

Rebirth: Regaining Joyful Moments

Chapter 6: Chapter 006: When the Son Grows Up, He's Out of His Father's Control

"Ever since I can remember, our house has always been smaller than Uncle and Aunt's house. I had to squeeze in with my brothers to sleep, while Xu Jiaojiao could sleep by herself."

"Later, Dad and my brothers, out of love for me, made me a separate little room. My brothers moved into that room, which was cold in the winter and hot in the summer."

"Of course, those things are too far in the past to talk about now," Xu Nianhua said, with a faint smile. She continued, "Let's talk about the past few years, during the busy farming seasons, my two brothers, our parents, and I were all working in the fields, but what about Uncle's family?"

"Which year did Uncle's family not return to Aunt's maternal home during this time?"

"Uncle and Aunt don't need to rush to deny it; this is a well-known fact in the village."

Xu Nianhua wasn't frightened by Xu Zhong's stern face. She rattled on, giving no one a chance to interject, saying, "My eldest brother worked at the brick factory, making thirty yuan a month, five yuan of which went to food, and the remaining twenty-five was all given to Grandma and Grandpa. My Dad, as a carpenter, didn't earn much either, but he still brought home fifteen to twenty yuan each month."

"And there's my mom at home, washing clothes, cooking, going to the mountain to gather pigweed to feed the pigs, cleaning out the pigsty, sweeping the chicken and duck droppings from the yard. Is there a single meal that isn't prepared by my mom?"

Taking a deep breath, Xu Nianhua thought about how hard her own mother worked for the Xu Family like an ox or a horse. What did she get in the end?

Nothing?

"What, are you accusing us, their grandparents, of favoritism? The money was handed over, but I was saving it for the kids' marriages," Xu Zhong said with a face as dark as the bottom of a pot.

"Ji Ying, how can you say that? Don't I also cook meals at home?" Zhao Juxiang couldn't sit still and retorted.

"Yes, you cook three meals a year, and my mom has to prepare the sides. After the meals, it's also me and my mom who wash the dishes," Xu Nianhua retorted without hesitation, her words laced with a hint of mockery.

"Grandpa."

Xu Nianhua was about to say something else, when Xu Qinghe interrupted, "Third son."

Her lips moved, but Xu Nianhua shut her mouth and said not another word. Her parents were pushovers, treated by Grandma, Grandpa, and Uncle like dough to be kneaded at will, taking on every dirty and tiring job. Any time there were treats, her family was never thought of.

Saving money for marriages?

When it was time for Xu Zhihao to get married, they had emptied their savings.

Xu Zhiyuan was in school, and that meant she and her siblings couldn't study. When Xu Zhiyuan finished school, he'd need to get married too, and that would also cost money.

Not to mention that her eldest brother's engagement to the Zhou Family had been dragging on without the formalities, also because they couldn't produce the two hundred yuan needed for the bride price.

Because of this, her parents were frantic, having discussed it with Grandma and Grandpa countless times. Grandma sure spoke prettier than a song, but the money somehow never materialized.

"So, this is what you all think?" Xu Zhong stared at Xu Qinghe.

Thinking of his feverish daughter and defending Ji Ying with strong arguments, Xu Qinghe knew he couldn't be the one to hold things back as a father. He said, "Dad, I know it sounds bad to split the family, but it's not like there aren't other families in the village that haven't done the same."

After speaking these words, Xu Qinghe hung his head, not daring to meet Xu Zhong's eyes.

"Good, good, good!"

Xu Zhong said the word 'good' three times, his face full of disappointment as he spoke, "When a child grows up, they are no longer under their father's control, they get too big for their britches and can't be told what to do anymore."

Chapter 7: Chapter 007: The Old House

"Old man, don't be mad at the kids." Grandma Liu Sanmei gently patted Xu Zhong's back, helping him to calm down while comforting him, "The kids are grown now, they all want to live on their own, and we as parents can't control them for their whole lives, can we?"

"Qinghe, don't blame your dad, and Nianhua, don't blame your grandpa either. Second uncle and second aunt, this is all my fault as your grandma." Liu Sanmei wiped away the non-existent tears from the corner of her eye, saying, "I'm frail and can't do much around the house, which has forced your mom to take on so much."

"Your second aunt is busy with many things in the village, in this regard, your family has indeed suffered a disadvantage."

Liu Sanmei's tone suddenly changed, saying, "But, your second uncle and second aunt's salaries are also all handed over each month."

"Since Qinghe wants to split the household, then let's split, to spare us elders from being accused of favoritism." Liu Sanmei's words evoked a sense of guilt in Xu Qinghe.

Nianhua's heart rose to his throat, and he inadvertently grabbed hold of Xu Qinghe's sleeve, worried that a moment of soft-heartedness from Xu Qinghe would change his mind about splitting up the household.

"Qinghe, based on what you said, how should the house be divided?" Liu Sanmei kicked the question back to Xu Qinghe.

Xu Qinghe lifted his head in bewilderment; how would he know how to divide it?

In the past, Ji Ying, furious as she was, had mentioned splitting the household, even the eldest, Xu Nianji, had brought up the issue, but Xu Qinghe had always blocked it.

Today's events had caught Xu Qinghe off guard, his mind was still in disarray.

Xu Nianhua tried to speak again, but after holding back twice, she could only glance quietly at Ji Ying, who at that moment also didn't know what to say and simply kept her mouth shut.

"Since Qinghe hasn't thought it through, I think it's best like this, your dad and I will take the second son and live in the old house," as soon as Liu Sanmei finished speaking, it was immediately met with strong rejection.

"Why should I, the father, have to give up the house for him?" Xu Zhong glared harshly at Liu Sanmei.

Xu Qingjiang also disagreed, saying, "Mom, the old house has been deserted for over a decade now, how can anyone live there?"

"Exactly, Mom, aren't we living quite well as it is?" Zhao Juxiang chimed in.

Xu Qinghe added, "Dad, Mom, even if we split the house, we can't let you stay in the old house. If anyone is to stay, it should be us, not you."

"Qinghe, are you really willing to live in the old house?" Liu Sanmei looked at Xu Qinghe and said, "The old house is a bit old, but if we fix it up a bit, it's still livable. However, people in the village will surely say that we're driving you out to the old house, so just stay here."

The more Liu Sanmei said this, the more resolute Xu Qinghe became about living in the old house. Splitting the family was already dishonorable enough, how could he let them live in the old house.

Xu Nianhua's lips couldn't help but twitch; Liu Sanmei was advancing by retreating, her real intention was to make them live in the old house.

"Dad, Mom, after we split the family, we'll live in the old house," Xu Qinghe stated firmly.

Ji Ying frowned and glanced at it, the house that had only been hers for a dozen years when she married into it; she had initially lived in the old house. Later they moved to this new house, and just like that, they had lived here for over a decade, while the old house had been left to grow weeds in the courtyard.

"Mom, I also agree to live in the old house," Xu Nianhua whispered.

"I agree too."

Xu Nian'an couldn't wait to raise both hands in agreement; the old house was better than here anyway. He believed that his elder brother, being here, would rather live in the old house and not want to continue to make money for the second uncle's family like in the old days.

Chapter 8: Chapter 008 No Money

Ji Ying looked at her son and daughter, feeling extremely bitter inside. It was her failure to protect them that made them so eager to leave this place.

"Dividing the family property is fine, but there's one thing I must make clear to you," Xu Zhong said with a darkened face. After calming down, he felt that dividing the family wasn't such a bad thing.

Zhihao was married, and every year when he came back, he always made Zhiyuan give up his room.

Zhiyuan was about to go to college, yet he still didn't have a room of his own. When the time came for him to get married, surely the two brothers couldn't still share one room, could they?

"Since we are going to divide the property, we must certainly discuss things clearly," Xu Qinghe said in a deep voice. Because of Nianji's delayed marriage last year, they had almost divided the property, but Xu Zhong had strongly forbidden it at that time.

Moreover, Xu Zhihao had married a girl from the city. If a family division happened at this time, it would look particularly bad in terms of saving face.

Last year's division of property came to nothing, and because of this, his eldest son, Xu Nianji, had become a lot quieter.

Xu Zhong first explained the details of the property division: Xu Qinghe's family of five would move into the old house.

The old house, the one that had been neglected for more than a decade, had grass in the courtyard that had grown taller than the door, a leaky roof, and drafts coming from all directions in the winter.

As for the land, the piece that Xu Qinghe's family of five inherited was all the land in front of the old Xu family house. Not only was it not fertile, but it also had the lowest yield every year, and most importantly, Xu Zhong had allocated too little land.

Xu Qinghe sat there stunned, unable to believe that his own father would divide the family property like this.

Beyond the old house and those few infertile pieces of land, they would keep only the belongings inside their home, with not a single cent of money to their name.

After all these years, their family of five had no savings beyond their daily expenses?

"Dad, the elder brother is getting married in the second half of this year. It doesn't matter if the house is old, but the money for the marriage..." Xu Qinghe finally spoke up, but before he even finished, Xu Zhong interrupted him.

"After the division, we won't involve ourselves in Nianji's marriage," Xu Zhong stated bluntly, his words dropping like a heavy stone onto the calm surface of a lake.

Xu Qinghe's expression changed. With all their money handed over, if they didn't take care of Nianji's marriage, how could Nianji get married this year?

The marriage arrangement with the Zhou family had already been delayed by a year. It couldn't be postponed another year, could it?

It wasn't just that the Zhou family wouldn't agree; even he felt he would be letting his eldest son down.

"Dad, we agreed that you would provide for Nianji's wedding this year. Last year, when Zhihao got married to a girl from the city, you said that because Zhihao worked at the supply and marketing cooperative, it was a formal position, and for the girl to be willing to marry into the Xu family was a blessing our family had cultivated for eight generations!"

As Ji Ying brought this up, it still upset her. Her son was after all the eldest grandson. Because of this issue, they had delayed for a whole year. Last year, she had wanted to push for dividing the property, but Xu Zhong was vehemently against it, saying that if Zhihao hadn't married this bride...

Zhihao had even threatened with his death, saying he wouldn't live if he couldn't marry his bride.

Ji Ying and Xu Qinghe didn't want their son to be upset, and in the end, Xu Nianji, not wanting to see his parents struggle, had voluntarily suggested delaying his marriage for a year.

Now that it was July and they would soon be discussing wedding plans after the Mid-Autumn Festival, who could have known that Xu Zhong would suddenly declare he wouldn't be involved in Xu Nianji's marriage? Ji Ying wasn't willing to accept this.

"Dad, Nianji is your grandson, your own flesh and blood. When you helped Zhihao get married last year, this isn't what you said," Ji Ying argued, biting her lip as tears swirled in her eyes. Besides the little bit of grain they got from this year's harvest, they didn't have a single cent left. When school started, how would they pay the children's tuition fees?

Chapter 9: Chapter 009 Move In The Evening

"Since you wanted a division of property and we've divided it all, and Nianji is getting married and needs the ceremony, what does that have to do with us?" Xu Zhong interrupted him, clearly impatient, saying, "Qinghe, it was you who wanted to split the property. Now you've got the house, the food, and the fields. You're not expecting this old man also to hand over his retirement savings, are you?"

"Zhiyuan needs to attend university, and we need a lot of money for that." Xu Zhong's attitude was clear—having divided those assets, that should be the end of it.

Grandma Liu Sanmei said with a troubled face, "Qinghe, Qinghe's wife, it's not that we parents don't want to give money, but we genuinely don't have it."

"Nobody believes we don't have a penny."

Xu Nian'an muttered. All these years, the money his parents earned hadn't spared a cent; it all went to the grandparents.

And his elder brother, who had been working for over a year, had his earnings just vanished into thin air?

"Grandpa, if you don't give us a single penny, are you trying to starve us to death?" Xu Nianhua, her cheeks flushed from the fever and her voice weak, said as her clear and bright eyes, moistened as though drenched in tears, looked towards Xu Zhong.

"Aren't you afraid the people in the village will criticize you? My parents have slaved away for the Xu family for half their lives, and everyone has seen it." Struggling to stand, Xu Nianhua's feeble voice was pitiful. After speaking, she fainted.

This fainting spell gave Xu Qinghe and the others quite a scare.

Xu Qinghe, seeing Xu Nianhua looking as red as a boiled shrimp, anxiously touched her forehead and said, "Nianhua, wake up quickly."

"Nianhua, don't scare your mom," Ji Ying said, extremely worried, looking helplessly at Xu Qinghe.

"Little sister." Xu Nian'an looked anxiously at Xu Nianhua, fearing the worst, and said, "Dad, mom, perhaps we should take little sister to the county hospital."

Xu Zhong and Liu Sanmei exchanged glances, looking at Xu Nianhua's frail condition and considering her recent words, thinking that refusing to share any money indeed seemed unreasonable.

Just as they were preparing to take Xu Nianhua to the county, she faintly woke up.

"I'm fine, just powerless. I'll feel better after some sleep," said Xu Nianhua, leaning on Ji Ying, dizzy and disoriented.

"Ahem."

Xu Zhong cleared his throat, thinking about the thirty yuan Xu Nianji contributed every month—just consider one month not given to him, to avoid the claim of not sharing at all.

He said, "There isn't much money in the house, at most we can only give you thirty yuan. But let me be clear, if I get sick in the future, even if we've divided the property, the eldest still has to care."

"Dad, I'm still your son," Xu Qinghe said. "Once dad gets older and can't work, I definitely won't neglect him."

Thirty yuan is, after all, better than nothing.

Xu Nian'an added, "Grandpa, you won't be asking us for money for every little headache or fever, will you?"

"I'm not that poor yet," Xu Zhong's face darkened.

"That's good," Xu Nian'an seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

Xu Nianhua quietly asked Ji Ying, "Mom, how can we prove the old house is ours?"

Actually, Xu Nianhua meant to inquire about the property deed, but then thought that in these times, there was no such thing as a property deed.

Reminded by her daughter, Ji Ying immediately addressed it, and Xu Zhong, with a grim expression, said, "We'll make a trip to the village committee tomorrow."

With that, Xu Zhong started shooing people away.

"Dad, it's late at night, and the old house isn't ready for us to move in yet," Xu Qinghe was taken aback, completely unprepared for Xu Zhong's urgency in kicking them out.

Chapter 10: Chapter 010: Knock on the Door in the Night

Xu Nianhua had returned to the night of 1979 and began the busy move.

Despite being physically weak, Xu Nianhu still helped with moving everything. It was tough, but she felt grounded knowing they were moving away from that family. From then on, their days would definitely get better, and eventually, they'd be the envy of everyone!

The family of four first carried the essential items to the old house. Along the way, they encountered many villagers who were surprised to learn they had split from the family.

The Xu family's old house was located on the easternmost edge of the village, backed against a bamboo forest, with a large yard in front.

No, this yard should be called a lawn now.

The grass, taller than a person, grew lushly.

"Nianhua, you and your mom wait on the road," Xu Qinghe said as he took a stick, and together with Xu Nian'an, began to thrash the tall grass. The place had been uninhabited for a long time—they didn't know whether there might be snakes. They thrashed the grass to drive any snakes away and then lit some dried mugwort to smoke the mosquitoes out.

"Nianhua, don't be afraid, your mom is with you today," Ji Ying said, holding a torch and looking at the pitch-dark house standing alone, quite a distance from any other house. This made not only Xu Nianhua but also Ji Ying a bit nervous.

"Mom, I'm not afraid."

A smile appeared on Xu Nianhua's face, and in the flickering light of the fire, her bright eyes seemed to shine.

The family of four together quickly tidied up the two rooms, laying mats and blankets on the beds so they could finally sit down.

"I feel sorry for you," Xu Qinghe said, looking around the drafty house. If it rained, the house would leak, and he felt remorse for his wife and children.

"Dad, it's not a hardship, I like it here," Xu Nianhua said cheerfully, looking at her father and mother who cherished and pampered her, and her older brother. She felt extremely happy and was determined not to let the tragedies of her past life repeat in this one.

"Mom, our life will definitely get better and better in the future. I'm not afraid of the house being old. What's important is that we are all together, happy, and never apart."

Xu Nianhua leaned on Ji Ying's shoulder, feeling dazed from the heat and somewhat tired herself.

"Yes, we will get better and better," Ji Ying said, also feeling a sigh of relief. Although the house was old and they would have to live frugally for a long time, this was their home now.

"Little sister, don't worry, your second brother will definitely make a lot of money in the future. Then, I'll ensure that dad, mom, and you have a good life," Xu Nian'an declared with ambition, determined to earn a lot of money to ensure a good life for his parents and little sister.

"And with big brother, we will all surely have a good life."

"Good, I will also work hard to ensure you all have a good life," Xu Qinghe said, looking at the smiles on the faces of his children and wife. The sadness brought by the family split gradually dissipated.

'Knock Knock Knock'

The old yard door was knocked on. The family of four looked at each other.

"Dad, Mom, Nian'an, little sister,"

an anxious voice called from outside.

Xu Nianhua jumped up excitedly, slightly stirred, "It's big brother, big brother has come back."

Youthful and robust, Xu Nian'an quickly ran from inside the house to the yard gate, opening the old yard gate to find indeed it was their big brother, Xu Nianji.

"Big brother!"

Xu Nian'an exclaimed excitedly hugging Xu Nianji; he had deeply wished that his big brother was with them during the family split.

Big brother had always been the most formidable, the most authoritative.