

Fat Wife 2021

Chapter 2021: Going South

The three of them had not known Qiao Mei for very long and still did not know that Qiao Mei liked to buy properties. Wu Duo did not know why she would say such a thing to him, but he knew that she would not lie to him. She must have her reasons for saying something and he just needed to listen to her.

“Alright, I’ll remember this,” Wu Duo said.

“Is your father still working in my factory?” Qiao Mei asked.

“He’s still there...” Wu Duo replied softly.

“Look at me confidently with your head held high. Don’t be so jittery. I’m not here to hold you accountable, I’m just very glad to see that your family members haven’t given up their jobs because of these issues. Otherwise, I’ll have to worry about your financial situation,” Qiao Mei said casually.

“Sigh... For someone like me, my life is already over. What future do I have?”

Wu Duo said dejectedly.

“Although you can’t continue to attend university, it doesn’t mean you can’t make money. You can start your own business. The news of the ‘open economy’ is all over the newspapers now! Do you read the newspapers at home?” Qiao Mei asked.

The newspapers which Wu Duo had at home were all bought for him by Li Xue and Wang Wei. Sometimes, the two of them were so busy with their studies that they did not have time to take care of him. He was too afraid to step out of his house and did not dare to face the villagers, so he did not really keep abreast of the latest news.

“I’ve read about it in the newspaper, but the articles are really too complicated. I don’t quite understand the whole thing,” Wu Duo said honestly.

The few of them were just ordinary folks and could not get more detailed information than what was published. Qiao Mei also did not tell them about these things in advance. She began to explain to them with regard to the contents of the articles in the newspaper and also gave them more detailed information that they were not aware of.

Wu Duo and the rest focused on taking notes as Qiao Mei spoke. It was as if they had suddenly returned to that summer three years ago.

“Do you understand now?” Qiao Mei asked.

“Yes 1 do!” Wu Duo said firmly.

“Then do you still feel that there’s nothing you can do now?” Qiao Mei asked again.

Wu Duo kept quiet. He really hoped that he could become a big boss himself and get whatever he wanted, just like what Qiao Mei said! However, he was very conscious of the fact that he did not manage to graduate from Capital University. Every time he thought of this, his heart would hurt terribly.

However, he wanted revenge more than anything! He wanted Cui Hua and Xie Jing to pay the price for what they did! As long as Qiao Mei was around, he had someone to back him up! Even if there were another three or four more

Xie Jings, they would definitely not be able to win against Qiao Mei! However, Wu Duo also did not want to trouble Qiao Mei because of his issues. He did not want Qiao Mei to get caught up in the fight between him and Xie Jing.

Wu Duo looked at Qiao Mei and asked anxiously, “I want to do it! Of course I want to make money and be the boss! But more than that, 1 want those two people to die a horrible death! Mentor! Save me! Teach me how to destroy them! You just have to tell me the method! I believe I can defeat them myself!”

Qiao Mei had thought that Wu Duo did not have any intention of taking revenge and intended to let things be. Looking at how spirited Wu Duo looked now, Qiao Mei felt more gratified and asked, "Do you know where they have gone?"

"I only know that they headed to the south, but I don't know the exact address. I asked many people but I couldn't get any information. Furthermore, the two of them had made themselves out to be the victims so everyone was very rude to me and I didn't continue investigating," Wu Duo said dejectedly.

For some inexplicable reason, Qiao Mei felt that it was very likely for Xie Jing and Cui Hua to make it big in the south with their capabilities. They were so scheming that it would be extremely hard for anyone to compete with them.

"You should go to the south too. I have a relative who's doing business there and you can work with him. If you build up a business in the south, you'll be able to find them," Qiao Mei said.

Wu Duo knew very well the importance of money. As long as one had money, one could do anything. As the older generation always said, "money talks".

"I'll do it! I'll go there to start a business now!" Wu Duo said excitedly.

Li Xue and Wang Wei were still studying. There was a high chance that the two of them would go down the usual path and work in either government services or the hospital. Qiao Mei did not intend to let the two of them go into business..

Chapter 2022: Change Surname

Some time ago, Xiang Chen had made a few phone calls to her. He had already graduated from university and was now anxious to start his business. Previously, Qiao Mei had promised him that as long as he went back to finish his studies obediently, she would help him start a business after he graduated. It was time for her to fulfill her promise.

“This is my relative’s phone number. Just look for him when you get there,” Qiao Mei said as she wrote down Xiang Chen’s number on a piece of paper.

Qiao Mei gave Wu Duo 100,000 dollars. This money was meant to be the initial capital for his business with Xiang Chen. As for the exact business they were going to do, they had not decided yet. Qiao Mei asked them to choose the location of their place of business first. Once that was almost done, she would go over to help them plan the rest.

If she wanted to expand her own business in the future, she needed to have affiliated companies all over the country as well as sufficient manpower. She had never lacked rank and file workers, but what she lacked were people who had business acumen and would remain loyal to her.

Most people would change after they got rich. Whether a person had a predatory nature could only be discovered at the end of it all. In the beginning, it would not be obvious to others.

Although Xiang Chen was her business partner, he was still her relative after all. It was always very difficult to manage money issues between relatives. If she gave him too little, it would hurt the harmony between them. If she gave him too much, she would suffer a loss herself. It would be much better to draw a clear line right at the beginning. This was also the reason why she had asked Lu Huai and Deng Fan to register new companies for each business.

Qiao Mei drove all of them to the most luxurious hotel in the capital for a nice meal. The knot in Wu Duo’s heart was already loosened and he felt as if he had been reborn. He also felt much more energetic.

After eating and drinking his fill, Wu Duo packed his things the next day and bade farewell to his parents. He set off to the south to look for Xiang Chen. He could not wait to give Xie Jing and Cui Hua a fatal blow!

Qiao Mei returned to school to settle her graduation procedure. All the teachers in the agriculture faculty advised Qiao Mei to stay on and continue with her studies before ultimately joining the laboratory to contribute to the country’s scientific research.

However, Qiao Mei did not want to be tied down in a small laboratory. Besides, her understanding and knowledge of seeds was obtained through her special energy. There would be trouble if this was discovered.

Qiao Mei rejected the idea by using the excuse that she wanted to start a biological research company in the future. In less than two hours, Qiao Mei successfully completed the graduation procedure.

Tonight, Qiao Mei wanted to have a nice celebration with her family at home. Her four younger siblings were also home for the holidays. It was rare for her entire family to be able to gather together.

Qiao Mei had not seen them for a long time. In the blink of an eye, the children were about to become adults. After Qiao Mei left, Li Gui changed the children's surnames to Qiao. The children had agreed readily to this change.

"Elder Sister! I miss you so much!" Qiao Miao rushed into Qiao Mei's arms excitedly and said sweetly.

Qiao Mei picked up Qiao Miao dotingly and said, "Our Miao Miao has grown up. Elder Sister can barely carry Miao Miao anymore!"

In the past, Li Gui had always reminded them not to get too close to Qiao Mei. For a long period of time, Qiao Mei was either pregnant or in confinement and was quite weak. Children were mischievous by nature and Li Gui was worried that they would hurt Qiao Mei accidentally.

Now that Qiao Mei was in good health, the few of them rushed forward and surrounded her. Qiao Qin and Qiao Miao hugged Qiao Mei tightly, but Qiao Wei and Qiao Chao stood at the side and were too embarrassed to go forward and hug Qiao Mei. The two of them had grown a lot taller and Qiao Wei was even taller than Qiao Mei now.

"Don't the two of you miss me?" Qiao Mei asked with a smile.

"Yes, of course we miss Elder Sister," Qiao Wei said embarrassedly.

"How are you doing in school? Are you confident of getting into university?" Qiao Mei asked.

The four of them looked at Qiao Mei smugly. Qiao Miao replied on behalf of all of them, "How can we embarrass Elder Sister? Each one of us is the top student in our schools! It's been like this for a few years now! No one has ever defeated us!"

"That's right, Elder Sister. You were so famous in the capital back then. As your younger siblings, how can we have bad results?" Qiao Chao said.

Qiao Mei had become famous overnight that year and many students saw her as their idol. There were even people who prayed to Qiao Mei's photo before the examination, hoping that Qiao Mei would bless them to do well..

Chapter 2023: Gathering of Friends

In the beginning, the four children kept a very low profile. They had an unspoken mutual understanding not to tell anyone that Qiao Mei was their sister. However, they did not expect a reporter to manage to find out their identities. Once that happened, they could no longer keep a low profile.

Many of their classmates began to pay a lot of attention to them. Some of their classmates even asked them for items which Qiao Mei had used before, so that they could carry the items around like protective charms. They were willing to pay any price for these things.

Qiao Wei was already 16 years old. He had already passed the military school's initial examination. There was only the interview and final physical examination to go. As long as he could pass these two examinations, he would be able to enter the army for training in two years' time and work towards his goal of being the most outstanding soldier!

Qiao Chao's intelligence and talent had received attention from all walks of life. At the age of 14, Qiao Chao was already in the second year of high school. The syllabus in junior high school was too simple for him and he skipped grades to enter the best high school in the entire capital, one which was affiliated with Capital University.

Qiao Qin was more steady in her progress. Her piano skills had already been certified by a famous teacher in the capital and her piano teacher even wanted her to go overseas to participate in competitions! The teacher wanted Qiao Qin to strive to get a good ranking so that she could go to an outstanding music school overseas to further her studies.

Qiao Miao did even better. Xia He had sent her to learn dancing since she was young and she had a talent for it. She was talent spotted by the most senior dance professor of the art school in the capital and the professor even decided to become Qiao Miao's teacher. Qiao Miao was her only student.

"My younger siblings have all grown up. You guys will definitely do even better than me," Qiao Mei said happily.

Li Gui cooked personally for tonight's banquet. Qiao Mei's usual meals were prepared by the helpers and she had long wanted to have a taste of her mother's cooking. At the dining table, the family chatted about the future. The children all had their own preferred careers in mind, as well as things they wanted to do in the future. Qiao Mei felt very gratified to hear that.

These few kids had been very sensible since they were young. Now that they had grown up, they remained worry-free and their school fees were all covered by scholarships. If the Zhang family saw how far these children had gone, perhaps they would regret what they did.

The next day, Qiao Mei organized a banquet at her house for her friends. Actually, Qiao Mei did not have many friends. After she came to the capital, she had been busy with being pregnant, taking care of her pregnancy, caring for her children, being in confinement and so on. She did not have the time to go out and make friends. There was only Qian'e, who was an enemy turned friend.

The main banquet was scheduled for noon, but the guests arrived at Qiao Mei's house very early. This time, it was not just Qian'e who came by. Zhao Fei and his wife came as well, and Chi Ze and the others also brought their families to Qiao Mei's house.

"Brother Chi! Sister-in-law! I'm so happy that all of you can come!" Qiao Mei said excitedly as she came to the door.

"We must definitely turn up for your event! These are the clothes that your sister-in-law sewed for Xia Yue. They're all made of new fabric! These are foodstuffs from our hometown. They're all natural and

safe for consumption! You can eat them without any worry! You can use the fruits to make some dried fruits for the children! I hear that it's good to let the children use dried fruits to grind their teeth during the period when their baby teeth drop out!" Chi Ze said enthusiastically.

"Look at him. When he heard that you were back, he was so happy that he couldn't even speak clearly. There are still many other nice things inside! I'll go through them with you later," Wang Fang said.

"Sure! Thank you, Brother Chi. Thank you, Sister-in-law!" Qiao Mei said smilingly.

The few wives surrounded Qiao Mei to chit chat with her. The men stood around feeling a little awkward, so they all went to chat with Luo Yu. All of them looked at him enviously.

"Luo Yu, did you have fun overseas this time?" Chi Ze asked.

"It's not too bad. I usually stay by Miss Qiao's side to protect her and the children. I didn't really go anywhere, but the fresh air and environment there are truly quite nice," Luo Yu said truthfully.

"Then are the foreign women good-looking? You've been single for so many years. Isn't there any pretty woman you have your eye on?" Mao Hang asked softly.

"I don't really want to get married. I'm too busy protecting Miss Qiao, so how can I have time to look at beautiful women! Brother Mao, speak softly and don't let Sister-in-law hear you! Otherwise, there'll be trouble when you get home!" Luo Yu said.

"Hmph! I'm just worried about my buddy's happiness! I didn't say anything out of line!" Mao Hang quickly explained..

Chapter 2024: Trouble at the Factory

“We definitely won’t tell on you! Don’t worry! But to be honest, you guys must have made a lot of money there this time. We’re all feeling a little envious,” Chi Ze said with a smile.

“You guys earn more money than us back here in the country! I’m the one who’s envious of you!” Luo Yu said.

“That’s different! Your earnings are in foreign currency, which is a lot of money when you convert it back to our currency! This is so amazing! We’ve never seen foreign currency before!” Chi Ze said.

Luo Yu chatted with the guys about many things in Country M and even gave the leftover foreign currency in his pocket to Chi Ze and the rest as a memento. He also told them about all the interesting and strange things that happened there.

Chi Ze and the other men were considered the managers of the various workshops in Qiao Mei’s factory and their salaries were definitely enough to support their respective families. However, Wang Fang and the rest of the womenfolk did not want to stay at home all the time. Half a year after Qiao Mei left, Qian’e agreed to let them work at the factory.

Qian’e did not give them any special treatment. They all started with the most basic jobs and everyone was treated equally. Whoever could get more work done would become the team leader of the workshop.

Qiao Mei brought them to the children’s room. During this period of time, the children were all at Xu Lan’s place, so the room was left vacant. It was a suitable place for them to sort out the gifts they had brought for the children. They opened up all the gifts and introduced the items to Qiao Mei one by one.

“Can you remember everything? If you can’t, we’ll write it down and leave the instructions with Sister Feng Hua. Then they’ll also know how to use the things,” Wang Fang said.

“Thank you, sisters-in-law. I thank all of you on behalf of the children. Oh right, I haven’t had the chance to ask Qian’e yet. How’s business at the factory recently?” Qiao Mei asked.

Wang Fang and Yang Mei looked at each other. They looked awkward and for a moment, they did not know how to tell Qiao Mei about those nasty things that had happened at the factory.

"We're all family. If you have anything to say, just say it," Qiao Mei said.

"Currently, the seeds business is getting better and better and the braised meat business is also doing very well, but... it's just that the popcorn business is especially bad. We have already closed three or four shops. If this continues, the popcorn business will suffer a huge loss!" Wang Fang said agitatedly.

"Why so? The popcorn business is nothing complicated. We just need to sell it directly in our own shops. How can it do so badly?" Qiao Mei asked in confusion.

"It's all the fault of that woman named Ding Xiang! She doesn't even know anything and yet she keeps ordering us around! She makes everyone suffer so much! Many of our colleagues came to complain to us and many people had even left the factory!" Yang Mei said.

At that time, Qiao Mei did not want Qian'e to tire herself out. To make it easier for Qian'e to manage the factory, she handed over the management of the popcorn business to Zhao Fei. She and Qian'e only received dividends and Zhao Fei and his wife had full authority to run the popcorn business. They had always worked well with Zhao Fei and felt that this good working relationship would continue into the future. She definitely did not expect things to end up like this.

"Alright, I hear you. I'll definitely give everyone an explanation, but before that, I have to clarify things first," Qiao Mei said.

"We'll listen to you," Wang Fang said firmly.

Xu Kang entered the room. She quickly walked to Qiao Mei's side and whispered, "Qian'e is here with Zhao Fei and his wife. They're in the guest room now."

"You guys have a chat first. I'll go take a look at the guests who just came." Qiao Mei told Wang Fang and the others about where she was going and followed Xu Kang to meet Qian'e and the other two people.

Qian'e sat in the master seat in the main hall with a look of disdain. She had always occupied this seat when she was here. Even if Qiao Mei was present, she would still sit in the master seat. She knew very well that Qiao Mei doted on her and she did this knowing she had Qiao Mei's backing.

"Sister Qian'e, Qiao Mei isn't here yet. It's not so good for you to sit there, right?" Ding Xiang said sarcastically.

This was Ding Xiang's second time at Qiao Mei's house. The first time, she had also come with Zhao Fei. At that time, the couple had agreed amiably to take over the factory's popcorn business. Now, they already looked completely different from before.

"Why do you care where I sit?" Qian'e said sulkily.

"You! How can you talk to me like that! I'm older than you after all. You should actually address me as Sister-in-law!" Ding Xiang said arrogantly..

Chapter 2025: Exchange Red Packets

"Pfft!" Qian'e spat fiercely onto the ground and continued, "As if you are worthy!"

Ding Xiang tugged at the corner of Zhao Fei's shirt. She gritted her teeth and whispered to him, "You're my husband! Don't you know how to speak up for me? Are you mute!"

Zhao Fei did not know what to say to Qian'e. This was the person who took pity on them and gave them this job. Now that they had caused such a mess, he was really too ashamed to come and see Qiao Mei. He would not dare to get into a conflict with Qian'e at this moment.

Qiao Mei walked into the room slowly. As she came in, she said, "Oh, are you having an argument? Did I come at the wrong time?"

From the moment she entered the room, she started to size up Ding Xiangs clothes. The first time she met Ding Xiang, the woman looked gentle and refined. Although she was wearing cheap clothes that were patched all over, it was still apparent that she had a gentle temperament. Now, Ding Xiangs clothes were made from expensive fabric and exquisitely tailored. Even the jewelry she wore was very expensive.

On the other hand, Qian'e was dressed in a low-key manner and looked very casual and relaxed. She did not even wear much jewelry. If outsiders saw these two women, they would definitely think that Ding Xiang was the rich factory director. It seemed that a lot had indeed happened in the past two years.

"No, no! We are not arguing! I was just joking with Sister Qian'e," Ding Xiang quickly explained.

Qiao Mei sat in the auxiliary seat next to Qian'e. She smiled at Qian'e and said, "It's been so long since we last met. Why don't you look surprised to see me at all? Don't tell me you haven't missed me at all over the past two years?"

"I miss you so much that I can't even sleep well! But I miss the children even more. The children aren't here today? I have wanted to take a good look at Xia Yue!" Qian'e said, showing a rare smile.

"The children are all with my mother-in-law. I'll bring them back here soon.

If you want to see them, I'll give you a call when they are back," Qiao Mei said.

Before the two of them could catch up properly, Ding Xiang suddenly came over to Qiao Mei and took out the red packets she had already prepared while saying, "What a shame. I'm not aware that the children are not around today, but this is a token from me to the three children. I hope you will accept it."

Qian'e looked at the three bulging red packets and was a little shocked. She did not expect the usually stingy Ding Xiang to be willing to give Qiao Mei's children such substantial red packets. The sun must have risen from the west today! What a rare sight!

Qiao Mei did not reject Ding Xiangs red packets. She put them aside and took out a bigger and thicker red packet from her pocket and handed it to Ding Xiang, saying, "It's only after I come back that I hear

that you and Zhao Fei already have a child. I didn't manage to congratulate you in time since I was overseas. This is my makeup gift to you and I hope you don't mind."

Ding Xiang stole a glance at Qian'e. When she gave birth to her first child, she had wondered how much red packet money Qiao Niei would give her during the baby's one-month-old celebration. She felt that Qian'e would definitely inform Qiao Mei about such big news, but even after the baby turned one year old, they did not receive any news or calls from Qiao Mei.

Ding Xiang had urged Zhao Fei to give Qiao Mei a call, but Zhao Fei would always reject her with all kinds of reasons. After all, it was very expensive to make a long-distance phone call and there was also a need to make an appointment two hours in advance. There were so many things to do in the factory and he did not have time to look for Qiao Mei at all. He also did not want to contact Qiao Mei and get her involved in those troublesome matters in the factory.

"It's fine! It's good enough that you have kept my child in your thoughts! How long will you be staying in the capital this time round? If you are going to be back for an extended period of time, you'll be around when I give birth to this baby!" Ding Xiang said as she touched her round belly.

If Ding Xiang had not mentioned it, Qiao Mei would not have been able to tell that Ding Xiang was pregnant. She had thought that Ding Xiang had only put on weight. It seemed that Zhao Fei was doing quite well if he had the mood to plan for a second child.

"Then I'm looking forward to that day. Why did I hear that there has been trouble at the factory? Have you run into any difficulty on your end?" Qiao Mei probed.

Ding Xiang immediately said, "We're not having any difficulties! We're fine!"

"What a load of crap! Do you dare to tell Qiao Mei everything you've done! How dare you lie to Qiao Mei! I think you're really not interested in this business anymore!" Qian'e shouted angrily..

Chapter 2026: I Will Give You a Chance

“Why are you shouting! What if you harm my son! Do you know how serious the consequences can be! I didn’t do anything! Why should I be afraid!” Ding Xiang said agitatedly.

The real reason why Ding Xiang wanted to have this child was because she had always wanted a son. Ding Xiang’s first child was a girl and this made the Ding family very dissatisfied with her. The family members did not treat her first daughter kindly and her status in the family had become worse off.

For her prenatal checkup, Ding Xiang begged Qian’e to bring her to Xia Fang for a consultation. There were so many doctors around, but she only trusted Xia Fang. Since it was Qian’e who made the introduction, Xia Fang revealed the baby’s gender to Ding Xiang. From then on, Ding Xiang took extra care of herself and became very finicky and fussy. The entire Ding family’s hopes and dreams now rested on her unborn child.

“I must have been blind to agree to bring you to Aunt’s place for a prenatal checkup back then!” Qian’e said angrily.

“Enough! Talk nicely!” Qiao Mei grabbed Qian’e by the hand and whispered,

“Control your emotions. Don’t let her have a chance to faint here.”

Qian’e suppressed her anger and nodded. She gritted her teeth and said, “So many things have happened to the popcorn business. Now that Qiao Mei is back, you should give us an explanation.”

“It’s inevitable that one will face both profits and losses when doing business. You can’t reprimand us for making a loss after Zhao Fei and I took over the business. We’ve done our best over the years! We have never slacked off at all!” Ding Xiang complained.

Qiao Mei did not pay any attention to Ding Xiang and only stared at Zhao Fei. They had been business partners for many years and had worked hard together since before the factory was built. Qiao Mei had also helped him a lot with his problems in the Zhao family village. When Zhao Fei got married, it was Li Gui who gave him the money for the wedding. Qiao Mei did not believe that Zhao Fei would remain indifferent after having gone through all this with them.

“Zhao Fei, is everything your wife said true?” Qiao Mei asked.

She was giving Zhao Fei a chance to come clean. As long as Zhao Fei told them the whole story, Qiao Mei was willing to forgive them this time. After all, to Qiao Mei, this was only a part of the factory's business. It did not matter to her who took charge of the popcorn business. However, it meant everything to Zhao Fei's family.

Zhao Fei's expression was dark and hard to read. Just as he was about to come clean and tell Qiao Mei the truth, Ding Xiang immediately stood up and said, "I have the final say in our family! Zhao Fei listens to me! Sister Qiao, we treat the factory like our own house! In the two years that you were not around, we did our best for you. What did we do wrong?"

Qian'e could not stand Ding Xiang's nonsense anymore. She stood up, pointed at both Ding Xiang and Zhao Fei and roared, "What do you mean by you did your best! It's obvious that you're scheming to destroy the factory! Your relatives sold inferior products in private and passed them off as the factory's products! Otherwise, would we have lost so much money and have to close down several shops!"

Qiao Mei sighed in disappointment and said, "Tell me about all this."

Before Qiao Mei headed overseas, she had left behind two years' worth of corn seeds in the warehouse. These corn seeds were handed over to her own team for safekeeping in the warehouse. She had also personally chosen the piece of land to grow the corn. She even reached an agreement with the relevant companies to ensure a constant supply of butter to the factory. It was only after everything was settled that Qiao Mei felt at ease to leave the capital and head to Country M.

However, half a year after Qiao Mei left, a large group of people suddenly came to the factory. They stood at the main entrance with copies of food poisoning diagnosis reports from the hospital and scolded the factory for producing "poison"!

Apparently, there were many people who had food poisoning after eating the popcorn produced by the factory. Among the victims, there were not only adults but also children! Some children even almost died! If not for the fact that Qiao Mei had left behind a lot of medicinal wine, some of the victims might have died.

Qian'e had wanted to tell Qiao Mei about this matter and ask her to come back and make a decision. However, Li Gui was worried that it would be too tedious for Qiao Mei to fly back from overseas.

Moreover, she did not want Qiao Mei to worry about such an exhausting issue, so they did not inform her at the first instance.

Given that it was a matter of life and death, Qian'e did not have the time to do a full investigation. She compensated 3,000 dollars to each adult and 5,000 dollars to each child who got food poisoning after eating the popcorn.

Furthermore, the factory undertook to cover the medical expenses for the children if any of them had any further discomfort within one year after the diagnosis..

Chapter 2027: Theft

Qian'e spent a lot of money to settle and suppress this matter. However, the reputation of the factory's popcorn was already tarnished and business deteriorated day by day.

When this issue was no longer in the limelight, Qian'e finally had time to investigate the source of the matter. She did not expect the problem to lie with Ding Xiang!

"Tell us! How did the recipe for the popcorn get leaked! How did your brothers know how our factory made the popcorn! If you don't make things clear! I'll send you to the police station! On account that we are old friends with Zhao Fei, you'd better tell us the truth!" Qian'e said angrily.

"I didn't leak the recipe! My brothers figured it out themselves! What can I do!" Ding Xiang said as she pretended to be aggrieved.

What Ding Xiang did was just to demonstrate how to make popcorn in front of them. As for how much they understood and learnt, it was up to them. She did not consider this a leak of information.

"Nonsense!" Qian'e roared.

Their products were already being sold widely in the country, but they also had to keep launching new products, otherwise consumers would start to lose interest. Once that happened and sales decreased over time, they would earn less money than before. If their competitors made a move to take over their market share during such a time, that could lead to a challenging situation. Qian'e would never allow such a thing to happen.

She specially set up a "Creative Department" and recruited many experts with extensive culinary knowledge to come to the factory to develop new flavors.

It was only then that Qian'e realized that the taste of the products in the factory had never been dependent on the ratio of the seasonings, but on the quality of the base ingredients. What was most important was the ingredients and not the ratio.

Ding Xiang and her brothers also realized the same thing. They started with white sugar and corn, but the taste of the popcorn they made was very different from the taste of the popcorn produced by Qiao Mei's factory. If they continued to make it their way, they would not be able to make any money at all. Hence, they spent a lot of money to buy butter but of poorer quality. Although it seemed similar, the taste of the popcorn was still far from the real thing.

Even though they wanted to buy the same type of butter as Qiao Mei, they did not have that much money. The cost of good butter was too high and a small workshop like theirs could not afford it at all.

The warehouse where the seasonings and seeds were kept had always been guarded by the security team hired by Qian'e. Nothing had ever gone wrong all these years. When the popcorn business was handed over to Ding Xiang and Zhao Fei, Qian'e left all the decisions to them and the guards started to take instructions from the couple.

Just before the new year, Ding Xiang suddenly came to the factory and told the guards at the door that they could go home for the festivities. She said that she and Zhao Fei would take over the job tonight.

Since Ding Xiang was their boss, the guards did not raise any objections. Everyone thought that she was such a rare and nice boss and they thought even more highly of her. That day, all the guards left the factory feeling satisfied, but that very night, the seasonings in the warehouse disappeared without a trace.

By the time Qian'e and the others made their way back to the factory, the entire warehouse was empty and they only saw Ding Xiang lying unconscious on the floor. Blood was still flowing out from the back of Ding Xiang's head and it scared Qian'e so much that she took out her portion of medicinal wine to save Ding Xiang. When Qian'e thought about that incident now, she felt that she had wasted such good medicinal wine!

"I thought that you were really attacked by thieves that day, but it's clear to me now! It was actually all part of your arrangements!" Qian'e said.

"I was really knocked unconscious! Why would I endanger my own life! Those people must have been targeting me for a long time! They came to steal things while I was guarding the place alone!" Ding Xiang said.

"Hmph, why are you alone when there are so many warehouses to guard! Do you dare to say that you did not purposely give the guards the night off? This is what makes you such a vicious woman. You can even be so ruthless to yourself, what more to us," Qian'e said mockingly.

That night, Ding Xiang had asked her brothers to enter Qiao Mei's warehouse to take all the butter. They did not take Qiao Mei's corn seeds because firstly, it would take time for the seeds to grow and they did not have that much time. Secondly, they had all grown up in the city and did not know how to farm. The seeds were useless to them..

Chapter 2028: Let's Dissolve Our Partnership

"We lost all the butter and the butter factory was unable to provide us with more supplies in time. We had to halt production, causing many of our shops to have to close, leading to heavy losses. We'll be lucky if we don't make a loss this year!" Qian'e lamented.

Qiao Mei looked at Ding Xiang silently and did not say anything. She was thinking about what Qian'e had just said and trying to estimate how much money she had lost. She could not let such a large sum of money be unaccounted for and was considering how to make Ding Xiang and the others pay for the loss.

“We really didn’t do it. We’re the victims too! What good will it do us if my brothers snatch our business? There’s no need for us to do this!” Ding Xiang said.

“Of course it’s so that your Ding family can take over the popcorn business! Fine! Even if we put this issue aside, why didn’t you ask your brothers to step up and take responsibility when the food poisoning incident happened and pushed all the blame to the factory instead?” Qian’e questioned.

“That... that’s because those customers assumed that they bought our factory’s products! That’s their own assumption and it’s not something that we can control!” Ding Xiang argued.

“Do you think I’m a fool? Back then, you went around bragging to everyone that the brand name of our factory’s popcorn was ‘Campus Popcorn’. After that, your brothers also sold their products under this brand name. As time passed, everyone naturally thought that they were our partners!” Qian’e said.

“Wait a minute, what ‘Campus Popcorn’? Why is there a brand name?” Qiao Mei asked.

As most of their shops and vendors were located near to schools, Ding Xiang instructed the staff to paste a logo indicating “Campus Popcorn” on the packaging and even went around publicizing this brand.

When Qiao Mei’s factory commenced operations, they did not manage to receive the food permit for the popcorn. Qiao Mei had instructed everyone not to come up with any brand name for it, not even a nickname. She understood the principle that the winds would always howl around the highest peaks. Given that she had made a lot of money in the capital, there must be many people who disliked her. She was doing this so as to prevent any enemies from using the issue as a chance to take revenge.

“All your Ding family members are really heartless! You stole so much butter but you were unable to use it all and kept them beyond the shelf life. The corn you used was also of inferior quality! So many people fell sick! There were even children among them! What if it’s your own child who eats the poisonous popcorn and the child dies! Have you thought about the consequences of doing all this!” Qian’e said.

Now that there was solid evidence, Qiao Mei looked at Ding Xiang and Zhao Fei coldly. Qiao Mei could accept Ding Xiang and the rest for being money-mad. At most, she would just send them off with some money. However, now that it involved causing harm to other people’s lives, it was no longer child’s play.

“You should give me an explanation for this,” Qiao Mei said sharply.

“I’m sorry... We didn’t do it on purpose... I have old folks and young children to take care of at home! It’s not easy for me either! I’m really sorry, please don’t call the police...” Ding Xiang said fearfully.

Ding Xiang completely believed that Qiao Mei had the means and connections to send her and the other Ding family members to jail. She was simply jealous of Qiao Mei’s life and did not understand why Qiao Mei could make so much money every day without needing to do anything and could even go overseas to study. Qiao Mei’s family members and children could even live in such a luxurious house.

Why could Qiao Mei have all these, but not her? That was why she wanted to steal the popcorn business. She did not expect that something so serious would happen. By now, everything had completely deviated from what she expected.

Qiao Mei looked at Zhao Fei and asked, “What about you? Aren’t you going to give me an explanation?”

“I’m sorry. I take responsibility for all of this as well,” Zhao Fei said after a long silence.

“Alright then. I want to take back the popcorn business and the two of you will have to pay for all the factory’s losses. Our company’s finance department will calculate the exact amount and let you know,” Qiao Mei said.

“No! You can’t dissolve our partnership! How can you kick us to the curb like we’ve outlived our usefulness! Even if we haven’t made any major contributions, we have worked hard! You can’t treat me this way! You already gave us the popcorn business back then! What right do you have to take it back!” Ding Xiang looked at Qiao Mei and shouted at her like a lunatic.

“If you have time, you should read more. Didn’t you read the agreement we signed? I only allow you to make most of the business decisions. The business still belongs to me. Moreover, Qian’e and I are the largest shareholders in the business. The two of us can decide on whether you stay or leave,” Qiao Mei said..

Ding Xiang had always been sore about the fact that she did not go to school. She was the eldest child in her family and had many younger siblings. The family could only afford to send two kids to school. Ding Xiang's parents sacrificed her chance in order to let their sons have an education. They told

her to go to work and earn money so that she could contribute to her younger brothers' school fees.

Both Qiao Mei and Qian'e were highly educated and Ding Xiang had always been very jealous of them. She was jealous that Qian'e could gain Qiao Mei's trust and become the factory director. If she had known Qiao Mei a few years earlier than Qian'e, she might have become the factory director!

She always complained how the world was unfair and that the people around her were not nice to her. She was filled with resentment all the time. Even the ghosts of people who died in vain did not have as much resentment as her!

"Zhao Fei! Say something! Are we going to let them decide on our lives! You still have a daughter and a son to take care of! Say something!" Ding Xiang looked at Zhao Fei and yelled at him exasperatedly.

The truth was that Ding Xiang had an idea of the costs involved. She had already done a rough calculation of how much compensation Qian'e had paid out in order to settle this matter back then. It was at least 50,000 dollars! This was just the amount for the compensation and did not include the costs of any subsequent medical treatment nor the factory's losses.

By right, in the two years that Qiao Mei had gone overseas to study, Zhao Fei's family should have done well enough to save up at least 100,000 dollars. However, Ding Xiang's brothers had taken over Zhao Fei's house and even acted like tyrants there. All they did was ask Zhao Fei for money. It did not take long for the couple to spend almost all their money.

Zhao Fei lowered his head in silence. Ding Xiang quickly turned around to beg Qiao Mei and said pitifully, "Sister Qiao Mei, we were just muddle-headed for a moment! Can you not dissolve our partnership! We're still counting on this business to bring up our children! Think about my children. You know, there's no one to take care of my child at home!"

"Nonsense! Your family hired two helpers! The helpers were told that they only needed to take care of the children, but your entire family kept ordering them around, so the helpers resigned in a fit of anger. After that, your family members fought among themselves to be the one to take care of the children. Today is just one of those rare days when all of them are not at home, so there's no need for you to make it sound as if it's a daily affair! Don't think that we don't know anything!" Qian'e said.

"But... but this baby is going to be born soon! You can't force us into a dead end!" Ding Xiang said.

"What do all these things have to do with us? I'm only asking you to pay for the factory's losses caused by that incident. If you want to continue working together with me, I'm fine with it. Then I also want you to pay for the losses you incurred," Qiao Mei said with a smile.

That would be nearly a million dollars in total! Ding Xiang did not have that much money to return to Qiao Mei. She would not be able to raise the money even if she sold everything in her workshop!

"Qiao Mei, we'll think of a way to repay this sum of money. Let's part ways." After saying that, Zhao Fei grabbed Ding Xiang and prepared to leave Qiao Mei's house without looking back.

Qian'e suddenly stood up and opened the three red packets which Ding Xiang had given Qiao Mei. They were all filled with 50 cents and one dollar bills. It was not clear if there was even a total of 150 dollars in the three red packets!

"Stop! Since we're going to part ways, then let's return the money to each other," Qian'e said to Ding Xiang as she held up three red packets.

Ding Xiang grabbed her pocket tightly. When she took the red packet just now, she already gauged how thick it was. It was definitely full of 100-dollar bills! And there were more than just a few inside!

"These are gifts! There's no reason for us to give them back to each other!" Ding Xiang said.

"It's so obvious what you're thinking! Don't force me to expose your intentions in front of so many people! Are you going to give it to me or not? If not, don't blame me for reaching out to snatch it back!" Qian'e threatened.

"I'm a pregnant woman! If you hurt me! I'll make sure you pay the price for it!" Ding Xiang said aggressively.

Qian'e did not care about that at all. She just reached out to snatch the red packet from Ding Xiang's pocket. Zhao Fei held Ding Xiang tightly to protect her and the child, as well as to create a window of opportunity for Qian'e. She took back Qiao Mei's red packet and stuffed the other three red packets into Ding Xiang's pocket as she said, "Make sure you look closely. Don't blame us later and say that you have lost something! It's none of our business once you walk out of this door! Sister Xu! Send the guests off!" Qian'e said domineeringly..

Chapter 2030: Register the Brand

On the way out, Ding Xiang kept hitting and cursing Zhao Fei. He just endured everything silently and did not retaliate. Qiao Mei's heart ached when she saw this. She had wanted to use the popcorn business to thank Zhao Fei for saving Li Gui's life, but now it seemed that the decision she made back then might be a wrong one.

"You're really something. You actually gave them a red packet with 3,000 dollars inside! Don't you know the maximum amount of money a red packet can hold? It's almost bursting!" Qian'e said as she counted the money in the red packet.

"How do you know that there's something wrong with the red packets she gave me?" Qiao Mei asked.

Qian'e sat back down and said smugly, "How can someone like her bear to give you such generous red packets! Look at the thickness of those red packets! If it's really 100-dollar bills inside, those three red packets would contain more than 10,000 dollars! She can't even bear to spend 100 dollars, so it's impossible for her to give you so much."

Qiao Mei was not interested in Ding Xiang's three red packets at all, which was why she did not bother to use her X-ray vision to look at the amounts inside. She was only thinking about Zhao Fei's issue.

"So Zhao Fei has allowed them to do whatever they want for so many years?" Qiao Mei asked.

“In my opinion, he just doesn’t care about what they do. However, even if he does, there’s also nothing he can do about it. During the past two years, Ding Xiang was pregnant, gave birth and then went through confinement. No matter what she did, he didn’t dare to stand up to her. He’s afraid that it’ll affect her health. In addition, her brothers are all big and burly. He won’t be able to fight back if all of them beat him up together,” Qian’e said.

“With Zhao Fei’s intelligence, it’s very easy for him to give them the runaround. There’s probably something else that we don’t know about. Let’s ignore them. When you return to the factory, remember to print out all the invoices and receipts for that period of time and tabulate the total,” Qiao Mei said.

Perhaps it was because Ding Xiangs father had taken Zhao Fei in despite all the hardships back then and Zhao Fei wanted to repay Ding Xiangs father for his kindness. However, Qiao Mei was indebted to Zhao Fei, not the Ding family. The Ding family’s behavior was really too atrocious. Qiao Mei would definitely make them spit out whatever they had taken from her and she would not let them keep anything!

“Our popcorn business is gradually getting on track again, but how are we going to deal with those imitation popcorn from the Ding family? If they sell it again to take revenge on us, our factory’s reputation will be completely ruined,” Qian’e said.

“We can apply for a patent and register our brand,” Qiao Mei said.

“What is that?” Qian’e asked curiously.

In the past, private businesses were not allowed. Now that the economy had already opened up, anyone could run a small business or workshop. In modern times, when such small-time merchants came up with brand names for their products, they would go to the Industrial and Commercial Bureau to register their brand. After that, the brand would belong to them exclusively. If someone copied their product, then that copycat would have to pay a huge amount of compensation.

“I still have to discuss this with Eldest Brother. I’m not sure if my plan will work,” Qiao Mei said.

“It will be great if it works! Then we don’t have to worry about any more despicable people setting us up!” Qian’e said.

“Alright, don’t be angry anymore. I feel that you look more haggard nowadays. Don’t you drink my medicinal wine regularly?” Qiao Mei asked.

“My respected elder, you don’t know how busy we are at the factory during this period of time. Ever since Elder Brother Xia set up the collaboration between the factory and the government, we can’t cope with the orders anymore. The order list is already filled up for the next three years!” Qian’e said agitatedly.

Qiao Mei was a little shocked. She did not expect Xia Wen to have done so many things quietly. The factory was now at its peak and even the famous He family would have to give up their position in the business world soon. At the thought of He Ning, Qiao Mei remembered the issue of Auntie Cui in Country M. She must find some time to settle this matter with He Ning!

It was soon mealtime and everyone sat together happily. They were all filled with anticipation for the future and were very grateful to Qiao Mei for helping them earn money and making their lives so much better.

A few of the men could even go home to get married after they saved enough money! Otherwise, based on their previous situations, those men would have to stay single for the rest of their lives!

“Qiao Mei! Next time you go to that... Country M, can you bring me along too! I also want to go out and see the world!” Chi Ze said..