

Regaining 151

Chapter 151: The Price of Chili Sauce

"Mom, your chili sauce is so delicious, I would buy it too if it were me," Xu Nianhua lavished praise on Ji Ying without holding back!

Ji Ying truly had a gift when it came to cooking.

Xu Nianhua thought she could cook quite a few tasty dishes herself, but in terms of these farm-style delicacies, she felt she was still far from Ji Ying's level.

Not to mention anything else, just this chili sauce, hers never tasted as good as Ji Ying's.

"You, you always know the nicest things to say," Ji Ying said, beaming. As long as the chili sauce could make some money, even just a few dozen yuan, she would be content.

"Auntie's sauce really is delicious."

Even Pei Yicheng, the big boss, had spoken up, and Ji Ying was even happier.

"Right, how much should we sell this chili sauce for?" Ji Ying felt pricing was something she was also not good at.

Xu Nian'an instinctively looked towards Xu Nianhua. His younger sister had opened his eyes with the pricing she had set for the Mung Bean Jelly last time!

They followed suit when it came to selling bean sprouts, their pricing just went with the flow.

"Let's first see how many bottles this pot can fill."

Xu Nianhua suggested.

Everyone immediately got busy, working together efficiently and orderly.

Xu Nian'an and Zhou He, meticulous in their tasks, handled the bottling, while Ji Ying checked for any bottles that were a little underfilled or needed more oil and topped them up.

Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an were in charge of handling the bottles, and Ling Dong, not finding anything specific to do, arranged the bottles Ji Ying had filled on a table to the side.

Before long, the chili sauce had all been bottled, and Xu Nianhua watched the filled bottles with a deep sense of accomplishment.

They had filled fifty-eight bottles in total.

"Mom, how much did you use in ingredients?" Xu Nianhua asked.

"Ten jin of mild chili, ten jin of spicy red chili, and ten jin of garlic, I didn't count the oil," Ji Ying said. She had made a point to weigh everything while making it, and now it came in handy.

"Plus the cost of the bottles, labor, and labels," Xu Nianhua quietly added these costs into the calculation.

Pei Yicheng stated the price of the bottles and the cost of the labels.

On the side, Xu Nian'an, already with a notebook in hand, began to calculate, saying, "In that case, without counting the labor and label costs little sister mentioned, just the bottles cost one yuan each."

"Big Brother Pei, where do you plan to sell these chili sauces?" Xu Nianhua inquired.

Pei Yicheng outlined his plan, saying, "Ningbei is too far from here. We'll start by selling in South City. Ling Dong knows a driver who regularly goes to South City; we can have him take our chili sauce along."

"In that case, let's sell our chili sauce for four yuan a bottle," Xu Nianhua said as soon as she finished speaking.

Ji Ying's eyes widened as she said, "Nianhua, isn't that too expensive? You know, a can of pears only costs three yuan and fifty cents a bottle."

"Mom, you can't compare it like that. You can finish a can of pears in one sitting, but chili sauce is different; you won't finish it in a day or two," Xu Nianhua explained, saying, "When there are no vegetables, chili sauce becomes really useful. Also, when eating noodles or boiling Mung Bean Jelly, adding a bit of it makes it especially delicious."

"Besides, considering the labor and label costs, the cost reaches one yuan and fifty cents. Eventually, we have to ship it to the city for sale, and we also have to consider how to sell it. If we need our own people to sell it, then the price would be even higher."

Xu Nianhua wished she could price it at five yuan, but this was just regular chili sauce; too high a price wouldn't be right. Four yuan wasn't too much, but it certainly wasn't too little either.

Chapter 152: You Get What You Pay For

Ji Ying and the others were left dizzied by Xu Nianhua's barrage of words. It's just selling chili sauce, right?

Why did it become so complicated once Nianhua talked about it?

"Nianhua, where did you learn all this? It's as if you've sold it before." Ji Ying looked at her familiar daughter but felt she was somewhat unfamiliar. When had her daughter learned so much?

"Mom, Nian'an is smart, you know. She must have thought of these things." Xu Nian'an had been very impressed with Xu Nianhua ever since the translation of the contract.

Therefore, when Xu Nianhua spoke eloquently this time, he didn't pay much attention to it. He felt that his younger sister was indeed smart.

The success of the first batch of chili sauce had given Ji Ying tremendous confidence. Ji Ying and Zhou He, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, would start making chili sauce whenever they had time.

After all the chilies in the village were harvested, they let everyone tell their relatives and friends about their need for chilies.

Meanwhile, to avoid having to take the chilies into the county themselves, Ji Ying directly gave everyone the address of the food factory, allowing them to sell the chilies there directly. For this purpose, Pei Yicheng specially hired an uncle to watch the gate.

Uncle Jiang stayed at the factory with his wife, Wu Meili. Uncle Jiang was responsible for guarding the gate and collecting the chilies.

Wu Meili would work in the Chili Factory, helping to wash glass bottles and turning the chilies drying in the yard.

"Oh, this label is really beautiful."

The moment Ji Ying received the labels, she couldn't help but praise them. The thin kraft paper with black text, the labels were divided into two parts, one stuck on the top and the other on the body of the bottle.

The top part was round, featuring a logo and a drawing of a good mother, with a long tail extending from the tightly sealed cap, all the way to the bottom, with "Handmade" written in big letters on it.

As soon as the cap was twisted, this label would also break.

The plain glass bottle of chili sauce, once labeled, seemed to instantly take on a... very upscale appearance.

"Isn't it? Just twist open the cap, and the label is broken." Zhou He also found it novel, looking at the label and thinking, no wonder a piece of paper sold for so much, it was too beautiful.

Ji Ying and Zhou He, their first task upon arriving in the county, was to make a few pots of chili sauce, then set it aside to cool. They then labeled the chili sauce that had been made earlier and chopped up the dried chilies.

With Wu Meili's help, the three of them were busy processing a particularly large pile of chili sauces stored in the warehouse.

This type of chili sauce, as long as stored properly, could last for three to five months without any problem.

Moreover, a bottle of chili sauce wasn't much; customers would probably consume it within a month.

The labeled chili sauces, arranged according to the production date, looked particularly nice.

Seeing them all lined up, Xu Nianhua thought maybe they needed paper boxes to pack these chili sauces, otherwise, letting them sit scattered might easily cause them to spoil.

This idea was highly agreed upon by everyone. To facilitate handling and storage, everyone brainstormed on the paper boxes. In the end, it was Pei Yicheng, with his broad knowledge, who ordered a batch of boxes, each box layered with foam to keep each bottle separated, ensuring the chili sauces were well preserved.

"Mom, do you think our chili sauce is too plain? I think we should make some fish chili sauce?" Chili sauce with chunks of fish, the flavor sounded delicious!

Xu Nianhua would never admit she was just craving

Chapter 153: The Joy of Net Fishing

"Nianhua, these chili peppers haven't sold yet, and you're already thinking about fish chili sauce?" Ji Ying felt helpless about her daughter's idea. They needed to sell the chili sauce to make money; if it didn't sell and just sat there, they would be at a big loss.

Now they wanted to make fish chili sauce, isn't that a bit risky?

As soon as Ji Ying voiced her worries, Xu Nianhua replied, "Mom, that's the point, to have a comparison. This would give people a choice. Besides, I remember there's a reservoir not far from Shuangzhu Village that's teeming with fish. I heard you just have to pay a little to go net fishing."

"It's practically a giveaway," Xu Nianhua added.

Ji Ying: "..."

The river is so deep; netting fish is not that easy, right?

On the weekend, with no afternoon classes, Xu Nianhua and her companions headed to the reservoir.

Pei Yicheng found a boat and got a big sticky net; they went off to the reservoir with great enthusiasm. Originally, Ling Dong didn't agree with Pei Yicheng's participation.

But he couldn't withstand Pei Yicheng's determination to go.

"Brother Cheng, you can't get on the boat. If not, just stay here and fish. I brought fishing rods and bait," Ling Dong thought. Since Brother Cheng was going to be on the shore, he couldn't possibly do nothing, so he had prepared all these things early.

"Not bad," Pei Yicheng praised, "You're becoming more and more attentive."

Ling Dong chuckled with a 'heh heh' laugh.

"Big brother Pei, let me keep you company here fishing." Xu Nianhua looked at the reservoir waters; the wind rippled across it, creating a sparkling scene that was exceptionally beautiful. However, the idea of actually sitting in a boat to net fish was something Xu Nianhua felt she couldn't do.

Just coming back to it, she had an uncomfortable experience of choking on water, and because of that, she subconsciously felt afraid of water.

"Little sister, you just take good care of Pei Yicheng here, and be careful not to go near the edge, watch out for falling into the water," Xu Nian'an reiterated with concern.

Even Xu Nianji gave a stern reminder, "If something happens, just shout for us."

"Big brother, second brother, I'm not a child anymore," Xu Nianhua replied, feeling sweetness in her heart from her brothers' concern. She said, "You guys be careful too, no matter how many fish we net, it's all profit, just do your best."

"Nianji and I can swim, so you don't have to worry," Xu Nianji said with a smile. Since getting married, his face always bore a happy smile, and with the daily sales of bean sprouts, their family made money every day – naturally, he was happy.

Ling Dong stood to one side, glanced at Pei Yicheng, then at Xu Nianhua who stayed behind, and he finally understood why Brother Cheng, despite his inability to move freely, insisted on coming for the net fishing!

It was well known that previously, Brother Cheng would never leave the house if he could stay in and read books!

Even for the monthly trips to the hospital for checkups, Ling Dong had to remind him over and over. But recently, Brother Cheng was exceptionally active in going for his check-ups.

Ling Dong, Xu Nianji, and Xu Nian'an, the three of them set off in a small boat.

Net fishing wasn't Ling Dong's strong suit, and the brothers Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an didn't really know how to do it either. The three of them were like ducks being herded onto a perch, clumsily spreading the sticky net in the water and dragging it behind them as they paddled.

"We need to herd the fish, drive them into the net to catch them," Xu Nian'an suddenly spoke up, thinking about what would happen if they dragged the net back empty.

"Shall we give it a try?" Without experience, the three of them randomly slapped the water, which amused Xu Nianhua watching from the shore.

"Big brother and second brother have never used a sticky net to catch fish before, I wonder if they'll be able to net any," Xu Nianhua stood on tiptoe, peering out in anticipation.

Chapter 154: None

"Unless there are a lot of fish, their method is pointless," Yicheng said as he sat in the wheelchair, watching Nianhua's excitement, reminiscent of a child. He couldn't help but ask, "You've never seen fish glue before?"

"No."

Nianhua shook her head; it was her first mess in both her lives.

Though there was a fish pond in the village, she always missed the fishing times, either because she was in school or staying at her grandfather's house.

"But it's quite interesting. It would be even more fun if I could go into the water myself," Nianhua said, eager to try. Yet, considering the unfathomable depths of the reservoir, she decided she better just sit obediently on the shore.

"By the way, do you want to fish?" Nianhua asked, worrying Yicheng might feel bored sitting there alone, so she kept him company by chatting.

The weather today was indeed suitable for fishing, neither too sunny nor too hot, just comfortably overcast.

"Mmm."

Yicheng prepared the fishing rod that Ling Dong had set up for him, baited it, and cast it straight into the reservoir. His spot was just under a bridge above the water, so he could still catch fish even while sitting on the bridge.

No sooner had he cast the line than Nianhua grew restless, frequently asking Yicheng when they would catch a fish.

"Fishing really tests your patience," Yicheng observed her restlessness and couldn't help asking, "You don't seem like someone who can't sit still."

The most required qualities in translating a contract are patience, meticulousness, and robust professional skills. Nianhua didn't seem like someone who lacked patience.

Nianhua: "..."

Given a book and a pot of tea, she could sit for an entire afternoon.

But her elder and second brothers had gone to the center of the lake.

It was just her and Yicheng; sitting beside him while he fished made her awkwardly unsure of what to do, leaving her no choice but to inquire about the fish.

The atmosphere suddenly turned awkward.

Just then, the fishing rod twitched. Yicheng, with his experience, timed it perfectly and pulled up the rod—sure enough, there was a fish hooked.

"There's a fish!"

Nianhua said excitedly.

When the rod was lifted, a fish about the length of three fingers was flung onto the shore.

Nianhua didn't mind the small size of the fish; she sprinted over and carefully removed it from the hook. Holding the fish, she walked back, asking, "This is a crucian carp, right? It makes the tastiest soup!"

Moreover, this crucian carp wasn't like those contaminated ones from the future. To prepare it with a few pieces of tofu in a broth would create a milky white fish soup that was unspeakably delicious.

"Exactly, it's a crucian carp, weighing around 150 grams," Yicheng said, seeing her happy. "One fish isn't enough for a soup; looks like I need to up my game."

"Go for it! I'm rooting for you!"

Nianhua put the fish into a bucket and looked up to see Yicheng attentively pinching bait onto the hook before expertly placing the fishing rod into the water, his movements smooth and sure, his eyes sparkling with confidence.

Suddenly, Nianhua remembered the first time she met Yicheng, when nothing in the world seemed to concern him.

Back then, his eyes were deep and vast, indifferent to everything around him.

She even felt a pang of regret over Yicheng's handsome, noble face. Although she had never seen him stand, his demeanor alone was outstandingly magnificent, making him the most handsome man she had ever seen in her two lives, without a doubt.

Chapter 155: Can We Help?

When did Pei Yicheng start to change?

Xu Nianhua sat there in a stupor, completely forgetting she had been staring at him this whole time.

Until Pei Yicheng's voice came through, "Do I look good?"

Last time, she seemed to have complimented his looks.

"Handsome."

Xu Nianhua nodded subconsciously.

The corners of Pei Yicheng's lips curled up involuntarily; taking advantage of her momentary distraction, his fishing rod twitched with another bite.

Fish after fish were being reeled in; Xu Nianhua became so delighted she forgot to feel awkward.

"The fish is getting away." Xu Nianhua failed to hold it firmly, and the fish slipped to Pei Yicheng's feet; she quickly announced it.

Pei Yicheng bent down, and before he could catch the fish, it gave a wriggle and, with a 'plop,' successfully escaped back into the water.

"What a pity, just missed it by a little."

Xu Nianhua didn't have time to react, she could only watch the ripples made by the escaping fish.

"It was me, I moved too slowly."

A hint of annoyance flashed across Pei Yicheng's eyes, thinking if his legs could walk, such a thing would never happen.

Just as Xu Nianhua was about to say something, she turned and saw the vexation in his eyes, and she playfully said, "Brother Pei, perhaps this fish didn't want to be made into our soup."

"You're already amazing, catching so many fish; we could make several bowls of soup. There are two big carp and three crucian carp!"

Xu Nianhua sincerely praised him; they'd only been there for about two hours, and Pei Yicheng's catch was indeed impressive!

"Not bad," Pei Yicheng said modestly, feeling Xu Nianhua deliberately skirted the subject and was trying to cheer him up, he thought: Nian'an was right, she truly is a considerate and kind-hearted girl.

"I plan to visit an old traditional doctor in South City during the National Day holiday," Pei Yicheng suddenly mentioned.

Xu Nianhua looked at him somewhat astounded, thinking he would be very resistant to talking about his leg, but he treated it as casually as if he were discussing a common cold, she asked, "Is Doctor Du going with you?"

"No, Grandfather's clinic rarely closes, it will just be me and Ling Dong going." Pei Yicheng thought, while it's true that the clinic is always busy, when his grandfather found out about the trip to South City, he was adamant about going along.

But Pei Yicheng didn't want his grandfather to have to travel so much; though his grandfather was in good health, he suffered greatly from car sickness. Each trip left his grandfather as if he had been through an illness.

"With just the two of you, will you manage? Can we help in any way?" Xu Nianhua volunteered eagerly, adding, "My second brother and I will have a holiday for National Day as well."

She thought, Pei Yicheng had helped them so much, and if the Chili Sauce Factory were to develop, it would be very beneficial to the Xu Family.

Coming and going to South City would take at least three days, and depending on the condition of his leg, if treatment were needed, it could be as short as three to five days or as long as ten days to half a month.

Xu Nianhua and her classmates were high school seniors; he couldn't let his selfishness interfere with her studies.

"No need," Pei Yicheng said firmly after some thought, refusing the offer, "Ling Dong is very capable, and besides, it's only my legs that can't walk, not my whole body that can't move."

"Then," Xu Nianhua thought of Gu Family when she considered South City, and refrained from saying more, she said instead, "I wish you all the best and hope your leg heals soon."

"Thank you."

Pei Yicheng, looking into her sincere eyes, thought to himself: Hopefully, the old doctor in South City is as remarkable as the rumors suggest.

Chapter 156: Full of Harvest

"Brother Pei, if there's anything you need help with, just ask. You've done so much for us, we're embarrassed." Xu Nianhua thought to herself that they couldn't really be of any help to them, so she could only say so.

"Then, tonight, can I have the crucian carp soup made by you?" Pei Yicheng's eyes were filled with anticipation.

Xu Nianhua cleared her throat. The contrast to the man she first met was too great, and it took her a moment to respond.

"Of course you can, the fish were caught by you. You can do with them as you please." Xu Nianhua wasn't really just nineteen, and though she occasionally saw herself as a nineteen-year-old girl, most of the time she was quite self-aware.

Xu Nianhua made such a clear distinction, and Pei Yicheng lowered his eyes and said, "Then, tonight we'll take out some crucian carp to make soup and pick one grass carp to save for a late-night snack."

"It's just that it's going to be a bit of work for you." When Pei Yicheng looked up again, the brief dimness of a moment ago seemed as though it had never been there.

"How could it be hard work when there's fish to eat?" Xu Nianhua chattered on, "We could buy a few more pieces of tofu to make crucian carp and tofu soup. Simmer it for a while, and the flavor will be delicious. As for the grass carp, we could make chopped chili fish head—it's spicy and fresh. Then a simple stir-fried bean sprouts, fish-flavored eggplant, and perilla-flavored edamame."

"And with a pot of wine, it would definitely be delicious." As she talked about it, Xu Nianhua even made herself drool.

She liked to drink fruit wine and would only have a little, just enough to feel slightly tipsy.

"You, you want to drink too?" Pei Yicheng seemed puzzled by the thought.

"Cough, not me, my older and younger brothers..." Xu Nianhua paused in her speech and then said, "My older brother can indeed drink a bit of wine."

The younger brother might as well forget it.

He has school tomorrow.

"Little sister, you guys, how many fish did we catch?"

The boat hadn't even gotten close when Xu Nian'an's excited voice could already be heard.

Once at the shore, they tossed the sticky net onto land, and oh boy, it was teeming with fish.

"There really are a lot of fish here!" Xu Nian'an, from his childhood to now, had never had such fun.

Even though they didn't catch many at the beginning, by the last cast, they had caught a lot!

It felt like they were in luck and had stumbled upon a school of fish!

"Right, now we have plenty of fish for that chili sauce." Xu Nianhua looked at the fish peppers and thought of the crispy-fried fish mixed with chili sauce. The taste would be particularly good.

"Let's not rush to get the fish off the net. Let's head back to the plant first. Brother Pei caught a lot of crucian carp; we'll take them home to make soup." Xu Nianhua urged, as the crucian carp soup needed to be simmered for a while to be delicious and fragrant.

Seeing that the sun was almost setting, Mom and big sister-in-law should have returned home early.

When they got back to the plant, Ji Ying and Zhou He had intended to wait for them, but after waiting left and right, they went back without seeing anyone.

Xu Nianhua picked out a dozen or so crucian carp and asked her younger brother to buy some tofu.

The edamame and eggplants were brought by Pei Yicheng from his grandfather's place, anyway, he was supposed to come over for dinner that evening.

Bean sprouts were specially saved by Xu Nianji that morning.

Xu Nianji had planned to go back, but Pei Yicheng invited him over and over again, so he stayed.

Xu Nianji couldn't cook, so he just sat there with Ling Dong, peeling the fish off the sticky net, one by one, and then cleaning each one!

As happy as they were when they netted the fish, that's how despairing they now felt!

"If I had known, I wouldn't have caught so many." Ling Dong felt that the endless stream of little fish was just too much trouble to deal with.

Chapter 157: Busy and Fulfilling

Wu Meili was cooking rice at another stove while she made fish soup at the stove normally used for making chili sauce. Her movements were deft as she handled the crucian carps. Her fingers were slender, and the fish in her hands seemed just like toys. In no time, a fish was ready.

Pei Yicheng sat in front of the stove, stoking the fire, and when he saw Xu Nianhua dealing with the fish, what should have been... How was it that when Xu Nianhua did it, it looked so pleasing to the eye?

Her movements were crisp and efficient, without any dawdling. After processing the fish, she heated up the pan and fried the crucian carps for a while, then scooped them out, and started a new pan. Scallions and aged ginger first, then she poured in ample water. She brought it to a boil over high heat, added the fried crucian carps to the water, and left it to stew with time.

"Once the water comes to a boil, you don't need too high of a flame,"

Xu Nianhua reminded before she went to handle other ingredients. She cleaned the edamame, used scissors to snip off the ends, making sure they would absorb flavor better when cooked.

In the yard.

Xu Nian'an joined the team cleaning the fish. At first, he complained that Xu Nianji and Ling Dong were too slow, but when he started working on his own fish, he found it to be quite strenuous.

You had to use scissors to cut them open first, then scoop out everything inside, tear away the gills; it looked like just a few steps, not too many, but with many fish and not much size, it became arduous.

After finishing the dinner, Wu Meili and Uncle Jiang also joined in cleaning the fish, and their pace became faster too.

The aroma from Xu Nianhua's fish soup drifted over to where Xu Nian'an and the others were, causing their stomachs to growl with hunger.

The moment Doctor Du walked in, he was greeted by the fragrance of the fish soup. Even without tasting it yet, that delicious scent alone was enough to make one's taste buds rejoice.

There was milky white crucian carp tofu soup, chopped pepper grass carp, fish-flavored eggplant, stir-fried mung bean sprouts, and a dish of perilla-flavored edamame.

"Nianhua girl, did you make all this?" Doctor Du looked at the spread of dishes, and the thought of having his grandson marry this girl grew even stronger.

"Yeah, Doctor Du, would you like to try some?" Xu Nianhua looked at him, a pleased expression on her face.

"Girl, stop calling me Doctor Du, it's too formal. How about following Yicheng and just call me Grandpa Du instead?" Doctor Du, Du Chang, couldn't take his eyes off the bowl of fish soup.

"Grandpa Du." Xu Nianhua ladled a bowl of fish soup for Du Chang.

After tasting it, Du Chang couldn't stop singing its praises.

Everyone gathered around the table, where the sound of compliments for Xu Nianhua could be heard along with the clattering of adding more dishes.

Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an had long been familiar with Xu Nianhua's meatballs and braised pork, aware of how delicious their sister's cooking was. Yet, this was their first time tasting the fish she made, and the first thought that struck them was, why hadn't they thought to go fishing in the river before?

The reservoir charged a fee, but fish from the river were free.

Near Shuangzhu Village, there was a large river. The water wasn't deep, only about knee-high, and was teeming with fish. However, fishing was also a laborious task, so unless they hadn't had fish for a long time, they'd go fishing.

Fish had a strong fishy smell regardless of ginger; therefore, they would only think to catch some if they were really craving it.

If they'd known that their sister's fish dishes were this delectable, they'd be willing to fish every day.

Each dish was plentiful, but now they were all gone, eaten up completely.

Xu Nianhua felt particularly happy, which signified that her culinary skills were well recognized by everyone.

After dinner, Xu Nianhua took the cleaned small fish and decided to fry them all. If not, with the current weather, they might spoil and go bad.

After washing the dishes, Wu Meili also came over to help with frying the fish.

Chapter 158: Your Wife Is Really Beautiful

The next day, when Ji Ying and her mother-in-law Zhou He arrived at the factory, the first thing they saw was the fried fish on the table.

Wu Meili told Ji Ying everything Xu Nianhua had entrusted her with the day before.

The fish were for making fish chili sauce, and there was also a grass carp specially reserved for the Xu Family by Pei Yicheng, for Ji Ying to bring back home.

"How can I accept this?"

Ji Ying felt embarrassed looking at the large grass carp that swam back and forth in the water.

Wu Meili relayed, "Boss Pei said, after working so hard yesterday, they should at least take a fish home to enjoy the delicacy and asked you not to dismiss it."

Speaking of which, Wu Meili praised, "Yingzi, speaking of which, your daughter is really skilled at cooking. The fish stew she made yesterday was especially delicious, and the chopped chili grass carp was both spicy and fresh. Old Jiang and I were lucky to have a taste."

Ji Ying said modestly, "Nianhua just figured it out by herself." Her daughter's cooking skills had blossomed, seemingly inheriting the Ji Family's genes. She was good at cooking, as was her third brother, who was also very skilled in the kitchen.

"Sister Wu, they got back very late last night, didn't they?" Ji Ying inquired.

"Indeed, after dinner and frying the fish, they didn't return until after ten," Wu Meili said, praising her two sons and a daughter.

She had seen many families with numerous children, but to have such outstanding and harmonious sons and daughters, their family was indeed enviable.

"Xiaohe, go check on Nianji. He's probably been too busy to eat breakfast. See if you can buy him a few buns," Ji Ying handed fifty cents to Zhou He, thinking that Xu Nianji and the others must have been very late and hadn't returned the day before.

Zhou He was newly married, and she hoped she wouldn't overthink it.

"Mom, I still have money on me."

"Take it, buy two meat buns to eat," Ji Ying insisted, pushing the money into Zhou He's hand and pushing her out the door.

After Zhou He left the food factory, she headed straight to Xu Nianji's bean sprout stall. Mother-in-law Ji Ying was right; Xu Nianji had been busy nonstop since six in the morning, with no time for breakfast.

"Xiaohe." Xu Nianji's eyes lit up the moment he saw his newlywed wife, Zhou He.

They had just married and were in the sweetest phase. If it hadn't been too late yesterday, he would have rushed back for sure. Pei Yicheng had suggested Ling Dong drive him home, but it was late, everyone in the village was asleep, including his parents and Xiaohe. Having Ling Dong make a special trip didn't seem right to Xu Nianji.

Pei Yicheng had already helped them so much. It was best not to bother others if not absolutely necessary.

"Nianji, I bought you meat buns. I had noodles at home," Zhou He said, handing over the steaming hot meat buns to Xu Nianji and then taking over the scale from him, weighing bean sprouts for customers with a smiling face.

Some recognized Xu Nianji, and seeing Zhou He, they couldn't help but praise, "Your daughter-in-law is really pretty."

Xu Nianji, eating his meat buns, couldn't stop his smile from reaching ear to ear.

The meat buns were generously filled; the aroma made Xu Nianji feel these were the most delicious buns in the world. He even saved one for her. Seizing a moment when no one was buying bean sprouts, he stuffed the bun into her hand, insisting, "Have another meat bun."

Zhou He wanted to refuse, but Xu Nianji seemed to anticipate her resistance and brought the bun directly to her lips.

Chapter 159: Do as You Say

Zhou He's face turned red all of a sudden, feeling the snickers of the vendor nearby, she had no choice but to take the meat bun and started eating with her head down.

Xu Nianji ate very quickly, and the buns were still steaming hot. He deliberately left one for her, probably wanting her to taste the flavor of the meat bun, right?

Being married to such a caring person, Zhou He felt very fortunate.

Without delaying too long here, Zhou He went back to the factory to work. Today, with the addition of fried fish, Ji Ying and Zhou He had to make more fish and chili sauce. It was their first attempt, but looking at those fragrant and crispy fish, they both felt the flavor must be exceptionally delicious.

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In Gaoliang County, at the Zou Family's place.

Xu Qinghe came to the Zou Family to do carpentry. The newly built two-story house looked very imposing, complete with a yard, and both inside and out, it exuded wealth.

For instance, the clean and smooth floor tiles on the ground, even the gate looked more impressive than other houses.

"Mom, I have so many clothes they can't all fit; this room is too small," Zou Yaru complained about the size of her room, incessantly asking her mother to add more cabinets.

Xu Qinghe, who was working on the side, heard this and, thinking of his daughter's suggestion, looked at them and figured they didn't seem short on money, so he offered, "Actually, there's a kind of cabinet that reaches the ceiling and can hold more clothes."

"A cabinet that reaches the ceiling?" Zou Yaru's eyes lit up immediately upon hearing it could hold more clothes.

Xu Qinghe nodded and said, "That's right, you can make cabinets that go all the way to the ceiling. You can store seasonal quilts and clothes on top and below, there can be sections to hang and fold clothes, as well as drawers."

Zou Yaru was very interested and asked Xu Qinghe to sketch it out briefly. She didn't realize until he drew it just how pleased she would be. She could even design it herself, wanting many drawers and lots of space to hang clothes.

"Do it the way you said; money is no issue."

Zou Yaru returned to her room to reassess. Before, she had thought about making two cabinets and joining them together, but now, having heard Xu Qinghe's idea, she envisioned an entire wall turning into cabinets, possibly even hiding a mirror inside. She felt extremely anticipatory.

Once Xu Qinghe received confirmation, he naturally wanted to do the job even better.

He watched as his wife and daughter-in-law had started factories, his eldest son was selling bean sprouts and earning more money than he ever did, and his younger son and daughter were his pride and hope!

Xu Qinghe felt that, as a father, he couldn't afford to fall behind, right?

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The labels for fish chili sauce were ready, distinguished from the regular chili sauce with an extra fish drawn on them.

National Day was fast approaching, and Pei Yicheng had Ling Dong help to pack more jars of chili sauce, striving to make more so that on this trip to South City, they would not only seek treatment for the leg but also explore more sales channels for the chili sauce.

Because of this, everyone in the food factory was working extra hard, hoping to make more chili sauce.

"Ji Ying, why don't you make the chili sauce during the day, and at night, I'll do the bottling?" Wu Meili thought she was quite fast at bottling the chili sauce.

"Sister Wu, bottling chili sauce is really time-consuming. If you're bored at night, you could chop the chili peppers for us," Ji Ying felt a bit embarrassed to assign Wu Meili work, considering she was only paid for daytime hours. Working at night would mean she wasn't being fairly compensated, right?

Wu Meili was very efficient; every night, she chopped a lot of chili peppers, giving Ji Ying and the others more time during the day.

When Xu Nianhua found out about this by chance, he quietly said to Ji Ying, "Mom, since she's been doing a lot, when it's time to settle wages, we can just give her a bit of overtime pay."

Chapter 160: The Sorrowful Cheng Hao

Ji Ying's eyes sparkled as she praised Xu Nianhua's quick thinking. With that in mind, she felt much more comfortable—it had seemed as if she was taking advantage of Wu Meili.

Xu Nianhua continued to be busy with studying.

She had been memorizing texts recently and, luckily, her memory was good. There were many ancient poems and essays to learn by heart, but that was no match for Xu Nianhua's diligence. On the way back home with Xu Nian'an, or on their way to the canteen, the siblings were either reciting poetry and essays or memorizing formulas.

Or Xu Nianhua would be overseeing her second brother memorizing vocabulary.

Although Xu Nian'an's foreign language grades were passing, they were barely just that.

Therefore, Xu Nianhua wanted to help her second brother improve his foreign language grades.

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"Ling Dong, don't you have my package?" Pei Yicheng looked at Ling Dong's empty hands and frowned. It shouldn't be. He had called Cheng Hao a few days ago. Cheng Hao would definitely send the things, so why aren't they here?

"Brother Cheng, could it be that it hasn't arrived yet? Ningbei is quite far from here," Ling Dong reminded him. It should take at least ten days to half a month to send something from Ningbei here, right?

"That's true."

Pei Yicheng thought about it. Sure enough, that's the case. He should wait patiently. They should arrive before National Day.

What Pei Yicheng didn't know was that on the day Cheng Hao received the call, he had packed his bags and come to him.

Cheng Hao, having traveled with factory workers before, had memorized the address and was full of anticipation about the expression Yicheng would have upon seeing him.

His expectations were beautiful, but reality was somewhat cruel.

Cheng Hao was also somewhat unfortunate.

He carried a big bag on his back, filled with question papers needed for the senior year and self-study books for mathematics, physics, and chemistry, plus his spare clothes and some food.

On his wrist, he wore a shiny silver watch.

With the train clattering along its way, Cheng Hao arrived in South City the afternoon of the next day. When he got off, it was incredibly crowded. After a lot of effort, he managed to disembark, planning to find a place to stay for one night before heading to Gaoliang County the next day.

However, upon reaching the hotel, Cheng Hao made the unfortunate discovery that his money had been stolen.

He had brought a full three hundred yuan for this trip.

But now, not a single yuan was left.

It was nearly dark outside, and after a tiring day, he couldn't possibly sleep on the streets, could he?

In the end, Cheng Hao took off the watch from his wrist and pawned it for twenty yuan...

"My watch cost two hundred yuan!" Cheng Hao looked at his watch, heartbroken that aside from one day's room charge, it only pawned for twenty yuan.

This twenty yuan was only given after Cheng Hao had sadly recounted his ordeal. The hotel owner, feeling pity for him and seeing that the watch did indeed seem valuable, agreed to the twenty yuan.

"Just pay me for the room. I don't want your watch." The owner returned the watch directly to Cheng Hao and said, "The room charge plus twenty yuan is already a lot. Nowadays, your watch would only fetch fifty or sixty yuan."

"Then give me ten more yuan." Cheng Hao pleaded desperately. "I'm going to Gaoliang County to find someone. If I take the bus tomorrow and can't find anyone, I'll still need to eat and drink, right? Otherwise, I might starve to death."

"Please, boss, do me a kindness. I really did pay two hundred yuan for this watch."

From his childhood until now, Cheng Hao had never suffered over money. Yet now, for the sake of ten yuan, he was flattering the owner like this, and Cheng Hao couldn't help but stifle a sorrowful tear.

With thirty yuan, he could at least afford the bus to Gaoliang County.