

The Billion 101

Chapter 101 - Principal Ding

At noon on the second day, a towering rainbow arch stood at the hotel entrance, flanked by numerous firecrackers. Lee Sumei and Su Ming greeted guests at the doorway, while Su Tao took his place at the head table. A fleet of buses, summoned by Su Ming, rolled in from the distance, ferrying villagers to the event.

“Old Lee, your son has really made something of himself. Make sure he remembers me in the future,” one guest remarked.

“Old Lee, is your son seeing anyone?” another inquired, adding, “My niece is quite a catch.”

Relatives filled the venue, with men gathering inside to converse with Su Tao and women clustering around Lee Sumei. Both Su Tao and Lee Sumei beamed with pride and joy.

Suddenly, a sizable group approached from a distance, numbering in the dozens.

“Isn't that Principal Ding?” someone exclaimed.

Principal Ding, the head of the town's only elementary school, was a respected figure in the community.

“Principal Ding! What brings you here?” they called out, eager to greet him.

“Good day to all,” Principal Ding responded with a warm smile, his attention quickly turning to Su Ming. He approached briskly, “Su Ming, thank you for hosting this wonderful gathering.”

The crowd was taken aback. Principal Ding was a local luminary, and while they had assumed Su Ming's success came from a lucrative job or a lottery windfall, none expected him to command such respect from a figure like Principal Ding.

Yet there stood Principal Ding, deferential before Su Ming, as if a student before a teacher, showing him great reverence.

Principal Ding, astute as ever, then turned to Lee Sumei. "You must be Su Ming's mother. What an extraordinary woman you are! Raising such a talented individual is not only your achievement but also an honor for our school."

Lee Sumei was momentarily speechless. As a rural woman, the most prominent official she was accustomed to seeing was the village chief. The idea of engaging with someone as esteemed as Principal Ding was beyond her wildest expectations.

Blinking in disbelief, she found herself in an unfamiliar scenario, one she had never experienced before.

"Principal Ding," Su Ming interjected calmly, "It's quite warm outside. Please, lead the teachers inside to sit down."

With an eager nod, Principal Ding shook hands with Su Ming, bidding him farewell before escorting the teachers into the hotel.

The teachers stood at the back with a clear view, and most had already met Su Ming during the school's anniversary celebration.

As they walked past Su Ming, each one greeted him with a friendly smile.

Their unexpected arrival brought a hush over the villagers seated inside the house.

Why were these teachers here?

Amidst the confusion, Principal Ding stepped forward to greet Su Tao, mentioning that other key school officials were with him.

The room fell silent, everyone taken aback.

Upon seeing Su Tao, the school leaders became exceedingly courteous.

Su Tao himself was baffled.

This was Principal Ding!

Su Ming had encountered Principal Ding during a parent-teacher conference back in his elementary school days.

To them, Principal Ding was an influential figure.

“Brother Su, you've raised an exceptional son!”

Principal Ding warmly shook Su Tao's hand. “Your son made a generous donation of twenty million at our school's anniversary the day before yesterday.”

The room erupted in astonishment at Principal Ding's announcement.

For the locals, a year's hard work might yield only a few tens or hundreds of thousands of yuan.

Tens of millions were simply beyond their wildest dreams.

Seeing the crowd's reaction, Principal Ding nodded with satisfaction; his intention was to have Su Tao revered by others.

After exchanging a few words with Su Tao, he and the teachers took seats at tables in the corner.

Fong Yuemei and Su Hai had just woken up.

Fong Yuemei, still upset from her earlier altercation with Su Ming, had been to the hospital for several IV drips.

She had only managed to fall asleep halfway through the night.

Su Hai got up, quickly freshened up, and opened the door to a peculiar silence.

Why was it so quiet today?

In the summer, villagers typically tended to their crops and weeded their fields.

At midday, neighbors would usually be chatting under the banyan tree while sharing a meal.

But today, there was an unusual stillness.

Su Hai blinked in surprise to see that all the neighbors' doors were locked.

He was utterly perplexed. What was happening?

“What's the matter?”

Fong Yuemei emerged from the house, urging, “Hurry up and start cooking.”

Su Hai remarked, “The neighbors aren't home.”

“What's that got to do with you?”

Fong Yuemei frowned and stepped outside. On their street, theirs was the only door unlocked.

They exchanged a puzzled glance. What was happening here?

“Why are you both at home?”

Just then, an elderly woman approached. She was over eighty, her back bent, relying on a walking cane for support.

Upon seeing her, Fong Yuemei called out, “Sixth Aunt, where has everyone gone?”

“You're not aware?”

The old lady blinked, her age evident, yet her mind was sharp.

“No, I have no idea.”

Fong Yuemei and Su Hai were utterly baffled. What on earth had occurred?

The sensation of being left behind was distinctly unsettling.

What exactly was the situation?

Chapter 102 - Anger!

The elderly woman remarked, “Su Tao invited us over for dinner today. A good number of villagers attended, and he extended an invitation to me as well. But given my age, I decided not to go.”

Su Hai was taken aback.

Su Tao had invited the whole village to dine, yet they were the only ones not asked.

The couple was seething with anger.

What was Su Tao trying to imply?

If word got out, they would surely become the laughingstock of the village.

Despite Su Hai and his wife having mistreated them in the past, they were still kin. Su Hai was Su Tao's own Second Brother.

The elderly lady was no relation to them, yet she had generously given them a thousand dollars when they were in a tight spot the year before last.

Fong Yuemei had felt somewhat better after her medication yesterday, but now her anger was flaring up again.

The old lady probed, "Didn't Su Tao invite you?"

Fong Yuemei replied, "He did notify us, but we're not ones for social gatherings. Eating at home suits us just fine."

The old lady offered a knowing smile and left without another word, leaning on her cane. Her expression, however, left the couple feeling deeply unsettled.

Once inside their home, Fong Yuemei scowled and raised her voice, "What's Su Tao playing at?"

Hands on her hips, she continued, "Is he singling us out?"

"Let's not get worked up. We've been known to overstep ourselves," her husband tried to soothe her.

Fong Yuemei retorted loudly, "I'm his sister-in-law. What's so wrong about reprimanding him or asking for a hand with chores? We've lent him a fair amount of money."

"But you lent him fifty thousand and took back a hundred thousand," he pointed out.

"Shut it!" Fong Yuemei snapped, pointing an accusing finger at her husband. "I'm only put through this humiliation because of a good-for-nothing like you. I'm going to give him a piece of my mind today."

Su Hai involuntarily recoiled. His wife's reputation as the village spitfire was well-earned.

Provoking her meant endless bickering.

"So, what do you suggest we do?" he asked cautiously.

After a moment's thought, Fong Yuemei pulled out her phone and dialed a number.

As soon as the call connected, Fong Yuemei blurted out, "Son, I've been wronged!"

Her son, Su Tian, was employed in the city.

She had proudly told everyone that her son had married into a wealthy family, boasting of their newfound wealth and influence.

But the reality was far from rosy.

Indeed, her daughter-in-law came from money, but her morals left much to be desired.

With her family's wealth, she had her pick of boyfriends in high school.

As she grew older and the rumors piled up, her parents grew desperate.

They hastily arranged for her to marry just to ensure the birth of her child.

That man was Fong Yuemei's son.

Fong Yuemei was oblivious to these details. She only knew her son had wed a rich girl whose family owned a company, a connection that landed him a high-ranking position there.

Fong Yuemei was aware that her son wielded little real power at the company, yet she never asked him to return home.

But after today's indignities, she resolved to summon him back to her aid.

“Mom, what's going on? Tell me exactly what happened,” came a worried voice over the phone.

“Son, your Third Uncle's family has struck it rich, and now they're looking down on us.”

Su Tian's expression darkened.

He was painfully aware of his wife's infidelities.

Despite being a man, it ate away at him.

Their marriage lacked any real emotional foundation.

He had risen to the position of general manager only with his wife's assistance.

But her constant affairs were more than he could bear.

Powerless to confront his wife, he redirected his focus onto others, like Su Ming. Su Ming had always outshone him, but after university, his fortunes had faded.

While Su Ming's life spiraled downward, Su Tian's only improved.

In this lifetime, Su Ming would never outpace him.

“Mom, hold on. I'm actually nearby on a business trip. I'll be there shortly!”

With that, Su Tian ended the call.

The moment Fong Yuemei hung up, her face swiftly regained its composure, and with a cold laugh, she muttered, “My son will be back soon.”

“You're just making things harder for your son.”

“Shut up!”

Fong Yuemei glared at Su Hai, her anger palpable: “If you can't help me, then don't speak!”

Su Hai fell silent.

Soon after, the blare of a car horn sounded at the entrance, followed by a young, dashing man stepping out in a suit.

“Son?”

Fong Yuemei's eyes brightened at the sight of the young, handsome figure.

“Mom, Dad, get in the car.”

Once Su Tian had his parents settled in the car, he headed straight for the shopping mall.

His in-laws owned a real estate company with a substantial market value.

And with only one daughter in their family, he was poised to be the future patriarch.

Su Ming could win the lottery or strike it rich, but he would never match up to him.

Su Tian's swift return was driven by a desire to stand up for his parents and by his suspicion over Su Ming's abrupt shift in status.

Chapter 103 - A Sense of Superiority

On his way over, Su Tian had already made a call to his company, requesting an investigation into Su Ming's circumstances. The response from his company was swift.

They uncovered the details of Su Ming's relationship with Wang Xue. The couple was on the brink of marriage, but due to unforeseen events, they called off the engagement. Now, they acted as if they were strangers to one another.

Su Ming was out of a job. Rumor had it that he was laboring away on a construction site. To confirm, a few snapshots of Su Ming at the site were sent to Su Tian. In the photos, Su Ming, along with several others, was seen working on a villa, his hands and feet caked with dirt.

Seeing this, Su Tian had an epiphany. He suspected that Su Ming might be using the returned betrothal gift money to treat everyone to a meal, aiming to keep them quiet about the broken engagement. After all, if word got out in the village, it would be a major blow to his reputation.

Su Tian had pegged Su Ming as a down-to-earth man, but now he seemed consumed by vanity. In Su Tian's eyes, Su Ming lacked the means to fulfill such a superficial desire. Yet, Su Tian had jumped to a significant, albeit incorrect, conclusion based on outdated news and easily misinterpreted photographs.

The atmosphere at the hotel was buzzing with excitement. Su Ming had spared no expense, opting for the finest arrangements. Given the lower cost of goods in the town, he had gone all out for the guests. The tables groaned under the weight of abundant dishes.

While the village did host banquets from time to time, they were usually modest affairs. This time, however, it was a feast of extravagance. The villagers murmured among themselves, impressed by the newfound wealth of Su Tao's family. There was more than enough food to go around, with plenty left over for guests to take home.

In the midst of the meal, the curtain was suddenly drawn back. Expecting a server, the guests were surprised to see Su Tian instead. Flanking him were Fong Yuemei and Su Hai. Su Tao and Lee Sumei were taken aback by their arrival.

Su Ming immediately realized that Fong Yuemei had summoned her son back to the village. As the family of three made their presence known, the chatter among the villagers quieted down. They were all from the same village and were well aware of the unfolding drama. Su Hai's family had crossed a line, and it was understandable why Su Tao hadn't extended them an invitation.

If they hadn't gone overboard, Su Tao's family wouldn't have reacted this way.

"Second Brother, Second Sister-in-law, welcome!"

Lee Sumei rose to her feet and said, "I completely forgot to mention dinner to you both. Your whole family is here, so please, find a seat wherever you like."

Su Tian scoffed, "Third Aunt, since my dad and Third Uncle are blood brothers, I noticed some empty seats at the main table. We'll just sit there, all three of us."

Lee Sumei was taken aback.

Su Ming then stood up and greeted, "Cousin, it's been too long. Have a seat."

Upon seeing Su Ming, Su Tian let out a derisive snort.

He led his parents over, grabbing three chairs along the way to place next to the main table.

The table was large enough to comfortably seat fourteen or fifteen people.

But Su Ming, wanting everyone to enjoy their meal, had limited it to eight per table.

“Cousin,” Su Tian began as he took his seat, “I heard you're about to tie the knot. Make sure you let me know when it happens—I definitely want to congratulate you.”

Su Ming responded with a cold laugh, “We've split up.”

Su Tian feigned shock, “You finally found a girlfriend, why break up? You're just working on a construction site, not earning much each month.”

He raised his voice intentionally so the others could hear.

The chatter in the room quickly quieted down.

Su Tian was smug, eager to expose Su Ming's true colors.

He thought the crowd was stunned by the bombshell he'd dropped.

But in reality, most considered Su Tian a fool, especially Principal Ding.

Had Su Tian made such a claim earlier, Principal Ding might have believed him. But during the school anniversary, Zhang Chongyang had stood by Su Ming's side, calling the bank himself. Principal Ding learned of Su Ming's bank deposits.

Zhang Chongyang had even stated that such money was trivial for Su Ming.

As the vice president of Tianhua Bank, Zhang Chongyang had access to funds exceeding ten billion yuan!

He wouldn't lie for a young man who worked construction. .c(o)m

In other words, Su Ming's identity and standing were far from ordinary.

With a whopping two hundred million in Su Ming's account, picking up the tab for everyone's meal would be a breeze for him.

Su Tian's tactics might work on others, but trying them on Su Ming was a recipe for disaster.

The local villagers shared this sentiment.

Many of them had been present at the school anniversary celebration and had seen everything firsthand.

Principal Ding himself had verified Su Ming's generous donation of 20 million yuan.

Though such a sum was astronomical to them, they were no fools. Su Ming's ability to donate so generously clearly indicated that this was but a drop in the bucket for his overall wealth.

Yet, Su Tian had the audacity to smear Su Ming's name.

Upon hearing these words, Su Ming gave a faint nod. "I hadn't expected you to uncover that."

Chapter 104 - A Donation of One Million

Su Tian couldn't help but feel smug upon hearing the conversation.

“Cousin, after all the effort to scrape together 500,000 yuan, you're still splurging on a meal for us. Your parents are getting on in years. This isn't the best way to handle things,” Su Tian remarked.

“You have a point,” Su Ming replied with a slow, knowing smile.

Fong Yuemei and Su Hai perked up at this exchange, pride straightening their posture. Their son truly had his act together.

With just an offhand comment, Su Tian had unwittingly exposed Su Ming's true character.

“Cousin, the grind at the construction site is grueling. Now that I've made it to general manager at the company, why don't you come work for me? I'll set you up as a security guard. Others earn 5000 a month, but I'll give you 7000. What do you say?”

“Sure, thank you,” Su Ming responded, his tone even.

Su Tian felt a twinge of irritation. He was the one who had offered Su Ming a job. Shouldn't Su Ming be groveling with gratitude?

“Cousin, that's not how it works. You need to earn your stripes. As long as I'm with the company, you'll have a steady job as a security guard. You ought to be thanking me,” Su Tian said, his brow furrowed.

The bystanders couldn't help but overhear, and one of them burst into laughter.

Su Tian heard it but was oblivious to the mockery.

“Thanks, cousin,” Su Ming said with a smile.

“That's better,” Su Tian replied coolly, his gaze drifting to the side.

Wasn't that Principal Ding from Central Primary School? And the teachers—what were they doing here?

It must be sheer coincidence. It was summer, after all, and the day was fair. Many people would be hosting banquets. It was perfectly normal for school teachers to enjoy a meal out.

Su Tian lifted his wine glass, straightened his attire, and made his way toward Principal Ding with measured steps. The villagers' eyes followed him, and a broad, triumphant smile spread across his face. He was convinced he alone had the stature to engage Principal Ding in conversation.

“My son is truly accomplished; he's acquainted with Principal Ding,” Fong Yuemei and Su Hai beamed with joy.

Fong Yuemei felt the envious stares from the entire village and reveled in the attention.

“Principal Ding, I was one of your students back in primary school. To see you again after all these years is such a privilege,” she said with heartfelt reverence.

Su Tian stood before Principal Ding, a subtle smile playing on his lips. His tone brimmed with deference, yet his eyes betrayed a prideful glint that belied any true sense of respect.

He had risen to the role of general manager at a major company, overseeing numerous significant projects.

“One day, I'll be the chairman of the company,” he declared.

“Su Tian,” Principal Ding responded, his own smile mirroring Su Tian's.

“I heard about the school's anniversary celebration the day before yesterday, but work kept me too busy to attend. Today, my schedule aligned, and I was able to make it back.”

With that, Su Tian produced a check from his pocket, inscribed with the words: “Su Tian donates one million to the school.” He glanced around with a self-satisfied air as he spoke.

He knew well that the school typically garnered around two million yuan for each anniversary or fundraising event. His contribution of a million should have surely drawn a beaming thank you from Principal Ding.

Instead, Principal Ding remained impassive, as if the gesture was invisible. "I'm sorry. The school is sufficiently funded, so we don't require your donation."

"What?" Su Tian was taken aback.

"Principal Ding, my signature and the bank's stamp are on this check. Take it to the bank, and it's a million. You're really turning it down?" Su Tian's disbelief was palpable.

Truth be told, under normal circumstances, Principal Ding would have gladly accepted the money. But today, with the evident rift between Su Tian and Su Ming, he simply couldn't.

"Principal Ding, this is my cousin's heartfelt offering. Please, take it," Su Ming interjected suddenly.

"Alright," Principal Ding acquiesced swiftly, snatching the check. "Thanks."

Su Tian was perplexed. His donation of a million yuan was met with disdainful refusal from Principal Ding. Yet, with just a few words from Su Ming, the money was readily accepted.

Chapter 105 - Failed

Su Tian was dumbfounded.

What in the world was happening?

He couldn't seem to grasp the situation.

Typically, after donating a million yuan to the school, he would expect the teachers and leadership to greet him with warm handshakes and expressions of gratitude, even posing for photos with him.

But now, things were different.

“He only donated a million yuan, and we're supposed to thank him?”

“That million could fix up the school's bathrooms.”

“Showing off with just a million?”

A few vice principals and directors murmured among themselves.

They were all sharp cookies.

Ordinarily, the school's administration would be grateful for his million-yuan donation.

But Su Tian had a rocky relationship with Su Ming, which naturally put him in their crosshairs.

Su Tian had thought this would be his chance to shine, but the school leaders' comments blindsided him.

Were schools so flush with cash these days?

The leaders appeared to accept his donation begrudgingly.

It seemed the school was so well-off that his million yuan was merely earmarked for bathroom repairs.

What was their endgame?

Su Tian blinked in confusion.

The school leaders paid him no mind.

The villagers did the same.

Standing there alone, he felt the sting of embarrassment.

Things weren't unfolding as he had pictured.

“What's the meaning of this?” he demanded.

Fong Yuemei was livid. “My son gave your school a million yuan!”

Principal Ding blinked, his impatience evident. “Do you have any idea how much Mr. Su Ming donated?”

At that, Fong Yuemei scoffed. “How could he donate? He's broke.”

“Mr. Su Ming donated 20 million yuan.”

Both Fong Yuemei and Su Tian gasped in unison. “How much?”

“That can't be right. Principal Ding, you're lying on his behalf!”

Fong Yuemei quickly shook her head as she regained her composure.

Su Tian shared her disbelief, but one look at Principal Ding and the teachers' faces told him everything he needed to know.

The principal was telling the truth.

But where on earth did Su Ming find that kind of money?

Su Tian himself was worth only twenty million yuan. He had donated a million today to make his parents proud and one-up Su Ming.

He never anticipated Su Ming outdoing him by such a margin.

Amidst Su Tian's awkwardness, a figure approached.

Zhang Chongyang had arrived.

He's been here handling business for the past couple of days without leaving.

He's keen on opening several bank branches in town, so the locals' ability to save is crucial.

If everyone banks with him, there'll be a substantial amount of money.

Plus, the bank could offer a variety of services, like loans and retirement insurance.

His bank might not earn much just in this town, but if residents from all the nearby towns deposit their money with him, his bank could amass assets in the hundreds of billions.

Su Ming had reached out to Zhang Chongyang to join him for a meal today. But Zhang was tied up in a meeting and missed the call.

Post-meeting, his secretary mentioned the missed call. Realizing it was Su Ming, Zhang quickly returned the call.

Invited to dinner by Su Ming, he made his way there promptly.

“Vice President Zhang?”

Su Tian was taken aback to see Zhang Chongyang.

What brought Vice President Zhang here?

He approached quickly, “Vice President Zhang, what brings you here personally? If there was an issue, I would've come to the bank myself. Why the long trip?”

Su Tian assumed Zhang Chongyang had approved a bank loan.

He also knew Zhang was in the area on business.

He thought Zhang had come specifically for him.

But Zhang Chongyang asked, “Who are you?”

“I'm Su Tian,” he replied hastily.

“I remember you. Let's discuss your matter later.”

Zhang Chongyang spoke with a hint of impatience and then briskly made his way to Su Ming, “Mr. Su, my apologies for being late. I'll make it up with three drinks on me.”

What?

Su Tian was utterly stunned by Zhang Chongyang's deferential behavior towards Su Ming.

He was even more astonished.

Zhang Chongyang was the vice president of the biggest bank in Eastsea City.

Zhang was an influential figure, rarely seen by the average person. Even Su Tian's father-in-law would respectfully address him as Mr. Zhang.

Yet, here he was, treating Su Ming with such respect.

What kind of incredible fortune had Su Ming stumbled upon?

“Who's that?” Fong Yuemei whispered from the side.

“Mom,” Su Tian replied, swallowing hard. “That's the Vice President of Tianhua Bank I mentioned before.”

“What?” Fong Yuemei's eyes widened in shock.

Zhang Chongyang was a high-profile figure, someone she'd only ever seen on television. Yet there he was, in the flesh, right before her eyes, treating Su Tao and Lee Sumei with such caution. What in the world was happening with this infuriating family? Just days ago, they were scraping by, begging for loans left and right. How had they become so wealthy overnight?

It was clear they were not just affluent but also held significant social standing. Meanwhile, Su Tian and his mother were left standing awkwardly to the side, ignored by everyone. The villagers were enjoying their meal, and the schoolteachers were engaged in merry conversation over drinks. The mother and son duo, however, were isolated in their own solitary shadow.

Even Su Hai, with great care, edged closer to Su Tao.

Chapter 106 - Betrayal of Marriage!

“Second Aunt, Cousin, come join us for a meal.”

Su Ming offered a serene smile.

“What?”

Su Tian paused briefly before responding, “Alright.”

He exchanged a glance with his mother, and together they cautiously shifted to seats adjacent to their original ones.

“Su Tian is your cousin?”

Zhang Chongyang seemed taken aback.

“Yes, he is.”

Su Ming confirmed with a nod.

“So, you two are related?”

Zhang Chongyang chuckled, turning to Su Tian, “Alright, I’ll make sure your loan gets approved as soon as I return.”

“Thank you.”

Su Tian stuttered out his gratitude.

He had been waiting for news on his loan application for over two months, hoping to secure 20 million. With a car, a house, and savings, not to mention his father-in-law's substantial means, the loan should have been straightforward.

Yet, he had heard nothing for so long.

Su Tian had intended to flaunt his success today, but things hadn't gone as planned.

However, upon seeing Su Ming, Zhang Chongyang immediately declared the loan approved.

Just who was his cousin, and why was he becoming more enigmatic by the day?

As Su Tian's thoughts raced, Zhang Chongyang bluntly added, "Tian, your wife's behavior is quite reckless. It's one thing to have had many boyfriends before marriage, but her post-marital antics are unacceptable."

The room fell silent at Zhang Chongyang's words.

Su Tian's face flushed with embarrassment, acutely aware of the eyes now fixed on him.

The villagers were aware of his wife's affluent background when they married. They didn't have a village ceremony but instead celebrated at a five-star hotel in Eastsea City.

Thus, while everyone knew Su Tian was married, the details of his wife's life remained a mystery—until now.

Zhang Chongyang's statement had piqued everyone's curiosity, leaving Su Tian feeling exceedingly uncomfortable.

He wished Vice President Zhang would stop; he had chosen to marry in Eastsea City precisely to avoid such gossip.

But there was no stopping Zhang Chongyang, a man of even higher standing than his father-in-law.

“I really had no idea,” Su Tian said, his face awash with embarrassment.

The people around him caught on immediately after hearing his words. It was clear that Zhang Chongyang's statement was the truth.

“How could you be unaware of something so crucial? I usually stay out of others' affairs, but this involves your wife dipping her fingers into our bank's affairs. She's entangled with several of our bank's directors and managers,” someone pointed out.

Zhang Chongyang's revelation sent shockwaves through the crowd. Truth be told, Zhang was the bank's vice president.

Would he bother with such personal issues? Not at all.

His true thoughts were: What my subordinates do is their own business, as long as it's legal and benefits the bank. Their personal lives are of no concern to us.

Yet, Zhang Chongyang was astute enough to notice right away that Su Tian and Su Ming were at odds. Su Ming was a major client of their bank, owning a piece of downtown land valued at ten billion. And according to President Chen, this land was just a fraction of Su Ming's wealth.

What did that imply? It meant that even a small favor from Su Ming could significantly improve their lives.

Not to mention, the Golden Bamboo Shoots Su Ming had recently sold were still sitting in the vault, awaiting appreciation to sell for a hefty profit.

Zhang Chongyang and President Chen were cut from the same cloth—both slick operators skilled in the art of flattery. They could praise Su Ming while simultaneously shaming someone else.

"I..." Su Tian stammered, wishing the ground would swallow him up.

"Old Sun never disciplined his daughter. She's had a slew of boyfriends since middle school—I'm aware of over fifty. It's surprising she's still so frivolous, even as a married woman," Zhang Chongyang sighed, shaking his head with a tinge of pity. "Being a son-in-law is no easy feat."

Su Tian was on the verge of tears!

Fong Yuemei and Su Hai were equally shocked; this news was completely new to them. Reflecting on it, they now understood why, during Su Tian's wedding, his wife's relatives and friends had given them such meaningful glances.

Initially, they assumed that Su Tian's wife came from wealth and that, as farmers, they were being scorned.

They did manage to open a modest factory in town, and the income was decent.

Yet, when stacked against city dwellers, their earnings paled in comparison.

Upon reflection, the truth dawned on them: their son had been duped.

Unable to contain himself, Su Tian rose to his feet and announced, "Vice President Zhang, ladies and gentlemen, please accept my apologies. I have urgent business to attend to at my company. I must take my leave now."

With that, Su Tian turned on his heel and departed.

Seeing their son exit, Su Tian's parents also grew restless and excused themselves to follow suit.

At the doorway, Su Tian clenched his jaw, seething with anger.

“Son!”

Fong Yuemei called after him.

Yet, she found herself at a loss for words, unsure of what to say next. Knowing her son was upset, she ultimately chose silence. .c(o)m

“And what does it matter if you're wealthy? Is the car you're driving made locally?”

Fong Yuemei glanced at Su Ming's car and let out a scornful laugh.

“Mom!”

Su Tian couldn't contain his frustration. If it weren't for his mother's competitive spirit, he wouldn't be in this humiliating predicament.

“I'll have you know, this isn't just any car. This is a Rolls Royce Phantom, and it's priced at 13 million!”

“How much?”

Fong Yuemei was taken aback.

She hadn't expected the rundown vehicle to be a high-end luxury car worth over 10 million.

“Dad, Mom!”

Su Tian, furrowing his brow, raised his voice, “I've told you before, don't disdain others just because you have it slightly better in the village. Now, we've all lost face!”

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Chapter 107 - Back to the City Center!

Fong Yuemei and Su Hai were witnessing such opulence for the very first time.

Luxury cars with price tags soaring over ten million yuan were beyond their realm of experience.

The sudden appearance of such a vehicle was almost too much for them to process.

They ran a modest factory in town and their son was the general manager, which led them to believe Su Ming might look upon them with envy.

Yet, to their surprise, they discovered that Su Ming and his family were even wealthier and more influential.

“Son, who is Zhang Chongyang?” Fong Yuemei asked tentatively, after a brief pause.

She had a hunch that Zhang Chongyang was connected to the banking industry and held a significant position.

Upon hearing his mother's question, Su Tian inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly.

“Mom, just to give you an idea, even my father-in-law wouldn't dare cross Mr. Zhang,” he explained.

The couple gasped at the revelation. The most influential person they knew was their son's father-in-law, and now this.

They were astounded. How had Lee Sumei and Su Tao, who just days ago were pleading for a loan at their doorstep, become so affluent and commanding?

The trio stood at the doorway, engulfed in awkwardness, and ultimately slinked away.

Meanwhile, the banquet buzzed with energy.

The villagers relished the feast, and with a bit of alcohol, the cheerfulness escalated.

Su Ming was the center of attention, flanked by personalities like Principal Ding and Zhang Chongyang.

It was well past four in the afternoon by the time the guests began to trickle out. After settling the bill, Su Ming departed with his parents.

From that day on, Lee Sumei and Su Tao were met with beaming faces wherever they went. Such is the nature of people—ever pragmatic.

That evening, the family of three sat down to a lavish meal.

The spread was extravagant, thanks to Su Ming reserving ten extra tables of food at the restaurant.

He had packed up the meals from two of those tables, keeping a portion for their dinner.

“Mom, Dad, I'll need to head back tomorrow,” Su Ming announced, setting down his chopsticks and smiling.

“You head on back, we're as fit as fiddles!” Su Tao chuckled, thumping his chest to show his vigor.

“Don't fret over us.”

Lee Sumei beamed with pride, her heart swelled with contentment at her son's accomplishments. “You go on with your work. The money you've left us will more than cover our needs.”

“Alright.”

Su Ming nodded thoughtfully before speaking up, “Mom, Dad, leave the house construction to me. You two should quickly find a place to rent in town for the next few days. I'll get the construction crew started on the house soon.”

“Okay.”

Lee Sumei and Su Tao had no objections.

They understood that if they disagreed, they would only become a source of concern for their son.

After all, Su Ming was a devoted and dutiful child.

The night passed quietly, and by the next morning,

Su Ming bid farewell to his parents and drove back.

By his calculations, the cacti in the field should have been ripe by now.

And considering the construction team's efficiency, the villa and the underground parking lot were likely complete.

Thinking of this, Su Ming's excitement grew, and he pressed the accelerator a little harder.

What was normally a three or four-hour drive took him just two hours.

Having been away for a few days, Su Ming found himself missing the place dearly.

His previous way of life had been so leisurely and satisfying.

It's no wonder that many of the talented ancients enjoyed farming—such a tranquil existence was truly delightful.

“Mr. Su, you've returned at last!”

The construction team's foreman, spotting the approaching car, came over in a rush.

“Thank you for all your hard work.”

Su Ming said with a smile as he stepped out of the car.

“It's our privilege to work for Mr. Su. The villa and parking lot are finished. Please, have a look.”

“Really?”

Su Ming was pleasantly surprised by the construction team's swift progress.

He strolled in, first glancing at the wheat field on his right, lush and verdant, obscuring the cacti's progress from view.

But Su Ming wasn't worried; he headed straight for the villa.

Inside the villa was a spacious courtyard, complete with a swimming pool and a walkway amidst the green lawn.

Adjacent stood the villa itself, its interior decor exuding opulence.

Su Ming examined the details meticulously, finding everything to be impeccable and well-appointed.

Particularly impressive were the two subterranean levels—the construction team had built a vast basement per Su Ming's specifications, boasting substantial storage capabilities.

They had even thoughtfully installed numerous security locks and safes.

Su Ming took a moment to inspect the underground garage. Spanning nearly 2,000 square meters across two levels, the space was impressively large.

Under normal circumstances, constructing a parking facility of this magnitude would take at least several months, if not half a year.

But with financial leverage, the timeline for the project had been significantly reduced.

“Excellent!”

Su Ming expressed his satisfaction.

The construction crew breathed a collective sigh of relief upon hearing his approval.

Curious about Su Ming's background, they had done some digging.

Eventually, they were astounded to learn from President Chen that this parcel of land was merely one asset among many in Su Ming's portfolio, and not even a particularly large one at that.

Their respect for Su Ming grew even further.

“Oh, and there's something I'll need your help with in a few days.”

Su Ming turned to the construction team's leader. “My parents live out in the countryside, and I'd like you to build a villa for them.”

“Consider it done!” the leader responded, thumping his chest with assurance.

“Just a standard two-story villa will do.”

Su Ming pondered for a moment, realizing his parents wouldn't require an overly spacious home.

“Rest assured, we've handled many projects like this before. You can count on us!” the leader quickly added.

Su Ming's comments signaled his deep satisfaction with the work thus far.

His words were not only a nod of approval but also a motivating spur for the team.

Chapter 108 - The Fruit of the Cactus

Su Ming had just finished surveying the garage and villa when he selected a villa plan for his parents. He then gave them a call to arrange a few days for their move. Initially, they had no intention of accepting money, but Su Ming firmly insisted, and they reluctantly took it.

With the supervisor gone, Su Ming excitedly shut the gate and gazed at the land with eager eyes. He couldn't wait to step inside. As he did, the scenery transformed before him, revealing fully-grown cacti.

The cacti were spaced about a meter apart, leaving a perfect walkway in between. Each stood roughly a meter tall, their emerald bodies bristling with sharp spines. But what caught his eye most was the small, vibrant red fruit each cactus bore.

Su Ming had tasted cactus fruit before; the unripe ones were tart, but ripe, they were delightfully sweet. Approaching one of the cacti, he licked his lips in anticipation. With a surge of excitement, he carefully reached out and grasped the fruit, mindful of the thorns. With a firm tug, he plucked it from the plant.

He paused, puzzled. Why hadn't anything happened? Based on his previous experiences, the fruit should have transformed into something like a phone, a watch, a bag, or car keys—something tangible. But in his hand was simply a cactus fruit. It wasn't a precious stone or any valuable item, just a fruit with a subtle, pleasant aroma.

Was this really just an ordinary cactus fruit? It seemed unlikely.

A wave of disappointment washed over Su Ming. He had hoped for the cactus to yield something extraordinary, but it appeared his expectations were unmet. Could there be an issue with the system? Or was it possible that he only reaped extraordinary items when planting specific crops? If he planted ordinary crops, did he only get ordinary fruits, their only remarkable trait being their rapid growth?

With a heavy sigh, Su Ming shook off his gloom. He should appreciate what he had; the land's growth properties were coveted by many and unattainable for most. Bringing the cactus fruit to his nose, he inhaled its fragrance. It was surely delicious, he thought, a small consolation in the face of his letdown.

Su Ming remained composed as he effortlessly split the fruit open with his hands.

Expecting to find luscious red flesh inside, he was surprised to discover two black pills instead.

What were these?

Su Ming paused, momentarily taken aback.

He carefully picked up the pills and gave them a sniff, detecting a medicinal scent.

What?

Pills inside a cactus fruit?

“Special item detected. Congratulations, you have obtained the Body-stretching Pill!”

What in the world?

Body-stretching Pill?

That sounded like poison!

Surely not!

He had never before harvested any special items from this plot of land.

And now, this special item turned out to be the Body-stretching Pill.

Su Ming blinked, taking out one of the pills.

Could this really be poison?

Yet, it didn't have the acrid smell of poison. Instead, it was surprisingly aromatic.

Su Ming was tempted to try the pill.

The System had apparently given him a generous supply of this so-called poison.

But Su Ming had come to a realization—he had been wrong about the System.

The System was indeed formidable; it had just provided him with an extraordinary item this time.

“The Body-stretching Pill can treat bruises, colds, fevers, frequent urination due to kidney deficiency, and cardiovascular diseases. Just one Body-stretching Pill will restore your health! It is also water-soluble!”

Su Ming couldn't help but let out an expletive.

Could the Body-stretching Pill really be that potent?

He began to suspect that the System had done this deliberately.

This was no mere Body-stretching Pill; it was a miraculous life-saving elixir.

“Please be advised, Host, that this medicine is a primary-level remedy. It can cure only minor ailments, not serious illnesses!”

Just then, another notification chimed in Su Ming's mind, leaving him stunned.

It all made sense now.

This medicine had to be beneficial for the body, capable of fortifying muscles and bones, enhancing one's constitution.

Yet, to consider it a panacea was unrealistic.

Still, its potency was impressive, and the System had been clear: what he had was a primary-level medicine, suggesting that in time, he could obtain intermediate or even advanced-level remedies.

While primary-level medicine might not cure serious diseases, advanced-level medicine surely would. But that was for the future. For now, the primary-level medicine was more than sufficient.

Su Ming couldn't contain his burgeoning excitement.

His father had sustained external injuries. If only he had such a pill, his recovery would be swift.

“Fantastic!”

Su Ming was elated.

Previously, the land yielded only valuable crops. Yet for Su Ming, money was merely a number.

Glancing around the field, Su Ming blinked in surprise. The cacti were sparse, but there were still at least a hundred.

Harvesting them all would surely bring in a bounty of goods.

With a grin, Su Ming dashed inside, grabbed a plastic bag, and began picking the cacti, buzzing around like an industrious little bee.

In under two hours, he had neatly organized all the cacti.

Picking them was the easy part; dealing with the leftovers was another story.

The harvest's joy was fleeting; the real agony for Su Ming was the cleanup.

Surveying the land, his face etched with a grimace, Su Ming knew he had no choice but to soldier on.

Thankfully, the shop owner had given him a water jacket, which sped up his work considerably under its protective embrace.

By nightfall, Su Ming had felled every last cactus in the field.

“Successful crop harvest. Earned 450 experience points!”

“Recycled. Congratulations, Host, you've earned an additional 50 experience points!”

Weariness weighed on Su Ming, his back sore and aching. With a deep exhale, he watched as the cacti vanished from the ground.

Though he longed for a break, a sudden thought struck him. He darted over, snatched up a pill, and gulped it down decisively.

The moment the pill was consumed, Su Ming's eyes bulged. A rush of warmth radiated from his abdomen, swiftly erasing any trace of soreness, leaving him invigorated.

Chapter 109 - The Diligent Wang

Energetic as ever, Su Ming drove the farm tractor, giving the land another thorough plowing. Amidst their bustling work, a figure approached the doorway. Clad in a T-shirt, shorts, and flip-flops, the man's presence was unexpected. Who could it be? Su Ming paused, momentarily taken aback. Was this man a thief?

Carrying a bucket, the man casually strolled over to the side of the thatched cottage, turned on the tap, and filled his bucket with water. Just as he was about to water the ground, he froze in his tracks. There, on the tractor, sat a young man gaping at him in astonishment.

“Mr. Su, you've returned?” The young man's voice was laced with surprise as he caught sight of Su Ming. He quickly set the bucket down and jogged over, his anxiety palpable.

“Wang?” Su Ming's surprise was evident. He recognized the man. This was President Chen's subordinate, someone Chen was grooming for greater things.

Su Ming was no fool. He could tell from the young man's actions that he was there to water his crops. That morning, upon his return, Su Ming had noticed the land was immaculate, not a weed in sight. President Chen had certainly been diligent in his absence.

“Wang, what are you up to?” Su Ming inquired.

“Mr. Su, please don't get the wrong idea,” Wang blurted out, worried that Su Ming might suspect him of theft. “I came to lend a hand.”

As expected. Su Ming couldn't help but smile. President Chen's actions were always reassuring.

Truth be told, Wang had been over the moon when he was assigned this task. He was, after all, assisting a land magnate from the city center. Su Ming had the potential to become a billionaire overnight. A single building on this land could yield a fortune in rent.

Wang was aware that this was President Chen's way of giving him an opportunity to connect with Mr. Su.

“I appreciate your efforts,” Su Ming said with a smile, stepping off the tractor to give Wang a reassuring pat on the shoulder. Wang nearly teared up under the weight of that gesture.

“This is no trouble at all. It's my duty!” Wang replied, his earnestness causing Su Ming to chuckle inwardly.

“Why did President Chen send you over?” Su Ming asked, his tone light and teasing, though he likely already knew the answer.

He could see the nervousness in Wang's heart.

Su Ming aimed to alleviate that nervousness and lighten the mood with his approach.

Yet, unexpectedly, Wang grew even more anxious upon hearing this.

He swallowed hard, mopping the sweat from his brow.

Mr. Su was inquiring about his situation, and he knew he had to tread carefully to avoid any issues for President Chen.

Wang weighed his words with care and spoke tentatively, "A few days ago at the meeting, President Chen called me out for criticism. He said I was aiming too high and needed to be more grounded. That's why he assigned me to assist Mr. Su with farming and weeding—to give me a taste of what it means to be down-to-earth and to find true peace of mind."

"Mr. Su, I apologize for encroaching on your land these past few days."

Su Ming's cheeks flushed slightly at the remark.

Wang truly was a product of President Chen's tutelage; their manner of speaking was strikingly similar.

His tone was a dead ringer for President Chen himself.

Initially, Su Ming had requested their help, but it turned out they were eager to serve him instead.

Truth be told, Wang felt a bit sheepish after speaking.

It was clear to everyone that it was merely a pretext.

His actual intent was to make contact with Su Ming.

He vividly recalled President Chen's parting words: "Wang, remember, the task I've entrusted to you this time is of great significance. Keep this in mind—it's more crucial than our entire company, more important than any of your other responsibilities."

Wang knew it was his pride that he couldn't set aside.

He found it challenging to offer flattery in a natural way.

Su Ming couldn't help but be amused, finding President Chen quite the character.

He mused, "President Chen, you're selling yourself short. How could I possibly forget you?"

"Mr. Su, please don't refuse. Otherwise, I'll face trouble when I return."

Su Ming responded with a wry smile.

"Alright then."

Wang's spirits lifted instantly at the response, and he eagerly grabbed the bucket to begin watering.

Truthfully, the land was already immaculate, not a weed in sight. Yet, Wang diligently sought out the tiniest sprouts of weeds emerging from the smallest of crevices.

"Mr. Su, your tractor's looking a bit dirty. I'll give it a wash for you right now."

"Mr. Su, the corridor seems a bit grimy. I'll clean it up for you now."

Su Ming was torn between laughter and tears.

He really felt like reminding Wang that there was no need to scrub the tractor spotless.

But Su Ming knew all too well that if he voiced that thought, Wang would be wracked with guilt.

So, he let him carry on with the tasks.

Wang worked with the fervor of someone on a mission, tidying up everything inside and out, even giving the front door a good wipe-down.

Despite being drenched in sweat from the effort, his eyes sparkled with sheer delight.

Chapter 110 - President Chen Was Sick!

It was well past eight in the evening, and the sky had already darkened. Wang had nearly finished his tasks, yet he showed no signs of quitting. He gazed at Su Ming with fervent enthusiasm, causing Su Ming to feel a shiver of goosebumps. What was Wang up to? Could it be that he had feelings for Su Ming? But Su Ming had it all wrong.

Wang simply wanted to offer a helping hand with Su Ming's laundry and even clean his slippers. Ultimately, Wang abandoned the idea, knowing Su Ming would likely decline. Scanning the area for any remaining chores and finding none, Wang let out a resigned sigh. He was disappointed; he had hoped to stay a bit longer.

“Mr. Su, I'm just about done with my work. This experience has given me a profound appreciation for the value of hard work. I won't be chasing unrealistic dreams anymore...” Wang approached Su Ming, his tone reflective of self-critique.

Su Ming was torn between amusement and exasperation. Wang was quite the actor. It was clear Wang didn't want to leave—such a golden opportunity.

“Oh, by the way, where's President Chen? Has he been away on business?” Su Ming suddenly remembered, expecting that President Chen would have been present under normal circumstances.

Wang paused, momentarily caught off guard. This was the moment he had been waiting for—Su Ming had finally brought it up! Without Su Ming's inquiry, Wang would have struggled to broach the subject.

“Mr. Su, I apologize. President Chen really wanted to come and assist you, but he's been under the weather and is currently in the hospital,” Wang explained with a hint of regret.

“President Chen is ill?” Su Ming was genuinely taken aback. President Chen had been a great help to him.

Concerned, Su Ming pressed for details. "What happened? Why is President Chen hospitalized?"

Wang let out a heavy sigh. "You see, Mr. Su, there was a downpour in the city center the night before last. President Chen was concerned about your wheat crop, so he rushed over and stayed the entire night. By morning, he had caught a severe cold, which has now escalated, possibly into pneumonia. But please, Mr. Su, don't let on that I told you. President Chen made me promise not to speak of it."

Su Ming was momentarily frozen in shock.

The fact that President Chen's illness was somehow connected to him was astonishing.

Did President Chen really brave the rain to protect his wheat?

Su Ming couldn't help but feel a mix of amusement and disbelief, knowing full well that rain posed no threat to wheat.

But President Chen was unaware.

It made sense now why President Chen had sent Wang. Had he been able, President Chen would have surely come himself much earlier.

"So that's what happened," Su Ming murmured, stroking his chin thoughtfully.

Then, something occurred to him.

"Hold on a second, don't leave just yet," he said.

Su Ming got up and went inside the house.

He pulled a cactus fruit from a plastic bag and opened it to reveal two pills.

Grabbing a bottle of mineral water, he poured out a little and dissolved half a pill in it. With a gentle shake, the liquid quickly turned into a dark, inky substance.

Su Ming had his reasons for this concoction: he wanted to keep his secret safe and the disguise was more convincing.

This was the only way he could justify it to Wang.

Once everything was ready, Su Ming stepped back outside and handed the bottle to Wang.

Wang examined the bottle closely. Was this ink?

The liquid was pitch black, and to Wang, it seemed almost toxic.

But this was something Mr. Su had provided, so he refrained from questioning it.

“Wang, could you drop by the hospital and pass on my regards to President Chen? Tell him I'm grateful,” Su Ming instructed. “This bottle contains something very beneficial. Make sure he remembers to drink it.”

President Chen was merely suffering from a cold; this would set him right. Even if it had escalated to pneumonia, there was no cause for concern.

One sip of this concoction and he'd be on the mend in no time.

Even if it didn't heal him instantly, it was bound to make a significant difference.

To others, this remedy was invaluable, but for Su Ming, it was trivial—he had plenty.

Besides, President Chen had fallen ill because of Su Ming's field, so it was only right to show his gratitude.

"Understood," Wang replied, still a bit taken aback.

If President Chen knew the extent of Su Ming's concern, he'd be absolutely delighted.

Yet, there was no escaping the oddity of Su Ming's gift.

It resembled a bottle of ink. Could President Chen truly be expected to drink it?

The packaging was far too basic—it was nothing more than a mineral water bottle.

"It's getting late; you should head back and get some rest," he suggested.

"Okay!" Wang replied quickly, before turning on his heel and departing. Once in his car, Wang blinked and glanced at the ink bottle.

He was convinced that Mr. Su's gesture held a significant meaning, and it was perfectly normal for him not to fully grasp it.

With that thought, he set off for the hospital, but halfway there, he pulled over.

He pondered whether it would seem odd to show up to President Chen with just an ink bottle in hand, claiming it was a gift from Mr. Su.

Wang couldn't shake the feeling that Mr. Su must be preoccupied with an important and pressing matter. Otherwise, why wouldn't a man of Mr. Su's means offer a more substantial gift?

He remembered how Su Ming had once sold those Golden Bamboo Shoots—merely at the going rate for gold, completely disregarding their artistic value.

So it was clear to him that Su Ming wasn't hurting for money. There had to have been an urgent reason for him to have given just an ink bottle.