

RTAMM 321

Chapter 321: Let Us Bury the Hatchet

“What do I want the most?”

“Brother, don’t you remember? Last year, you requested your dad and grandpa to buy something for you. Even though you tried very hard to persuade them, they did not agree to it. I asked my dad for help. He entrusted the task to someone else and they finally managed to buy it. However, it will take some time to get through the customs. In another half a month’s time, I will deliver the things to you. As the saying goes, ‘Gift blinds the eye’. After accepting my gift, you must not be angry at me. You must not let your dad and grandpa worry about us anymore.”

If whenever Zhu Baoguo was back at the Zhu family’s residence, he would be treated as if he was transparent, then how could he take control of the Zhu family and make sure that it belonged to the Wang family eventually?

These had happened so many times that Wang Yang could not sit back and not do anything.

All these years, Wang Yang had always been successful in framing and slandering Zhu Baoguo. He had been very confident that his plan of taking control of the Zhu family would not fail.

When he was discovered by the Zhu family regarding the previous incident where he drugged Zhu Baoguo, he had proudly thought that with his previous effort, it would not have much impact on his position in the Zhu family.

However, the aftermath was not as he had expected. The incident had a huge impact on him and he could not help but panic.

Whenever Zhu Baoguo returned home from school, he would be asked to leave by his grandpa. In other words, he no longer had any foothold in the Zhu family. As long as Zhu Baoguo was around, he must go back to his house.

Why should he?

“What’s the matter? You can’t do anything about my grandpa, so you want to buy me off?” Zhu Baoguo looked at Wang Yang contemptuously.

“How could you say that I am trying to buy you off? Brother, what you said is... Besides, Grandpa has been very good to me. I don’t want him to worry about us. Grandpa is no longer young. If the family stands united and has a harmonious relationship, he will be happy and will be able to live a long life. Brother, I am sure you would like for Grandpa to stay healthy as well. Therefore, let’s bury the hatchet so that he will not have to worry about us again.”

Wang Yang had a smile on his face, and his attitude was particularly good. He was very tolerant of the arrogant Zhu Baoguo.

“You want to bury the hatchet?”

“Yes.”

“Dream on!” Zhu Baoguo laughed happily. “Wang Yang, Wang Yang, I never thought that you’d have this day. I have suffered under your hands and I am not sure how I can deal with you. But Wang Yang, from today onward, you have to prepare yourself as I have seen through you and your acts. After all, you are only capable of this stuff, aren’t you?”

Wang Yang tried hard to maintain his smile. “Brother, what do you mean by this? Are you still angry with me and want to keep on quarreling with me?”

He had already backed down. If it were in the past, Zhu Baoguo...

“Wang Yang, I suggest that you read ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’. Have you heard of a phrase that says, ‘A scholar who has been away for three days must be looked at with new eyes’? I am no longer the ignorant person in the past. I won’t be fooled by you. Do you think that if you act pitiful and apologetic, I will be complacent and forgive you like what I did in the past? I am not stupid!” Zhu Baoguo’s words were dripping with sarcasm. He slammed the table in anger.

Wang Yang was a wolf, a poisonous snake even. He would not be the stupid farmer who died in its hands.

“Baoguo, we are one family. How could you say that? I have heard about the incident. Yang Yang was definitely not intentional...” Qiao Zijin interrupted.

“Another word from you and I may whack you! Who are you to reason with me?” Zhu Baoguo turned and stared at Qiao Zijin. “Let me warn you. I can’t stand the sight of you, but it’s just that I don’t have the chance to deal with you. If you dare to spout nonsense, I will give you a bashing such that your mom can’t even recognize you!”

“I...” Qiao Zijin paled and cowered in fright.

Qiao Zijin shut her mouth. Zhu Baoguo looked at Wang Yang. “Wang Yang, what you did today goes to show that you are at your wit’s end. Wang Yang, bear in mind that your surname is Wang, while my surname is Zhu. The Zhu family and the Wang family are two different families. Everything in the Zhu family will not be yours.”

“Grandpa has been saying that you have improved a lot. At first, I didn’t really believe him, but now I have to believe his words. I really don’t know about the ‘Romance of the Three Kingdoms’, though.” Wang Yang sneered. In the past, Zhu Baoguo would fall easily for his traps.

The worst thing was that Zhu Baoguo had Qiao Nan by his side now.

Originally, Zhu Baoguo was just like a fool, easily manipulated. But now that there was Qiao Nan, he had grown smarter.

Therefore, if he wanted to deal with Zhu Baoguo, he would have to solve the problem of Qiao Nan first.

Wang Yang cast a sideways glance at Qiao Nan and vowed that he would make her pay for the humiliation that he suffered today.

The moment Wang Yang caught a glimpse of Qiao Nan with his peripheral vision, he found himself under Zhai Sheng’s piercing and dangerous gaze.

Zhai Sheng sat upright in the chair as if he was in the middle of a national conference. He did not seem to be in the small quad. It was as if he was at the Great Hall of the People. Even though before him was only a low coffee table with a few cups of water, it seemed as if it was a grand conference table at which important issues were discussed. Most importantly, the ordinary teacups on the table suddenly seemed as if they were priceless cultural relics that the soldiers in the army had risked

their lives and spent a lot of effort in getting, taken from the hands of foreign tomb raiders, and would be a great contribution to the Chinese archeology.

Zhai Sheng had that dignified aura about him that no matter how shabby the environment was, they would seem to be classy and exquisite with him around.

Compared with the common furniture and cutlery that instantly seemed as if they were of high value, Wang Yang paled at a slight glance from Zhai Sheng. His eyes flickered and he hunched his back as if he were a rat that came out of its hiding place in the day but was so scared by the bright daylight that it scurried back into its hiding place!

Wang Yang paled in comparison to Zhai Sheng, and he could not help but want to hide away.

Zhai Sheng had some water. He did not say anything or look at Wang Yang again. However, Wang Yang was so ashamed that he lowered his head and wished that he could dig a hole and hide in it.

Chapter 322: I Was the Veteran

If he had known that Zhai Sheng would be here today, he would have never come.

“Wang Yang, are you interested in having a chat with me?” Zhai Sheng put down the cup of tea and looked at Wang Yang.

If Zhai Sheng was the embodiment of righteousness, Wang Yang would be the villain with a guilty conscience. Villains were most fearful of righteous soldiers like Zhai Sheng. At the very least, when Wang Yang was with Zhai Sheng, he could not help but feel guilty as if he had been up to no good.

“No, I am here to look for my brother!” Wang Yang immediately rejected when he heard that Zhai Sheng wanted to have a chat with him. “Brother, don’t you like the army very much? Don’t you have anything to ask Brother Zhai? Brother Zhai is very familiar with how it’s like in the army. He knows as much as your dad.”

That was right. Zhu Baoguo had no interest in studying. Initially, Grandpa and his uncle planned to send Zhu Baoguo to the army after he went to high school and was old enough for the army.

A soldier with no culture, no knowledge, and no education background would not have a promising future in the army. In the end, he would only be treated as someone who had brawns but no brains, and would be treated as cannon fodder.

Perhaps, if he tackled his problem from this area, he would be able to achieve his goal.

“Do you think it is appropriate if I ask someone else instead of my father?” Zhu Baoguo gave Wang Yang a fake smile.

His relationship with his father might be distant and they might not get along well with each other, but it was all in the past. Compared with Zhai Sheng who was an outsider, he was definitely closer to his father. If he had any questions, it would be more convenient for him to ask his father.

Zhu Baoguo refused to admit that he did not want to ask Zhai Sheng because he had an unexplainable feeling of being threatened and this awkwardness when he was around Zhai Sheng.

“Aren’t you going to say anything?” The three men were engaged in their own conversation. Qiao Zijin tried several times to cut in and join them in their chat but was unsuccessful. She had planned to make use of this opportunity to get closer to the three of them so that Zhu Baoguo and Zhai Sheng would grow to favor her more than Qiao Nan.

Qiao Zijin was anxious that she had no other way to join in the conversation. She gave Qiao Nan a slight push, hoping that she would help her.

Qiao Nan moved slightly to the side and gave Qiao Zijin a disdainful look.

Since Qiao Zijin could not realize that she was no longer the Qiao Nan who would be submissive to her and accede to all her requests, she could not be bothered with Qiao Zijin.

She knew that if she helped Qiao Zijin strike up a conversation with Brother Zhai and Zhu Baoguo, Qiao Zijin would push her to the side once the three of them mingled well. Qiao Zijin might have a plan in mind, but she was not so foolish to be used and deceived by her.

“Sister, do you and Wang Yang have anything else to say? If not, perhaps you would like to make a move first?” Qiao Zijin and Wang Yang had already wasted one hour of their time. If they continued to stay at the house, there was no way that she and Zhu Baoguo could finish their homework.

“I do. Both of us have to go to school and we don’t have time for each other. Moreover, Dad moved to this place for you. Look, in the past two months, there weren’t many chances for both of us to see each other and have a good chat. Don’t you miss me? It’s rare that we have a chance to catch up with each other, so we must make use of this chance to clear any misunderstanding. Nan Nan, do you really not miss me at all? Do you know that I miss you dearly? Let’s have a good chat. Should we chat in your room?” Qiao Zijin walked forward and grabbed Qiao Nan’s hand, wanting to take a look at Qiao Nan’s room.

Wang Yang grinned. Qiao Zijin had done well. She had not forgotten that before coming here, he had asked her to separate Zhu Baoguo and Qiao Nan.

However, with Zhai Sheng around, even if Qiao Nan was not by Zhu Baoguo’s side, it would not be easy to rile up Zhu Baoguo.

He would have to find another time when Zhai Sheng was not at the quad to do that.

“No.” Qiao Nan turned and slipped out of Qiao Zijin’s grip. Qiao Nan was quick like a loach. Qiao Zijin could not catch hold of her. “I have nothing to hide from the rest, so just go ahead and say whatever you want. I don’t mind.”

“It’s inappropriate.”

“I’m sure it’s nothing inappropriate.”

“Do you mean it?” Qiao Zijin took a deep breath. No wonder her mother always chided Qiao Nan as a wretched girl. She was really shameless. “You’ve started having the menses for quite some time already. Is it painful? Are the days accurate? As a girl, you have to pay more attention to this aspect. Mom told me that if one does not take good care of oneself, it may be difficult for one to have children in the future.”

As soon as Qiao Zijin said these words, everyone, including herself, flushed red in embarrassment.

Especially her last sentence that mentioned about Qiao Nan getting married and having children.

But this was what annoyed Qiao Nan the most. What did she mean by not taking good care of herself and that she might not be able to have children? Was she concerned about Qiao Nan or cursing Qiao Nan?

Qiao Nan took a deep breath and brushed at her bangs. “Thank you for your concern, but I am very healthy. Most importantly, I do not have the problem of dysmenorrhea. Speaking of which, Sister, you really have to pay more attention. I heard that having a cold uterus will result in dysmenorrhea. The cold uterus is considered an illness, and you have to cure it. Otherwise, one can’t give birth to children as well.”

“...”

“...”

“...”

“...”

Everyone felt awkward at the topic, especially when Qiao Nan brought up the specialized term ‘cold uterus’. Qiao Zijin’s face turned bright red as if she were a metallic pot that was about to explode from boiling water.

The five of them who were present knew what Qiao Nan was referring to.

Not only the boys but also Qiao Zijin, who was a girl, was reminded of the picture that she saw in the biology book. She knew which female organs Qiao Nan was referring to and how sensitive this topic was.

Qiao Zijin was so embarrassed that she was about to let off steam.

As the second youngest person among the five people present, Qiao Nan was proud that her words had such a big impact. She flung her ponytail. How dared Qiao Zijin start this topic. Qiao Zijin had no idea that she was the ‘veteran’ among the five of them.

Qiao Zijin was not the only one who knew how to talk about sensitive topics out of nowhere.

The five of them sat awkwardly in total silence.

In the end, Zhai Sheng shot a meaningful look at Qiao Nan and broke the silence. “Nan Nan, you seem to know a lot.” Since Nan Nan had an interest in this kind of topic, could it be that she liked children very much?

If this was the case, then he could have a few more kids with Nan Nan in the future.

However, on second thought, the country’s national planning policy promoted raising healthier and better-educated children. Although they could not have more children, they could make up for it through other means.

Chapter 323: Perfect Unison

It was a matter of opinion as to who stood to gain in the end.

Qiao Nan gave a slight cough to cover up for her embarrassment. “As a top student, this is expected of me. I must be well-read in different areas, lest it comes up in the college entrance examinations.”

Qiao Nan’s eyes lit up at the mention of the top student. She had an idea. “Sister, since both you and Wang Yang did not bring your homework, it’s so boring to just sit and chat. Why don’t we ask each other some knowledge-based questions to test one another and accumulate points? Whoever who can answer will get a point. If no one can answer, the person who asks the question will score a point. All of us will pool our money together to buy a good notebook as a prize for the person who has the highest score.”

Qiao Zijin and Wang Yang were here to create trouble. They wanted to stop her and Zhu Baoguo from studying hard.

She had ways to deal with their plots.

Qiao Nan did not believe that she, who was more than forty years old, would not be able to deal with a few spoilt brats who were less than twenty years old.

“Sounds good,” Zhai Sheng agreed.

“I have no objections.” It was much better than engaging in meaningless conversations with Wang Yang and Qiao Zijin.

“... Alright,” Wang Yang replied reluctantly. If they had to play the game, he would have to go easy on them.

Since everyone else had agreed, Qiao Zijin could not say that she, in fact, was not interested. She certainly could not answer the questions. Even if she managed to answer all the questions, the money that they pooled together could only be used to get a simple notebook. She had no interest in such a prize. If the prize was a bracelet, necklace, or earrings, then she would be slightly more interested.

However, it was one against four. Nobody cared that Qiao Zijin was reluctant to join the game.

Once the game had been set, what happened next was an interesting sight.

Zhai Sheng was the oldest among them and had the most extensive knowledge as well. Qiao Zijin, Zhu Baoguo, and Qiao Nan were all high school students. Wang Yang was the only person who was in the third year of junior high school.

Zhai Sheng and Qiao Nan had a tacit understanding with each other. They raised questions that were based on high school knowledge points. Even though Qiao Zijin was a level higher than Zhu Baoguo and Qiao Nan, she was either unable to answer or was too slow to answer the questions that Zhai Sheng asked. Zhu Baoguo took the chance to answer before her.

Qiao Nan knew the answer to these questions. However, she went easy on Zhu Baoguo, letting him have the chance to answer.

Qiao Zijin was too slow to answer the questions, whereas Wang Yang did not know the answers to them at all. No matter how smart he was, he was still in junior high school. He did not read up on senior high school knowledge.

Therefore, Wang Yang could only gape like a fool as Zhu Baoguo answered one question after another, his eyes brimming with confidence.

Wang Yang's original intention was to go easy on the rest. Hence, he would always ask questions that even elementary school students would be able to answer. He did not want Qiao Nan and Zhu Baoguo to enjoy the game.

But as Zhu Baoguo answered more and more of the questions, and his score went higher and higher as if he was the sole winner, Wang Yang, who did not like to see that Zhu Baoguo was doing good, could not take it lying down. He forgot about his original plan and started to ask tough questions one after another which inadvertently let Zhu Baoguo have the chance to learn more.

"Congratulations, Zhu Baoguo. You have the highest score. We will pool our money and get you a notebook as a reward. Let's give a round of applause!" Qiao Nan took the lead in getting everyone to applaud.

Zhai Sheng cast a meaningful look at Qiao Nan. He was sure that when he had a child with Nan in the future, she would be a good mother. She knew how to teach them well.

"Thank you. It is thanks to everyone that I have this score." Zhu Baoguo could not help but laugh. He was very pleased and proud of himself at winning the game. He had won, while Wang Yang almost did not score any points. Wang Yang was not as smart as he thought him to be.

Zhu Baoguo, who was exhilarated, forgot that Wang Yang was a junior high school student. As a high school student, there was nothing to be proud of to win over a junior high school student.

But nobody cared about this.

Qiao Nan and Zhai Sheng took advantage of the situation and deliberately made it such that nobody would spell out the obvious. Wang Yang thought highly of himself and felt that he would not lose to Zhu Baoguo under all circumstances. With his intelligence, even if he was only a junior high school student, it was common to be better than Zhu Baoguo who was in high school.

Zhu Baoguo, who was over the moon, would not realize that, and Qiao Zijin, who was foolish at times, would not think of it either.

Wang Yang who felt insulted flushed red in anger and was speechless.

He was fooled again. He was fooled by Qiao Nan and Zhai Sheng.

Zhai Sheng took control of the overall situation while Qiao Nan helped him by the side to steer the flow. They made Zhu Baoguo seem as if he was very clever at the expense of him...

The most annoying thing was that he had fallen for Qiao Nan's trap and had asked many questions to test Zhu Baoguo.

Wang Yang had scored a few points, and he was not the one with the lowest score. He had a higher score than Qiao Zijin and Zhai Sheng. In Qiao Zijin's case, she really could not answer them, whereas Zhai Sheng did not want to be seen as a big bully. As for Wang Yang, the few questions that he had answered were a blow to his confidence.

He had wanted to go easy on them, but the few points that he scored near the end made him seem like a fool!

"I am tired. I will go back to rest. All of you can continue to play." Wang Yang was very upset. He was worried that he would not be able to control his temper. He stood up with a sullen face and went straight out.

"Yang Yang, wait for me. Let's go together." She came in Yang Yang's family car. If Yang Yang left without her, did it mean that she would have to walk back home?

"It's getting late. Zhu Baoguo, I will send you back to the quad. Let's go together." After Wang Yang, the god of plague left, Zhai Sheng stood up, getting to leave as well.

The smile vanished from Zhu Baoguo's face. He had no intention of leaving and wanted to stay a little longer.

Zhu Baoguo did not respond to Zhai Sheng's words, but Qiao Nan had already packed his things for him. "That's right. You should go back as well. Besides, judging from how it is today, Wang Yang has not given up on dealing with you. He wants to make sure that your performance will lag behind. He wants to disrupt our revision plans so that we do not have time to study. In addition to studying at my house, you must make use of the time at the Zhu family's residence to study. There's no way that he can keep a watch on you all the time. You must not skive during this winter break and don't be affected by Wang Yang either. You must make sure to do your revision on the knowledge that the teachers have taught us. Do you understand?"

Wang Yang was so shameless that he had resorted to roguish behavior of pestering Zhu Baoguo.

“But...” If that was the case, did it mean that he could not come looking for Xiao Qiao to revise and practice the sums during the winter break?

Chapter 324: Difficult Situation

“Alright, let’s go.” Zhai Sheng stood up, his pants straight without any creases as if it had just been washed and ironed.

Although Zhai Sheng said it coolly, one could not help but do according to what he said.

Zhu Baoguo grounded his teeth. Wang Yang and Qiao Zijin had spoiled his day and taken up all his time. He would have plenty of chances to deal with Wang Yang. As for Qiao Nan, he would make her suffer the moment he got hold of any chink in her armor!

“Xiao Qiao, then I will go back first. Uncle Qiao is not back yet. Will you be fine at home alone?”

“I’m not a three-year-old child. You should worry about yourself. Without me around, do not be affected by what Wang Yang said and acts like a halfwit. You are older than Wang Yang, so you should be wiser than him. You must not fall for his tricks. Isn’t that shameful? You must not be all brawns and no brains. You must have your wits about you!”

Qiao Nan could not hide her exasperation. She and Brother Zhai were around to help him today.

If they had not been around, Zhu Baoguo would not have been able to have a sure win against Wang Yang. She had no idea how Wang Yang grew up to be so scheming, whereas Zhu Baoguo was so naive and simple-minded.

“Xiao Qiao, you must not look down on me. Wait till you see. Previously, I didn’t know that he would be so vicious. After all, he is my relative and his mother is my auntie. Hence, I was not wary of him. But now that I am on my guard, he will not have the chance to plot against me. I will not believe in whatever he says! I have already said that in the Zhu family, it’s either me or him. I will not tolerate him. I can definitely think of a way to make sure that Wang family will not be able to

take advantage of the Zhu family. If they think that I am a pushover and dare to deal with me, I will make sure that they suffer!” Zhu Baoguo said indignantly.

In fact, back then, when Qiao Nan advised him to be careful, Zhu Baoguo had already planned to deal with the Wang family.

Wang Yang might be scheming, but he was just a kid. If nobody had taught him to do so, he believed Wang Yang could not have done so many bad things. To put it bluntly, the adults in the Wang family must have played a part.

Wang Yang was the pupil that surpassed the master. He was more ruthless than the elders in the Wang family.

He was reminded of the incident two years ago when he was almost killed by a group of hooligans. Zhu Baoguo, who used to be bubbly, had a grim look on his face.

“Well, don’t just worry about me. Qiao Zijin is much more stupid than Wang Yang, but she is cunning and much more difficult to deal with than Wang Yang. Now that these two people are in cahoots, it will mean more trouble for both of us.” At the mention of the two of them, Zhu Baoguo was even more annoyed.

“It’s good that you know. Now that they are in cahoots, all the more we must buck up. When we enter a good college, we will be able to leave this place and be rid of them.”

“Well said! We must study hard and work hard for the college entrance examination so that we can leave this disgusting place!” He really wanted to be rid of Wang Yang, but Wang Yang kept pestering him. It was plain annoying for Zhu Baoguo.

“When you’re done, let’s go.” Zhai Sheng was very gracious. He waited till they had given each other their encouragements before grabbing Zhu Baoguo and walking out with him.

“Zhai Sheng, let me go. Don’t think that just because Xiao Qiao calls you big brother, you’ve really become the big brother. You are only two years older than me. I won’t acknowledge you as my big brother.” Zhu Baoguo pulled a long face as soon as he left the small quad. He looked at Zhai Sheng, feeling displeased.

Zhai Sheng was the person that Zhu Baoguo could not stand the most in the quad. When he was a child, every time he did something to disappoint his family, Elder Zhu would bring up Zhai Sheng, saying that if he had a grandson like Zhai Sheng, then he would not have to worry about the future of the Zhu family.

It was not only Elder Zhu. At times, Zhu Chengqi would compare Zhu Baoguo to Zhai Sheng as well.

As a result, Zhu Baoguo could not stand the sight of Zhai Sheng since childhood. Zhai Sheng knew that Wang Yang had been the person behind Zhu Baoguo's bad reputation. Zhai Sheng never liked such a foolish and troublesome Zhu Baoguo. He was like a young lady who needed pacifying.

The two people who found each other to be a nuisance had come face to face with each other. The atmosphere was not pleasant at all.

"You will be mocking me if you call me your brother." Although Zhai Sheng appeared to be calm and composed, his words almost made Zhu Baoguo explode in anger.

"What do you mean?!" Was Zhai Sheng laughing at him that though he was older than Wang Yang, yet he was always plotted against and tricked by him?

"Your family chauffeur is here. I will go first." Seeing that the Zhu family's car had arrived, Zhai Sheng opened the door to his car and got onto the driver seat. He did not really mean to drive Zhu Baoguo home when he brought him out.

"Crap!" Zhu Baoguo turned green in anger as Zhai Sheng drove off in his car. He had the feeling that he was being used by Zhai Sheng, and now that he was of no use, he was being dismissed. Why did Zhai Sheng insist that he went home? What did he mean by that?

This was too strange.

"Baoguo, why did you wait outside? Are we going home now?" The Zhu family chauffeur was shocked when he saw that Zhu Baoguo had been waiting at the doorway of the small quad. He was worried that he had arrived late. "Baoguo, you could have waited inside. It's cold outside, and the snow has not melted yet. It may snow again today. Next time, you should wait in the house."

“It’s not cold at all. My dad made me swim in the winter. Alright, I am hungry. Let’s go home and eat.”

Zhu Baoguo was too embarrassed to bring up Zhai Sheng to his chauffeur. He could only admit that he was unlucky. He got on the car and returned to the Zhu family’s residence.

After how Wang Yang was humiliated today, Zhu Baoguo finally had a few peaceful days. Zhu Baoguo’s life had gotten better, but Qiao Nan was not that lucky. It was almost the Lunar New Year, yet trouble kept coming her way.

“Nan Nan, there is something that I want to discuss with you.” Qiao Dongliang looked as if he was in a difficult situation. He did not know how to approach the matter.

“Is it regarding money?” Qiao Nan’s heart jumped a beat. Could it be that her father could not help it and told her mother about the money in her account, and her mother wanted to use the money on Qiao Zijin?

“No, it has nothing to do with money.” Qiao Dongliang waved his hand again and again. He had repeatedly advised Nan Nan not to let anyone know about the money, so how could he possibly tell Ding Jiayi about it? Once Ding Jiayi knew that Nan Nan had the ability to make money and that she had a lot of money with her, it would be big trouble.

“Then, what is it?”

Chapter 325: Family ‘Reunion’

Apart from money, what was it that put her father in such a difficult position?

“Your mom said that we are one family, and there must be a family reunion during the Lunar New Year. During the Mid-Autumn Festival this year, our family did not have the opportunity to have a meal together. Nan Nan, what do you think?” Though Qiao Dongliang was in a difficult position, he wanted to have this reunion dinner as well.

He had not divorced Ding Jiayi. That said, she was his wife and Qiao Zijin was his daughter. Even if they were divorced, it was not too much to ask that the family came together once a year to have a meal.

“Dad, so you actually have the same thoughts as well?” Qiao Nan twitched the corners of her lips and asked, “Since Dad thinks that way as well, I have no opinion. Do we go to the quad or have it here?”

“We will go to the Qiao family’s residence at the quad.” This house was lent to them by Ping Cheng High School. Given what Ding Jiayi had done previously, no matter how thick-skinned or desperate he wanted to have the reunion dinner, Qiao Dongliang would not have the reunion dinner in this ‘home’.

“Fine, it’s settled.” Qiao Nan nodded and agreed.

“Nan Nan, will you be unhappy?” Qiao Dongliang was shocked that Qiao Nan agreed readily to his suggestion. He thought that Nan Nan would be unhappy and would refuse to have the reunion dinner.

He had thought of different ways to persuade Nan Nan, but they did not come in handy.

Sure enough, Nan Nan was the most sensible and most obedient child at home. He did not need to worry about her.

Qiao Nan turned around and said nonchalantly, “There’s nothing to be unhappy about.” It was merely a meal.

“I’m glad that you are not unhappy. This year, during the Lunar New Year, we will have a sumptuous meal. Nan Nan, you can rest assured that with me around, your mom will not—” Qiao Dongliang had a happy smile on his face.

“Dad, I know.” Qiao Nan interrupted his words. Did her father mean that her mother would not create trouble again? Her mother would not be able to stay still for long. Otherwise, she would not have stirred up so much trouble at her school that she almost could not continue with her studies in Ping Cheng High School.

Without Brother Zhai’s help, she would have been transferred to another school all because of her mother.

“It’s good that you know.” As a traditional Chinese, Qiao Dongliang was glad that like any other year, he would be able to have a happy family reunion this year as well. He did not notice that although Qiao Nan said that she was not unhappy, she did not say that she was happy either.

The days building up to the Lunar New Year passed by in a blink. Qiao Dongliang and Ding Jiayi were kept busy and in no time, it was the day before the Lunar New Year’s Eve.

“Old Qiao, it’s already so late today. Why don’t you just stay here?” After being together for a few days, Qiao Dongliang’s attitude toward Ding Jiayi was much better, and Ding Jiayi was more affectionate to Qiao Dongliang.

When she thought of the cold bed at night, and that there was nobody beside her, an agitated Ding Jiayi reached out to grasp Qiao Dongliang, refusing to let go. “Old Qiao...”

Qiao Dongliang also had the same intentions, but in the end, he let go of her hand. “No, Nan Nan is alone at home. I worry about her.”

“Nan Nan is not a child anymore. After the Lunar New Year, she will be an adult. She can take care of herself. You can feel free to stay behind. At least, you should stay here for another two hours. Zijin has already gone to bed anyway.” No matter what, making Qiao Dongliang stay behind was the most important. As for whether she would let him go two hours later, that would be a different matter.

“No!” Qiao Dongliang pulled a long face. “Ding Jiayi, if it is you, will you let Zijin stay alone in the house? Ding Jiayi, you are reverting to your old ways again. If you continue to be like this, I will have to reconsider the family reunion dinner this year.”

“What have I done? I have been behaving myself for the past six months. Haven’t I done enough?” Ding Jiayi felt that she was wronged.

If not for the fact Old Qiao had been losing his temper, she would have liked to ask Old Qiao why he moved to a new place again without leaving any message, causing her to be so distressed.

“You should know whether you have done enough or not. If it is not for the sake of Zijin, I will not come back with Nan Nan this Lunar New Year. Ding Jiayi, I am so disappointed in you.” Their relationship had just gotten better, but it turned sour again because of what Ding Jiayi said.

Qiao Dongliang's expression turned cold. He shrugged Ding Jiayi's hand away and walked off without any hint of hesitation.

"Did you quarrel with Dad again?" Qiao Zijin, who had woken up and was thirsty, poured herself some water. At the sound of people quarreling, she yawned and walked over.

"It's all because of Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, who smeared my reputation in front of your dad. If she hasn't spun tales, your dad will not treat me in this way. I really don't know what I did wrong in my previous life that I have to pay my debts in this life." Ding Jiayi stomped her feet in frustration. She could feel that Old Qiao treated her very well recently. She had thought she could make Old Qiao stay today.

"From what I heard from Dad's tone, something is not quite right. Mom, let me ask you again. Did you give Qiao Nan any trouble this semester?" After Qiao Zijin took a sip of water, her throat was not as dry and uncomfortable.

"No, no, no! How would I dare to do anything given your dad's attitude? Your dad has already moved out with Qiao Nan. If I create any more trouble, I am afraid he will divorce me for the sake of that wretched girl. I will not be so stupid and sacrifice my marriage with your dad in order to deal with that wretched girl."

She did not want this daughter, but it did not mean that she did not want her husband.

On the contrary, she wanted her husband back with her and grew old with him.

For the sake of Old Qiao, she would tolerate living with Qiao Nan.

Qiao Zijin wrinkled her eyebrows. She would always get the same answer whenever she asked her mother. She might have to find a chance to ask Qiao Nan or her father to find out the truth.

"Alright, now that Dad has left, you should sleep as well. If you really want Dad to stay, there is a perfect opportunity on the Lunar New Year's Eve. By then, Dad can't use Qiao Nan as an excuse again. But Mom, you must rein in your temper. Don't spoil the ship for a halfpenny-worth of tar. Even though you don't like Nan Nan, you must endure it lest you anger Dad. Qiao Nan has a nasty temper. If you do anything wrong, she will not be able to control her temper, and she will pull a long face and leave. Whether you can make Dad stay for the night is totally up to you."

Even if she wanted to make life difficult for Qiao Nan, she had to know her limits and judge the situation as well, lest she ruined her plans to keep Qiao Dongliang for the night.

Chapter 326: Let Us Confront

As long as her father had not brought Qiao Nan home, her mother and she had to continue to hide their tails.

Qiao Zijin was not afraid of anything else. She was only afraid that, given Ding Jiayi's character, she might do something shameful and create trouble for Qiao Nan. In the end, Qiao Nan might not even be embarrassed, but her father would leave for the sake of Qiao Nan nevertheless.

"Why would I?" Ding Jiayi replied, sounding a little guilty. "I think tomorrow is a good day. I've thought about it. I'll take the blanket and mattress pad from Qiao Nan's room to wash and dry in the sun. At the same time, we can clean away the dust in the room. That wretched girl is so scheming. I've not provoked her, but she's been talking bad about me in front of your dad. If I do anything in particular, she'll most likely smear my name in front of your dad. I... I'll not give her the chance!"

Qiao Zijin smiled satisfactorily, but then she knitted her brows. "Mom, it's good that you can think in this way. However, Mom, don't tell me what you said earlier are the opposite of your thoughts?"

"It's almost twelve. I'm so tired after a long day. Zijin, quickly go to sleep. I'm going to sleep too." Ding Jiayi nearly could not respond to the question.

Ding Jiayi had already thought about what she had just said before but did not wish to do it at all.

She was unhappy that Qiao Nan kept asking Old Qiao to move house. If the latter wanted a dry and warm blanket, she could prepare it herself. When she harmed her, did she think of her as her biological mother? When she needed her, Qiao Nan treated her like a servant. How could she be willing to serve Qiao Nan? Wishful thinking!

Ding Jiayi only had such small thoughts and a little brain. She could not create anything spectacular.

“This is really...” At the sight of Ding Jiayi’s evasive attitude, Qiao Zijin was speechless. After all, her mother was really speaking words that were contrary to her thoughts. She wanted to ignore Qiao Nan and let Qiao Nan tidy up her own room when she was back.

Fortunately, Qiao Zijin poked her nose and asked her mother the question. Otherwise, her mother would have made a mistake again and gave Qiao Nan an excuse to make trouble.

“Old Qiao, you’re back with Qiao Nan. Quickly come into the house. I’ll pour the two of you some tea. I’ve just boiled the water.” On Lunar New Year’s Eve, Qiao Dongliang brought Qiao Nan to the house and arrived at one o’clock in the afternoon. At the sight of Qiao Dongliang, Ding Jiayi was overjoyed and greeted him warmly.

Qiao Nan, who was initially walking beside Qiao Dongliang, was pushed to the side with this action of Ding Jiayi.

Qiao Nan, who was caught off-guard by this action, nearly fell down.

“Nan Nan, are you alright?” Qiao Zijin saw this and quickly reached out to hold Qiao Nan. She then lowered her voice, held on to Qiao Nan, and slowed down the latter by a few steps to prevent Qiao Dongliang from seeing what happened. “Nan Nan, I have something to ask you. Can we chat?”

“I don’t wish to chat with you.” Qiao Zijin shook her hands away. Her parents were far and her father would not be able to see what happened earlier. So, there was no need for Qiao Zijin to do that.

“Nan Nan, listen to me. I’d like to ask you about something serious.” Qiao Zijin felt helpless. “Nan Nan, you’re now like a hedgehog. I’m your biological sister. We’re one family. The usual minor arguments and fuss, bickering and fights, which family does not have them? However, can I harm you? Why do you have to guard against me like I’m a thief? I didn’t do anything that let you down, did I?”

“You really didn’t?” Qiao Nan halted her steps, her black eyes turned gloomy as she looked deeply at Qiao Zijin. “During the summer vacation when I was in the second year of junior high school, yes, that rainy night, who was the one who opened my window and caused me to have a fever?”

She was certain that she had closed the window. Her father had never entered her bedroom. Hence, the person who opened her windows and removed her blanket was either her mother or Qiao Zijin.

To put it bluntly, Qiao Zijin was definitely capable of doing such a thing for her own sake.

If it was not Qiao Zijin, then it was her mother. Her mother would only do this for the sake of Qiao Zijin. If Qiao Zijin had never said anything to her mother and encouraged the latter to do that, Qiao Nan dared to chop her head down and let Qiao Zijin use it as a stool!

“Why are you still talking about that matter? You have definitely remembered it wrong. Nan Nan, are you suspecting me? Suspecting Mom? What kind of people do you take us for? Mom is your biological mother and I’m your biological sister. We’re all in one family. Have I gone overboard in anything that I’ve done to you? If you don’t believe me, then... let’s confront each other in front of Dad and Mom?” This happened two years ago. Qiao Nan did not have any evidence. She would not be afraid even if Qiao Nan brought this matter up.

The more Qiao Nan talked about this matter, the more she did not feel guilty about it.

“Nan Nan, let’s go and clear up this matter in front of Dad and Mom now so that you won’t keep feeling paranoid. Don’t tell me that, for the past year, you’ve been angry with Mom because of this misunderstanding? Nan Nan, you... you’re really... I don’t know what to say about you. It’s been two years. How are you so certain that you did not remember it wrong and that it’s not your illusion since you were sick? To dispel your suspicion, let’s go and talk before Mom and Dad. You keep thinking that Mom will side with me, but it’s impossible that Dad will help me, right?”

With the sound of a bang, Qiao Nan slapped away Qiao Zijin’s hands that were grabbing her. “No need.”

“Why not? If we don’t clear this matter up, you’ll certainly distrust me in the future. If you didn’t bring this up, I would never know about your suspicion. But since you’ve mentioned it, I definitely have to clarify this matter and clear up my name. Otherwise, I’ll be wronged although I didn’t do it. What an injustice.” Seeing that Qiao Nan did not want to pursue the matter, Qiao Zijin became more enthusiastic and would not let go of Qiao Nan as she grabbed her hands.

“You have been wronged?” Qiao Nan was both amused and angry. In the past two years, Qiao Zijin did not improve in other things but her skin had become thicker than before. “Sister, I know what you’re thinking of. I only suspected initially. But judging by this attitude of yours, I’m very certain that I did not remember it wrong. That window was not opened by Mom. It was you. If you have a reason and really don’t do anything wrong, you will usually not reason it out with people.” Qiao Zijin would only kick up a fuss.

Now, the fact that Qiao Zijin insisted to clear up this matter fully in such a serious and logical manner could only be because she had a guilty conscience.

“You’ve wronged me. I’ve already said that I didn’t do it. Nan Nan, how will it benefit you to wrong me like this?”

“Precisely. Since I won’t have any benefit if I wrong you, then why should I waste any effort on this? On the contrary, when I was sick at that time, I nearly missed the school enrollment deadline. Would you benefit from that? Do you dare to tell me?” Qiao Nan halted her steps and looked at Qiao Zijin coldly. “Qiao Zijin, this is a house. You’re only a family member in the house. You’re not the judge in the court. You can’t request for proof for all the witnesses’ statements. If I can’t provide any evidence, you can’t say that I’m certainly wrong and you’re right. This tactic doesn’t work on me. Don’t treat me like a fool that I was in the past!”

Chapter 327: Don’t Talk to Me about Kinship

“You!” Qiao Zijin bit her teeth. She was furious beyond words.

If Qiao Nan was willing to have a confrontation with her, she was confident of convincing Qiao Nan and let Qiao Dongliang understand that it was all a misunderstanding. However, Qiao Nan did not even bother to reason with or have a face-to-face discussion with her. She had condemned Qiao Zijin. As such, no matter how many tricks and ploys Qiao Zijin had in mind, she had no opportunity to unleash them.

“Go into the house if you’ve nothing to say.” Qiao Nan looked at Qiao Zijin coldly. In her previous life, Qiao Zijin kept reasoning with her and shortchanged her for an entire lifetime. In this life, if she ‘reasoned’ with Qiao Zijin again, then damn, she would be a big moron!

“Nan Nan, what did you and Zijin talk about? Why did you just come into the house now? Do you feel cold?” Just as Qiao Nan stepped into the house which was familiar yet strange to her, Qiao Dongliang tucked a cup of hot tea into her hands.

Ding Jiayi was smiling and nodding. “The two sisters grew up together from young and have a close relationship. After being separated for so long, they must have many small secrets to share. Actually, they should be able to talk to each other as they wish. This pair of young sisters have suffered.”

Qiao Dongliang did not bother about what Ding Jiayi was implying by her words. He asked Qiao Nan to sit down. “What did you talk to your sister about?”

“Since when did I have something to talk to her about? Just now, at the entrance, I slipped and nearly fell down when Mom bumped onto me. That’s why I came in later.” After Qiao Nan sat down, she pulled the corners of her lips and gave Qiao Zijin a glance before she described this as a matter-of-fact.

“You fell?” Qiao Dongliang was anxious. While he was looking at Qiao Nan, he gave Ding Jiayi a hard stare.

“No! I held on to Nan Nan!” Qiao Zijin explained nervously.

“Is that right?” No wonder Nan Nan and Zijin took so long to come into the house.

“Yes, I didn’t fall. It’s just that I might have sprained my ankle. The good thing is that it’s not that painful anymore. It’ll be fine after some rest.” Qiao Nan ignored the anger and blame in Ding Jiayi’s eyes.

By saying that, she just wanted to express that no matter what kind of tactics Qiao Zijin used to coax her, it was useless!

“What kind of mother are you?!” Qiao Dongliang’s face stiffened as he shouted at Ding Jiayi. “Don’t you know what the occasion is today? Do you still wish to have a proper Lunar New Year? If you do this again, I’ll bring Nan Nan back!”

There was no mother who would push the daughter and cause her to have a fall. Moreover, it was the biological mother!

Ding Jiayi rubbed her hands on her apron uneasily. “I didn’t do it on purpose. I was overjoyed to see you. Old Qiao, have you thought about how long we’ve not seen each other? We’ve never even had a proper conversation with each other. Do you know that many people in the quad are laughing at me? They said that although I have a husband, it’s the same as not having any—that you don’t want me and are going to divorce me soon. Old Qiao, you’ve been angry for long enough. I already know that I’m in the wrong. During the past six months, have I not done well enough? Or do you really want to divorce me and leave me?”

At the end of her speech, Ding Jiayi's eyes were red and tears rolled down her face uncontrollably.

"Talk properly. You're already the mother of two daughters. Don't you find it embarrassing to cry in front of the children?" Qiao Dongliang was both angry and amused. "Do you really think that you've been performing well in the past six months?"

"Haven't I?" She didn't deal with Qiao Nan anymore, but why was it still not enough?

"Forget it. I'll be at odds with myself if I talk to you about this matter." Qiao Dongliang took a deep breath. "I just wish to have a peaceful year. If you create trouble again, I'll leave with Nan Nan. If you don't want the people in the quad to watch a joke, then please be clear about what you should and should not say today. Nan Nan, sit down. Dad will make you a sweet egg soup to sweeten your mouth and fill your stomach."

"I'll do it. I prepare sweet egg soup pretty well. The yolk is sweet and delicious." Ding Jiayi quickly took over the task. Since Qiao Dongliang had said his piece, Ding Jiayi wished to have a successful meal tonight. It would not do if she did not 'perform' well.

When Ding Jiayi and Qiao Dongliang were busy in the kitchen, there were only Qiao Zijin and Qiao Nan in the living room.

Qiao Zijin pulled a long face. "Nan Nan, did you do that on purpose just now? Do you know that what you've said just now nearly called off the reunion dinner tonight? Are you happy and proud to see Dad and Mom quarrel and live separately from each other? This proved that you have an important place in Dad's heart, more important than both Mom and I. Did you need to be so heartless and make things turn out so badly?"

"Don't talk nonsense with me. If Mom and you wish to have a successful meal today, don't provoke me. I did it on purpose. Now, I'm happy and proud. Don't tell me that I should be happy and proud when bullied continuously by Mom and you just like in the past?"

"Nan Nan, don't tell me you're really treating Mom and me like your enemies? We're your family members!" Qiao Zijin was furious beyond words. When did Qiao Nan's temper become so strong? She would not listen to her at all. Qiao Zijin had put in both good and bad words, but Qiao Nan yielded to neither the carrot nor stick. She was resolute to be at odds with her mother and her.

"Qiao Zijin, don't mention kinship to me. When you talk to me about kinship, don't you think that the phrase 'family member' is too scary? You opened the windows and caused me to have a fever.

Mom thought of ways and means to make me quit school and work instead. Was I the one who treated you as enemies or was it the other way round? The reason why I spoke so much today is to tell you one thing. Don't use this kind of tactic with me in the future. It's too annoying!"

Having that said, Qiao Nan decisively changed her seat. She even sat opposite Qiao Zijin and there was a table separating them.

Qiao Zijin lifted her head and rolled her eyes a few times. She was furious. She was nearly driven to the grave by Qiao Nan.

She did not expect that Qiao Nan, this wretched girl, was so daring now. She dared to talk to her in this manner. Did Qiao Nan mean that she would not treat her and her mother as Qiao Nan's elder sister and mother respectively in the future? That she would no longer talk to them about kinship?!

"Come, eat some sweet egg soup. It's piping hot." Qiao Dongliang and Ding Jiayi were each holding a bowl of the egg soup. In each bowl, there were two white and tender eggs with orange-yellow yolks in the middle.

Qiao Nan took over the bowl in Qiao Dongliang's hands. Without a word, she devoured the eggs in a few mouthfuls.

"Nan Nan, are you hungry? Should Dad make another two eggs for you?"

"No need, two is enough. Anyway, we'll be having dinner soon. If I'm too full, it'll be hard to have good food in the evening." Her father was the one who paid for the reunion dinner this year. Having a mouthful less would make her feel shortchanged.

"Sure." Qiao Dongliang felt that Qiao Nan was right in saying that. "Ding Jiayi, hurry up. Quickly prepare the reunion dinner."

"Alright. Go in and bring out the melon seeds first. This way, Nan Nan and Zijin can munch on some melon seeds while they watch the television. They won't be bored, then," Ding Jiayi said smilingly in a rare gentle tone.

Chapter 328: Stabbing Lungs and Piercing Heart

“Zijin, come in and help me.”

“Coming.” Qiao Zijin took a deep breath. She had been having empty talks with Qiao Nan for half a day and was nearly driven to the grave. Moreover, she was unable to get any response from Qiao Nan on the serious matters that she wanted to inquire about.

All of a sudden, Qiao Zijin had a premonition that the coming year would not be a smooth one for her. There would be a lot of trouble.

“Didn’t you give me quite good advice last time? Why were you so silly and argued with the wretched girl today? Don’t you know that the wretched girl is emboldened now with Old Qiao backing her? It’s Lunar New Year’s Eve today. Don’t provoke your dad and cause this meal to fail.” As soon as Qiao Zijin entered, Ding Jiayi immediately reprimanded Qiao Zijin.

Qiao Nan was the one who did all the household chores in the past while she propped her legs and waited for the meal to be ready. However, the situation was reversed now. Not only did she have to do the chores but also get reprimanded by her mother. At the thought of this, Qiao Zijin’s mood worsened. “Mom, didn’t you feel guilty when you said that? Would I commit a mistake that I told you not to? Qiao Nan was the one who deliberately irked me. She said she was determined to be at odds with the two of us. She even said that she treats us as enemies and we can forget about getting along harmoniously in this life. I’m so furious with her. Argued with her? I’ll thank God if she doesn’t quarrel with me!”

“Did she really say that?” Ding Jiayi’s voice sharpened. That wretched girl really thought that she could turn the sky upside down!

“Why should I lie to you? Can’t you see how furious I am with her?” Qiao Zijin grabbed the melon seeds. She really did not wish to bring them out for Qiao Nan. “Mom, in the future, I’m not going to interfere in the matters between Qiao Nan and you. I can’t interfere anyway. Otherwise, I’ll be driven to the grave alive. Qiao Nan has only left the house for half a year, and yet she has become so bold and arrogant. She doesn’t take you and me seriously at all.”

Qiao Nan was truly different from the past. Her wings had hardened. After she flew out of the house, she could no longer catch hold of Qiao Nan.

Qiao Nan picked this kind of occasion to tell her all this. She wanted to make a clean break with her.

“This wretched girl!” Ding Jiayi was furious after hearing what Qiao Zijin said.

“Alright, it’s enough to scold Qiao Nan, that wretched girl, in front of me. If you dare to scold her in front of Dad, do you believe that Dad will leave with Qiao Nan immediately? No wonder Qiao Nan became so bold and arrogant and doesn’t take us seriously anymore. She has Dad as her backing. Exactly what spell did Qiao Nan cast on Dad for Dad to side with her so much? If Dad is not around, I’ll let her suffer!” She could certainly say that if her father was indifferent to household affairs just like he used to be in the past, she was absolutely confident of torturing Qiao Nan till the latter would shiver at the mention of her name!

“Qiao Nan, this is your favorite five-spiced melon. Eat more.” At Qiao Zijin’s reminder, Ding Jiayi rubbed her angry and distorted face. She put on a fake smile as she walked out and intentionally placed the melon seeds close to Qiao Nan in an approachable manner.

“Dad, it’s already eight o’clock. The evening Spring Festival show is starting.” Qiao Zijin switched on the television excitedly.

At the start of the 21st century, it was a popular practice to watch the Spring Festival show during the Lunar New Year.

True enough, as soon as the television was switched on, the Qiao family quiet down as they listened to the familiar melodies. The whole family stared at those familiar faces on the television. The previous disharmony and awkwardness disappeared thoroughly.

Ding Jiayi and Qiao Dongliang were sitting very close to each other. This time, Qiao Dongliang did not refuse. Both of their hands and legs were touching that of each other as they watched the television show. From time to time, their faces that were facing the television leaned close to each other as they exchanged a few words.

Qiao Zijin was enthusiastically watching the language programs, especially the short skits and comic dialogues. Whenever she heard something funny, she laughed loudly.

All of a sudden, there was a stronger atmosphere of Lunar New Year in the Qiao family and everyone was harmonious and happy. It truly seemed like they belonged to the same family.

In the previous life, Qiao Nan looked forward to the Lunar New Year most. This was because the eve of the Lunar New Year was the only day in the whole year that she would not be reprimanded. In addition, she could eat her fill as she wished on that day.

However, at this juncture, Qiao Nan's face was stiff and she realized that she could no longer completely integrate into this family.

Just like her previous life, her father, mother, and Qiao Zijin were one family. She, alone, was another separate family unit. There were four people in one house. Unfortunately, she was the only one that was out of place as if she was unrelated to the other three.

When she saw the extremely harmonious atmosphere between the three people despite them not conversing a lot with one another, Qiao Nan not only felt awkward but also extremely uncomfortable.

Having a positive and peaceful mindset as she did in the past did not work at this moment.

At around ten o'clock, Qiao Zijin stretched herself and yawned. "Dad, Mom, I'm tired and will be going to bed."

"Then..." Qiao Dongliang hesitated for a while. They had finished the reunion dinner. Should he bring Nan Nan back?

"Old Qiao, come with me for a while. It's the Lunar New Year and I've weaved a new sweater for you. Would you try it?" Ding Jiayi's eyes were bright and watery as she looked at Qiao Dongliang. She made full use of the opportunity to fawn on him.

"Alright..." Qiao Dongliang nodded and did not reject Ding Jiayi's good intentions.

The two young ladies watched the couple went into the room. Qiao Zijin, in particular, kept smiling. "Qiao Nan, how good will it be if the country did not implement family planning? Then, perhaps Dad and Mom could fulfill their previous wish. We could possibly still have a younger brother at our age."

At the sight of Qiao Nan's stiff face and silent composure, Qiao Zijin felt more pleased. Qiao Nan made her furious today. At the very least, she had regained the victory.

Ah, at this time, Qiao Zijin was certain that she could still have a good year ahead and went to bed happily. “Your room has not changed at all. Mom has tidied it up for you. You might not treat us as your family members, but Mom and I have been extremely patient and magnanimous with you. Alright, I’m going to bed. You can continue to watch the TV if you wish to. Otherwise, go to sleep.”

There were only Ding Jiayi and Qiao Zijin living in this house. Although Qiao Zijin never did any household chores, she had to help on this occasion. As such, Qiao Zijin, who was not used to doing chores, was feeling the soreness all over her body. She just wished to have a good sleep and recover her energy.

How good would it be if her father did not move out of the house with Qiao Nan? If he hadn’t, then Qiao Nan would most probably be the one doing the chores today.

“Qiao Zijin, why do I feel that your hands are now much rougher than before, although it’s only been less than six months?” Since Qiao Zijin stabbed Qiao Nan’s lungs, Qiao Nan would pierce her heart.

“What did you say?!” True enough, Qiao Zijin, who was feeling extremely sleepy earlier, was jolted by these words of Qiao Nan. Her hair stiffened and she stared as if she were a tigress whose tail had been stepped on and whiskers pulled. She nearly bared her teeth and brandished her paws at Qiao Nan.

In the past, although Qiao Zijin’s family background was clearly average, her pair of hands that was more slender and beautiful than others was something that she was proudest of.

Chapter 329: File a Marriage Report

In the previous life, after Qiao Zijin was married to Chen Jun, she received many praises for the pair of hands that resembled those of a rich man’s daughter. Everyone thought that she was, in fact, born to a wealthy and good family—that the Chen family married a daughter-in-law that was compatible with the family.

Since Qiao Nan and Qiao Dongliang moved house, Qiao Zijin could no longer maintain that pair of fair and tender hands. It was a matter of course before it turned coarse.

Qiao Zijin had already tried to let go and not think too much about it. Who knew that Qiao Nan had to expose her and rub salt on her injury today!

“You! Forget it. I’m happy today and won’t take issue with you. I’m going to bed.” The more she quarreled with Qiao Nan, the more pleased Qiao Nan would be. Anyway, her father would not leave today. She could not be bothered to argue with Qiao Nan and waste her breath.

Qiao Zijin lifted her chest like a little rooster, returning to her bedroom and shutting the door without any hesitation.

The loud bang of the door closing made Qiao Nan’s heart increasingly uneasy.

Her father, mother, and Qiao Zijin were in the room. She was the only one outside. This door did not seem like a door to the bedroom but a door to the heart. It segregated her from the three of them.

Qiao Nan tugged one corner of her mouth and frowned. In the end, she walked toward the main door and opened it without any hesitation. She left the small courtyard of the Qiao family.

She had stayed in this house of the Qiao family since she was born. Moreover, she grew up in the quad. However, this place did not belong to her. She kept feeling suffocated when she was here.

After leaving the house of the Qiao family, Qiao Nan looked up at the sky. It was dark and starless. She gave a long sigh, her head drooping. She then walked toward her temporary ‘home’ in a sullen mood.

The lights were bright in all the houses. Walking along the dark roads, Qiao Nan’s gaze was gloomy. That lonely figure of hers seemed to have been abandoned by the whole world.

Although there was no one to laugh and cry with Qiao Nan if she returned to the temporary home, and it would be cold and quiet with only Qiao Nan in it, Qiao Nan felt more comfortable being alone than to stay at the house of the Qiao family. In the Qiao’s residence, she would find it hard and depressing to spend the Lunar New Year.

There was the sound of someone stepping on the snow. This greatly alerted Qiao Nan who had been immersed in her own sorrow. She was so frightened that her hairs stood up.

“Now you know what fear is?” Zhai Sheng walked out from a dark spot. He looked at Qiao Nan angrily as his heart ached. “You’re going home alone so late in the night? Since when did you become so daring? Why did I remember that one and a half years ago, you didn’t even dare to look at me more than once and talked to me with your head bowed?”

“Brother Zhai?!” Qiao Nan heaved a sigh of relief and shouted with happiness and joy. She quickened her steps and ran over to Zhai Sheng’s side.

On a supposedly lively night, as she was experiencing the coldness and loneliness of the world, she would inevitably think of her good friends. The first person that she thought of was, in fact, not Zhai Sheng, but Zhu Baoguo, who was her playmate and classmate.

However, Qiao Nan knew that it was not appropriate for her to look for Zhu Baoguo at this moment. Everyone was happily having a reunion dinner with their families. As an outsider, she should not join in.

Nevertheless, to her surprise, the person whose appearance that Qiao Nan dared not wish for was right before her now. This was like a miracle.

“It’s already so late and you’re still out. Why won’t you rest at home? Are your troops on leave this year, so you could come home for the Lunar New Year?” Standing beside Zhai Sheng, Qiao Nan transformed from a downhearted lady to a lively and energetic one. Her tiny mouth was so chatty. It was so noisy that Zhai Sheng wanted to use a special way to shut this sweet little mouth up.

“I know that a fool will definitely not feel good about herself so I can’t rest even when I’m on leave. I’ll send you back.” Thoughts were thoughts. Zhai Sheng eventually dared not do something so abrupt to Qiao Nan. As per his usual habit, he rubbed Qiao Nan’s head and held her slightly cold hands as he walked.

Zhai Sheng’s hands felt very hot and warm. That temperature was akin to that of the sun and gradually dissipated the haze that was hovering in Qiao Nan’s heart. It brought her beautiful sunshine. “Brother Zhai, how did you know?”

Prior to today, she always believed that she could endure for just one night.

Before Qiao Zijin said it, Qiao Nan already knew that it would not be possible for her father and her to go back after the reunion dinner.

Clearly, she had portrayed herself like a flour dumpling with a good temper. Even Zhu Baoguo thought so. She thought that she could endure it, but she did not expect that although she had just left the house that brought her immense pain for a short period of six months, she could not even tolerate one night of stay there. She could not make herself suffer anymore.

What Qiao Nan did not understand was why she could not even accurately predict her own temper. Yet, why was Zhai Sheng so spot on and was ‘coincidentally’ waiting for her here? It was as if Zhai Sheng understood her more than herself.

Zhai Sheng thought for a while. His gaze deepened but his eyes became brighter. This became the only light that Qiao Nan saw in the darkness. “Yes, tell me. Why did I know?”

“...” Qiao Nan’s face turned red. She was stunned. What did Brother Zhai mean by this word of his? Why did it sound like he was confessing his love for her? Had she become confused from her anger toward her mother and Qiao Zijin that she had such an illusion?

Qiao Nan looked stupefied and could not react. This made Zhai Sheng smile bitterly. “No wonder, you’re still young.”

Clearly, she was older by a year after today and would be an adult. Why couldn’t she understand his words?

“No, not young anymore!” Qiao Nan would not concede defeat. She was young? She was already an ‘old auntie’ that was over forty years old!

“Are you certain that you’re really not young anymore? One must know that there are certain things that only adults can do.” Zhai Sheng halted his steps. He looked at Qiao Nan seriously. Once he received a certain answer, he would definitely not let Qiao Nan have any chance to back out.

Eighteen years old. This was a beautiful age that people looked forward to. This was the age that Zhai Sheng had waited one more year for.

“Brother Zhai, you... are you serious? Or are you kidding me? It’s the Lunar New Year today, not the April Fools’ that people in western countries celebrate. Furthermore, this joke is not funny at all!” How could Brother Zhai mean that? She must have been thinking too much and confused by

her anger toward Qiao Zijin. “Brother Zhai, you... don’t bother about what I have just said. I was angered beyond my sense. There is no other meaning. Don’t laugh at my narcissism.”

“Today’s not the April Fools’ indeed. I’m not teasing you, and I’m not joking with you either. Nan Nan, actually, you understand what I mean, don’t you?” Zhai Sheng was a soldier. He preferred to be straightforward. This was not a military training exercise, and neither was it a war with his enemies. Standing before him was a young lady that he loved most, someone that he wished to marry and spend his life with.

“Nan Nan, I like you. If you’re willing to accept me, when you reached eighteen years of age, I’ll directly file a marriage report with the top leadership to marry you. After you marry me, you don’t need to have any burden. You can follow me to the army.”

“G-get married?!”

Chapter 330: Discuss and Resolve the Areas of Incompatibility

When she heard the two words ‘getting married’, Qiao Nan was immediately dumbfounded. “Brother Zhai, you... did you meet with any blow recently?

“You don’t believe that I wish to marry you?”

Of course I didn’t!

The villain in Qiao Nan’s heart was shouting. Brother Zhai was the future chief of the army. His future was bright. He would be more formidable than the Father Zhai now. She clearly remembered that Brother Zhai was married in his previous life to a lady that was compatible with his family.

What did she have? She had nothing.

If Brother Zhai was not willing to help her and she had to rely on herself, most probably, her life might not be better than her previous life.

She was not the most beautiful one, and neither was she the smartest. Furthermore, she was not good at human skills and could not grasp a man’s heart. It was hard to come by that Brother Zhai had taken a liking to her. Her character had already erupted. Brother Zhai was now telling her that

he not only liked her but also wished to marry her. Qiao Nan felt that Brother Zhai must have taken some blow today to be talking so mindlessly.

What a person said on impulse could not be trusted. As soon as he had calmed down, Brother Zhai would definitely regret it.

Hence, if Brother Zhai was not calm enough, she had to be.

“Brother Zhai, actually, the distance to my home is not too far. It’s the eve of the Lunar New Year today, and it’s late. You should go back and keep your family company. I can go back on my own. I’m not scared. Really, I’m not scared at all.” If she allowed Brother Zhai to continue with his words, she would become as crazy as him no matter how calm she was.

“Nan Nan!” Zhai Sheng shouted in a voice that was neither loud nor soft, but it sounded as serious as shouting ‘Attention. At ease’ in the army. This made Qiao Nan, who had already started running away, halt her steps. She stood firm on the ground. “Army personnel would never joke on such matters. I hope that you can consider what I said seriously and earnestly and then make an objective and rational decision.”

“...” Qiao Nan, whose body froze when she heard what Zhai Sheng said, was both angry and amused. She was not a soldier. She did not need to carry out everything in such a stiff and regulated manner. The saying that military orders were as inviolable as a mountain would not work on her.

Was Brother Zhai confessing his love and proposing marriage or treating her like the new soldiers under his wing?

“If I seriously and earnestly consider what you have said, will you support me in whatever objective and rational decision that I make?” Qiao Nan took a deep breath. She forcefully suppressed the struggle beneath her eyes.

She could not even keep Chen Jun. It was impossible for her to be together with Brother Zhai.

“...” Zhai Sheng hesitated for a while. He then said, “The country and the top leadership have always been concerned about the marriage of ordinary soldiers like us. They hope that we can have a complete family. Only then can we protect the country. However, we also need people to look after us. Nan Nan, this is the trust and test that the party and organization placed on you. Nan Nan, as the country’s citizen, you must have the realization. The party and the country needs you. You should be at the frontline. How can you reject?”

In short, Zhai Sheng being together with Qiao Nan was the arrangement of the country and party. Qiao Nan must accept this. In addition, she had to seriously and conscientiously carry out and complete this 'mission'.

"..." An imaginary black line appeared on Qiao Nan's forehead. "Brother Zhai, do all the soldiers in the army talk like that? Why do I feel that I'm back to the 1960s and 1970s? There's country, party, and organization?"

This was not an acceptable reason for someone from the 21st century that was reborn into this era.

Damn. The country did not request her to marry Brother Zhai, and neither did the party nor the organization. No one mentioned this to her.

"Stand still, be quiet. On such a serious topic, put away your cheeky smile, and be more serious." There was a flash of helplessness in Zhai Sheng's eyes. He was older than Qiao Nan by four years. Nevertheless, since he was a child, Zhai Sheng had always been focused on three areas: home, school, and army.

He had a lot of dealings with men. However, except for Zhai Hua, Zhai Sheng never had the experience of interacting with girls, not to mention confessing his love and proposing for marriage.

As a soldier, Zhai Sheng was most accustomed to portraying his most authentic self in front of Qiao Nan. He was most comfortable being himself and speaking his mind without any reservation.

If Zhai Sheng were to do something else, such as Chen Jun who staged the 'hero saving the beauty' scenario to create a beautiful encounter, he only knew six out of seven apertures. He was completely ignorant.

He liked Qiao Nan and wished to spend a lifetime with her. He wanted to protect Qiao Nan. Therefore, he told Qiao Nan that he would marry her. He was so direct that he was a little dull and clumsy.

Qiao Nan had a stomachache because of the reunion dinner. Facing the unbelievable love confession and marriage proposal before her, Qiao Nan only felt a headache and her eyes started seeing stars. "Brother Zhai, I'll reply to you in a very serious and earnest manner. We're not suitable for each other."

“Why aren’t we?” Zhai Sheng’s face stiffened as he looked at Qiao Nan. He completely displayed a soldier’s spirit of being fearless of hardship and difficulty and persistence to overcome all problems. “Which aspects are not suitable? You can tell me. We can examine together on whether these incompatible areas are truly present.”

“I’m still young. After twelve midnight today, I’m, in fact, only seventeen years old. Even if I’m eighteen, it’s not the legal age for marriage. Brother Zhai, you’re a soldier and should lead by example. How could you disregard the law!” She had already said that they were not suitable. Even the law, which was the country, party, and organization, that Brother Zhai was referring to, would not allow that.

“Regarding this situation, it’s completely not a problem. I fully support that you should gain more knowledge when you are of an appropriate age. When you step out into society, you can then contribute to the country. I know you wish to study in college. Even after we file a marriage, we do not need to immediately register and receive the marriage certificate. We can always get engaged first. We can get the certificate after you graduate from high school and are studying in college.”

Of course, if he had already filed the marriage report in the army and it was approved, even without the marriage certificate, Nan Nan and he would be considered as a couple. Furthermore, it would be an army marriage!

Qiao Nan knitted her brows. Was Brother Zhai playing a game of promise with her?

“Brother Zhai, I don’t know why you suddenly have such thoughts. However, I still wish to advise you not to be too impulsive. I don’t think you’re someone that’s so impulsive. Calm down. No matter what has caused you to say this to me, you will definitely regret it in the future. For the sake of both of us, I can’t agree to this matter. This decision is best suited for us.” Brother Zhai was only twenty-two years old. There were many kinds of possibilities and temptations in the future.

Many ladies were better than her in terms of family background. There were also many ladies that were prettier than her. Even smarter ladies were prevalent. It was too numerous to enumerate.