

# Quick Transmigration: Underdog Turns out to be Untouchable

*Chapter 46: Chapter 46 Gender Crimes 46*

The Qin Clan Ancestral Hall is the most important place for the Qin Clan. There must always be someone to clean the ancestral hall, and the rule for the Qin Clan is that every household with the surname Qin has to provide one person to take turns living in the ancestral hall for ten days, responsible for cleaning and guarding it.

Outside the Qin Clan Ancestral Hall, there is a small independent courtyard with only two rooms, where the people who come to clean and guard the ancestral hall live.

Qin Shuangshuang and Mrs. Bai have been unable to find a suitable place to live, so Mrs. Wang thought of this place. The small courtyard is not big, but it's more than enough for the Second Lady and Lady Bai to live together.

At that time, they could build a small stove in the courtyard, make a fire to cook, and fence a wall to plant some vegetables, enough for the three of them to eat. As for the rent, it would be offset by cleaning the ancestral hall.

This way, no one in the village would have to live alone to guard and clean the ancestral hall. In the future, as long as the men in the village come regularly to clean the room where the ancestors' tablets are placed, it will work. Everyone will undoubtedly agree; it's a win-win situation!

Qin Shuangshuang and her family were quite satisfied with this place. Renting someone else's room certainly wouldn't allow them to have their own private courtyard, which would be inconvenient in many ways, so this arrangement was just right.

When they moved, Aunt Hao brought her son Qin Yuan, daughter Qin Qiao'er, the butcher Qin Sheng, the driver Uncle He, the village chief, and Mrs. Wang, along with her two teenage grandsons, Da Hu and Xiao Hu, over to help. It took less than half a day for them to help move the three of them, set up the stove, and organize everything neatly!

Qin Shuangshuang bought ten pounds of fat pork. The butcher kindly gave her seven or eight large bones; although the meat was a bit cleaned off, it was still good for making soup and could be used to cook noodles with bone broth.

She picked some greens from the village chief's yard. Qin Shuangshuang made a big pot of stew and invited those who helped with the move to a good meal. Qin Shuangshuang originally wanted to divide the leftovers among everyone, but they all refused, mainly because they empathized with the hardships faced by the three women.

Once the living situation was settled, the remaining, and most important task was to establish an independent household for Mrs. Bai, and this required the help of the village chief.

The village chief was a well-connected person, with relationships with the town head and several acquaintances at the county government's office. Qin Shuangshuang gave out a couple of ounces of silver to furnish several boxes of nice pastries. It took only a few hours at the county office to successfully establish Mrs. Bai's independent household registration.

Incidentally, Qin Shuangshuang also changed her name, officially changing Second Lady to Qin Shuang, and her nickname to Shuangshuang. Although Mrs. Bai didn't know why Qin Shuangshuang wanted to change her name, she didn't object. Besides, the name Shuangshuang sounded quite nice, with a good meaning of good things coming in pairs.

Only, with Qin Shuangshuang changing her name, the name Eldest Lady seemed inappropriate. After some thought, Mrs. Bai said to the Eldest Lady: "When you were little, I once took you to a temple to burn incense. The grandmaster at the temple said you lacked the element of water in your fate, so I'll rename you to Qin Miao, and we'll call you Miao Miao from now on!"

"Miao Miao!" The Eldest Lady mumbled a few times, her face filled with delight; the name Miao Miao was more to her liking than the casual name Eldest Lady.

After several days of moving, establishing the independent household, and changing names, Qin Shuangshuang was managing quite well, but Mrs. Bai and the Eldest Lady were exhausted. However, looking at their new home and thinking about their future free from beatings and scoldings, and no longer working hard yet hungry and cold, the hearts of the three women were filled with unstoppable smiles.

Although they still had twenty-one ounces and nine hundred coins left, they couldn't just sit back and live off their savings, so Qin Shuangshuang planned to continue going to the mountains to cut firewood and hunt. Wild chickens and rabbits, although small, also had some worth.

Moreover, both the Eldest Lady and her mother, Mrs. Bai, had damaged bodies from years of hard work and needed to eat more meat to nourish themselves. Buying meat every day was unaffordable, but catching some game to eat was doable.

Just as she entered the mountains, Qin Shuangshuang ran into Fang Zhongyi with Fang Yaoyao. Qin Shuangshuang's eyes lit up, and she joyfully approached, "Uncle Fang, Yaoyao, are you going into the mountains too? What a coincidence!"

"Coincidence? We've been waiting for you here for several days!" Fang Yaoyao said and pinched Qin Shuangshuang's cheek, laughing: "I've got good news to tell you; it's up to you if you're interested!"

"What good news?" Qin Shuangshuang asked, her speech a bit garbled due to Fang Yaoyao pinching her cheek.

"This girl, don't bully your younger sister as soon as you see her!"

Fang Zhongyi came over to slap away Fang Yaoyao's hand on Qin Shuangshuang's cheek and smiled at Qin Shuangshuang: "I'd like you and Yaoyao to learn some martial skills with me. Are you interested?"

Qin Shuangshuang's eyes lit up instantly with excitement and she blurted out, "Uncle Fang, are you taking me as your apprentice?"

"Apprentice?"

Fang Zhongyi was taken aback for a moment, he hadn't really thought of that. Even though he felt that Qin Shuangshuang, with her unusual strength, was a born martial arts prodigy, he was reluctant to let such talent go to waste and wanted to pass down his martial skills.

Now hearing Qin Shuangshuang mention becoming an apprentice, Fang Zhongyi thought it was not a bad idea. Although Qin Shuangshuang was a girl, she was a girl who surpassed men a hundredfold, and having such a capable female disciple was good.

Thinking of this, Fang Zhongyi nodded, "Yes, I'd like to take you as my apprentice. Do you want to learn martial arts with me?"

Do I want to? Of course, I do!

Qin Shuangshuang had been contemplating this for quite some time, and now that Fang Zhongyi had offered himself, she certainly wouldn't miss this opportunity. She immediately knelt down, kowtowed, and called him master, afraid Fang Zhongyi might change his mind if she was late. Qin Shuangshuang's eager behavior amused Fang Zhongyi and delighted him even more.

After apprenticing, Fang Yaoyao kept urging Qin Shuangshuang to call her senior sister. Qin Shuangshuang doted on Yaoyao and, for fun, called her senior sister a few times.

This embarrassed Fang Yaoyao who was flustered for a bit, insisting Qin Shuangshuang call her by her name, Yaoyao, instead.

Although the apprenticeship was hurried, Qin Shuangshuang later supplemented it with a formal ceremony, inviting the village chief as a witness, and went alongside her mother, Mrs. Bai, to formally visit Fang Zhongyi and pay respects as the custom dictated.

Fang Zhongyi, although saying it was unnecessary to make it so ceremonious, felt very touched. His little apprentice valued him as her master, and he was naturally pleased!

The days of training with Fang Zhongyi were tough. Qin Shuangshuang thought she was already very capable of enduring hardship, but upon truly experiencing the rigor of martial training, especially practicing in the coldest days of winter and the hottest days of summer, she realized her past hardships were nothing compared to this.

In the beginning, with the idea of practicing martial arts alongside Qin Shuangshuang, both Fang Yaoyao and Qin Miao started training. Although they didn't practice as diligently as Qin Shuangshuang, now they could at least fend off three to four men if necessary. Fang Yaoyao's archery had improved significantly through hard practice. Though it lacked the power for hundred-step piercing willow, it had gained precision!

Qin Miao, with less strength but a nimble and swift body, and very flexible fingers, was directed by Fang Zhongyi to specialize in hidden weapons and skills relying on agility. The lethality of hidden weapons was quite impressive, making them apt for a girl with relatively less physical strength to use for self-defense.

With the passing of spring and fall, time flew by quickly. In a blink, Qin Shuangshuang was eleven years old. Due to martial training, Qin Shuangshuang's height exceeded that of other girls her age. Despite being eleven, she appeared the height of a thirteen or fourteen-year-old.

Today, Qin Shuangshuang was in excellent spirits. Ever since she learned her master Fang Zhongyi's herbal collection skills, she no longer needed to rely on chopping wood and hunting for income. Instead, she earned money by gathering herbs. Qin Shuangshuang was exceptionally lucky when it came to herb gathering, always finding top-quality medicines. This time in the mountains, not only did she capture a fully grown, over five hundred-pound fat pig, but she also found a Lingzhi of exceptional quality!

Perhaps due to martial training, Qin Shuangshuang's strength had clearly increased much more, carrying the huge pig that nearly blocked her entire figure, with her steps remaining light and quick.

With familiarity and ease, she carried the pig straight to the butcher Qin Sheng's home to have the wild boar slaughtered and processed. She would deliver a few pounds of meat to friendly families, and the bulk of it she would carry back home. This had become a routine for Qin Shuangshuang when hunting.

When she delivered meat to the village chief, he was squatting at the doorway, smoking a pipe, and his expression didn't look good, his entire demeanor worried and troubled!

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Needless to say, Qin Shuangshuang knew why the village chief had a worried look on his face. Last year's drought left the fields with a yield only about thirty to forty percent of the usual harvest, though not an entire crop failure.

Fortunately, the court issued an edict to reduce and exempt taxes, allowing villagers to keep their grain for themselves. Although there was no income, they wouldn't starve to death.

Everyone hoped for a better harvest this year, but the snowless winter had already given rise to a foreboding feeling. Indeed, from the start of spring until now, there has been no rain, leaving the fields so dry they're cracking, making planting impossible!

Not to mention farming, even Qin Shuangshuang had to go deep into the mountains to find medicinal herbs. The usual game had become scarce, and she hadn't seen large game for over a month!

Given the excellent hunting skills she'd learned from Fang Zhongyi, surpassing even her teacher, this was very unusual! Today's encounter with the wild boar happened when Qin Shuangshuang ventured near a drying pool in a deep mountain.

Despite this wild boar weighing over 500 pounds, it was actually very thin. This type of wild boar, unique to their area, is known for its extreme attack power, at least twice the size of ordinary wild boars. Even tigers and black bears dare not challenge it, and hunters fear to easily provoke it, making it virtually invincible.

However, these wild boars are rare. Normally, an adult boar weighs over a thousand pounds, twice that of an ordinary boar! Yet this adult boar weighed only a little over 500 pounds, indicating that life for the creatures in the mountains was tough, very tough, indeed!

Qin Shuangshuang looked at the village chief, who had aged and grown much thinner, feeling deeply unsettled. This elder who had always cared for her had rapidly become haggard and aged in just a few short months!

The village chief saw Qin Shuangshuang and pulled a smile on his dry, thin face, "It's Shuangshuang!" He glanced at the large boar head weighing more than twenty pounds in her hand and sighed.

"Lately, game has been hard to come by. You haven't caught much for several days, so you don't have to keep bringing stuff to me. Make this boar into smoked meat or jerky,

don't sell it. Looking at this year's harvest, it's quite unlikely anything will suffice; if something happens, silver won't help, so it's better to save more food!"

Qin Shuangshuang smiled as she put down the boar head in her hand, "I've got plenty, this is nothing. You've been looking quite haggard lately and need to eat something nourishing. I'll bring some bones over later and have Grandma Wang make you some soup. That's the most nourishing."

After saying goodbye to the village chief, on the way back, Qin Shuangshuang felt a heaviness in her heart because, unlike the villagers who still held hope for rain, she already knew that this year would be harsher than the last, with no harvest at all!

Adding insult to injury, when the villagers wanted to head toward the Capital City to make a living, they were met with the government's travel prohibition order and a decree for forced resettlement!

The court planned to relocate tens of thousands of disaster-stricken people to the Northwest Border City because it intended to establish a border trade center, requiring a population to fill the desolate border city!

What kind of place is the border city! It's next to the barbarians, and for the people of the Da Ran Dynasty, the terror of the barbarians is unimaginable; living in the border city is almost akin to death, for every barbarian raid results in burning, pillaging, and looting on the border. The people fear the barbarians deeply!

Although the court offered many generous policies, even promising that non-trader residents in the border city would be exempt from taxes for fifty years, no one was willing to go because, for ordinary people, going to the border city was tantamount to going to Yama Hall!

No matter how much the people resisted, the court was determined to force them to the border city. As long as they agreed to go, food, clothes, travel expenses were provided, and porridge stations were set up along the way to maximize the survival of the people reaching the border city.

But if they refused to go, the court neither allowed the people to leave their hometowns nor provided relief grain. Even if they starved, it didn't matter.

Despite the inability to escape and lack of assistance, the people's fear of the border city kept them rooted in place, hoping the court would eventually show mercy and provide aid!

Facts proved that the arm can't twist the thigh. The court, having made up its mind, saw the people starving to the point of cannibalism, yet many still refused to leave their hometown.

Finally, when the impatient court exhausted its patience and began sending troops for violent eviction, the people reluctantly left with their families, tearfully bidding farewell to their homeland, unwillingly headed toward the border city.

In her past life, Qin Shuangshuang, together with the Qin Family, was driven to the border city by soldiers as if they were criminals.

After arriving at the border city, all the preferential policies were revoked. The people had to first endure a year of hard labor building the city before they could earn land to farm, and those preferential policies were only available to those who voluntarily came to the border city beforehand.

At the time of her rebirth, Qin Shuangshuang hadn't wanted to go to the border city. She planned to run away with her mother ahead of the forced migration, hiding temporarily in a remote mountain forest.

She thought that, with her extraordinary strength, hardly anything in the wild could pose a threat to her and her mother.

Moreover, Qin Shuangshuang knew that after the forced resettlement, a nearby State Mansion would face a locust plague, creating many refugees. The court wouldn't continue migrating people to the border, allowing her to rejoin the refugees and avoid checkpoints requiring official permits, starting anew elsewhere with her mother.

Qin Shuangshuang's plan was good, but realities changed swiftly. By now, she couldn't just leave with her mother, Mrs. Bai.

Her family had grown to include the Eldest Lady, Fang Zhongyi, Fang Yaoyao, and others like the village chief grandpa, Grandma Wang, Aunt Hao, Qin Yuan, Qin Qiao'er, Qin Sheng, Uncle He, and many villagers who, though gossip-loving, had fed and clothed her!

Qin Shuangshuang couldn't abandon these people; she wanted to take them all with her. She clearly remembered that in her past life, many villagers died on the road due to poor health!

Among them were the kind village chief grandpa and Uncle He. Now, she couldn't bear watching those who had helped her die!

"Shuangshuang, Shuangshuang!" Qin Shuangshuang snapped back to reality, seeing Qin Miao waving in front of her. She had been so lost in thought, standing dazedly in front of her house, with the large boar, weighing no less than 500 pounds, she had been giving away to others lying at her feet.

Rubbing her temples in slight frustration, Qin Shuangshuang asked Qin Miao, "It's my sister. Why are you calling me?"

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"It's nothing much, I'm just curious about what you're thinking so deeply about. I've called you several times and you didn't respond. Should we smoke this wild boar and make it into salted dried meat?"

The Eldest Lady, now renamed Qin Miao, had become more cheerful living with Qin Shuang over the years. She no longer had the timid and shy demeanor she once had, always with her head down, afraid to speak loudly behind Qin Shuangshuang.

Qin Shuangshuang nodded and brought the pork back into the house, saying to Qin Miao, "Let's make it into dried meat!" She looked around the house but didn't see Mrs. Bai, "Has our mother gone out to dig wild vegetables again?"

"Yes, lately every household has barely any greens. It's too dry in the fields, and nothing can grow. Even wild vegetables are very scarce." As Qin Miao spoke, she skillfully came out with a knife and a basin, ready to cut up the wild boar meat.

The boar's head and offal were already gone, and some of the fattier belly pork had been given away by Qin Shuangshuang. In those days, having fatty meat was considered the best because cooking with it was both delicious and economical on oil.

Qin Shuangshuang first went to check the place where she stored preserved meat. It was a loft she had specially built, filled densely with smoked meat dried and baked using a clay stove, allowing it to be preserved long-term! Qin Shuangshuang had spent nearly half a year secretly accumulating this stock.

After clearing a space among the packed dried meat for the new batch, Qin Shuangshuang went out, planning to help Qin Miao process the wild boar meat. Just then, Mrs. Bai returned, carrying a basket woven from willow, which contained only a small pile of poor-quality wild vegetables.

Qin Miao was carefully washing these wild vegetables, not even willing to throw away the yellowing wilted leaves.

Whether it's vegetables or water, they're both rare now. Water is manageable; last year, during the drought, Qin Shuangshuang spent a full twenty taels of silver to have a deeper than usual well dug nearby.

Now, all the wells in the village are dry, except this deep well, which still provides water, but it's limited to domestic use only. Watering the fields is completely out of the question!

Pork belly was minced, wild vegetables chopped up, and together they were seasoned and mixed with black flour, as refined as white flour, formed into vegetable dumplings, and steamed! Dipped in garlic and chili oil, they tasted exceptionally delicious.

While eating, Qin Shuangshuang and Mrs. Bai discussed with Qin MiaoMiao about sending some to their master, mainly for Fang Yaoyao, because her master, Fang Zhongyi, was a pure carnivore who never tired of eating meat, and being served greens was like taking medicine for him.

Before Qin Shuangshuang could deliver the food, Fang Yaoyao arrived with a basket full of fresh elm seeds.

Qin Shuangshuang immediately recognized them; they were surely gathered by her master while in the mountains, as the village's elm trees were so dry this year they hardly sprouted leaves, let alone elm seeds.

Fang Yaoyao joined them, conveniently sharing the vegetable dumplings. Afterward, she helped Qin Shuangshuang process the household's wild boar, slicing meat, rubbing on salt, smoking, baking; it was a painstaking process that took over ten days to turn a wild boar into dried meat.

It still wasn't raining in the village, and the villagers were becoming quietly desperate, yet they clung to a thread of hope for the next day, refusing to give up entirely. Many families were running low on grain, and yet market prices were sky-high, unaffordable. If they didn't buy, they would run out of food, forcing them to scrape together all they had to buy some coarse grain.

Amidst this shortage, Mr. Qin somehow managed to transport a cart of grain and set up a stall at home, selling it to the villagers for two Copper Coins less than the market price in the town.

Qin Shuangshuang frowned; the Qin Family was ordinary with no connections, and profiting off their kin during a disaster would ruin their reputation. Furthermore, when people were starving to the point of cannibalism, families without any means of defense would be in trouble.

Qin Shuangshuang had experienced it herself. In her past life, Mr. Qin also acquired a batch of grain to sell, but as the spring planting season passed without rain, the villagers became panicked and desperately hoarded grain.

The Qin family's grain prices kept rising, but eventually, even with money, Mr. Qin didn't dare sell anymore, intending to keep it for themselves. When there was truly no grain left, silver became useless.

Yet, the Qin family's grain wasn't preserved; the villagers respected their shared surname and kinship, yet the neighboring villagers did not care. In the end, many resorted to eating those who starved, long losing their morality and humanity.

One night, several families from Qin Family Village conspired with villagers from two neighboring villages. They secretly infiltrated the Qin Family premises, stealing all the grain from the Qin family's granaries and injuring several Qin family members.

Thankfully, the Qin family's grain was hidden in several places, with two particularly well-concealed spots, enough to avoid starvation. Yet, after the robbery, even with grain in hand, the Qin Family didn't dare to eat it, fearing that those driven mad by hunger would rob them again.

To dispel suspicion that their family still had grain, Qin the Third, Mr. Qin, along with Old Chen and Little Chen, conceived a heartless plan: to take their useless daughters to other villages and engage in the exchange of children for food.

The Qin Family intended to demonstrate they had no grain left, to avoid being targeted again by desperate people, and the girl exchanged for food was Qin Shuangshuang.

In normal times, such an event would have been strictly dealt with by the Qin Clan to avoid tarnishing their reputation, but in these times of widespread hunger, the family's handling was merely a casual discussion and simple expulsion from the clan.

Later, Qin Shuangshuang was saved by Fang Zhongyi. When Fang Zhongyi died, she was brought back by the Qin family and soon after was marched like a prisoner to the border city by soldiers sent by the court.

But these are stories of the past life, and this time, Qin Shuangshuang will never let such events happen again!

The skies remained dry, and as the best time for spring planting drifted away in a month, everyone grew anxious. Qin Shuangshuang spent the next month trekking daily into the mountains, capturing countless pheasants and wild rabbits but never encountering game as large as a wild boar again.

The drought became increasingly severe, with every household nearly out of grain. Fortunately, Qin Shuangshuang's deep well still provided enough water for everyone to cook a pot of porridge thick enough to stave off starvation.\*

With not enough grain to eat, villagers had previously relied on buying from the Qin Family, but Mr. Qin lately sensed trouble and had ceased selling grain. Unable to purchase grain, villagers had no choice but to consume even more frugally.

Although the village was out of food, there remained a shred of hope that the court would decree the opening of the granaries to relieve the stricken! But this hope was dashed when the court issued an edict ordering the relocation of people to the border.

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Lord County Magistrate personally arrived, and after conveying the order for relocation to the border, he tirelessly reiterated the various preferential policies provided by the court. But it was in vain, as all the common people couldn't hear a word of it once they learned they were being sent to the border city!

Their minds were filled with panic and resistance! They thought that the court intended to abandon them, the common people, and send them to their deaths at the border! To these inland commoners, the border city was as terrifying as Yama Hall, an unimaginable horror!

The county magistrate spoke until his mouth was dry, yet no one responded. Even when he mentioned that without agreeing to leave, the court wouldn't open the granaries to provide food, and only those willing to leave would receive food supplies and travel expenses, along with many other preferential policies.

However, the common people's hearts harbored the hope that as long as they refused to leave, the court wouldn't let them starve to death! But if they went to the border city, they would truly be doomed!

The county magistrate finally left in great frustration. The court had issued a strict order not to release the grain, leaving him helpless. As their appointed official, he naturally did not want to see the number of people under his governance dwindle, but alas, he was merely a humble county magistrate, and could not change the court's decision.

By now, not only had no disaster relief grain arrived, but there came a relocation order like a death knell. The mood among the villagers was extremely depressed; there was even a brawl between men from different villages who bumped into each other accidentally while walking, both becoming uncontrollably aggressive!

The two men gritted their teeth, eyes bloodshot, frantically swinging their fists at each other as if they had a deep-seated hatred, fighting relentlessly!

But in reality, they were just venting the fear and panic they couldn't dispel from their hearts, as well as a despair they were unwilling to admit but was becoming increasingly clear!

Qin Shuangshuang frowned, glancing around at the villagers who were expressionless, ignoring the fight, and merely going about their own business, with no intention of watching the spectacle. She sighed, stepped forward, and pulled the two men apart with one hand each!

The two men, separated by Qin Shuangshuang, still wouldn't stop, pushing back together, one punching, the other kicking, unwilling to settle down.

Qin Shuangshuang had to exert her strength, forcing the two men to sit down on the ground, and when they found they couldn't break free from her hold, they gradually fell silent.

Seeing the two men cease moving, Qin Shuangshuang released them. The two men got up, but instead of continuing to fight, they returned to their respective families.

From start to finish, the two men remained silent during their fight, and though it was intense, leaving them bruised and bloody-nosed, the atmosphere was deathly still, pervaded by a sense of lifelessness. The two families, who had watched, showed the same expressionless demeanor, and when the fight ended, they silently dispersed. Not a word was spoken from start to finish.

Qin Shuangshuang sighed, exchanging a glance with Mrs. Bai and Qin MiaoMiao. Although their family wasn't lacking food, the oppressive atmosphere affected their mood all the same.

Qin Shuangshuang was additionally worried. The villagers hadn't reached a point of desperation yet; people were lifeless, but no one had broken moral boundaries!

But when starvation drives people mad, humanity disappears, turning humans into demons, becoming the nightmares of their kind, and humans, when terrifying, are far more frightening than any demon. That was something Qin Shuangshuang had experienced firsthand... Purgatory in the Mortal World!

Qin Shuangshuang wanted to persuade everyone to move to the border city, but at this time, everyone still believed the court wouldn't let them starve and would eventually help them. Anything Qin Shuangshuang said would be futile; the fear of the border city and the attachment to their homeland were deeply ingrained in their bones!

When Qin Shuangshuang returned home, her master Fang Zhongyi and Fang Yaoyao came over to deliver many dried wild vegetables. Although eating meat was the wish of many poor people, eating only meat every day was unbearable for anyone, especially now that Qin Shuangshuang and Qin MiaoMiao, along with Mrs. Bai, had developed a fondness for vegetables.

Given that there was a single woman, Mrs. Bai, in the household, Fang Zhongyi would avoid coming to Qin Shuangshuang's home to prevent gossip. Qin Shuangshuang always went to Fang Zhongyi's home to practice martial arts.

Fang Zhongyi came over this time due to special circumstances, but he just quickly left the dried wild vegetables and hurried away.

Of the dried wild vegetables Fang Zhongyi brought, two bags contained various kinds of mushrooms and fungus. Seeing these, Qin Shuangshuang suddenly remembered something!

Every year, when there was a lot of rain, she collected plenty of mushrooms and fungus, which she dried and stored instead of selling, saving them for times like this.

In the yard were two rooms, with large spaces. Qin Shuangshuang, Qin Miaomiao, and Mrs. Bai shared one room while the other was used for storing odds and ends, food, and other items. Qin Shuangshuang stored the mushrooms and fungus in this room.

Because of last year's drought, Qin Shuangshuang hadn't collected any mushrooms or fungus, and since they could grow some vegetables with well water, she had forgotten about these supplies. It was only while searching that she found several large bags of various kinds of mushrooms and fungus!

Though mushrooms and fungus are a bit monotonous, they are certainly better than only eating meat.

Over the past few days, Qin Shuangshuang frequently went into the mountains, mainly to haul dry firewood home. If she encountered prey, she wouldn't let it slip by, but she wouldn't waste time searching if there was none.

The atmosphere in the village remained very low. Qin Shuangshuang wasn't too worried about the people of Qin Family Village. Maybe because the village had several educated folks, in her previous life, the Qin Family Village had never resorted to cannibalism, even though people starved to death.

After all, no matter how ethical a clan is, once the population increases, there will always be a few troublemakers!

Qin Shuangshuang wasn't concerned about the people from Qin Family Village. She worried about Mr. Qin's family and the nearby village folks. In her previous life, although Fang Zhongyi didn't speak much about it, it seemed Fang Yaoyao was likely tricked by someone she knew from a village.

Fang Zhongyi was capable and wouldn't have let his daughter go hungry even during times of famine, and Yaoyao also learned martial arts from Fang Zhongyi; three or four men weren't a match for her. If it weren't for being completely unsuspecting, it would've been impossible to harm Yaoyao.

Previously, Qin Shuangshuang was busy storing food but had forgotten to stockpile firewood. Recently, she had gone a bit overboard, chopping firewood for seven or eight consecutive days. She piled enough firewood into two small mountains, which would last her family a year.

Qin Shuangshuang initially thought about chopping for another two days, as she noticed the village chief and Aunt Hao's families didn't have much firewood, so she planned to chop more to give some to them later.

Before Qin Shuangshuang could head to the mountains, several outsiders entered the village!

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Several people from neighboring villages were pushing two flatbed carts, each laden with several large empty wooden barrels. It was clear that these outsiders had come to draw water from the well at Qin Shuangshuang's house since the wells in their village had completely dried up.

Qin Shuangshuang's heart sank. Just a few days ago, she noticed that although her well still had water, the water level had dropped again. But she didn't expect the wells in other villages to have already dried up!

Seeing outsiders entering the village, Qin Shuangshuang immediately decided not to venture into the mountains anymore. She would stay home to guard her mother, Mrs. Bai, and Qin Miao.

These outsiders had come to fetch water accompanied by the village chief and a few young villagers. Fortunately, the well was drilled deep enough that even though a lot of water was taken, the water level had not dropped significantly, indicating a relatively abundant aquifer below.

After these water-fetchers left, Qin Shuangshuang immediately deceived Fang Yaoyao to come to her home. Qin Shuangshuang didn't know when Fang Yaoyao had been harmed by someone, but she was really uneasy about leaving Fang Yaoyao in Fang Family Village.

Qin Shuangshuang decided that during this time, no matter what method she needed to employ, she would keep a strict watch over Fang Yaoyao in their home, even as a villain separating a master and his daughter!

A few days later, Qin Shuangshuang heard that a group of refugees was roaming around, capturing isolated people to eat! This made Qin Shuangshuang very uneasy because such incidents had never happened in her previous life.

Although each household's food supply was dwindling, they hadn't run out completely, and it was still a long way from needing to eat people out of starvation. Besides, when people first resorted to eating human flesh, they didn't dare eat the living; they started by eating those who had died of starvation.

It was only after eating dead people's flesh many times, breaking their psychological bottom line repeatedly, and being driven by hunger, that humans would finally abandon all moral boundaries and hunt living people to eat.

Ever since those people from neighboring villages came to fetch water, more and more outsiders came to Qin Family Village for water. The people of Qin Family Village were getting a bit tense. The large number of outsiders combined with the rumors of refugees eating people made everyone nervous during this sensitive time.

Most importantly, the well at Qin Shuangshuang's house couldn't sustain so many villages. Recently, it had run dry a few times. The villagers were worried that the well might be exhausted by these outsiders drawing water.

The great bell in the ancestral hall rang once more. The village chief gathered all the villagers to discuss whether they should continue allowing outsiders to draw water from the village.

Food supplies were becoming increasingly scarce. Many families had begun to count grains of rice before cooking. Everyone was looking grim, and with hunger, they naturally lacked energy. Everyone leaned or sat crookedly, but there was consensus: the water in the well was running low, and they couldn't allow outsiders to keep drawing water.

The village chief sighed, chewing on a grass stalk. His increasingly muddy eyes landed on Qin Shuangshuang. In recent years, everyone knew that although Mrs. Bai was the head of the household, it was Qin Shuangshuang who made the decisions.

In a hoarse voice, the village chief asked Qin Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, this well was drilled with your money. It's your private property. What do you think we should do?"

Qin Shuangshuang's brows knitted tightly. Naturally, she was reluctant to let outsiders draw water, but sometimes what one wishes and what one can do are two different things.

"Village chief, it's not a question of whether to allow people from other villages to draw water; it's a question of whether we can prevent them from doing so," Qin Shuangshuang said, rubbing her forehead as she felt a headache coming on. "In these nearby villages, there's no water left. People may survive without food for seven or eight days, but without water, they can't last three. If we cut off their water supply, we cut off their chance to live. Without a chance to live, they will certainly go mad. Can our village fend off such people?"

The village chief lowered his head, sighed long and hard, and said nothing. The surrounding villagers also remained silent. What could they say? If it were them, cut off

from water while another village had it but was unwilling to share, they too might go mad. There's no telling what someone might do when driven to the brink of madness.

After a long while, a young man couldn't help but shout in anguished fury, "Are we just supposed to watch them dry up our well and then all die together?!"

A few older folks glanced at the young man and didn't speak, but several sharp and energetic young villagers echoed the man's sentiments, speaking with passionate anger, though ultimately useless. It's clear that Qin Family Village couldn't stand against people from over a dozen villages!

Qin Shuangshuang looked at those young men, filled with righteous yet helpless rage, and frowned. She turned to the village chief, "Village chief, our village's well hasn't dried up, indicating that the aquifer below is still in decent shape."

Her words sparked a glimmer of hope in many people's eyes, including the village chief. They all looked at her expectantly.

Feeling a bit awkward, Qin Shuangshuang cleared her throat and continued, "I think if we restrict our water usage a bit, we might last through this drought. How about negotiating with outsiders to limit each village's daily water withdrawal? After all, our village is the only one with a functioning well for miles around. If this well goes dry, they'll perish from thirst too!"

The elders and the village chief discussed it quietly and concluded that this was the best option. Not allowing anyone to draw water was unrealistic, and unrestricted water drawing was not feasible either. Limiting the water quantity was indeed the best solution!

After some further discussion, they finally decided that each village could draw three large barrels of water per day. While that amount might not be much for a village, it would ensure that no one would die of thirst and there would still be enough for cooking.

As for water for washing, such a luxurious use was out of the question during these dire times.

Early the next morning, the people of Qin Family Village erected a wooden barricade at the village entrance. When the water-fetchers gathered, the village chief explained the newly agreed-upon rules. Surprisingly to the villagers of Qin Family Village, the outsiders did not object.

Only one man from a neighboring village frowned and said, "Three barrels of water per village really is too little."

The village chief patiently explained, "It's very little, but it is enough for drinking and cooking. It's not that our village is stingy or reluctant to share water. Our well has

already run dry twice. We fear it will truly dry up, and then we all would face death. Even in our village, we're conserving water as much as possible. Three barrels are little, but we must think long-term. Who knows how long it will be before it rains again? With only one well, we must save and not truly let it run dry!"

The village chief's earnest words made sense, and considering the well belonged to their village, the fact that they were allowed to draw water at all was a life-saving grace. After some murmured discussions, everyone reluctantly agreed to adhere to the rule.

The water-fetching issue was finally resolved. Qin Shuangshuang, standing guard alongside Qin Miao near the village chief, tensed up, wary of these water-fetchers suddenly resorting to violence. She finally let out a sigh of relief.

However, that sigh of relief was short-lived. It caught in her throat again when she saw Mrs. Bai rushing over to tell Qin Shuangshuang that Fang Yaoyao had run back home while she and Qin Miaomiao were out!