

Quick Transmigration: Underdog Turns out to be Untouchable

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The middle-aged man looked very scholarly and refined, but his body was very frail. He lay lightly on the ground, his loose clothes flapping in the wind, looking as if he could be blown away at any moment.

A small child, with two little ponytails, looking no older than six or seven, lay on the man's body, crying loudly.

Beside the child, there was also a middle-aged woman who was equally frail, with a pale complexion that could not hide her beauty, crying incessantly along with the child! Scattered around the three people were several large and small bundles!

Qin Shuangshuang got closer to listen and learned that the man was walking along the road when he suddenly fell headfirst in front of Uncle He's ox cart and fainted!

As soon as the man fainted, the woman and the small child with him threw themselves onto him, calling out "Husband" and "Dad" several times, but he did not wake up. In their panic, they started crying!

The crowd was gathering around the man not to watch the commotion but to discuss whether they should help and try to save him. The people of Qin Family Village were kind-hearted; during past disasters, they couldn't help the victims due to unavoidable circumstances.

Now that they had come out of difficulty, no one was lacking in food or money, and their kind nature resurged. Seeing someone in trouble on the road, they thought about pooling together a few Copper Coins to call for a doctor to have a look. It's tough being away from home; if they could help, they would.

At that time, the village chief was discussing with some clan elders how much each family should contribute to call a doctor. Qin Shuangshuang thought it wasn't a bad idea, so she stepped forward to take charge of the matter.

Since she wasn't short on money, she decided not to ask the others to contribute. Even though thirty taels of household silver was substantial, spending it frivolously wasn't wise, especially considering how many expenses there would be once they reached the border city.

The woman, seeing someone willing to help, quickly knelt down and kowtowed in thanks, "Thank you! Thank you, kind people! Thank you so much..."

Realizing that her father could be saved, the sobbing child, understanding the situation, wiped away tears, stopped crying, and joined his mother in thanking everyone.

A few people went forward to move the man to the side. Qin Shuangshuang looked around and saw a large open space next to a forest not far from the main road. She suggested to everyone that they might as well set up camp there for the night.

This way, they could quickly free up an ox cart, and she could take the man back to the county to see a doctor.

Since they had already decided to help the man, resting early and taking fewer steps was a small price to pay, so naturally, no one objected.

Uncle He's ox cart was soon freed up. With Qin Shuangshuang's help, the man got onto the cart, and naturally, his wife and son followed along.

Uncle He cracked his whip towards the sky, and the big yellow ox pulling the cart started moving on its own. Soon, the group arrived at the county, and after asking around briefly, Qin Shuangshuang found a rather reputable medical clinic.

The resident doctor at the clinic was a middle-aged man in his forties. He came over, examined the man carefully from top to bottom, took his pulse for a while, and then nonchalantly said, "Nothing's wrong, he's just overly hungry. Feed him and have him eat a few full meals, and he'll be fine!"

It turned out to be a false alarm. The man's wife visibly relaxed, and the worry on her face diminished significantly. Although still concerned, she no longer discreetly wiped away tears.

Qin Shuangshuang, having decided to do a good deed to the end, went out and bought a large amount of food, including porridge, soup, vegetables, and rice. She even brought back a big portion of high-quality feed for Uncle He's big yellow ox as a reward for the extra trip.

Inside the house, the man's wife fed him, while outside, Qin Shuangshuang and Uncle He fed the ox. Qin Shuangshuang was particularly fond of this spiritually intelligent big yellow ox from Uncle He's family.

The ox was not only smart on its own but also helped manage the other oxen. During the journey, it always led the way, ensuring the convoy traveled smoothly, a contribution for which the big yellow ox deserved much credit.

After feeding the ox, the man, who had fainted from hunger, gained back some energy after being fed two bowls of porridge by his wife. He felt some strength returning to his body, and his legs were no longer as heavy or shaky, allowing him to stand and walk.

The first thing the man did was come out to thank Qin Shuangshuang, who naturally didn't mind.

Originally, Qin Shuangshuang hadn't planned to inquire about who the man was or where he was going; she just intended to give him a few taels of silver and be done with it. Perhaps because Qin Shuangshuang saved him, the man voluntarily shared his identity and background with her.

This man's background was remarkable. His name was Min Tiancheng, the somewhat beautiful middle-aged woman was his wife, Mrs. Li, and the child was his son, Min Baolai!

Min Tiancheng was born into an aristocratic family dedicated to both farming and studying. Although it sounded impressive, it was similar to Qin Family Village, where everyone shared the same surname, with most people farming and a few studying.

What was remarkable about Min Tiancheng wasn't his family background but his prowess in academics. From the age of twelve, he passed exams starting from a child student to Advanced Scholar. After the palace examination, he became a Second Class and was exceptionally admitted to the Imperial Censorate, basking in glory.

However, he wasn't vigilant enough as an official and was banished by the Emperor to serve as a tutor in a remote border city. Min Tiancheng only briefly mentioned the reason for his demotion without elaborating, and Qin Shuangshuang sensibly did not press for details.

Even though she didn't ask in person, Qin Shuangshuang was extremely curious about why a distinguished Advanced Scholar and Second Class Imperial Censor was disgraced and sent to a border city as a mere tutor, to the point of being so destitute that he fainted from hunger. This situation couldn't be explained merely by "being inept as an official."

The responsibility of a tutor was to oversee the county school and instruct county students in their studies, as well as conduct annual assessments of the scholars to qualify them as recipients of state support.

This position was already considered a notable official post among ordinary people, being elegant and allowing for social connections, but for someone with Min Tiancheng's Advanced Scholar background, it was an underutilization of talent. Typically, tutors were selected from scholars since scholars sufficed to instruct other scholars in their studies!

It seemed he had either been falsely accused or had crossed some powerful political enemies. Although this was her thinking, Qin Shuangshuang was already scheming about what she could do with this respected scholar.

Qin Shuangshuang was considering Min Tiancheng being sent to the border city, which aligned with her own destination. She wondered if she could persuade this Advanced Scholar to come to Qin Family Village and perhaps teach both her and Qin Miao and Fang Yao to read.

The main focus was on teaching Qin Miao and Fang Yao. Qin Shuangshuang was already literate and reasonably learned.

In her past life, Qin Shuangshuang had been traded countless times because of her beauty. A certain merchant intended to present her to an official, who was a refined gentleman, demanding his concubine, possessed of red sleeves and fragrance, to be educated. Under the intensive training of seven to eight tutors, Qin Shuangshuang quickly learned poetry and prose.

However, what she learned back then was directed at appeasing men. Now, Qin Shuangshuang aspired to learn genuinely useful knowledge. As for whether Min Tiancheng had any enemies or whether they posed a risk to her, Qin Shuangshuang wasn't concerned.

In any case, she had no plans to mingle in the Capital City. Even if Min Tiancheng's enemy were the highest-ranked minister, his influence wouldn't reach the border city. She had no worries.

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"Mr. Min, we are all common people heading to the border city under the court's decree. Since you are also going to the border city, why not travel with us? We can look after each other. Besides, as your health hasn't fully recovered, you can ride on the ox cart."

Qin Shuangshuang was planning in her mind, no matter what, to first get Min Tiancheng to travel with them, and then gradually find a way to keep him in Qin Family Village.

Min Tiancheng understood that Qin Shuangshuang's invitation for him to join them was to look after their family, to prevent him from fainting from hunger again.

Although, being a man of letters, he felt a bit embarrassed to follow others for free food and lodging, he was completely penniless, and he couldn't bear to see his wife and children suffer any more. So, with a blush on his face, he nodded and agreed, while in his heart he decided to properly repay these kind people once they reached the border city.

Qin Shuangshuang was not yet aware that her plan was already seventy to eighty percent successful. Seeing Min Tiancheng's awkward demeanor, she understood that he was shy about taking charity due to his scholarly nature. She just smiled and didn't reveal his thoughts.

After bringing Min Tiancheng back, Qin Shuangshuang sought out the village chief, a few clan elders, and her mentor Fang Zhongyi to explain Min Tiancheng's background, emphasizing that he was an Advanced Scholar with profound knowledge, and mentioned her intention to keep him in the village, urging everyone to be gracious and courteous to him.

As soon as Qin Shuangshuang spoke, even if others didn't, the eyes of several clan elders with scholars in their families immediately lit up. They had been worried about finding a good teacher for their grandsons once at the border city, and now a ready-made teacher had come to them. They wouldn't let this opportunity slip away!

Next, Qin Shuangshuang personally witnessed what it meant to curry favor! Several young Scholars and child students from Qin Family Village swarmed around Min Tiancheng's family, eager to help, as if they wanted to carry them while walking and feed them at meals, making Min Tiancheng laugh and cry!

He knew these people wanted to learn from him, and with a mind full of knowledge and nothing else to do, he used the time during breaks to teach them and solve their doubts! It was also a way to pass the time.

Every day, while traveling and giving lectures, he enjoyed the eager and admiring eyes of the students. Over time, it released much of the pent-up frustration in his heart since he left the Capital City, and even his mood brightened up.

Whenever this happened, Qin Shuangshuang would pull Fang Yao and Qin Miao along to listen to the lessons. Qin Shuangshuang was fine, with her foundation from her past life, she could barely understand. However, Qin Miao and Fang Yao, both illiterate, listened to Min Tiancheng's lessons just like ducks hearing thunder—completely oblivious.

After several sessions, seeing that Qin Shuangshuang and the other girls were also interested in learning, and considering that Qin Shuangshuang had saved him, Min Tiancheng began special lectures for the three girls, teaching them some basic knowledge.

It must be said that Fang Yao and Qin Miao had great learning talent. Putting aside Qin Shuangshuang, who intentionally hid her skills, the progress of these two amazed Min Tiancheng. Of course, the most surprising was Qin Shuangshuang, whose learning speed was extraordinary. Naturally, Qin Shuangshuang's case was exceptional, so no comment was made.

Recently, everyone's enthusiasm for learning soared, slowing down the pace of their journey significantly. Originally calculated to reach the border city in about ten days, it took them over a month to get there due to their delays.

Although everyone called it a border city, it was not actually a city. Rather, it was a high and long wall housing soldiers guarding the frontier, magnificent and grand like Feiying Pass!

Beyond Feiying Pass lay a vast, boundless grassland, where barbarians lived. Inside Feiying Pass, there were no actual cities; the common people lived in communities, though there were many of them.

Originally, this place only had one Feiying Pass, a crucial post for guarding the frontier. Later, General Qi came and intimidated the barbarians severely. It reached a point where wherever General Qi was, the barbarians would retreat automatically.

The common people living at the border gathered automatically behind Feiying Pass for protection, and as their numbers grew, the place became known as the border city. In fact, there wasn't a city here, and this time, the Emperor moved people en masse to make the border city live up to its name.

Those who heeded Qin Shuangshuang's advice and came to the border city also discovered it was not the desolate place they imagined. On the contrary, it was bustling with various shops and markets everywhere. As they entered the border city, they immediately felt its robust and open atmosphere, vastly different from the inner regions!

In the streets, people spoke loudly and boldly. Women, dressed neatly, were seen everywhere bustling through the streets and alleys. Even among the street vendors, women were common, and no one found it unusual. Clearly, such scenes were normal at the border city, indicating its openness compared to inner regions.

Even before entering the border city, everyone had heard of General Qi's fame. They knew there was no need to fear barbarian attacks here, and after experiencing the bustling city, any lingering worries they had were completely put to rest!

As emigrant common people, Qin Shuangshuang and her group first went to report to the government, waiting for land distribution and housing plots.

They were received by a clerk who flipped through the ledger for a while, then counted the number of people, fifty-seven households in total, including 472 people.

Upon finishing the headcount, the clerk registered the total number of households, population per household, and each household head, etc. After registration, he reported to his superior and then allocated Qin Shuangshuang and her group a vast tract of wasteland, estimated to be around 3,000 acres.

Following the court's incentives, the government provided materials for the houses, and they built them themselves. As long as the main gate didn't violate regulations, they could build as large as they wanted.

The same applied to land. They cleared the land themselves and allocated it among each household as needed, as long as it didn't exceed the land given to them. Regardless of how much wasteland was developed, it belonged to the developers, and for ten years, the land would be tax-exempt.

Additionally, once the wasteland was developed, they could receive seeds from the government according to the amount of land. Although it was past spring, it was still possible to plant some vegetables.

However, the clerk distributing the land strictly warned that all developed wasteland must be planted with grain or vegetables and could not be left idle. If even one acre was not planted, the family's granted wasteland would be reclaimed.

This policy was meant to prevent common people from greedily expanding without planting, thus wasting land. Everyone agreed to this rule; as people who lived by the land, they wouldn't let the land go to waste.

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Although there is a ten-year tax exemption, it takes at least two years of effort to cultivate barren land into mature farmland. In the first year alone, just pulling the weeds can be exhausting.

Nevertheless, the ten-year tax exemption made everyone very happy. Once they arrived at the border city, they had large pieces of land waiting for them to develop and claim, along with enough materials to build their houses. This made everyone fully convinced of Qin Shuangshuang's decision to bring them to the border city.

Just as Qin Shuangshuang had said before, once they arrived at the border city, as long as they were willing to work, they had no worries about living a good life. With the allure of land and houses in front of them, everyone was in high spirits, each of them busy pondering whether to cultivate the land first or build houses first.

Recently, when people met each other, their greetings had turned into, "Have you decided what to do first? Our family wants to do both, but we can only choose one, it's really troubling." They spoke of troubles, but their faces were full of joy, perfectly demonstrating what it means to say one thing but mean another.

What made Qin Shuangshuang happiest was that Min Tiancheng had already agreed to live with them and promised to open an academy to teach children who love to study. Although Min Tiancheng came to be a lecturer, there wasn't even a city around, let alone a county school!

Min Tiancheng agreed to stay first because everyone's genuine respect warmed his heart, and second, he needed an income to support his family. By teaching students, he could naturally receive some tuition fees.

No matter how you look at it, Min Tiancheng agreeing to stay made everyone even happier. The clan elders whose grandchildren were learning from Min Tiancheng began arranging to build a schoolhouse for him, with classrooms in the front and living quarters in the back. Qin Shuangshuang expressed her wholehearted support.

Since everyone agreed, they rolled up their sleeves and got busy, working in high spirits. The design of the academy was exquisite, with the blueprints personally drawn by the talented and versatile Min Tiancheng. Moreover, Min Sir also took charge of designing everyone's houses, bringing another round of joy as everyone felt they had gained a scholarly air by being associated with an Advanced Scholar!

All the people were united, and the materials were readily available for free, so the academy was quickly built! Once the school was built, the elders temporarily stayed there, while everyone else thought that the most important task was to open up the land, as the land is the foundation for farmers.

In Qin Shuangshuang's household, there were only her, Qin Miaobai, and Fang Yaoyao, although Fang Yaoyao was almost a permanent resident. Since they were all women, Qin Shuangshuang didn't plan for them to farm the land. However, she still planned to develop a hundred acres of barren land.

Qin Shuangshuang was not planning to farm the land herself but was preparing to get some tenant farmers to do it. Based on the timing, those disaster victims would soon be sent to the border city.

According to memories from her previous life, after these disaster victims arrived at the border city, the court did not provide any preferential policies. If they wanted housing, land, or building materials, they had to participate in city construction, with land and building materials allocated based on the amount of work done, but even then, very little was given.

What was more troublesome was that they did not have the thirty taels of household silver per person, no land, no house, and no grain, so the disaster victims had no choice but to rent and cultivate the land of the original residents of the border city.

There was no doubt that since the court was willing to give the migrating people such preferential policies, the original residents of the border city naturally received even more favorable treatment at the first opportunity, such as better land parcels with richer soil!

In fact, the clerk who allocated land to Qin Shuangshuang and the others gave them very fertile land, naturally because they were the first group of people to voluntarily come over, and so they should receive a bit more preferential treatment as a reward.

Qin Shuangshuang, with her great strength, thrust a large iron rake into the ground and pulled it back and forth in a frenzy during land clearing, turning over all the grass roots,

and even the roofs of the homes of wild rats and hares in the barren land, startling them into a wild scatter!

Some quick-eyed and nimble-handed folks grabbed a few fat hares, and also killed many rats to prevent future grain damage, along with two long snakes, but although the snakes looked scary, they preyed on rats, so everyone simply sent them off without harming them.

Qin Shuangshuang's vigorous land clearing naturally attracted attention. Everyone knew that her household had few men and was composed mostly of women. Despite Qin Shuangshuang's capability, she was alone and didn't have the ability to farm so much land herself. At that time, if someone seized her land, it would be a major loss.

Everyone was a bit worried and came over to advise Qin Shuangshuang not to overexert herself. Qin Shuangshuang, not someone to keep things to herself, shared her plans openly.

Upon hearing Qin Shuangshuang's explanation, everyone suddenly understood, and a few insightful ones considered opening more land as well to rent out for others to farm.

Of course, some were worried about whether Qin Shuangshuang's analysis was accurate. What if the court didn't forcibly escort the disaster victims over, or didn't rescind the policies favoring the disaster victims? Then they would be in trouble.

Situations like this favored the bold while the timid starved. Ultimately, it was Qin Shuangshuang's mentor Fang Zhongyi, along with the village chief's family, Uncle He's family, Aunt Hao's family, Qin Sheng's family, and some clan elders and villagers who trusted Qin Shuangshuang, who chose to open more land, while other households only opened three or forty acres, barely enough for their own needs.

Qin Shuangshuang didn't mind; she was busy every day clearing land. Developing barren land wasn't indefinite: once it's opened up, they had to report the chosen acres to the government for registration, and the government would issue a red contract, officially making this land theirs.

Once the government issued a red contract, the common people could not continue clearing land. If they wanted to increase their land, they would have to buy it with money.

This time, Qin Shuangshuang opened up no less than two hundred thirty acres of land. Initially, she only planned to open a hundred acres, but since others dared not open more land for fear that it would be seized if left uncultivated, and three thousand acres were left with a large portion unused, Qin Shuangshuang couldn't bear to see it wasted and cleared over a hundred more acres.

When processing the red contract, the clerk in charge looked at Qin Shuangshuang with an entirely different gaze, repeatedly confirming whether she truly wanted so much land, and telling her several times that if she didn't cultivate the cleared land, it would be entirely reclaimed!

After receiving Qin Shuangshuang's firm confirmation, the clerk stared at her with a gaze that suggested he thought she was a fool before finally issuing the red contract.

Once the red contract was issued, it was time to collect seeds. When collecting seeds, Qin Shuangshuang was once again met with looks as if she were a fool.

Once the land was cleared, it was time to plant. It was midsummer, and they had missed the season for early spring crops, so the government provided seeds for fast-maturing greens, which was better than leaving the land barren.

The exhausting season of farming finally ended, and with two hundred acres of land, planting alone nearly drained Qin Shuangshuang, causing a fatigue she hadn't experienced since her reincarnation, a feeling familiar from her past life.

After the seeds sprouted, the next task came: distinguishing between seeds and weeds, and weeding them out.

This was very tiring work, bending down to locate each one. Qin Shuangshuang couldn't bear to let Mrs. Bai, Qin Miao, and Fang Yao suffer through this hardship but couldn't persuade them not to work, so she soaked herself in the fields, doing as much as she could.

One day, while Qin Shuangshuang was weeding, in the distance, the village chief's eldest grandson, Da Hu, ran over at full speed, his face flushed as he shouted loudly at Qin Shuangshuang...

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"Shuangshuang sister, my grandpa asked me to come over and tell you that the court-sent soldiers have escorted the refugees here! Now all those refugees are gathered at the marketplace, waiting to find some work. Grandpa wants you to hurry up and gather, so everyone can go together to pick some workers!"

After shouting loudly, Da Hu turned around and ran off again, probably to notify others.

Upon receiving this good news, Qin Shuangshuang's mood lifted instantly. She was getting fed up with spending every day weeding in the fields, and now she was finally about to be freed.

Qin Shuangshuang hurried back to her family's tent, changed into some outdoor clothes, and called her mother and Miao Miao, Yaoyao. When she came out, she

happened to meet her master, Fang Zhongyi. Fang Zhongyi wasn't as strong as Qin Shuangshuang and didn't have as much land as she did, but he also had over a hundred acres of land, so he also needed to hire some farmers.

The atmosphere in the border city was more open-minded, with fewer rules. Here, widows remarrying or couples divorcing weren't looked down upon or gossiped about. With Fang Yaoyao residing at Qin Shuangshuang's place every day and Fang Zhongyi being Qin Shuangshuang's master, the two families were close enough that Fang Zhongyi didn't particularly avoid suspicion as he used to and directly chose to live next to the Qin household, making daily interactions more convenient.

Qin Shuangshuang and her group reached the marketplace. Qin Shuangshuang didn't want her mother staying cooped up at home all the time; the outside world was so vast that one ought to explore more to make life worthwhile!

After spending several months traveling from Qin Family Village to the border city, Qin Family Village's people had long been accustomed to women showing themselves publicly, and the gender barriers had also relaxed a lot. Plus, they were unconsciously influenced by the open-minded atmosphere of the border city, and their thoughts had changed a lot.

Even Mrs. Bai herself, after a few months on the road and seeing various local customs and beautiful scenery outside the disaster area, had come to enjoy going out. So when Qin Shuangshuang suggested it, she changed her clothes and went along, instead of making excuses as she once did in Qin Family Village.

When they arrived at the gathering place, the village chief and others were already waiting there. Those gathered were families who had opened up more land, and along the way, the people they met looked at Qin Shuangshuang's spirited group with envy in their eyes!

They regretted not trusting Qin Shuangshuang's analysis back then and resolved that next time they wouldn't hesitate. Whatever Qin Shuangshuang told them to do, they would follow her lead. Even if they didn't understand, they wouldn't question it, because following Qin Shuangshuang would definitely not lead to a loss!

The marketplaces in the border city were numerous and large, each with no fewer than a hundred vendors selling all kinds of goods. Upon entering the marketplace, everyone found their eyes overwhelmed; the items in the border city were different from those inland, with many furs, and even the household utensils were different, less refined but more grand.

The group was excited at the sight and couldn't help but want to pull out their money bags and start buying! After some eager discussion, they decided to buy things first and then gather at the front of the marketplace to find long-term workers, so they divided and went their separate ways.

Actually, ever since getting a taste of the marketplace's bustle in the border city, everyone had wanted to explore the marketplaces. However, they were too busy recently building an academy and opening up farmland. After opening up the land, it was immediately time to plant, weed, and they were as busy as spinning tops, with no time to wander around. Even their grain was bought by gathering contributions of an ounce of silver from each family to purchase and bring back from the grain shop.

Meals were also prepared by a few efficient wives, cooked for everyone to eat together. While none of the houses were yet built, the villagers decided to eat communal meals like this, then build houses one by one together, thus saving time from having to cook at home, so they could get their houses up as soon as possible. Having one's own house was more important than anything.

Among these people, Qin Shuangshuang and Fang Zhongyi were definitely the wealthiest. Back in Qin Family Village, Qin Shuangshuang had always felt unsettled, thinking that Qin Family Village wasn't a place for her to stay long-term. Knowing a disaster would come, she dared not spend money recklessly, always saving instead.

Now in the border city, Qin Shuangshuang felt at ease and thus became generous. Seeing her mother Mrs. Bai and Qin Miao's bare heads, Qin Shuangshuang headed straight to the jewelry shop; she wanted to buy some fine jewelry for her mother and Qin Miao.

As for Fang Yaoyao, Fang Zhongyi was quite willing to spend money on her, so she lacked no accessories, though they were all kept tucked away in boxes.

Fang Yaoyao was quite wild, like Qin Shuangshuang, practicing martial arts every day energetically, unable to keep jewelry on, and if she insisted on wearing it, she'd lose it in her leaps. Therefore, neither Qin Shuangshuang nor Fang Yaoyao wore jewelry! Buying it would just be a waste, better not to buy.

The jewelry in the border city had a kind of rugged style, not that the craftsmanship wasn't fine, just that the styles differed from those inland. Qin Shuangshuang quite liked it and chose a pair of solid golden hairpins and silver hairpins for both her mother and Qin Miao, along with a couple of larger beautiful golden hair clips and two pairs of floral gold earrings.

Qin Shuangshuang spent a total of 117 ounces of silver on all these purchases, which had Mrs. Bai and Qin Miao's hearts aching as they kept pulling at Qin Shuangshuang, trying to stop her from buying!

Qin Shuangshuang just laughed and pushed their hands away. Her past reluctance to spend money didn't mean she was a miser unwilling to spend. Moreover, making money to spend on family was a joyful thing.

The shop owner was even happier, as big customers like Qin Shuangshuang were rare. When settling the bill, the owner was all smiles, seeing only teeth but no eyes, and he specially gifted her two exquisite large jewelry boxes!

This shop owner really knew how to do business; these two boxes were marked at five ounces of silver each, made of real rosewood and top-quality. Giving away ten ounces' worth in one go made Mrs. Bai and Qin Miao, who were initially displeased with the owner for constantly providing Qin Shuangshuang with jewelry, immediately happy!

Mrs. Bai and Qin Miao not only lost their discontent; as they exited the shop, they were expressing heartache over the spent silver while also praising the shop owner as open-handed, saying he was an honest man who knew how to do business.

The four hadn't walked far when they ran into Fang Zhongyi coming out of another jewelry store, and Qin Shuangshuang found it strange. What was her master doing at a jewelry store? After all, Fang Yaoyao didn't wear jewelry!

Getting closer, they saw that Fang Zhongyi was holding a stack of boxes. When he approached, he distributed one to each of Qin Shuangshuang, Fang Yao, and Qin Miao. When Qin Shuangshuang opened hers, she found a pair of intricately crafted golden sparrow hairpins!

Judging by the workmanship and materials, plus the exquisite tassels below, the pair of golden sparrow hairpins must be worth at least over thirty ounces! A glance at Fang Yao and Qin Miao's boxes revealed equally exquisite golden sparrow hairpins inside, with different floral patterns but equally costly.

Qin Shuangshuang's gaze fell on another larger box in Fang Zhongyi's hand, knowing that the item inside must be even more valuable by its size!

Seeing Qin Shuangshuang eyeing the box in his hand, Fang Zhongyi coughed and handed it to her, saying, "This is a gift for your mother, to thank her for always taking care of my Yaoyao!" After speaking, he coughed again, appearing a little awkward.

Qin Shuangshuang raised her eyebrows and opened the box in her hand directly, gasping in astonishment!

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Earlier, Qin Shuangshuang had thought the things inside the box were surely valuable, but upon opening it, she found that the items were even more expensive than she had imagined! It was a pair of golden hairpins twice the size of the hairpins Qin Shuangshuang and her group had, and a pair of large gold bracelets with coiling silk dragons.

Qin Shuangshuang frowned. Her mother was really kind to Fang Yao, but Fang Zhongyi, as a teacher, was also very good to her. There was no need to give such expensive gifts!

Qin Shuangshuang didn't want to accept these gifts, but they weren't for her; they were for her mother, Mrs. Bai. Qin Shuangshuang looked up to get her mother's opinion, only to see Mrs. Bai staring blankly at the jewelry in her hand.

When she caught her mother's attention, Mrs. Bai quickly coughed and turned her head to observe the nearby stalls. Qin Shuangshuang's heart suddenly skipped a beat; her mother's reaction was exactly the same as her teacher Fang Zhongyi's previous response!

Suddenly, the jewelry box in Qin Shuangshuang's hands felt as if it weighed a thousand pounds. Her mind became muddled, and she didn't even know how she felt, only wondering when exactly her mother and Fang Zhongyi had taken a liking to each other!

With this thought, many previously overlooked incidents suddenly came to mind. She remembered how her teacher used to be very careful to avoid suspicion, never speaking to Mrs. Bai or getting close to her, and his gaze never lingered on her, fearing he might ruin Mrs. Bai's reputation!

However, ever since they all traveled to the border city, Fang Zhongyi had changed. Unbeknownst to when it started, Fang Zhongyi, who never used to approach them, now wandered within her sight all day long and occasionally exchanged words with Mrs. Bai!

Though Fang Zhongyi never got excessively close or made any inappropriate moves, his frequency of appearance was simply too high!

Moreover, during times of food scarcity, Fang Zhongyi always found a way to gather food during the team's rest stops, and he gave it all to Qin Shuangshuang.

This was not surprising to Qin Shuangshuang because Fang Zhongyi had always been so kind to her, and she was accustomed to receiving things from him. After being saved by Fang Zhongyi in a previous life, he always acted this way because he knew Qin Shuangshuang did not keep the food to herself; giving it to her meant Mrs. Bai, Qin Miao, and Fang Yaoyao all had a share.

Later, after leaving the disaster-stricken area, when they could hunt prey, their meat supply increased, but every time Fang Zhongyi would also bring back many fresh wild vegetables. While Qin Shuangshuang, unlike Fang Zhongyi, wasn't purely carnivorous, she didn't particularly enjoy vegetables either. So, these wild vegetables naturally ended up in the mouth of Mrs. Bai and Qin Miao, who especially loved greens.

At that time, Qin Shuangshuang didn't think much of it. Looking back now, the wild vegetables Fang Zhongyi later sent were exactly Mrs. Bai's favorites!

What once seemed utterly normal now seemed completely suspicious in hindsight. Fang Zhongyi's intentions were already so glaring back then, yet she remained oblivious!

Even after reaching the border city, where customs were open, Fang Zhongyi actually set his tent right next to her home, which was way too close. What was infuriating was that she hadn't realized anything wrong, and looking at Mrs. Bai now, it seemed she was intentional about it!

Qin Shuangshuang's mind was in chaos, unable to tell what she felt. Rationally, she knew Fang Zhongyi was an absolutely good man, a great match, but emotionally, she had an obsession and possessiveness towards her mother, Mrs. Bai!

In both past and present lives, Mrs. Bai was the best to her, with no one surpassing her! Qin Shuangshuang had deep feelings for her mother and felt that any man daring to make advances on her mother was like touching her reverse scale!

If that person hadn't been Fang Zhongyi, her esteemed master whom she admired and revered as a father figure, she would have gone off and beaten the person half to death!

Qin Shuangshuang didn't even know how she proceeded afterward, drifting about with her mind full of this issue!

At times, she was adamant about taking her mother far away from Fang Zhongyi, making it so he couldn't even brush against her mother's clothing. Yet, at other times, she convinced herself that her mother was still young and had suffered much. If a man could take care of her mother together, it might make her mother's life happier. A daughter's filial piety could never replace having a life partner.

"Shuangshuang, Shuangshuang!"

Qin Shuangshuang snapped back from her thoughts to find her mother calling her. A bit dazed, she returned to her senses, seeing before her a lineup of about ten people of all ages, genders, and states, even some children, and glanced around at a crowd of people in ragged clothes. Her mother had apparently chosen people to hire, now seeking her approval.

Qin Shuangshuang looked at these people, who all appeared to be unhealthy and physically frail. It was clear they were a family, their eyes filled with both anticipation and anxiety, evidently fearing the presence of women and children might deter Qin Shuangshuang from agreeing to hire them.

Mrs. Bai's selection, without even needing to ask, was driven by her soft-heartedness and kindness. Naturally, Qin Shuangshuang wouldn't oppose something her mother wished to do!

Besides, Qin Shuangshuang didn't have any particular objections. This was a time when families kept all members, not abandoning girls to reduce population burdens. They still held onto the idea of keeping the family together, suggesting their character couldn't be too poor.

Qin Shuangshuang wasn't fearful of hiring anyone who might have eaten human flesh! The disaster victims who had resorted to cannibalism were already rounded up and imprisoned with harsh conditions before being forcibly moved to the border city.

Those cannibalistic disaster victims were likely dispatched to labor-intensive places like quarries as punishment. Did they really think there would be no law during times of disaster? Eating people without accountability? The court assures, at all times, the law is still in effect!

This particular family comprised more than a dozen members, many of whom were strong laborers. Although there were quite a few women, they all appeared capable of working. With the whole family, they should be able to manage the two to three hundred acres of land, so Qin Shuangshuang decided not to hire additional people.

It was common for land rental agreements to split the crops 70/30, but some conscientious families opted for a 60/40 split. Qin Shuangshuang naturally planned to adopt this more generous 60/40 arrangement. Even though the crops for this year's land had been planted, and by rules, a share should be deducted, working on barren fields was exhausting, so Qin Shuangshuang decided not to deduct any share.

Qin Shuangshuang's generous offer couldn't be more benevolent. The expressions of the family opposite were filled with joy, though the elder leader still nervously rubbed his hands, trying to negotiate with Qin Shuangshuang about changing this year's dividend to be issued in grain!

Their main concern was their lack of money; they had to eat upon reaching the border city but without money, buying food was impossible. Despite Qin Shuangshuang's generous terms, it couldn't alleviate their immediate need, so naturally, she agreed.

When they arrived, everyone traveled by ox-cart. When returning, they had a bunch of people, and the ox-cart was loaded with various purchases and the tenants' clothing, so they all slowly made their way back on foot.