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Chapter 31: Chapter 31: The Crime of Gender 31

In the same village, where you see each other every day, if there's an issue, everyone gives a bit of face. Especially in a life-and-death matter like this, everyone is very understanding and agreed to let Qin Shuangshuang use the cart first, valuing life above all.

Two villagers who had just helped put out a fire curiously asked Qin Shuangshuang, "Could it be your Eldest Lady who set the house on fire? But your family didn't suffer any big loss, so why is the beating so severe?"

Qin Shuangshuang resented Mr. Qin and Little Chen for their harshness, and also resented Qin the Third for shirking responsibility and causing trouble. Relying on her young age, she thoughtlessly replied without hiding the family's shame, "It wasn't Eldest Sister who set the fire, it was Si Lang and Wulang who did it.

Third Uncle blamed Eldest Sister for not watching Si Lang and Wulang, which led them to set the house on fire. In anger, Big Uncle kicked Eldest Sister flying, and Big Aunt even wanted to beat Eldest Sister to death!

Eldest Sister coughed up blood and is now unconscious. I have no money and brought some smoked meat to use as a consultation fee to invite a doctor. I don't know if the doctor will come." As she spoke, Qin Shuangshuang wiped her tears with her small hands, looking pitiful and worried!

After Qin Shuangshuang finished speaking, Old He had already hitched up the cart. He returned the smoked meat to Qin Shuangshuang and said cheerfully, "Since it's a matter of life and death, I should pull you this time. Keep the meat to pay the doctor, get on quickly, I'll take you to fetch the doctor. Don't underestimate my ox cart; it runs quite fast, so hold on tight."

Old He, though not of the Qin surname, got along well in this village full of Qin family members, thanks to his straightforward and generous nature!

Qin Shuangshuang quickly thanked him and got on the cart. Although Old He returned the meat to her, she remembered this favor and planned to repay it in the future.

Old He flicked his whip in the air, making a crisp sound, and said to the old ox pulling the cart, "Hey, the young girl is waiting to fetch a doctor to save a life. Give it your all and hurry up today!"

The old ox, well-fed and robust by Old He, seemed to understand him, lifted its head, and mooed, as if responding. It then scraped the ground with its hooves and started pulling the cart at a surprisingly fast pace!

Seeing Qin Shuangshuang leaving with the smoked meat on the cart, the waiting villagers, bored, began to gossip.

"This household has such a bizarre family culture. The grandma almost chopped her granddaughter to death, and the parents are ready to beat their daughter to death. And these two children haven't even done anything wrong! The Eldest Lady and Second Lady are truly pitiful, suffering such abuse at a young age!"

A villager shook his head, sighing over the recent events in the Qin family. It was rare to see such heartless parents and grandmother in this world.

"Ultimately, it's all due to the preference for boys over girls. The whole family disregards girls and abuses them recklessly. Qin the Third likes causing trouble all day. All the neighbors near him in the village know about it. An adult man causing trouble at home every day and bullying his sister-in-law, what an achievement!"

The speaker, though favoring boys over girls, did not dislike girls and treated his daughters well.

"With this family, it's best to keep your distance, never get too close, and definitely don't become relatives!"

After some gossip, everyone unanimously concluded not to closely associate or form family ties with such a family. Mr. Qin was unaware that the thing he feared most had already happened. In the future, it would be difficult for the Qin family's grandchildren to find brides!

When Qin Shuangshuang arrived in town by ox cart at the doctor who treated her last time, he was performing acupuncture on a patient.

The doctor, remembering Qin Shuangshuang, was surprised to see her carrying a lot of smoked meat and smiled, "Why have you come to me so late, little girl? Is there something wrong with your health? Why is there no adult with you?"

Qin Shuangshuang set down the smoked meat and anxiously said, "Doctor Grandpa, I'm here for your help. My Eldest Sister was kicked by Big Uncle and coughed up blood. She's still unconscious, and I have no money, so I brought some meat as a consultation fee. Doctor Grandpa, please come with me!"

The doctor, a man of medical ethics, immediately said upon hearing it was to save a life, "Don't worry, I'll come with you right away!" He hurriedly called the store's assistant for his medical kit and instructed someone to fetch the young proprietor from the back to watch the acupuncture patient.

Nearby patients, hearing it was a life-or-death matter, graciously allowed the doctor to leave with Qin Shuangshuang, including the one being given acupuncture.

When Qin Shuangshuang brought the doctor home, Mrs. Bai was anxiously watching over the Eldest Lady. Upon seeing him, she said, "The Eldest Lady coughed up blood twice more and remains unconscious. Please take a look, is she alright?"

The doctor hurried to the bedside, took the Eldest Lady's pulse, then pried open her mouth to examine carefully before saying, "Indeed, her internal organs are injured, but not too serious and will not threaten her life. I will prescribe medicine for her to take for a month and then carefully nourish her health for half a year, and she will recover. Remember, during her recovery, she should not work, and her diet should include at least one meal with meat every three to four days. If not meat, then at least two eggs to avoid any future issues!"

In fact, what the doctor suggested—having meat every three to four days—could only barely suffice for maintaining health. Ideally, like Qin Shuangshuang during her recovery, one should have meat every day. However, the doctor also knew that farmer families rarely ate meat every day, often only a few times a year.

Qin Shuangshuang and Mrs. Bai carefully noted the doctor's instructions in their hearts, with Qin Shuangshuang determined to ensure the Eldest Lady's full recovery, never letting her work before she healed.

"Doctor, is the Eldest Lady really alright? She was coughing up so much blood before; it looked really frightening!" Mrs. Bai still had her concerns.

The doctor stroked his white goatee and smiled, "No worries. The Eldest Lady coughed up blood because when she was kicked, she bit the root of her tongue. As she was unconscious, the blood flowed into her stomach. The blood's smell naturally causes vomiting. Her internal organs weren't ruptured; there's nothing to worry about."

After examining her and leaving a prescription, the doctor was ready to go. When Qin Shuangshuang sent him back to the village entrance, she happened to meet Old He returning after taking the villagers to town. Seeing the doctor, Old He enthusiastically drove the ox cart to give the doctor a ride, for which Qin Shuangshuang thanked him profusely.

When Qin Shuangshuang returned, she saw the lights in the main house were still on, with several shadows flickering against the window paper. Thinking for a moment, she

turned her steps toward the main house, planning to ask for the Eldest Lady's medical expenses.

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As soon as Qin Shuangshuang entered the room, she saw Mr. Qin, Old Chen, Little Chen, Mr. Qin, Qin Laoer, and Qin the Third all inside. To her surprise, Mrs. Fang, who always revolved around Old Chen and never disobeyed her, was not present.

Seeing Qin Shuangshuang come in, everyone in the room felt a headache and collectively remained silent, resolute not to speak first, as every encounter with Qin Shuangshuang ended with no one in the family gaining an advantage.

Just like last time, when Old Chen suddenly went mad and slashed Qin Shuangshuang, appearing to have the upper hand, only to end up pounding rice for a year, especially now that Little Chen was also implicated!

Qin Shuangshuang didn't care what these people thought. She first greeted everyone and then directly spoke to Mr. Qin, "Uncle, that kick of yours was vicious. The doctor has already confirmed it; Big Sister's body is ruined. She won't be able to work anymore and will need good food and drink to recuperate.

What a stern father you must be, to discipline your child so harshly. But what I don't understand is, what crime did Big Sister commit to deserve such a harsh lesson from you?"

Mr. Qin's face turned unpleasant at the sarcasm in Qin Shuangshuang's words. He frowned and kept his mouth shut. He knew Qin Shuangshuang was eloquent and that he couldn't win against her, so he planned to remain silent no matter what Qin Shuangshuang said.

Mr. Qin was determined that Qin Shuangshuang, being younger, could only say a few harsh words and couldn't really do anything to him!

Mr. Qin was smart, but his wife Little Chen, who had suffered because of Qin Shuangshuang today, wasn't thinking clearly and couldn't help but retort, "Second Lady, your words are ridiculous. Big Sister is my child; her life was given by me. As parents, hitting a couple of times doesn't mean we're heartless!"

Qin Shuangshuang was amused and angered by Little Chen's argument. "Auntie, your words are truly wise. I must spread them within ten miles and eight villages so more people can know your reasoning.

Just saying it's Uncle and Auntie's famous words: A child you gave birth to, hitting whenever you want, even when there's no mistake, or you're in a bad mood, you can

first kick them half to death! After all, you gave them life; you can take it back whenever you want!

I'm just not sure if others think the same way, if those with daughters dare to marry them to such ruthless in-laws, who, when upset, could guiltlessly beat their own daughters to death!"

"You..."

Little Chen was dizzy with anger from Qin Shuangshuang's long speech, "What nonsense are you talking about! When did I ever say such things!"

"When! Didn't you just say this! How come you don't admit it the next moment? Moreover, these aren't just words; Uncle has already exemplified the truth of your words with his actions. The Eldest Lady is evidence of that. Don't worry, I'll spread your words; there will be people who believe it! After all, Uncle is one who prefers doing over saying things!"

Little Chen was flushed with anger and anxiety by Qin Shuangshuang. If these words spread, she couldn't live respectfully anymore. Being an unfilial child was scorned, but being an unkind mother would also be despised, as people believed maternal love was the heaviest, surpassing paternal love after ten months of pregnancy.

Little Chen, blocked from arguing by Qin Shuangshuang, couldn't help but look pleadingly at the people in the room. Old Chen and Mr. Qin both covered their heads with headaches and ignored Little Chen's pleas, as both were troubled by Qin Shuangshuang's sharpness.

Little Chen then looked at Qin the Third, who always sided with her and stirred trouble, but he was pretending to nap now. He dared not provoke Qin Shuangshuang. As for Qin Laoer, he was like a wooden person, invisible!

Finally, Mr. Qin held back his anger and said directly to Qin Shuangshuang, "Enough, there's no need to ridicule your Auntie more. Tell me, what do you want?"

Qin Shuangshuang clapped her hands and laughed, "Uncle, you're truly straightforward. Actually, I'm very angry about this today, so angry that I want to go to the village chief to seek justice and let him decide. But family scandals shouldn't be exposed, so if we can resolve it peacefully, that's best.

The Eldest Lady is your daughter, Uncle, and she did nothing wrong, yet got beaten up by you. So, should you cover her medical expenses? It's not much, just forty days of medicinal costs, five taels of silver, I think Uncle surely won't be stingy with such silver coins!"

As soon as Qin Shuangshuang said this, even before Mr. Qin could speak, Little Chen was agitated and raised her voice, "What! Five taels of silver! Why don't you go rob! There's no money, say what you want, see if anyone in the village believes a child's words!"

Qin Shuangshuang ignored Little Chen and continued to stare at Mr. Qin, "Uncle, you're a smart person. Whether people believe me, you should know. Think carefully; whether five taels of silver are more important, or is your reputation and Da Lang and Third Lang's future wedding prospects more crucial."

Mr. Qin gritted his teeth, the muscles on his cheeks twitched, and finally, he ruthlessly said to Little Chen, "Give the money!"

"What?"

Little Chen looked at Mr. Qin incredulously, thinking she had misheard.

"I said, give the money quickly! Are you deaf or just can't understand!" Mr. Qin shouted irritably at Little Chen, jolting her into shock.

Little Chen was unwilling to give the money. The Qin Family hadn't split their possessions; all the money from farming, pig farming, and chicken raising was managed by Mr. Qin and Old Chen. Only the money Mr. Qin earned from odd jobs in the county town could be kept!

Odd jobs weren't frequent; throughout a year, Mr. Qin could barely save two or three taels of silver. Five taels meant saving for at least two years! Little Chen was reluctant to fork out such a large sum all at once, so her actions were slow and unwilling.

Qin Shuangshuang glanced askance at Mr. Qin, chuckling lightly, "It seems you're not qualified as a father; your man's dignity isn't impressive either, Uncle. Auntie is treating your words as nothing. Just be quick, my patience isn't great. I might just forgo the money, and go around talking negative things, just to feel better!"

Mr. Qin gritted his teeth again, eyes reddening with anger as he fiercely glared at the still dilly-dallying Little Chen. His large fan-like hand clenched into a fist. Mr. Qin wasn't one to refrain from hitting his wife. In the village, few men didn't hit their wives, although Mr. Qin didn't often do it.

Little Chen had been beaten before, and Mr. Qin's hand was never light; it was excruciatingly painful. Seeing Mr. Qin's current expression startled Little Chen because this was how he always looked before he hit her!

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Little Chen was very afraid of Mr. Qin. Although she was completely unwilling to give the money, she had no choice but to glare fiercely at Qin Shuangshuang and go to her room to fetch five taels of silver, which she handed to Qin Shuangshuang.

Qin Shuangshuang took the money and didn't stay in the main house any longer. She left and returned to her own room. Qin Shuangshuang disliked the people in this house. If it weren't for having no money, she wouldn't come here to argue with Mr. Qin and look at these annoying faces.

The room was filled with the smell of medicine. Mrs. Bai was simmering medicine for the Eldest Lady. The medicine was a kind gift from the doctor, who had prepared two doses and suggested giving them to the Eldest Lady first!

The Eldest Lady lay on the bed. She seemed to be awake, but her expression was one of half-consciousness, looking weak and fatigued. The Eldest Lady had always been somewhat frail, and now her injuries seemed to have drained her spirit severely.

Qin Shuangshuang sighed. In her previous life, her family never experienced such a fire incident, so until Little Chen married off the Eldest Lady, she managed to live somewhat well; she was not beaten much, didn't eat well but wasn't too starved either. So in her previous life, Qin Shuangshuang always felt that the Eldest Lady was luckier than her.

Now, looking at it again, Qin Shuangshuang realized she was much luckier than the Eldest Lady, because she had a mother who loved her dearly, willing to endure all hardships to the best of her ability to make her life better. As for the Eldest Lady, she actually had nothing!

The medicine was ready. Mrs. Bai held the Eldest Lady up, and Qin Shuangshuang slowly fed the cooled medicine to her. The Eldest Lady had injuries in her chest and abdomen, and each swallow brought pained expressions on her face.

But the Eldest Lady didn't make a fuss. Leaning in Mrs. Bai's arms, she drank very obediently. Despite the bitterness, she drank it all without making any noise or dodging.

Afterwards, Qin Shuangshuang fed the Eldest Lady some meat porridge, and this time, the Eldest Lady drank eagerly!

Meat was not often eaten in the family, and even when there was, the Eldest Lady couldn't get much, and girls could hardly eat any meat at all. Hence, the meat porridge tasted extremely delicious to the Eldest Lady, and she drank two big bowls one after another, looking longingly at the pot with the meat porridge when she couldn't eat any more.

Qin Shuangshuang then smiled and said, "There's plenty of porridge. If you haven't had enough, big sister, we can continue eating it tomorrow morning."

The Eldest Lady's face flushed slightly, and she looked at Qin Shuangshuang with affection and reliance. She still remembered that when her own father kicked her flying and her mother continued to beat her without mercy, it was this sister, who previously was not so close to her, that protected her.

Later, she even called a doctor to treat and give her medicine. In the Eldest Lady's heart, after being utterly disillusioned with her parents, she was full of gratitude towards Qin Shuangshuang who gave her warmth and help, and she couldn't help but start relying on Qin Shuangshuang, who had always been mature despite her young age!

Early the next morning, Qin Shuangshuang took the silver given by Mr. Qin and caught Uncle He's cart to the doctor's clinic in town. She bought all the medicines needed for treating the Eldest Lady's illness at once.

After buying the medicine, five taels of silver turned into only four qian. Qin Shuangshuang used the remaining silver to buy some salt, seasonings, and a large basket of eggs.

Salt was very expensive, and aside from a set of pots and bowls, the oil, salt, and seasonings in the main house were never allowed for Mrs. Bai to use. The dishes Qin Shuangshuang made during her recovery period relied entirely on the salty flavor of bacon to have any taste, and the eggs were bought for the Eldest Lady to nourish her body; Qin Shuangshuang did not intend to compete for food.

On the way home, Qin Shuangshuang kept thinking about how to live in the future. Many things had happened recently, and now she had almost completely fallen out with the Old Qin Family. Although she still temporarily had no shortage of meat, she had nothing else.

The granary was locked by Old Chen. Every time Mrs. Bai went to ask for rice and grain, Old Chen would say many unpleasant words before reluctantly giving a small handful. That portion was not even enough for Qin Shuangshuang alone.

If she went to argue, she might get the rice and grain. But constantly arguing was not a proper solution. Her good reputation was largely due to her never openly contradicting her elders in front of others and always appearing very filial to Old Chen.

One, no matter how seniors treated her, never complained and remained filial at a young age; the other, no matter how filial the granddaughter was, always treated her harshly, constantly scolding and finding fault, hitting aggressively, anyone who saw would side with the younger one.

But if she quarreled too much with Old Chen, it would inevitably be heard by others. Old Chen's reputation was already bad for overdoing things, and her contradicting once or twice would be fine. However, if it happened often, even if people still thought Old Chen was an unkind elder, they would inevitably whisper that she, the granddaughter, was also not sufficiently filial.

She couldn't make trouble, Old Chen wouldn't give food, and from the looks of Mr. Qin and Little Chen, they seemed to completely ignore and not care about whether the Eldest Lady ate well or how her injuries were. It seemed they had utterly abandoned the Eldest Lady, and she couldn't just watch the Eldest Lady starve to death.

The food for three mouths had to be figured out. Qin Shuangshuang thought about it and decided she had to go into the mountains to find things to sell in town for money to buy rice, flour, grains, and oil. She was reluctant to let her mother endure Old Chen's harsh words!

Qin Shuangshuang's injuries were not severe. Mrs. Bai had cared for her with utmost consideration. With good food and drink nourishing her, her body had actually recovered, with even the scars left being very faint, a shallow long line that was barely noticeable.

Qin Shuangshuang felt she had completely recovered and that there was nothing major. However, when she proposed to go into the mountains, Mrs. Bai strongly opposed it and refused to agree no matter how much Qin Shuangshuang explained.

Mainly, Mrs. Bai was terrified by Qin Shuangshuang's previous condition. She always felt that since Qin Shuangshuang had bled so much before, even if the external injury healed, having lost so much blood, the internal wounds must not have fully recovered.

Qin Shuangshuang couldn't persuade Mrs. Bai and could only reluctantly dispel the thought for the time being, continuing to recuperate. Anyway, they still had a lot of bacon at home, and she had bought a good amount of salt this time, enough for her, the Eldest Lady, and Mrs. Bai for a period.

In recent days, Old Chen had been exhausted from turning the fields. Though she only worked for half a day, with Little Chen doing most of the work, she couldn't entirely rest and had to do some work even if a little. For someone who hadn't done work for a long time, any labor felt particularly tiring.

Adding her advanced age, the first day left her dead tired, and resting for an afternoon and evening was not sufficient to recover. When a person is tired, their temper is particularly volatile. The angrier Old Chen got, the more she resented Qin Shuangshuang and Mrs. Bai, scolding especially harshly whenever Mrs. Bai went to ask for grain.

Qin Shuangshuang couldn't stand letting her mother suffer this mistreatment every day. Anyway, there was still a lot of bacon at home, so she took half of it to town to sell at the market for some money and bought rice, flour, and eggs back, to save Mrs. Bai from listening to Old Chen's insults every day.

Thus, nearly a month passed, and the family's meat and grain had dwindled again. Under Qin Shuangshuang's repeated assurances that she had fully recovered, Mrs. Bai reluctantly agreed to let Qin Shuangshuang go into the mountains.

Stepping onto the long-awaited mountain, Qin Shuangshuang felt a deep sense of familiarity. She knew every corner of this mountain very well. In the mountains, it was like she had returned to another home of hers.

Qin Shuangshuang couldn't help but lift her head, taking a deep breath in pleasant distraction and relaxation. However, before she could exhale, she suddenly heard a sharp whistling!

Qin Shuangshuang widened her eyes and saw an arrow, with a glittering sharp tip, shooting like lightning straight towards her!

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Qin Shuangshuang was shocked to the point where her scalp tingled! The arrow came so fast! It whistled past her ear before she could even react, with a thud, it embedded itself into the tree behind her!

After the arrow had shot past for quite a while, Qin Shuangshuang finally exhaled the breath she had been holding in her chest, unable to resist patting her small chest, realizing it wasn't aimed at her, it almost scared her to death!

"Oh dear! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I shot it crooked, are you hurt? Are you alright?"

A little girl, about eight or nine years old, wearing a coarse shirt like a man's but with her hair styled in buns and tied with long ribbons, hurriedly ran over.

The little girl held a small bow in her hand, and on her back was a small quiver, bulging and full of densely packed arrows. Qin Shuangshuang glanced back to see the arrow on the tree was clearly one size smaller than normal arrows.

Once the little girl arrived, she circled around Qin Shuangshuang several times, then started checking her up and down. Seeing Qin Shuangshuang was really unharmed, she let out a big sigh of relief. Then she turned and shouted towards the forest: "Dad! Dad! Come quickly, I found a little girl!"

Qin Shuangshuang was speechless. What do you mean you found a little girl? Aren't you a little girl yourself!

Following the little girl's shout, a tall man emerged from the nearby woods. The man was broad and thick-browed, with healthy bronzed skin, and extremely tall, especially towering over someone as small as Qin Shuangshuang, resembling a giant!

When Qin Shuangshuang saw this person appear, she was stunned on the spot because she knew him, and it was unforgettable! Because this man was the only one who had ever let her feel what fatherly love was. Similarly, this man was also her savior!

In her past life when Qin Shuangshuang was eight, the land experienced drought for two consecutive years, leaving the common people without food. Her father, Qin Laoer, was urged by Little Chen and Qin the Third to trade her away for food. Just as Qin Shuangshuang was about to be killed and cooked, this man saved her!

Qin Shuangshuang never knew this man's name, she only knew his surname was Fang and he lived in Fang Family Village, which was adjacent to her village. Just like everyone in Qin Family Village was surnamed Qin, most people in Fang Family Village carried the Fang surname too.

When the man rescued her, he was already severely ill, though his body was large, it was merely an emaciated frame, plus he always stooped, completely missing the majesty of the moment.

After rescuing her, the man kept Qin Shuangshuang by his side and took great care of her. He was an excellent hunter, always able to find something to eat for her even in places others had scavenged clean of grass roots and tree bark.

Thanks to this man, Qin Shuangshuang survived the hardest times. She wasn't starved to death, not eaten, no endless chores, no morning hits or evening scolds—difficult though it was, happiness felt like living in a fairyland!

At that time, Qin Shuangshuang had long forgotten her mother, Mrs. Bai. She only felt no one had ever treated her so well in this life. In this man, she saw the figure of a father, something she never felt from her biological father, Qin Laoer.

During their free moments, the man shared bits of his own story with Qin Shuangshuang. He said he had a very cute and sensible daughter who unfortunately during the famine went out to find food, got separated, and was caught and eaten by someone!

By the time the man frantically found his daughter, she had become a pile of bones, while her devourers survived. The man never told Qin Shuangshuang how he dealt with those who ate his daughter!

Since his daughter's death, the man fell ill. During famine times, there was no doctor to consult, so he could only bear it himself. But he couldn't make it through; he suddenly passed away, falling asleep one night never to wake again.

After the man died, Qin Shuangshuang was found by the Qin Family and forcibly taken back. She resisted, cried, and made a fuss. She wanted to mourn for the man who gave her the feeling of a father and wanted to build him a tomb!

But at that time, Qin Shuangshuang was just a powerless little girl, so besides digging a pit and burying him, she couldn't do anything. The only piece of luck was that the man died of illness, so no one dared to eat his body, allowing him to at least keep it intact.

Shortly after that, Qin Shuangshuang was taken by the Qin Family to leave that place. Since then, Qin Shuang started a displaced life at the mercy of others, unable even to visit the man's grave, only able to remember the warmth he once gave her in her heart.

Now seeing this man alive in front of her once more, Qin Shuangshuang's eyes could not help but turn red, her nose sore, feelings inside her were a mix of emotions, but an overwhelming joy boiled within her heart!

Being able to see this person again, seeing him standing healthily in front of her, with no illness, no exhaustion, no frailty, it was truly wonderful!

Just as Qin Shuangshuang was feeling emotional, she suddenly felt her body being shaken vigorously. Snapping back to reality, she saw the little girl waving a hand in front of her face, then turning to the man with a distressed, almost tearful expression: "Dad! This little girl was scared stupid by me. What should I do? I've caused a disaster! Boohoo, I didn't mean to, how can I explain this to her parents now?"

Qin Shuangshuang choked, all the touching, joy, and excitement in her heart suddenly faded away, she was so embarrassed by the little girl! What was this all about? Was she really that fragile? Scared stupid by an arrow!

Qin Shuangshuang had just lost her composure for a moment but quickly snapped back to reality thanks to the little girl's embarrassment, so the man didn't notice her unusual reaction, only seeing her helpless expression caused by his daughter embarrassing her.

Seeing the little girl crying earnestly, Qin Shuangshuang could only open her mouth to comfort and persuade: "Don't cry, I'm not that timid, I won't be scared silly by your arrow."

As soon as Qin Shuangshuang spoke, the little girl stopped crying, sniffing while looking at her with a tone still full of uncertainty: "Are you really okay?"

Qin Shuangshuang was helpless, she truly wasn't timid, but seeing the little girl crying so pitifully and adorably, she could only continue: "I'm really okay!"

The man on the side, watching the little child comforting the bigger child scene, couldn't help but laugh heartily and stride over, first looking at Qin Shuangshuang, seeing she had a large basket almost as tall as herself on her back, he frowned slightly.

The man raised his hand to pat his daughter's head in slight comfort, then crouched down to look at Qin Shuangshuang and asked: "Little girl, why are you in the mountains alone? It's dangerous here, where are your parents? Why aren't they looking after you? Letting you run around alone?"

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As the man approached, Qin Shuangshuang was momentarily taken aback before remembering to answer him, "I'm not afraid. I've been running around in the mountains for a long time. I'm familiar with every path here, I won't get lost."

"Running around in the mountains for a long time?!"

Hearing Qin Shuangshuang's response, the man was surprised. How young was Qin Shuangshuang, yet she was already accustomed to running in the mountains!

Moreover, he glanced at Qin Shuangshuang's basket, which contained quite a few wild vegetables, all of good quality, and even a small bunch of tender bamboo shoots that seasoned foragers couldn't find at this time of year! It was clear that her claim of running in the mountains wasn't false.

The man thoughtfully touched his chin, carefully looked Qin Shuangshuang up and down again, and confidently said, "You're the second daughter of the Qin Family Village!"

Qin Shuangshuang was stunned, a little surprised, and said, "Uncle, how do you know who I am?"

The man laughed heartily, "In Qin Family Village, there's a girl with immense natural strength, and she's quite capable. Even at a young age, she brings home lots of things from the mountains to help with household expenses. Who doesn't know that? I heard you recently hunted a wild boar on your own; this story has been spread around ten miles eight villages!"

What the man didn't say was that Qin Shuangshuang's reputation for natural strength and capability was accompanied by tales of her troublesome grandmother, who loved to torment her children-in-law and granddaughters, and her meddling third uncle and aunt.

The man also remembered the rumors that after the girl hunted the wild boar, she nearly got killed by her grandmother when she sent meat to the family that had taken care of her! The man had a good impression of the girl, understanding gratitude, she was a good child!

Seeing Qin Shuangshuang entering the mountains with her basket, the man felt a surge of compassion, instinctively patting Qin Shuangshuang's head like he would his own

daughter, and smiled, "It's not safe for a child to be alone in the mountains, why don't you come with me? Once we descend, you can head home on your own!"

Qin Shuangshuang was more than happy to have the chance to get close to him. She nodded happily, her beautiful eyes curved like crescents, which softened the man's heart. The little girl beside him was even happier, hugging Qin Shuangshuang tightly and insisting on taking care of her little sister.

The little girl was the man's daughter, and Qin Shuangshuang naturally had a good impression of her. The girl was lively and adorable, and Qin Shuangshuang, with the years of her past and present lives combined, felt that she could easily be the girl's grandmother.

With a mindset of a senior indulging a junior, Qin Shuangshuang was very indulgent as the little girl treated her like a doll, carrying her around. When the little girl felt tired, Qin Shuangshuang considerably got down and walked on her own.

As they walked, the man continuously taught his daughter and Qin Shuangshuang about survival and hunting knowledge in the mountains, even taking Qin Shuangshuang to dig several small ginseng roots, mostly two or three years, or five or six years old. They weren't very potent but were good for health nonetheless!

This time, Qin Shuangshuang finally learned the man's name, Fang Zhongyi, and the girl's name, Fang Yaoyao, who had a lively nature, loved hunting, and aspired to become a hunter as skilled as her father!

Today was Fang Zhongyi's first day bringing his daughter, who had been learning archery for a long time, to the mountains to test her skills. Who would've thought her first shot would result in meeting Qin Shuangshuang?

Qin Shuangshuang felt a spark in her heart. She had been pondering how to strengthen her relationship with Fang Zhongyi but hadn't come up with a plan. Until now. She had a sudden idea; what if she apprenticed herself to Fang Zhongyi? People spoke of honoring teachers and valuing the path; a mentor is like a father. A master carries the weight of a second father!

If she became Fang Zhongyi's apprentice, she could rightfully grow close to him, be filial to him, and make up for the regret in her past life when she couldn't even visit his grave after his death, only secretly burning offerings and cherishing his memory in her heart.

Qin Shuangshuang cherished this thought but didn't voice it yet. It was, after all, her first meeting with Fang Zhongyi, and they weren't familiar enough. Though both Fang Zhongyi and his daughter were kind-hearted and took care of her with good intentions, she couldn't take advantage of their kindness and behave presumptuously!

Qin Shuangshuang thought it best to deepen their acquaintance by interacting a few more times. Once she and Fang Zhongyi became familiar with each other, and Fang Zhongyi knew what kind of person she was, she could naturally broach this topic.

With Fang Zhongyi leading the way, the subsequent hunting trip was extraordinarily smooth. Every trace of game that Qin Shuangshuang couldn't find was almost transparent in Fang Zhongyi's eyes. A casual glance would reveal the presence of animals nearby.

Fang Zhongyi also witnessed Qin Shuangshuang's immense strength. The opportunity arose when Fang Zhongyi, along with Qin Shuangshuang, tracked down a herd of deer. Then, Fang Zhongyi used his exceptional archery skills to precisely shoot a stag as large as a small horse!

Fang Zhongyi's archery skills were incredibly precise. His arrow hit directly in the stag's eye without damaging the hide, leaving Qin Shuangshuang completely in awe, full of admiration! Little did he know that Fang Zhongyi was also astounded by Qin Shuangshuang's display!

Indeed, having encountered the herd of deer, Qin Shuangshuang couldn't go back empty-handed. She, too, captured a stag comparable to the one Fang Zhongyi had hit with his arrow, and it was still alive!

Qin Shuangshuang captured the deer purely by relying on her considerable strength. She charged in upon seeing them, jumped up without any care, and wrapped her arms around a deer's head, delivering punch after punch until she knocked the deer out! The capture process was simple and brutal, with no technique that could be learned!

Admittedly, Qin Shuangshuang was quite lucky. When she leapt onto the deer, she didn't choose, thinking any deer she could grab would be a gain. When she lunged, she hadn't even seen what she had captured yet found that she had grabbed a majestic stag with large antlers! Qin Shuangshuang was overjoyed. Deer were more valuable than other game, especially an alive one, which was even more valuable!

Fang Zhongyi took his hunts directly to the county to sell, and since he never damaged the hides, they could fetch a good price. Qin Shuangshuang entrusted her deer to Fang Zhongyi to sell along with his. Fang Zhongyi agreed cheerfully, without any fear of trouble.

Along the way, Fang Zhongyi also discovered two rabbit holes and three wild chickens. He didn't lay a hand on these prey, letting Qin Shuangshuang and Fang Yaoyao catch them for fun.

Qin Shuangshuang never found too much prey to be a bother. With the rabbits trapped in their burrows, Qin Shuangshuang, experienced in catching rabbits, easily caught two

plump ones. Wild chickens, however, were harder to catch. Qin Shuangshuang's movements weren't nimble enough, and she only managed to catch one.

Fang Yaoyao also participated, shooting an arrow which missed the wild chicken, just grazing its wing. The arrow flew straight into the thick woods opposite them. Qin Shuangshuang was thinking about how Fang Yaoyao's arrow had missed again when suddenly she heard an exclamation coming from within those woods!