established as the Zhai family. At least, not too far off of the established standard.

Chapter 309: See the Results

The Qiao family could not even compare with the Zhai family. They were too far apart in terms of financial status and social standing.

In short, her mother would not even consider Qiao Nan as her future daughter-in-law.

She did not understand. The 21st century was coming, but why would her mother have such a mentality that a marriage must be between two families of equal social status?

“There will not be any ‘what if’.”

“Why are you so confident?” Zhai Hua crossed her arms about her chest. “Anyway, you are the one who likes Nan Nan, not me. When Mom gives both of you a hard time, don’t come to me for help. You should know Mom’s character. She will not listen to anyone. I doubt there is anyone in this world whose words Mom will listen to.”

“You don’t have to worry about that.” Zhai Sheng looked at Zhai Hua with full confidence. “I have never been worried about Nan Nan. She is very outstanding. Mom may have strict requirements, but Nan Nan does not need my help. She will be able to prove herself to Mom. However, I am indeed a little worried about Mom.”

“You can sense it too?”

“Of course.”

Zhai Hua rubbed at her itchy fist. If not for the fact that she was no match for Zhai Sheng, she would have given that brat a punch. “Shall we do some investigations?”

“You shall check it out.”

“Why is it me? If I am found out, I will be the one who will be punished!” Zhai Hua disagreed.

“Because you are born three years earlier than me. Because you are my elder sister, and I am your younger brother.” Zhai Sheng pulled his lips into a smile. Zhai Hua felt like crying.

“Your elder sister? It is only at times like this that you are willing to call me your elder sister!” Zhai Hua was exasperated. Only when there was trouble would Zhai Sheng then admit that she was his sister!

“That’s right. If you can’t even do this, then you will really have to cry.” Zhai Sheng patted Zhai Hua on her shoulder. “I will leave this matter to you. Do a good job. Don’t shame the army.”

Zhai Hua was furious at the cunning and shameless look on Zhai Sheng’s face. In her next life, she wanted a younger sister. She did not want such a troublesome younger brother.

Time flew past.

People who cherished their time would make full use of it. But nevertheless, time and tide waited for no one.

“It’s so cold.” Qiao Nan warmed her hands with the heater. Qiao Dongliang pasted the word ‘Fu’ 1 on the door. “Dad, for the Lunar New Year this year, are we really going to stay here? Are we not going back?” For the Chinese, the Lunar New Year was the most important holiday of the year. It was even more important than the Mid-Autumn Festival. All the family members would come together for a reunion on this occasion.

Qiao Nan did not expect that her mother would create so much trouble and did herself in to the extent that her father would not go home for the Lunar New Year.

“I won’t go back,” Qiao Dongliang said firmly. “If we go back, your mom might not be happy. Everyone should be happy since it is the Lunar New Year.”

“Dad, Mom will only be unhappy if she sees me. She will be happy to see you.” Qiao Nan smiled.

“That’s the same. It’s the Lunar New Year. Nobody will like to see her throw tantrums. Just let her be.” Qiao Dongliang pursed his lips. He was unhappy at the mention of Ding Jiayi.

“What about my sister?”

“Your sister has your mom. I do not have to worry about her.” After pasting the word ‘Fu’, Qiao Dongliang looked at Qiao Nan. It comforted and pained him at the same time to know that Qiao Nan was just like a butler who cared for everyone in the family but herself. Qiao Dongliang said, “Nan Nan, you should care more about yourself. Your mother dotes on your sister, and your sister... she is very smart. She knows how to plan and think for herself. Unlike her, you are simple-minded and kind. Your sister will be able to lead a good life in the future. I am not worried about her. I am worried that you are too honest and will be easily bullied by others.”

Most importantly, outsiders might not be able to bully Nan Nan. It was her own family who bullied her.

Knowing this, Qiao Dongliang knew that the first thing he had to do now was to protect Qiao Nan, his younger daughter.

As for his wife and the elder daughter, Qiao Dongliang was certain that without him, given their wits and abilities, they would be able to lead a good life.

Qiao Nan was silent after listening to Qiao Dongliang’s words. She did not expect that her approach to retreat in order to advance would be so successful.

They were one family, yet they had to be wary of each other. Qiao Nan could not help but feel disheartened. But at the thought of her mother’s and Qiao Zijin’s personalities, she told herself that she could not be softhearted.

Regardless, when dealing with her mother and Qiao Zijin, it was either to tolerate them, to be ruthless, or to get away!

If she tolerated them, she might have to die for the second time.

Therefore, she could only be ruthless and get away from them.

Thinking of this, Qiao Nan had a determined look in her eyes. “Dad, I took on some translation work and earned some money recently. Dad, you can save it for me. If I keep it with me, I’m afraid that I will lose them like before. Dad, my sister is one level higher than me. Her expenses must be higher than me. It is too tiring on you to provide for both of us. I want to lighten your burden. If sister needs the money for a rightful purpose, I won’t mind that you give it to her. After all, she is

the elder daughter and she is the one who will stay with the family even after she gets married. I have thought it through. When I go to college, I can work and study at the same time. I heard that college students can work part-time. There are a lot of part-time jobs near the college. I will definitely go to college and make sure that I study hard and graduate. Dad, don't be too hard on yourself and tire yourself out. I know that you have been taking on a lot of extra jobs and working till late into the night."

Her father had to finance two daughters through college. It was really tough on him.

"Part-time?" This was the first time Qiao Dongliang heard of this kind of arrangement. "Is it safe? Shouldn't students put all their attention on their studies? If you work while you are studying, will it be distracting and affect your studies?" To be honest, it was a burden on Qiao Dongliang to finance both of his daughters through college.

Especially now that Ding Jiayi had spent all the savings at home, Qiao Dongliang was so anxious that he found it difficult to sleep. He wished that he could work for twenty-four hours a day.

"It won't. When I go to college, I will have more free time compared to when I am in junior high school and senior high school. The mode of teaching is completely different from what we have now. There will be more than a hundred people sitting in a big classroom... In short, you don't have to worry, Dad. I have a way. You only have to provide for my sister. Dad, I brought the money back so that you can save it for me. After all, there are still more than two years before I go to college."

Qiao Nan took all the money she earned from the translation work that Lin Yuankang assigned her in the past half a year and handed them to Qiao Dongliang.

Looking at the money in the Qiao Dongliang's hands, Qiao Nan swallowed with difficulty. She was betting that she had won over her father over the past two years and that her father would be on her side. Today was the day where she would see the results.

Chapter 310: 'Surprise'

Compared to Qiao Nan, there was another one and a half year, or, rather, one year before Qiao Zijin would enter college.

Qiao Zijin had not yet decided on which college to study at. Qiao Dongliang did not have the money to pay for the tuition fees for the first semester of college either.

Qiao Zijin was in need of the money more so than Qiao Nan. Qiao Nan wanted to know whether her father would use her money to pay Qiao Zijin's tuition fees under such circumstances.

Looking at the money in his hand, Qiao Dongliang had some misgivings and some hesitation.

In the end, Qiao Dongliang took a deep breath and said, "Nan Nan, bring your identity card and come with me to the bank."

"Why are we going to the bank? Why do we need the identity card?" Qiao Nan relaxed slightly.

"Just bring it with you."

Qiao Nan returned to her room. She took her identity card and went to the bank with Qiao Dongliang.

"Hello, I want to open an account for my daughter. I would like to get a passbook and deposit money into the account."

"Okay, please give me your identity card and fill out the form."

"Thank you." Qiao Dongliang picked up the pen to write. He paused for a while and handed the pen to Qiao Nan. "Nan Nan, your handwriting is nice. You should fill the form by yourself. With this experience, you can come by yourself next time."

"Okay." Qiao Nan took the pen and filled the form without the need to look at the examples. "Dad, I am done."

"Put it in."

The bank was very efficient. In less than a quarter of an hour, Qiao Nan had deposited the money.

Upon leaving the bank and reaching home, Qiao Dongliang handed the passbook to Qiao Nan. “Nan Nan, you are an adult now. Hence, you have to learn to manage your own money. This is what you have earned. In the future, deposit all the money you earn into this account and you can use them when you go to college two years later. Remember, you should not leave this passbook in anyone’s hands. You have to keep it yourself so that nobody will take it from you. Do you understand? There is one more thing you have to remember. Now that you have grown up, you should have your own privacy. You do not have to tell me or your mom how much money you have earned. You can save the money and use it when needed. Don’t be hard on yourself. You must keep this money well, do you understand?”

“Dad, I understood.” Qiao Nan clutched the passbook tightly in her hands. It grew warm in her hands. She totally understood Qiao Dongliang’s words.

Looking at the passbook in her hands, Qiao Nan was grateful for having such a father on one hand, while on the other hand, she was saddened by the unconditional love parents had for their children.

The reason why her father asked her to save the money in her own account and not to give the passbook to anyone, including himself, was that her father was not confident that he would stand firm when it came to his children. He was afraid that he might be muddleheaded and say hurtful words or do things that would hurt her one day.

As parents, when one of their daughters was successful while the other was not doing well, they would naturally hope that the two of them would help each other.

Her mother would not harbor such thoughts, but her father would.

“Nan Nan, you have to remember. You have grown up, and there are a lot of things that you have to handle by yourself. Don’t ask your mom or me for opinions. I believe you can make the right decisions.” Qiao Dongliang had mixed feelings.

The younger daughter was very capable. Even though she was still studying, she knew to work to save money for her college tuition fees. He was very proud of her.

On the contrary, the elder daughter would be enrolling in college very soon, but she only knew to spend money. She was not concerned about saving money for her tuition fees at all.

Qiao Dongliang was worried that as he hoped for his daughters to be successful, there would be a day where he would spend the money the younger daughter had earned on the elder daughter.

No, never!

Knowing that he might not be able to stop himself from doing that, Qiao Dongliang refused to have anything to do with the money. He would rather pretend that he did not know of its existence.

Qiao Nan sighed and put on a relaxed smile. “Dad, you can rest assured. I will remember your words and take care of myself.”

It was good enough that her father would do so much for her. She did not have the right to request her father to stop doting on Qiao Zijin or stop treating the latter as his daughter.

She had no idea how Qiao Zijin would turn out to be in this life. Would she disappoint her father like what she did in her previous life? Or would she further disappoint him in this life?

“Dad, we have to go to the Zhu family’s residence tomorrow. Uncle Zhu invites us over for dinner.” Qiao Nan put the passbook away. She had finally lifted a load off her mind.

“I won’t be going.” Qiao Dongliang shook his head. He knew that the Zhu family meant to invite Qiao Nan only, and he was just an extra.

“Let’s go. Back when we lived in the quad, the Zhu family’s residence is not too far away from us. But now, it’s a long distance from our house. If we finish dinner late into the night, I will be afraid to come back by myself.” Qiao Nan insisted that Qiao Dongliang went with her.

Qiao Dongliang frowned and thought about it before he agreed. “Okay, let’s go together tomorrow.”

“Dad, we have reached the Zhu family’s residence.” Last night, it snowed heavily in Ping Cheng. Qiao Nan and Qiao Dongliang had a difficult time getting to the Zhu family’s residence. Qiao Dongliang rode on a bicycle and slowly made his way to the Zhu family’s residence.

The ground was covered with snow that it was almost impossible to ride a bicycle. Even though the cleaners had shoveled the snow and Qiao Dongliang followed the tracks left by other cyclists, there was a very thin layer of ice on the ground, making it very slippery.

The journey to the Zhu family's residence was pretty far. On top of that, they skidded along the way because of the ice. Qiao Dongliang cycled very slowly for fear that Qiao Nan would fall and hurt herself. By the time he reached the destination, his face was red and his hair was wet with perspiration.

"Dad, are you okay? Dry yourself with this handkerchief." Qiao Nan had not imagined that the journey would be so tiring for her father.

"I'm fine." Qiao Dongliang habitually took Qiao Nan's handkerchief from her and wiped the beads of perspiration off his forehead before returning the semi-wet handkerchief to Qiao Nan. "Go back and wash it."

"Okay."

"Uncle Qiao, Qiao Nan and you have finally arrived. Look who we have with us." The person who opened the door for Qiao Dongliang was not the Zhu family's servant. It was none other than the person that Qiao Nan hated very much: Wang Yang.

Wang Yang had a bright smile on his clean face. One would easily mistake Wang Yang to be a well-behaved child.

"Oh?" Qiao Dongliang was stunned momentarily. He looked at Qiao Nan doubtfully. Who was this child? Was he from the Zhu family as well?

"Dad, he is Wang Yang, the son of Auntie Zhu." Qiao Nan used the same form of address as Zhu Baoguo.

"Oh, hi." Qiao Dongliang's demeanor changed. Though Qiao Nan did not go into details, and it was just speculation with no real evidence, Qiao Dongliang had heard from her about the things that Wang Yang had done.

Therefore, once he knew who Wang Yang was, Qiao Dongliang immediately labeled Wang Yang as a child who was dishonest, scheming, and ill-behaved.

Wang Yang turned grim at Qiao Dongliang's expression. Regardless, he sneered and said, "Uncle Qiao, Qiao Nan, there is a surprise for both of you."

