

Rebirth: Regaining Joyful Moments

Chapter 16: Chapter 016 What Should Sister Zhou Do?

Busy for three straight days, they got up before dawn and only returned home after dark. Even though Xu Nianhua tried to vary the dishes she made, it still didn't change the fact that they were eating vegetables.

The bright moonlight was as clear as daylight, and the stars twinkled, with fireflies occasionally seen flitting about.

The cicadas' chorus rose and fell, and the frogs in the fields were singing as the three siblings cooled off in the courtyard.

"Big brother, when are you going back to the brick factory?" Xu Nianhua looked toward Xu Nianji, who was four years older than her. At twenty-three, Xu Nianji was considered late in marrying.

Xu Zhihao, a year younger than Xu Nianji, had gotten married at the end of last year and was about to become a father.

All this was due to their partial step-grandmother who claimed that marrying someone from the city as Xu Zhihao did would eventually benefit their entire family.

Hmph.

Others might not know, but could she not be aware?

The recent division of the family had been so decisively handled, was it not because Xu Zhihao was about to become a father? His father-in-law worked at the supply and marketing cooperative as an accountant, and now, approaching retirement, he wanted to secure the job for Xu Zhihao.

Before the news was even confirmed, Liu Sanmei had begun scheming about splitting the family assets. Nianhua remembered from her past life, Liu Sanmei never managed to convince Grandpa Xu Zhong to agree, and with time dragging on, Xu Zhihao lost his job opportunity, and the matter of the family split naturally fizzled out.

Liu Sanmei's most valued grandson, Xu Zhiyuan, had also failed to gain admission to a university.

Liu Sanmei's efforts must have been in vain.

Xu Nianhua contemplated deep in her heart what her big brother could do—a job that could earn money yet be safe.

"Right."

Xu Nianji's features, resembling those of Xu Qinghe, appeared as if carved out of the same mold—thick black eyebrows, sharply defined features, just like Xu Qinghe, thoroughly reliable.

"Next time I come back, I'll get my paycheck. What would you like?" Xu Nianji asked, looking at her with doting eyes.

In the family, Xu Nianhua was the only sister, and both Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an treated her extremely well.

"I don't lack anything," Xu Nianhua had just finished speaking when Xu Nian'an stepped forward and said, "Brother, is the brick factory still hiring?"

"You just stay at home, at ease, wait to study another year, pass the college entrance exam, and bring honor to our Xu Family."

Xu Nianji glared at him and said, "Both of you better study hard. I am really looking forward to you getting into college, to bring us joy."

"Brother, let little sister study, I..."

Xu Nian'an hadn't finished his sentence, when Xu Nianhua interrupted, "Second brother, school's not starting for a while, why don't we earn our own tuition?"

"How would we earn it?" Xu Nian'an looked at Xu Nianhua with a clueless expression. Earning enough for tuition by themselves was truly not an easy task.

"We'll think of a way."

Xu Nianhua hadn't come up with a plan yet, but she felt that there would definitely be a way.

Xu Nianji, who was beside them, wanted to say something, but seeing the two of them talking excitedly, he did not want to dampen their spirits.

"Brother, what about Zhou Family's sister?" Xu Nianhua suddenly changed the subject.

Xu Nianji was taken aback.

"Don't worry about her, she said she would wait for me." Xu Nianji lightly tapped Xu Nianhua's forehead and then suddenly became serious, "You should worry more about

yourself. Going to the back mountain to play, you could have fallen into the lake, and if Nian'an hadn't been there to find you, do you realize how dangerous that was?"

Xu Nianhua stuck out her tongue playfully and said, "That was just an accident, really not my fault."

Chapter 17: Chapter 017: You're Blushing

"Big brother," Xu Nianhua suddenly became solemn, sitting up straight and said, "Zhou He is willing to wait, but what about the Zhou Family?"

The Zhou Family?

Xu Nianji furrowed his brow at the thought of the Zhou Family.

"What if the Zhou Family is unwilling to wait, and they want to marry Zhou He off to someone else?" Xu Nianhua wasn't talking nonsense; these events had actually happened in his past life!

Zhou He was willing to wait for big brother, but the Zhou Family didn't want her to wait. Coincidentally, a widower in the county, nearly forty years old, took a liking to Zhou He and offered three hundred dollars to marry her.

Naturally, Zhou He didn't want this, but the Zhou Family, seeing the amount of money, was willing.

Zhou He would rather die than comply, it's just a pity...

The Zhou Family was adamant about marrying her off to the widower, they even wanted to make the cooked rice into a done deal. The strong-willed Zhou He preserved her purity with her life.

This matter dealt a huge blow to big brother.

Zhou He had deep feelings for big brother; this sister-in-law, who had not yet become part of the family, Xu Nianhua naturally didn't want such a tragedy to happen again.

"I will go to the Zhou Family tomorrow."

Xu Nianji, thinking of the two hundred dollars for the dowry, became anxious. Without money at home, even if he wanted to marry, how could he?

"Big brother, don't worry," Xu Nianhua said, fearing his words were too severe. "Since the two families have agreed on the betrothal, there's absolutely no reason to go back on their word, and if they were to renege, they would not do so without informing us."

Xu Nian'an consoled his big brother.

Xu Nianji managed a faint smile, thinking he must work even harder.

"Big brother, let's figure out a way to make money tomorrow; we'll definitely get Zhou He to join our family sooner."

Xu Nianhua's words were met with a titter.

Xu Nianhua covered his forehead, which had been knocked, and pouted discontentedly, "I'm going to tell on you, you don't want to marry Zhou He sooner."

"You little rascal," Xu Nianji's dark face turned slightly red.

"Ha ha~"

Xu Nianhua, as if discovering a new continent, said, "Big brother, you're blushing."

"Really?"

Xu Nian'an also leaned in closer.

The three siblings, chatting and laughing together, their laughter carried far and wide.

Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying had just obtained the house title deeds from the village head of Zhou, and from a distance, heard the laughter of the three siblings.

"Although times are tough, they will always get better," said Ji Ying, who had left the Xu Family and felt relieved all over; from now on, no matter how much or how little they earned, it would all belong to their own family.

"Mhm."

Xu Qinghe responded, his gaze distant as he looked towards the only house lit by candlelight, thinking about the news he'd heard, feeling even colder inside.

When Zhihao got married, he was so affectionate calling me "Uncle," but now that he was about to take over his father-in-law's position and soon make big money, had he changed his attitude, considering becoming a city person, and become ashamed of our family?

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Xu Qinghe left to work early, while Ji Ying was tidying up at home, and Xu Nianji also went to the county early.

Originally, he intended to visit the Zhou Family, but with the family currently in straitened circumstances, it would be better if Xu Nianji did not visit empty-handed.

Xu Nianji suppressed his yearning and headed straight to the brick factory in the county.

"What are you going to do?" After Xu Nian'an had dried the rice, he saw Xu Nianhua dressed in long clothes and trousers, not looking like someone planning to stay at home.

"Second brother, I'm thinking of going to the back mountain."

"What are you going to do at the back mountain?"

Xu Nian'an thought of the lake in the back mountain and still felt a shiver of fear!

"To make money."

Xu Nianhua replied as if it were obvious, "Second brother, we rely on the mountain, so we have to figure out ways to make money, right?"

Chapter 18: Chapter 018 Fruit Jelly

"What can you earn money from in the mountains?" Xu Nian'an replied without even lifting his eyelids.

The bamboo and trees in the mountains are indeed valuable, but, at most, they could earn labor wages. And, that also depended on when there was work available at the village's forestry station.

Hunting?

Forget it, although they grew up on the edge of the mountain, they still didn't have the skills for hunting.

"There are plenty of ways to make money, like gathering medicinal herbs. It's better than just staying at home, right?"

Xu Nianhua urged, "Second brother, will you go or not?"

Xu Nian'an looked at her long clothes and pants and couldn't bring himself to say 'no'.

He couldn't let her go to the mountain alone.

Before long, Xu Nian'an had changed into long sleeves and pants. Now, in the midst of summer, with many mosquitoes, snakes, and ants on the mountain, long sleeves and pants were safer.

As they were leaving, Ji Ying interrogated them for quite some time until Xu Nian'an said they were going to the mountain to pick some sour plums.

Ji Ying mumbled, what's so good about those sour and astringent plums that aren't even sweet?

"Right now is precisely the season when plums are ripe," Xu Nianhua thought of the sour plums and couldn't help craving them.

"They are so sour, what's good about them?"

Xu Nian'an smacked his lips without any interest in the plums.

On their way up the mountain, Xu Nian'an chopped wood as they were living in an old house and short on firewood.

Xu Nianhua followed suit in chopping wood. Although she hadn't done such tasks for many years, she still knew how, but had ignored how frail her body was...

"Sit on that rock and rest, don't tire yourself out," Xu Nian'an suggested, drenched in sweat as he tied up the firewood they both had chopped. He continued, "I'm not criticizing you, but going up the mountain in this summer heat, you really want to drive yourself crazy!"

"With your skinny arms and legs, you're gasping for breath after climbing just a few steps."

Xu Nian'an's disdain was never concealed.

Xu Nianhua looked sheepish, but still argued, "Second brother, it's exactly because I'm weak that I need to climb more mountains, to strengthen my body."

Her eyes darted around as she wiped the plums she had picked clean and popped them into her mouth, the sourness seemingly strong enough to erode her teeth.

But the taste wasn't bad.

How can money actually be made?

There were plenty of medicinal herbs on the mountain, but she didn't recognize them!

Suddenly, her eyes lit up, pointing to some fruits in a tree not far away, she asked, "Second brother, what is that?"

Xu Nianhua was visibly excited.

Xu Nian'an followed her gaze and said, "Bixi fruit?"

"Yes, yes, yes, also called Fruit Jelly!"

Xu Nianhua said excitedly, "Second brother, hurry and pick that, I want that fruit!"

Fruit Jelly?

"You want to eat mung bean jelly?" Xu Nian'an asked.

"Mhm mhm mhm."

Xu Nianhua nodded vigorously.

Xu Nian'an picked some of the fruits, but Xu Nianhua felt it wasn't enough and asked him to pick more.

"What do you want with so much Fruit Jelly? If you want to eat, we can just make it at home," Xu Nian'an said.

Although the mung bean jelly made from these fruits tasted good, it was quite a hassle. To exert so much effort for a bite of jelly seemed less worthwhile than making something else.

"Second brother, I have a wonderful use for it," Xu Nianhua said.

She thought about the summer season, and how selling the mung bean jelly would surely make money!

The jelly-making process was simple, but it wasn't a unique business.

However, Xu Nianhua wasn't worried. Making mung bean jelly almost cost nothing, with the only significant expense being labor and some brown sugar. If she could use the mung bean jelly to save up some capital, that would always be good.

Chapter 19: Chapter 019 I Definitely Won't Buy

As evening approached, Xu Nianhua and her brother Xu Nian'an, one carrying firewood and the other dragging it, wearily made their way back home.

"I thought you went to pick plums, why did you bring back so much firewood?"

Ji Ying hurried forward to take the firewood from Xu Nianhua's hands, felt the bulging clothes, and couldn't help but ask, "What else did you bring back? Plums?"

"There are plums, and other things too."

Xu Nianhua was so tired she could hardly catch her breath.

Her face was also sunburnt red, and her hands, likely blistered by now.

What Xu Nianhua admired most was her second brother, Xu Nian'an; he chopped and bundled the firewood efficiently, without stopping for a moment.

"Those plums are so sour, and you can still stomach them," Ji Ying said as she placed the firewood into the stack and unwrapped what was bundled in the clothes—there were only a few green plums, but a whole bag full of Bixi Fruits!

"Even if you're craving Mung Bean Jelly, you didn't need to pick all the fruit and bring it back, right?"

Seeing so much fruit, Ji Ying wondered how much Mung Bean Jelly that would make—after all, two fruits could make a whole bowl.

Although this food cost little to make, it was extremely laborious; therefore, in the village, only occasionally would someone satisfy a child's craving by making it, and it was rarely made in large quantities.

"Mom, I have a great use for these," Xu Nianhua said as she gulped down a lot of well water, then filled a bowl with more and handed it to Xu Nian'an.

Thirsty as well, Xu Nian'an agreed; since they moved here, firewood was what they lacked the most. Now that they were on the mountain, Xu Nian'an wished he could chop enough firewood for ten days or even half a month all at once.

"These two fruits make a bowl of Mung Bean Jelly, enough for a satisfying meal," Ji Ying mentioned.

Grinning, Xu Nianhua said, "Mom, when did I say I wanted to eat it myself? I'm going to sell it in the county."

"You think you can sell this stuff for money?" Ji Ying was the first to disbelieve.

In the village, who couldn't make Mung Bean Jelly?

"Of course," Xu Nianhua confidently nodded. Seeing Ji Ying's disbelief, which was shared even by Xu Nian'an, she asked, "Brother, what would you do if you wanted to eat Mung Bean Jelly?"

"Make it myself," Xu Nian'an answered without hesitation.

"Then, what about the people in the county who want to eat Mung Bean Jelly? One makes a whole bowl, but what if someone only wants one serving?"

"Also, the process of making Mung Bean Jelly is particularly tiring. Tell me, if someone made it ready-to-eat, wouldn't you buy it?"

Xu Nianhua's eyes gleamed as she looked at him.

Without a second thought, Xu Nian'an replied, "I definitely wouldn't buy it."

Why spend money on that when it could be used for something else?

Holding back the urge to roll her eyes, Xu Nianhua said, "What if, just what if, you lived in the county where picking fruit isn't easy, and it's even more time-consuming to prepare?"

She slowly explained, and Xu Nian'an's eyes lit up. If one were a county resident, who would have the time to make Mung Bean Jelly?

Besides, just because they were short on money, it didn't mean others were.

If the price was right, there would definitely be buyers.

"Nianhua, that's a brilliant idea!" Xu Nian'an's eyes sparkled with excitement. "If this can make money, I'll pick fruits every day."

The thing their family lacked the most now was money.

Night fell.

The siblings set to work washing the fruit. Then, they sliced them open, packaging the seeds and pulp in cheesecloth to rub and scrub in well water.

This scrubbing was the most exhausting task.

Xu Qinghe returned from working outside and, hearing that his siblings intended to sell Mung Bean Jelly in the county, started making buckets with his tools after dinner.

Ji Ying: "..."

Done. She had wanted Xu Qinghe to dissuade his siblings from their idea, but instead, he went out of his way to make two buckets for their Mung Bean Jelly!

Chapter 20: Chapter 020 Two Cents a Bowl

With the support of their father, Xu Qinghe, the siblings worked even harder at kneading the Mung Bean Jelly.

Ji Ying sighed and quietly asked Xu Qinghe, "Can we sell things on our own now?"

"We should be able to," Xu Qinghe answered while making a wooden bucket. "The last time I was working, I passed through the county and saw quite a few people selling things. Since the siblings want to try, we should let them."

"After all, we won't lose our capital," Xu Qinghe said. "I can't do much else, but I can still make these two buckets. If it doesn't work out, we can always use the buckets at home."

Now, they were in an old house that lacked everything, and Xu Qinghe could only do some work late at night when he returned from his job.

"Then let them go ahead and try; they'll learn better after facing a few setbacks."

Ji Ying wasn't hopeful about this venture of selling Mung Bean Jelly.

"This should make up two buckets, right?"

Without electric lights and by the light of the moon, they could vaguely see the well water turning stickier.

"Let's knead it a bit longer."

Xu Nianhua had never done this before, and her hands were already soft, but she was afraid that if they didn't succeed this first time, they wouldn't be able to sell tomorrow. She felt it was better to expend a bit more effort and knead for a while longer.

"Alright then."

Each sibling took a basin. Xu Nian'an was a man and had more strength, kneading faster. In the end, Xu Nian'an had to help finish kneading Xu Nianhua's basin.

Only when she lay down in bed did Xu Nianhua realize that kneading Mung Bean Jelly was truly hard work!

Her hands ached intensely, and the blisters from chopping wood didn't help. Luckily, her left hand was blister-free, otherwise, she might have kneaded those blisters away.

In the early morning, as dawn broke and Xu Nianhua was sleeping soundly, she was roused by noises outside. As she moved, her arms felt sore and weak.

"Dad, why are you making buckets so early?" Xu Nianhua asked as she saw Xu Qinghe had already shaped the buckets, which were very beautifully colored.

"Dad, your craftsmanship is really good."

Xu Nianhua complimented the buckets, which were particularly good-looking.

"Once the buckets are finished, you can use them today," Xu Qinghe said with a simple smile. "I can't do much else."

"Thank you, Dad."

Xu Nianhua sweetly expressed her thanks, while Ji Ying had gone to till the land beside the house. Grabbing a bit of rice, she planned to cook porridge. Early in the morning, Xu Nian'an had gone up the mountain to chop wood because firewood at home was sorely needed.

"Wow, the Mung Bean Jelly we made is really good."

Xu Nianhua got up early and saw the Mung Bean Jelly, which they had put in basins of cool water. It was sparkling and translucent, like transparent jelly, and looked quite appealing.

She took half a pound of brown sugar, melted it, and then found a covered cup to store it, keeping it in the well water to cool the sugary mixture a bit.

After lunch.

"Tired, huh?"

Xu Nian'an carried two new buckets. Inside one was a bucket full of Mung Bean Jelly, while the other held several bowls and half a bucket of well water.

Xu Nianhua, on the other hand, carried the brown sugar water in a cloth bag, ready for light travel. Despite the scorching sun, they were both drenched in sweat.

"I'm not tired, it's you who must be exhausted, big brother," Xu Nianhua thought about vehicles from the future; if they had a tricycle, the siblings wouldn't have to toil so hard.

"By the way, how should we sell our Mung Bean Jelly?"

Xu Nian'an had been thinking about it the whole way and still wasn't sure how much to charge.

"Two dimes a bowl," Xu Nianhua answered.

Xu Nian'an was startled, took a glance at Xu Nianhua, and said, "Isn't that a bit too expensive?"