

## Regaining 221

### Chapter 221: The Purpose of Earning Money

On the twenty-eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, Xu Zhiyuan came over early in the morning.

"Uncle, Auntie, Grandpa said we're celebrating the New Year at home today and told me to invite you to come back for dinner in the evening," Xu Zhiyuan has been shattered by Xu Nianhua's blows for the past six months.

In the past, he thought that Xu Nianhua was just slightly better than him.

But during this half-year of repeating a grade, Xu Zhiyuan found that Xu Nianhua's grades were not just a bit better, but so good that he couldn't catch up even if he raced on a shuttle bus!

Xu Zhiyuan also began to focus more on his studies. He... even if he couldn't catch up to Xu Nianhua's performance, at least he wanted to raise his own scores a bit, to narrow the gap between them!

"Alright."

Ji Ying agreed without hesitation; even though the family had divided, Xu Qinghe was still Xu Zhong's son. Having a meal together for the New Year was the right thing to do.

After Xu Zhiyuan left, Ji Ying became a bit puzzled. In past years, the New Year was celebrated on the last day, so why did the celebrations start on the twenty-eighth this year?

This year there was no thirtieth, so after the twenty-ninth, it would be the first day of the first lunar month.

"I know, Xu Zhihao came back today." Just having returned from outside, Xu Nian'an said as he had heard about Xu Zhihao's return while chatting with Cai Feng.

"Did Qiuyun come back?" Ji Ying asked.

Xu Nian'an shook his head, "I only saw him come back by himself."

Ji Ying's eyes fell as she wondered, could it be that Shen Qiuyun wasn't returning to the Xu Family because she was about to give birth?

"We'll go to Grandpa's house for the New Year's celebration in the evening, let's pack some things." Ji Ying said, then asked Xu Nian'an to sort out the canned goods, malted milk, and cakes they had bought.

"Right, take that box of chili sauce as well."

Ji Ying reminded that the box of chili sauce contained four bottles of fish chili sauce and four bottles of regular chili sauce, which could keep for quite some time. They were neatly packed in a box, which looked very presentable.

A box of chili sauce was equivalent to the average person's two months' salary.

Of course, buying it at factory price could save them half the cost.

"Okay." Xu Nian'an sluggishly took the items, having not the slightest interest in going to the Xu Family.

"Little sister, put on your new leather shoes."

After Xu Nian'an finished taking the items, he noticed Xu Nianhua was still wearing the black leather shoes she had on before, and he quickly said, "Put on your new leather shoes."

"Does it make a difference?"

Xu Nianhua was wearing a white sweater inside, one she had knitted herself, and over it, a black and white checked coat that reached her knees, paired with black trousers and black leather shoes, which made her figure look exceptionally tall and slim.

At that time, Xu Nianhua had taken a liking to the black and white checked coat immediately. The past her always wore black and grey, never trying other colors. Now that it was finally possible, and her family had money, Xu Nianhua wouldn't treat herself poorly.

Dressing up beautifully and looking at the vibrant face in the mirror, she felt the days ahead were full of sunshine.

"It's different, hurry and change." Xu Nian'an went proactively to her room, took the pair of white leather shoes off the rack, and handed them to Xu Nianhua to put on, saying, "Little sister, in the future, I'll make sure you have new clothes to wear every year, you won't have to envy others anymore!"

Xu Nian'an thought of how Xu Jiaojiao would surely be envious of his little sister, which made him feel exceptionally pleased. In previous years, it was always his little sister envying others, but this year, it was finally someone else's turn to envy his little sister.

He planned to earn a lot of money in the future to buy his little sister delicious food and beautiful clothes and to make her look pretty and graceful.

Chapter 222: No Comparison, No Harm

Xu Family.

Xu Jiaojiao had taken a bath early in the afternoon and changed into a new set of clothes, a pink cotton jacket that she adored immensely.

"Jiaojiao, aren't you saving it for the first day of the new year?"

Zhao Juxiang saw Xu Jiaojiao in her new clothes and couldn't help but remind her, "Don't get your clothes dirty."

"Mom, it's New Year's today, I'll only wear it for one night," Xu Jiaojiao said coquettishly. She wanted to wear her new clothes and play outside.

Zhao Juxiang usually doted on her daughter, and hearing her daughter's coquettish words, she couldn't resist saying, "Be careful not to get it dirty."

"Got it."

Xu Jiaojiao ran off to show off her new cotton jacket to her classmates.

These days, having enough to eat and wear wasn't hard, but getting new clothes was still beyond the reach of many families.

Many wore hand-me-downs from older siblings for several years, never getting new clothes. For some families in poorer conditions, especially those with the youngest child, they might always be wearing the older siblings' cast-offs.

By the time Xu Nianhua's family arrived, Liu Sanmei was clearly displeased, saying, "Qinghe's wife, even though you've split off from the family, isn't New Year's meal a time for the whole family to eat together? Couldn't you have come earlier to help?"

"Grandma, it's only two o'clock in the afternoon," Xu Nianhua reminded her.

Liu Sanmei glared at Xu Nianhua displeased.

"Mom, we had lunch a bit late, and this is a little something from Qinghe and me," Ji Ying quickly presented the things they had brought.

A bottle of wine, two cans, a bottle of malt extract, two kilos of cake, a box of chili sauce, and some snacks.

Xu Nianji, Xu Nian'an, and Xu Qinghe, the father and his two sons, had carried these on their way and garnered attention from the villagers.

When Xu Qinghe's family had initially split off, they were incredibly poor, but in just half a year's time, they returned home for New Year's carrying so many items; other people's daughters didn't even bring back so much when visiting their parents!

The villagers were all thumbs up in praise of Xu Qinghe's family.

Especially since many households had benefitted from Ji Ying's kindness, gaining employment in the food factory, they were even more complimentary of Xu Qinghe's family, truly repaying evil with good.

"I heard Ji Ying makes over thirty a month at the factory?" Liu Sanmei glanced at the items on the table, quite satisfied. Wine, cans, malt extract, and cake—all valuable items.

Liu Sanmei's gaze fell on the chili sauce and asked, "Is this the chili sauce made in your factory?"

"Mom, we're choked by the chili every day, it's not easy for us," Ji Ying responded quietly, changing the topic, "Yes, this is the sauce made in our factory. It can be kept for over six months, and adding some to noodles in the morning tastes really good."

"These didn't come from the factory? Why only one box?" Liu Sanmei vaguely heard somewhere that the chili sauce was quite expensive.

Ji Ying: "..."

This one box cost several dozen yuan.

"Mom, I'll go help in the kitchen."

Ji Ying decisively avoided answering and went into the kitchen to get busy.

The Xu family was large, and even without Xu Qinghu's family returning, just Xu Qinghe and Xu Qingjiang's families alone filled more than one table.

Zhou He was pregnant, and even though she wanted to help in the kitchen, Ji Ying firmly pushed her out.

Xu Nianhua sat and chatted with Zhou He in the living room.

Xu Jiaojiao returned from showing off outside, quite pleased, but her mood turned sour the moment she saw Xu Nianhua sitting in the living room.

Chapter 223: The Filial Child

Xu Nianhua's black and white checkered coat looked strangely attractive.

The white sweater, pure white like snow, appeared very warm and attractive.

And those small white leather shoes, she had never seen such beautiful white leather shoes in her life.

She had thought that the red leather shoes her sister-in-law wore at her wedding were pretty enough, but seeing Xu Nianhua's red leather shoes made Xu Jiaojiao's pride disappear in an instant.

"Jiaojiao," Zhou He was the first to spot Xu Jiaojiao, she stood up and greeted her with a smiling face.

Xu Nianhua looked up towards the door, wearing a pink cotton-padded jacket which made Xu Jiaojiao's face look delicate, but the jacket was a bit cheap, and Xu Jiaojiao's skin wasn't fair, but wheat-colored, which only made her look much darker.

Yet, she hadn't done anything, so why did Xu Jiaojiao's eyes seem like they couldn't wait to devour her?

Xu Nianhua just felt perplexed.

"Hmph."

Xu Jiaojiao didn't respond to Zhou He, but turned and ran back to her room, and with a 'snap', she shut the door, returning to her room only to feel suddenly unsatisfied with the clothes she had previously loved.

In the living room, Zhou He sat down awkwardly, and Xu Nianhua quietly said, "Sister-in-law, don't mind her, she has always been like this, maybe she's just in a bad mood today?"

"Sister-in-law, don't you think this orange is a bit sour?" Xu Nianhua changed the subject, having just tried an orange, which really was sour.

"I think it's quite tasty."

Zhou He was happily eating an orange segment by segment.

Xu Nianhua: "..."

Forget it, she wouldn't compete with a pregnant woman over sourness.

As the sky darkened, spring couplets were posted, steaming dishes were continuously brought to the table, and the intermittent sound of firecrackers outside made one feel the deep festivity.

If only Liu Sanmei's picky comments were ignored, it would have been even more enjoyable.

One table for men and one for women, it was extremely lively.

"Ji Ying, you must have earned quite a bit of money at the factory? I noticed everyone is wearing new clothes," Zhao Juxiang's gaze fell on Xu Nianhua, for Zhou He, being integrated into the Xu Family, having a few new dresses was normal.

But Xu Nianhua had changed too much from usual.

The old Xu Nianhua had no presence at all, but now?

The moment she sat down, it was impossible not to notice her, her face as small as a palm, exquisitely beautiful. Even if Zhao Juxiang didn't want to admit it, she had to acknowledge that Xu Nianhua's face was exceptionally beautiful, and today her outfit matched even better, not looking at all like a girl who grew up in the village.

Xu Jiaojiao sat beside her, and was simply overshadowed...

Before Ji Ying could respond, Zhao Juxiang added, "Zhihao just got married this year, but he bought a new set of clothes for each of his parents."

Her underlying message was, if you bought new clothes for the kids, why didn't you think of buying something for your parents?

"Qiuyun couldn't come home because she's pregnant, but her heart is always with us," Zhao Juxiang said proudly, boasting about how good her daughter-in-law was.

Although Liu Sanmei was dissatisfied that Shen Qiuyun didn't return, the clothes that had been bought were indeed substantial, she said, "Zhihao and Qiuyun are both filial kids, they don't let me and his grandfather love them in vain."

"Nianji and Xiaohe didn't come empty-handed either," Ji Ying replied lightly, as Xu Nianji and Zhou He had brought wine and cake.

Chapter 224: What Did Aunt Buy?

In the past, Ji Ying was silent and spoke little, but over the past six months, she felt that there were some things she could not give in to.

Who says that you must buy clothes to show filial piety?

The hot pepper sauce they brought, and all those other things, were worth a lot more than clothes!

"Mom, Nianhua and the others hardly ever wore any new clothes growing up, and now that I can make some money, of course I want to make it up to the kids. Qinghe and I haven't bought a single piece of clothing," Ji Ying explained gently, apart from buying Xu Qinghe a pair of pants, she had not purchased any clothes.

"Auntie must have bought quite a few things for Grandpa and Grandma for the New Year, right? Why don't we take a look too?" Xu Nianhua spoke with a smile.

Zhao Juxiang was startled. She lived with her in-laws, what was there for her to buy?

"Auntie didn't buy anything at all?" Xu Nianhua asked with a look of shock.

Liu Sanmei glanced at her second daughter-in-law. Apart from the clothes Xu Zhihao bought, Zhao Juxiang and her husband hadn't bought anything.

Zhao Juxiang was extremely uncomfortable. She retorted, "I didn't buy anything, but I do all the housework, don't I? Today I've been busy from morning till night."

Xu Nianhua just smiled and didn't say anything more. She was clear about how much work Zhao Juxiang had done.

That afternoon, when Mom went into the kitchen, there were all sorts of things she had to do.

"Let's eat, shall we? Can't you let people enjoy the New Year properly?" Liu Sanmei said sternly with a serious face.

Zhao Juxiang did the work, but definitely not as she claimed, from morning till night.

"Jiaojiao, have some more chicken soup." Zhao Juxiang, unreservedly ladled a big spoonful of chicken meat for Xu Jiaojiao.

"Thank you, Mom." Xu Jiaojiao, smelling the fragrance of the chicken, couldn't have liked it more.

After Zhao Juxiang served Xu Jiaojiao, she helped herself to a full bowl.

Liu Sanmei frowned, very dissatisfied with Zhao Juxiang's behavior; such eating manners were unseemly.

After dinner, Liu Sanmei directly asked Zhao Juxiang and Ji Ying to clear away the dishes and chopsticks.

"Nianhua, where did you buy your white leather shoes?" Xu Jiaojiao was very fond of the leather shoes Xu Nianhua was wearing.

"Someone brought them from another province."

Xu Nianhua didn't want to talk more about it.

"Another province?" There was clear disbelief in Xu Jiaojiao's eyes.

"Yes." Xu Nianhua nodded, whether Xu Jiaojiao believed it or not, she wouldn't explain further.

"If you don't want to tell, that's fine, but don't make up stories about buying them from another province," Xu Jiaojiao huffed and walked away.

Night.

"Mom, I also want to buy a pair of white leather shoes," Xu Jiaojiao nagged Zhao Juxiang.

"What white leather shoes?" Zhao Juxiang didn't understand what Xu Jiaojiao was talking about.

Xu Jiaojiao explained, "Just like the white leather shoes Nianhua was wearing on her feet, Mom, I think they're really pretty, and I want to buy a pair too."

"Aren't the shoes you're wearing brand new?" Zhao Juxiang glanced at Xu Jiaojiao's shoes, which had been worn for less than a month.

Puffing her cheeks, Xu Jiaojiao complained, "But those shoes look good, Mom, please buy me a pair as well."

"No."

Zhao Juxiang's refusal was very definitive. The family was tight on money, where would they have extra for shoes? Seeing her daughter unhappy, she explained, "Your sister-in-law is about to have a baby, and there will be a lot of expenses then."

"Humph."

Unable to get what she wanted from Zhao Juxiang, Xu Jiaojiao turned and went to Xu Zhihao. Xu Zhihao looked hesitant and said, "Jiaojiao, it's not that Big Brother won't buy them for you, but Big Brother really doesn't have any money

Chapter 225: All Drunk

"Auntie doesn't buy anything for herself and still complains that we didn't buy clothes, yet Grandpa and Grandma didn't say a word," Xu Nian'an complained on behalf of his parents.

"Nian'an,"

Xu Qinghe spared a glance at Xu Nian'an.

Xu Nian'an muttered, "Not even allowed to speak, fine, I won't say anything to avoid upsetting everyone during the New Year. Dad, Mom, what are we going to do for New Year's tomorrow?"

Almost instantly, Xu Nian'an switched the topic, looking forward exceedingly to how their family would celebrate the New Year.

Ever since they were young, every New Year was spent at the Xu family home. Grandpa and Grandma doted on Xu Zhihao and Xu Zhiyuan, so it was never about the two brothers.

"Of course, it will be a family reunion," Nianhua replied without hesitation, holding Ji Ying's hand. Though the cold wind outside was freezing, being together with her family filled Nianhua with immense happiness.

"Mom, let's make some sweet rice balls tomorrow," Nianhua suggested, craving sweet rice balls.

In the past, she never touched sweet rice balls, as they made her feel particularly lonely.

"Okay."

Ji Ying always fulfilled her daughter's requests without hesitation.

The next day, bright and early, Xu Nianji and Xu Qinghe went to the county to buy groceries, including ingredients for the New Year's celebration and for the days following the holiday, as the market would have no vegetables to sell then.

Xu Nian'an was home slaughtering chickens and ducks that were raised for the New Year feast. The little chicks and ducklings had all grown up.

Nianhua was frying crispy pork, which was not only fragrant and crunchy but would also last a long time if kept well-sealed in a bag.

Ji Ying was kneading dough and making sweet rice balls, while Zhou He, who was pregnant, was treated delicately by everyone, as if she were a porcelain doll. Afraid of her getting hurt, they took extra care around her. Still, Zhou He kept busy, for instance, peeling garlic needed for the evening meal...

The whole family cooperated seamlessly, filling the table with dishes. Nian'an couldn't help but remark, "This is wonderful!"

Having money is wonderful; splitting the household is wonderful!

He had never felt so satisfied before in his life.

Pork belly with winter bamboo shoots, fragrant sausages, chicken soup, duck soup, spicy fried rabbit, braised pork, stir-fried bean sprouts, cabbage, little sister's steamed fish, and sweet rice balls—ten dishes in total.

The table was packed, and the aroma kept wafting into their noses, bringing an immense feeling of satisfaction.

"Yes, it's wonderful for our family to be together,"

Nianhua agreed, nodding, her words infused with a broad smile.

"These past years, I have not taken good care of you all," Xu Qinghe said, his eyes filled with remorse. He even regretted not splitting the household sooner, wondering if his children could have suffered less.

Especially Xu Nianji, could he have been married to Zhou He earlier?

Fortunately, it wasn't too late.

"Dad, you've been the one working hard all these years," Nianhua said as she poured wine for Xu Qinghe.

"Exactly, Dad, you've had it the toughest," Xu Nianji said with a broad smile, aware deep down of his parents' kindness.

Xu Nian'an eagerly eyed the wine, saying, "I'll try some too."

He held out his wine glass to Nianhua.

Considering it was New Year's Day, Nianhua didn't hesitate and poured wine for Nian'an.

"I'll have some too," Xu Nianji felt an itch to join in, feeling joyful today and wanting to drink as well.

"Be careful since your sister-in-law is pregnant; don't get too drunk," Nianhua reminded him.

"I won't get drunk."

Xu Nianji responded enthusiastically.

However, after the reunion dinner, Xu Qinghe and his two sons ended up drunk.

Chapter 226: Can't Keep Up Anymore

"Xiaohe, it's Chinese New Year today, everyone's happy, and Nianji might have drunk a bit too much," Ji Ying explained, worried that Zhou He might overthink it.

Zhou He didn't mind at all, her smile brimming as she said, "Mom, it's fine to drink a little more on a joyful day like today, but now it's trouble for you and Nianhua to help Nianji back to his room to rest."

She was less than three months pregnant and it was a precarious time. With Xu Nianji drunk and his heavy strength, she needed to consider the child and decided not to help him herself.

"He's gotten drunk in his own home," Ji Ying said with a scolding yet joyful smile, even deep in her eyes she was extremely happy, not just for Xu Qinghe and the other two, but Ji Ying herself was delighted as well.

Next year they would have a grandson, their son and daughter were going to take college entrance exams, and they still had to run the furniture factory.

As long as the Chili Sauce Factory didn't close down, they would earn even more money in the future, and surely live better days ahead.

The room was warmed with charcoal, not cold at all.

Xu Nianhua and Ji Ying cleaned up the bowls and dishes, while Zhou He tidied up the living room. Xu Qinghe and the other two sat in a row on chairs, their faces flush and all leaning to one side, sound asleep.

"Mom, don't you think dad, big brother, and second brother look exactly the same?" Xu Nianhua said in surprise, their poses all identical, presenting a harmonious scene.

After Ji Ying finished cleaning the kitchen and came into the living room, she smiled and said, "Right, they do look alike, no doubt they're father and sons."

"Let's help them to rest quickly, it's cold. We don't want them to catch a chill."

It took immense effort for Ji Ying and Xu Nianhua to get Xu Qinghe and his two sons back to their rooms, and Xu Nianhua felt himself break into a light sweat, as if his bath had been pointless.

Lying in bed, Xu Nianhua looked at the dim light and couldn't help but smile.

She hugged her pillow and rolled around in bed several times, unable to settle her heart filled with happiness and excitement.

...

On the first day of the lunar month, they followed their parents to pay New Year's visits everywhere. On the second day, Xu Qinghu returned home.

Seeing this aunt again, Xu Nianhua got quite a shock, feeling like she had aged a lot, with an undeniable tiredness in her eyes.

"Dad, Mom, can you please help me? I won't be able to keep going on like this," she said.

Xu Qinghu couldn't care that it was just the second day of the new year; she felt that she just couldn't go on like this.

Ever since her marriage prospects fell through, Xu Qinghu's husband, who was Fu Song, had been facing a different work environment at the brick factory and was being ostracized.

Then the Yue Family had an incident, and Fu Song became the scapegoat. Being the team leader at that time, and because the incident happened while he was on duty, he was fired from the brick factory. Accustomed to working there and earning a slightly higher salary than the average person, Fu Song found it difficult to find a suitable job elsewhere. Caught between a rock and a hard place, he spent his days idly at home and even picked up gambling!

When there was no money, he would take it out on her, blaming her for not handling things properly.

Before the New Year, Xu Qinghu had avoided going to her parents' home because she was ashamed of the bruise on her face from being hit. Now that the bruise was healed, she hurried back to her parents' house.

"When you think about it, it's all because of big brother and sister-in-law. I am Nianhua's own aunt, how could I harm her? I found her such a good match, our family's days would definitely be better than they are now, but she just wouldn't agree, causing me to be barely able to get by now," she said.

At the doorway, Xu Qinghe had come to call Xu Zhong to his home for a meal, but upon hearing Xu Qinghu's words, his face darkened with anger.

Chapter 227: I'm Not Your Brother

"Dad, when will you talk to Big Brother and help me out!" Xu Qinghu pleaded earnestly with Xu Zhong, sobbing with a runny nose and tears streaming down her face, "If Fu Song doesn't find some work soon, we're not going to make it."

"I heard that sister-in-law works at the food factory. See if you can speak to Big Brother on my behalf, maybe get Fu Song a job there?" Xu Qinghu had heard that her sister-in-law was managing things at the food factory, which seemed quite decent. As far as she knew, not a single woman working there from the village had anything but praise for it.

Although nobody had managed to find out the exact salary amounts, the very secrecy of it and the fact that so many people were vying for a position at the food factory only proved that the benefits were good!

During the New Year, not to mention other things, every employee received a box of chili sauce and two pounds of meat, and that was all money!

If Cai Feng's mother knew what Xu Qinghu was thinking, she'd definitely laugh. The gifts couldn't be hidden, but the fact they got an extra month's wages could be. They'd only tell their husbands and family members about this extra money—everyone else, they'd guard it like a state secret!

They definitely didn't want anyone else snatching away their great job.

"Dad, I'm your daughter, please help me." Xu Qinghu was truly at her wit's end; otherwise, she wouldn't be begging Xu Zhong to intervene after hitting a wall elsewhere.

"Don't make it hard on Dad, and don't come looking for me either," Xu Qinghe said with a dark expression as he entered the room. "I've told you before about this matter, and there's no room for discussion."

"Big Brother."

Xu Qinghu, wiping her tears, was startled by Xu Qinghe's sudden words. Turning around, she saw him walking in against the light. His tall figure blocked the light from outside, and she hurriedly said, "Big

Brother, we are siblings, with unbreakable bonds. Can you really stand by and watch me get beaten to death?"

"Stop, I am not your big brother," Xu Qinghe interrupted her, "As for Fu Song hitting you, Dad has taken up for you several times. You were the one who saw Fu Song soften and forgave him."

Xu Qinghu: "..."

Where had her previously kind-hearted big brother gone?

Since when had he become so cold-blooded, so devoid of empathy?

It had been more than half a year; how could he still be holding a grudge?

"What nonsense are you spouting?" Xu Zhong glared at Xu Qinghe with bulging eyes, "Qinghu may have made a foolish mistake before, but she is still your sister, your own sister!"

Xu Zhong pounded the table, his words resonating with conviction.

Xu Qinghe's eyelids drooped, not echoing Xu Zhong's sentiment.

"Exactly, we are family," Xu Qinghu nodded eagerly, agreeing with him. She looked at him with hopefulness, trying to find a trace of his former tenderness in his face, in his eyes.

"Dad, I came today to invite you and Mom to have a meal at my house. Since we separated the family, you have yet to eat at the old house." Xu Qinghe changed the subject abruptly.

"Yingzi has made lunch at home. You and Mom should come over for a meal," Xu Qinghe added before saying, "I have things to deal with, so I'll be going back now."

"Hey, Big Brother."

Xu Qinghu quickly stood up and followed him, saying, "Big Brother, please help me out."

"I'm afraid I cannot help," Xu Qinghe stopped in his tracks, turned to look at Xu Qinghu, and said, "I fear my daughter won't know when she might end up being sold by someone."

Chapter 228: Can't Help

Xu Qinghu was immediately embarrassed and explained, "Big brother, that's a really harsh way to put it. When have I ever sold out Nianhua?"

"About that matter..." Xu Qinghu paused, then continued, "I was thinking of Nianhua too. Since Nianhua didn't like it, that matter fell through, so, big brother, you've been angry for so long, it's time to let it go."

"Xu Qinghu, you're about to ruin Nianhua's life, and yet you say it's for her own good. Do you think I'm a fool?"

Xu Qinghe saw that she showed no sign of repentance and felt even more disheartened. He rejected the idea outright, saying, "As for the matter with Fu Song, our ability is limited, we can't help."

Having said that, Xu Qinghe left without looking back, ignoring Xu Qinghu, who was shouting behind him.

"Big brother!"

"Xu Qinghe!"

Xu Qinghu chased him all the way to the courtyard entrance, watching Xu Qinghe's retreating figure with a heart full of hate.

"Dad."

Xu Qinghu could only turn to Xu Zhong for help.

Xu Zhong's face was dark as he said unhappily, "Don't you know how much Qinghe dotes on his daughter? You know that, don't you? And yet you still meddle with the Yue Family's affairs?"

Xu Zhong was well aware of Xu Qinghe's stubborn temperament; in the village, nobody doted on their daughter more than he did.

Xu Qinghu meant well when she tried to set up Nianhua with a match, but the candidate was simply unreliable. Not to mention others, even he, as a grandfather, couldn't stand it.

"Old Xu, Qinghu meant well, but it turned out badly, though her heart was in the right place," Liu Sanmei consoled, while giving Xu Qinghu meaningful looks, comforting, "They are siblings; Qinghe is just angry. He'll get over it. In the future, they're still blood relatives, like bones attached to tendons."

Xu Zhong's face was stern, while Xu Qinghu also put on a remorseful facade along with Liu Sanmei's words.

After a long while, Xu Zhong finally said, "This Fu Song business, it's all because you spoil him. Last time, I scolded him severely, told him not to lay a hand on anyone, but what about you? Someone just has to say a few words, and you're bamboozled."

...

On his way back to the old house, Xu Qinghe didn't notice Xu Qinghu catching up and let out a sigh of relief, as driving people away was not his forte.

"How did it go, did you talk to mom and dad?" Ji Ying saw his return with a troubled look and asked with concern.

"I did, and they should be coming."

As Xu Qinghe thought this, he added a reminder, saying, "Xu Qinghu came back, but I didn't invite her for the meal."

"She's not welcome at home," Ji Ying said, changing the subject, "And how about Xu Qingjiang and his family..."

"They weren't there."

Xu Qinghe gave a wry smile, not wanting to bring up Xu Qinghu again, saying, "Their whole family must have gone back to the Zhao Family."

He was just taking this opportunity to invite his parents for a meal, wasn't he?

The things Zhao Juxiang had said during the New Year still made him uncomfortable.

Ji Ying's family was busy; today, Xu Nianji took Zhou He back to her mother's home, and she gave away a lot of things, specially instructing Xu Nianji to take good care of Zhou He.

Nianhua accompanied Nian'an to the county to pay a New Year's visit to Du Chang.

As Du Chang was Nian'an's mentor, Nian'an naturally could not miss it.

"Second brother, should we buy some more items?" Nianhua, looking at the gifts in her hands, felt that they should buy something more.

Alcohol, canned goods, snacks, cakes—these were the high standards for gifts nowadays.

"Little sister, this is enough. If we bring any more, master might not accept it," Nian'an felt it was sufficient. The master didn't care about material things; he believed that as long as he learned the medical skills well and mastered what the master taught, his master would be happy.

Moreover, there was a long road ahead. It wasn't about how much you brought now; it was filial piety that would stand the test of time.

#### Chapter 229: Sending Persimmons to Ningbei Next Year

"Next time you come, don't bring anything with you. I really don't lack for anything," Du Chang said, his face creasing into a smile as he saw the Xu siblings arrive.

"Master, I know you don't lack for anything, but this is just a small token from us. You mustn't look down on it," Xu Nian'an said humbly and respectfully. Du Chang was highly skilled in medicine, and Xu Nian'an truly admired him. At first, he merely wanted to avoid being helpless in case of family illnesses, but after seeing quite a few patients, Xu Nian'an began to think about using his medical skills to reduce the suffering of more people.

"Very well, very well," Du Chang said with a chuckle. "I won't look down on it. Ling Dong, take this away for me."

Turning his head towards Ling Dong at his side, Du Chang instructed him to cook, only then did he turn to Xu Nianhua and say, "Girl, you look so beautiful in that red dress."

The bright red color made Xu Nianhua's skin appear white as jade, her eyes sparkling and seemingly capable of speaking.

No matter how Du Chang looked at her, he was extremely pleased with Xu Nianhua. He felt that both her appearance and conduct were particularly well suited for Pei Yicheng.

After giving her the New Year's money, Du Chang began thinking about how to create an opportunity for Xu Nianhua and Pei Yicheng to be alone when someone came to see him for treatment.

"Nian'an, help carry these things. We're going," Du Chang said without any further explanation as he dragged Xu Nian'an outside. He then said, "Girl, stay here and have lunch at home. You absolutely must not leave."

Xu Nianhua: "..."

In the living room, only Xu Nianhua and Pei Yicheng were left.

"How is your trip to Xi Province coming along?" Xu Nianhua asked with concern.

Feeling the concern in her eyes, he pressed his lips together and replied, "Everything's arranged. I'll be leaving after the Lantern Festival."

"The sun is nice outside. Why don't we go to the backyard to soak up some sun?" Pei Yicheng suggested, as he wheeled his chair towards the backyard. It was a warm time for the sun, and with some snacks, it felt very pleasant.

"I'll push."

Xu Nianhua voluntarily took over the task of pushing Pei Yicheng's wheelchair. Ling Dong came out of the kitchen, skilfully cut up some fruits, brought out some pastries, and then went back to work in the kitchen.

The previously lush persimmon tree had become bare after the winter; spring growth had not yet begun.

In the autumn, when the persimmons ripened, Pei Yicheng and Du Chang had sent plenty to the Xu family. The persimmons were small but incredibly sweet and delicious.

"Grandpa Du's persimmon tree is growing really well. Next year it's sure to bear lots of fruit," Xu Nianhua said, swallowing saliva at the thought of the sweet persimmons.

"Don't worry, I'll send the persimmons to Ningbei next year."

Looking at her swallowing saliva, Pei Yicheng found her incredibly cute. Her eyes, eagerly fixed on the persimmon tree, seemed to be filled with light. He offered her an orange, saying, "This orange is also very sweet."

"Thank you."

Xu Nianhua didn't refuse. While peeling the orange, she chatted with him about the future development direction of the food factory and the furniture factory matters.

"Uncle Xu setting up a furniture factory is an excellent idea," Pei Yicheng praised.

No matter how empty the Xu Family's house seemed now, living in an old home with barely anything to their name, the children of the Xu Family were each outstanding in their own right. Both Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying were making great efforts.

Ji Ying managed the food factory very efficiently, and Xu Qinghe's craftsmanship, which Pei Yicheng had seen personally, was exquisite. The cabinets at his home were made by Xu Qinghe. They were meticulously crafted, filled with his personal touch, and very practical.

In time, he was sure that this furniture factory Xu Qinghe had set up would be profitable and gain the approval of many more people.

Chapter 230: New Year's Money

"The furniture Uncle makes is particularly good."

"The cabinets in my home are incredibly practical."

Pei Yicheng's lips seemed as though they were coated with honey.

Xu Nianhua looked at him in amazement and asked, "Yicheng, I remember when I first met you, you didn't make a peep, just like a sulky bottle gourd."

"The first time I met you, you were a little girl who wasn't afraid of pain. It wasn't until later that I realized, you..." Pei Yicheng paused, then said, "are a match for Grandpa Du."

Xu Nianhua's eyelids twitched as she inquired, "What do you mean?"

How could she be a match for Grandpa Du?

Nagging, fretting, the kind who has to repeat an instruction N times over.

However, when Pei Yicheng lifted his head and paused again, faced with her bright and sparkling eyes, he carefully chose his words in his heart and said, "You're very caring."

Xu Nianhua grinned and instantly felt happy. She said, "Of course, we're friends, so of course I should take care of you."

A red envelope was presented in front of Xu Nianhua.

"This is..." Xu Nianhua hesitated for a moment.

Pei Yicheng said, "I'm older than you, it's New Year's money."

"Yicheng," Xu Nianhua felt awkward for a moment. Pei Yicheng wasn't much older than her, and it felt odd to receive a New Year's red envelope from him.

It was okay when it came to her parents and brother, as no matter the age, parents and elder siblings always feel like seniors. She was very happy to accept New Year's money from them.

But from Pei Yicheng...

"You call me Yicheng, so you should accept this New Year's money. It's not much," Pei Yicheng pushed the red envelope towards her.

"Thank you, Yicheng."

Xu Nianhua picked up the red envelope. If it wasn't much, there was no harm in accepting it.

"Are you confident about the college entrance exam?" Pei Yicheng asked.

"Yes."

Xu Nianhua answered confidently, "I'm certain I can get into Beining University."

"I believe you can do it," Pei Yicheng liked seeing her so self-assured and radiant.

When she smiled, she was like a little sun, able to shine and give off heat, making people feel light, hope, and a sense of comfort and relaxation from within.

Wind began to pick up, carrying a chill.

"What's wrong?" Xu Nianhua noticed Pei Yicheng continuously rubbing his eyes, which seemed to struggle to open fully.

"It might be the wind just now. Some sand got into my eye."

Pei Yicheng rubbed his eye, feeling extreme discomfort.

"Don't rub it, be careful not to damage your eye."

Xu Nianhua quickly stood up, leaned forward, and her slender hand landed on his larger one. Her voice, gentle yet filled with concern, sounded in his ear as she said, "Don't move, let me blow on it for you."

Xu Nianhua blew hard several times, and then asked, "How is it, any better?"

Being so close to her, he could sense her clean and natural scent, not the aroma of perfume, but a fragrance that was uniquely hers.

As he opened his eyes, he could see her delicate and fair face so close that he could even see the fine fuzz on her skin. Her dark eyes seemed as if they could suck him in.

"How is it?"

Xu Nianhua looked at his eyes with concern; they were red and moist after being rubbed.

"Much better."

Pei Yicheng's lips curved upward slightly.

Under the leafless persimmon tree, Pei Yicheng sat in his wheelchair, tilting his head up, just a few fist's length away from Xu Nianhua. She squatted down but remained taller than him due to her standing position.

Their eyes locked, as if they were a couple deeply gazing into each other's eyes.

A 'click' sounded.