

Regaining 291

Chapter 291: Dating is Too Troublesome

"Yes, you're not drunk," Ling Dong knew he was as he looked at his state, supporting Xu Nian'an as they hurried back. He said, "Yicheng, I'll take him home first."

"I'm not going back; I want to drink more," Xu Nian'an slurred, his eyes so bleary that he could barely see anyone clearly.

"We'll drink at home."

Ling Dong knew how to comfort someone who was drunk, and sure enough, once he said they would drink at home, Xu Nian'an fell silent, obediently following him all the way back.

Despite the hot weather, a cool breeze made the walk down the street quite pleasant.

"Ling Dong will safely get Nian'an home," Pei Yicheng praised Ling Dong to himself.

"I'm relieved, but what about your leg? Can you walk that far?" Xu Nianhua looked worriedly at his leg, which had just recently recovered.

"I can."

Pei Yicheng, seeing the skepticism in her eyes, immediately reassured her, "Don't worry, I'm definitely up to it."

The two of them walked back, their shadows elongated by the moonlight.

Xu Nianhua didn't know what to say, and the atmosphere suddenly fell silent.

"That classmate who just confessed to you, if he hadn't hurried off, how would you have responded?" Pei Yicheng's voice suddenly broke the silence, a steady and powerful sound carried by the wind.

She paused awkwardly before saying, "Of course I would have rejected him."

"He's not worthy of you," Pei Yicheng stated.

Xu Nianhua corrected him, "It's not about being worthy or not, it's about suitability. He and I don't suit each other. There's no spark, so of course, I would reject him decisively."

"Besides, dating is too troublesome. I have no intention of dating," Xu Nianhua thought being single was quite nice. In the future, she would develop her career, attend university, honor her father and mother, and ensure they lived a good life and enjoyed their old age.

Pei Yicheng glanced at her, her serious demeanor taking him by surprise. He asked, "Nianhua, you're only twenty years old."

He reminded her that a twenty-year-old girl should be quite eager for romance, right?

"Exactly because I'm only twenty, there are so many things I want to do. Why should I bother dating?" Xu Nianhua seemed to find the very idea of love to be burdensome and tiresome.

Pei Yicheng's steps halted as he asked, "Haven't you ever met someone who made your heart flutter?"

"No," Xu Nianhua replied briskly. She thought, what's so good about dating? She had seen plenty of women who seemed like entirely different people after getting into a relationship or marriage, their lives revolving around their husbands and children, and not to mention dealing with interfering in-laws. If the family dynamics were good, one could consider themselves lucky, but dealing with a nightmare of in-laws and their endless demands could be a headache just to think about.

Pei Yicheng touched his face, wondering if his charm had stopped working.

Or had he become unattractive?

"Yicheng, what's the matter?" Xu Nianhua turned around and noticed that Pei Yicheng had stopped and was touching his face, deep in thought.

"Nothing."

Pei Yicheng dropped his hand and said, "In the future, when you meet someone who moves your heart, you definitely won't find it bothersome."

"Really?"

Xu Nianhua tilted her head, feeling that it was highly unlikely she would meet someone who would stir her heart, let alone someone she'd want to marry.

After all, she intended to remain single for life.

"Definitely."

Pei Yicheng said confidently, changing the subject, "Tomorrow evening, Cheng Hao is treating us to dinner and wants to introduce us to his girlfriend."

Chapter 292: Making a Presence

"You mean the Little Fairy, the music teacher?" Xu Nianhua had heard about Cheng Hao's girlfriend. Half a year ago, she had also encountered Pei Yining, but only saw her profile, not her face.

During this half year, she had been immersed in her studies but knew that Cheng Hao and his girlfriend were enjoying their relationship immensely.

"Yes."

Pei Yicheng confirmed, looking at Xu Nianhua's home, wishing the road there could have been a bit longer.

"Sure, let's go eat together tomorrow." Xu Nianhua didn't refuse, she smiled and waved goodbye to Pei Yicheng.

"Oh."

Xu Nianhua ran happily into the house. When she reached the doorway and turned back, Pei Yicheng was still following her.

"Say hello to your aunt." Pei Yicheng confidently followed her, definitely not missing a chance to make his presence felt.

Because of the numerous orders at the Chili Sauce Factory, Xu Qinghe had returned to the factory to continue working after Xu Nianhua's college entrance exams.

"Oh."

As Xu Nianhua entered the house and heard Ling Dong's voice, she remembered to say, "Ling Dong is here too; it's good, you can go back together."

"How much did you drink?"

"So drunk he doesn't even recognize anyone."

Ji Ying was scolding Xu Nian'an, looking at him with concern as he was throwing up terribly; she made him a cup of tea.

"Auntie, don't worry. Nian'an just finished his college entrance exams; it's his time to relax. He'll be fine after some sleep." Ling Dong comforted her, and recommended many hangover remedies.

"Mom, is brother okay?"

Xu Nianhua bounced into the room and upon seeing her brother lying by the bed and the strong smell of vomit in the room, it was incredibly unpleasant.

Ji Ying was cleaning up the room, with Ling Dong helping on the side.

"Mom, let me do it."

No sooner had Xu Nianhua spoken than Ji Ying chased her out, "Nianhua, don't come in; it's too smelly here. You didn't drink, did you?"

Ji Ying looked Xu Nianhua over, relieved to see that her daughter hadn't drunk. She was quite apologetic when she saw Pei Yicheng.

"Auntie, since Nian'an and Nianhua are safely home, we'll be heading back too."

Pei Yicheng spoke very politely.

After wrapping up things, Ling Dong also left. Xu Nian'an in the bed was sleeping soundly.

"Yicheng and Ling Dong are really good, if it weren't for Ling Dong, I'd really worry whether you could bring your brother back." After Ji Ying finished her chores, she shared a room with Xu Nianhua and they chatted.

"Yes, brother Cheng and the others are indeed very good."

Xu Nianhua agreed, completely missing the hesitation in Ji Ying's eyes. She asked, "How are the sales at the Chili Sauce Factory now?"

In the past six months, Xu Nianhua had barely involved herself in the factory's affairs, leaving the record-keeping to the literate Zhou He and her older brother.

"It's doing very well, don't worry. The Chili Sauce Factory is doing great." Ji Ying mentioned this with genuine happiness, "Last month, I added chicken pieces, and they sold well too. It's just that it's summer now, and storage isn't easy."

"No worries, the chili sauce is preserved in oil; even in summer, it can be kept for twenty days without a problem. Actually, we could also make fermented tofu," Xu Nianhua suggested. Fermented tofu is suitable for all seasons, tastes good, and doesn't spoil easily.

"I'm not very skilled at it, but your aunt knows how." Ji Ying remembered her family from her maternal home; they had all gone to South City for the New Year, and it had been almost half a year since they last contacted.

"Then we can ask auntie when the time comes."

Xu Nianhua said this, her impression of this auntie not very distinct.

Chapter 293: Zou Yaru

"My head hurts."

When Xu Nian'an woke up, he felt dizzy and in pain.

"Second brother, you were so drunk yesterday that you didn't even recognize people, and you kept holding onto a classmate's hand, insisting she be your girlfriend."

Xu Nianhua looked seriously at Xu Nian'an, scaring him quite a bit. He tried to recall the memories of the previous day. Besides drinking with classmates, he seemed to have rejected a few of them, and then what?

Xu Nian'an thought hard, very hard, but still couldn't remember. He looked at Xu Nianhua with a panicked face and said, "Little sister, you're my real sister. Surely I didn't really do such a thing, did I?"

"Of course."

Xu Nianhua nodded affirmatively.

Looking utterly dejected, Xu Nian'an said, "It's over, it's over. Why did I drink so much?"

"It's fake."

Xu Nianhua looked playfully at him, thinking her second brother looked so silly. She leaned in and said, "Yesterday, I saw quite a few classmates confess to you. Why didn't you accept any of them?"

"Xu Nianhua!"

Upon hearing it was fake, Xu Nian'an immediately breathed a sigh of relief. But the next moment, after hearing her words, he looked at her through gritted teeth and said, "Did Chen Hu come looking for you yesterday?"

He had been so hassled by classmates that he had no time to keep an eye on her.

"Second brother, no need to change the subject. I think there were a few classmates who weren't too bad, like Zheng Jin." Xu Nianhua stealthily tried to gauge her second brother's thoughts.

Zheng Jin was indeed a nice girl, simple and straightforward, without any malice, and as for her looks, she was decent and elegant, quite a sight to behold.

"Stop talking nonsense."

Xu Nian'an glared at her and said, "I'm not thinking about dating. I want to go to university; I want to be a doctor."

"Oh."

Xu Nianhua felt somewhat disappointed, having hoped that there could be some development between her second brother and Zheng Jin. She suddenly said, "Tonight, Cheng Hao is inviting us to dinner, saying he wants to introduce his girlfriend to us."

Originally, Cheng Hao had wanted to introduce her sooner, but unfortunately, both she and her second brother were occupied with classes and preparing for college entrance exams, while Pei Yicheng was getting treatment in Xi Province.

"We're not going to drink, are we?"

Xu Nian'an, still feeling a headache, became even more headachy at the mention of dinner.

That evening.

At Yingbin Grand Hotel, the county's finest hotel, just the decor alone was a cut above the rest.

The previous two times, they ate at Friendship Hotel, which was also good, but it couldn't quite compare to Yingbin Grand Hotel.

"Cheng Hao, will your friends not like me?" Zou Yaru got a little worried at the thought of meeting Cheng Hao's friends. She looked over her dress and said, "Is this dress too formal for the occasion?"

She was wearing a long, white dress today, adorned with a pink flower at the waist, suiting her usual ethereal fairy style, making her look every bit the gentlewoman.

Her hair was black and straight, and today it was tied up in a princess style, which looked quiet and very much in keeping with her dress and demeanor.

"How could they not, they'll definitely like you," Cheng Hao reassured her, holding her hand and smiling. "My Little Fairy is so beautiful, like a fairy descended from heaven; who wouldn't like that? You look the most beautiful in this dress today."

Cheng Hao's words were as sweet as honey, slowly erasing Zou Yaru's insecurities. She gave a soft smile and said, "You're just saying that to comfort me."

"Yaru, I speak nothing but the truth," Cheng Hao insisted, looking at her affectionately. Her face was one he could never tire of. Zou Yaru was completely different from anyone he had dated before, giving him a constant desire to cherish her in the palm of his hand.

Chapter 294: Yining Really Has No Chance

"Really?" Zou Yaru blinked her eyes, and when he gazed at her affectionately, it felt as if she was his entire world. She really liked that feeling.

"Truer than true gold."

Cheng Hao held her hand and placed it over his heart.

Zou Yaru's cheeks, already flushed, turned an even deeper red. She quickly withdrew her hand, pretending to look elsewhere.

"Your face is all red; I really want to kiss you." Cheng Hao moved closer, gazing at her flushed cheeks, feeling an urge to kiss her.

"Cheng Hao."

Zou Yaru was startled and quickly stepped back. She touched her heated cheeks, fearing that he might really kiss her. Although they were in a private room, his friends could come in at any moment, and there were also waiters. What if, what if someone saw them? Could she still show her face?

"Hehe."

Cheng Hao grinned, showing his white teeth, and said, "I'm just thinking about it."

Zou Yaru: "..."

"Knock."

The door was knocked on.

Cheng Hao instinctively restrained his teasing grin. He quickly got up, opened the door to see Pei Yicheng and the others arriving, and happily said, "Yicheng, you guys are here, just waiting for you to order."

"Come, let me introduce you. This is my girlfriend, Zou Yaru." Cheng Hao put his arm around Zou Yaru's shoulder, affectionately introduced her, and then one by one introduced to her, "This is Yicheng, we've grown up together since we were children, next to him, the guy with the stern face is Ling Dong, this beautiful girl is Nianhua, and he is Nianhua's brother, Xu Nian'an."

"Hello." Pei Yicheng, being around unfamiliar people, spoke even less and quickly averted his gaze after glancing at Zou Yaru.

"Hello."

Zou Yaru responded nervously and discreetly glanced at Cheng Hao.

Cheng Hao quietly explained, "Yicheng is not very talkative."

Zou Yaru smiled, took another look at Pei Yicheng, and quietly withdrew her gaze. Cheng Hao's friend was really... very handsome.

"What would you like to eat?" Cheng Hao handed the menu to Pei Yicheng.

Pei Yicheng directly passed it to Xu Nianhua.

Xu Nianhua paused for a moment, then handed it to Zou Yaru, saying, "Let Yaru decide."

"No need, Nianhua, you order whatever you like to eat," Zou Yaru said gently with a smile.

Cheng Hao intervened, "Stop passing it around. Yaru, I'll order for you."

Cheng Hao ordered a few dishes that Zou Yaru liked to eat, and then passed the menu to Xu Nianhua, saying, "Ladies first, Yicheng and Nian'an can definitely eat anything."

Xu Nianhua glanced at the menu, didn't fuss about it, and added three more dishes, along with the ones Cheng Hao had ordered, making it five dishes and one soup.

"I'm paying today; Nianhua, you're being too polite." Cheng Hao added one more dish, smilingly asking, "Why didn't your elder brother come?"

"My sister-in-law is pregnant; of course, he went back to be with her," Xu Nianhua explained with a smile.

Cheng Hao was naturally talkative, hence the atmosphere was very good. Even though it was their first meeting, it didn't feel awkward at all. Cheng Hao took great care of and was very considerate towards Zou Yaru, completely acting the part of a good boyfriend. Xu Nianhua thought to himself, Yining really has no chance now; Cheng Hao must be truly in love.

However...

Xu Nianhua's gaze flickered over Zou Yaru's face. Compared to Cheng Hao, who was deeply immersed in his feelings, Zou Yaru liked and enjoyed it, but definitely didn't love him to that extent.

Chapter 295: I Have a House

"Yaru, do you really want to go to South City?" Cheng Hao, embracing Zou Yaru and inhaling her faint fragrance, felt an urge to hold her until the end of time.

"Mhm."

Zou Yaru nestled quietly in his arms. After meeting his friends, she felt a vague unease. What if, just what if...

"My parents have been urging me to go to South City, I have already delayed it by more than ten days," Zou Yaru responded with downcast eyes. She should have gone to her parent's place in South City after the holiday, but she had been putting it off because of Cheng Hao. Now that she had met his friends, it was time to go.

If she didn't leave for South City soon, and by chance her parents came back to find her, everything would be over.

"Yaru," Cheng Hao, holding her shoulders and gazing straight into her eyes, suggested, "How about I come with you to meet your uncle and aunt? What do they like?"

"Don't."

Zou Yaru hastily refused upon hearing this.

A look of sorrow flashed through Cheng Hao's eyes as he pressed his lips together and said, "Yaru, am I really so unacceptable?"

"It's not that, I just..."

Zou Yaru stammered, at a loss for words on how to explain. It might be easy to explain to her father but her mother had always wanted her to marry into the Gu Family. If her mother learned that she was dating someone, she'd probably go ballistic.

"I am capable of giving you happiness," Cheng Hao's grip tightened as he explained, "Even though my home is in Ningbei, I'm willing to settle here for you. Otherwise, South City is fine too. We can buy a house in the county or South City. I'm currently delivering goods at the factory and earn five hundred a month. I can afford to give you a good life."

Five hundred yuan, a sum that a regular family might not earn in a whole year, yet he made it in a month.

And this was the off-season, summer. In the peak seasons, spring or winter, he could earn over a thousand in his best month.

"Yaru, I'm also good-looking. I believe your uncle and aunt would be pleased with me," Cheng Hao's affectionate gaze left Zou Yaru even more at a loss for words.

Five hundred yuan, a house; these would indeed mean a lot for the average family, but for the Zou Family, such a salary was actually negligible.

"Cheng Hao."

Zou Yaru flung herself into his arms and said, "Give me a little time. When the right moment comes, I will tell my parents. Otherwise, they will surely worry, right?"

Cheng Hao's hand stroked her hair. After a long while, he finally said, "Okay, but don't make me wait too long."

"Definitely, don't be sad now, smile for me, will you?" Zou Yaru tilted her head up and rubbed her forehead against his chin. His short stubble felt itchy.

"Then kiss me," Cheng Hao said with a grin, bending his head and closing his eyes, leaning his face forward.

Zou Yaru, blushing, amid Cheng Hao's urging, inched closer, when suddenly, Cheng Hao turned his head.

"Hmm!"

Zou Yaru, covering her mouth, looked at Cheng Hao with eyes full of reproach for his trickery.

"Hahaha~"

Cheng Hao's laughter carried far and wide.

"It's getting late, I should be heading back. You should go to bed early. I'll come and pick you up tomorrow and take you to South City."

Cheng Hao hurriedly left before Zou Yaru could get angry.

Stepping out the gate, Cheng Hao carefully checked the door several times, ensuring everything was locked before he stopped and looked up at her room with the lights on. He touched his lips and smiled foolishly to himself.

"Nianhua, what do you think of Zou Yaru?" Xu Nian'an suddenly asked.

Having had a little to drink, Xu Nian'an was a bit dizzy but not drunk. Catching the question unexpectedly, he paused and said, "What do you mean?"

Chapter 296: Marry Her First, Talk Later

"It's just..." Xu Nianhua hesitated for a moment, waved her hand, and said, "Never mind."

Talking to her brother was like talking to a block of wood; it was a waste of saliva.

"How strange." Xu Nian'an watched his little sister go back to her room, completely baffled. He said, "Nianhua, I'm going to the village tomorrow to pick Fruit Jelly berries. Do you want to go back to the village?"

"No."

Xu Nianhua's voice came from the room. If she went back to the village and up the mountain to pick Fruit Jelly berries, she would just hold her brother back. It was better to go help out at the factory

instead, especially since she was about to go to Beijing University. It was time to make a good plan for herself.

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"Cheng Hao, do you realize how silly you look when you smile?" Ling Dong didn't hesitate to tease him, even fetching a mirror from the room and placing it in front of Cheng Hao.

In the mirror, Cheng Hao's already handsome face looked even more suave due to his smile, and the twinkle in his peach blossom eyes made him appear even more charming. Not to mention others, even Cheng Hao himself was quite pleased as he touched his face and said, "Truly handsome!"

Ling Dong: "Truly silly."

"Are you just jealous of me?" Cheng Hao said, looking smug. For the past six months, his relationship with Yaru had been incredibly sweet, and his days had been filled with happiness.

Zou Yaru was different from any girlfriend he had before; she made him feel the urge to cherish her and the impulse to marry her and take her home.

"Pfft."

Ling Dong rolled his eyes and, surveying Cheng Hao's dopey smile, said, "Cheng Hao, none of your past girlfriends lasted more than three months. Are you, serious?"

"Of course."

When the topic of Yaru came up, Cheng Hao immediately became serious and said, "The relationship with Yaru isn't just for fun. I'm going to marry her, so you'd better be more polite to Yaru from now on."

"We'll see if you can marry her," Ling Dong didn't have high hopes for them. Even though Zou Yaru was pretty and seemed unworldly, he always felt there was something fake about her.

How could someone truly be unworldly?

"Ling Dong, what do you mean? Are you trying to rain on my parade or pick a fight with me? How about we throw down?"

Upon hearing Ling Dong's remark, Cheng Hao immediately flared up like a lion with his hackles raised. He rolled up his bare arms, clenched his fists, and looked ready for a challenge with Ling Dong.

"Let's fight then."

Ling Dong didn't care and got ready to throw down immediately.

The formerly quiet courtyard instantly came to life. Since the age of eight, Ling Dong had been training with Pei Yicheng; whenever Yicheng practiced his skills, Ling Dong would double his efforts. Over the years, Ling Dong never missed a day of training.

Compared to Cheng Hao, who was inconsistent like a fisherman who'd fish for three days and dry the nets for two, Cheng Hao was completely outmatched.

Pei Yicheng watched from the entrance of the yard, clearly aware that Ling Dong had held back.

"I'm done."

Cheng Hao, having vented all his energy, collapsed ungracefully onto a nearby lounge chair. While catching his breath, he said, "Ling Dong, I'll pretend I never heard what you said today."

"Just a reminder," Ling Dong said, dusting off his clothes, his brows still furrowed. He meant well, but why did Cheng Hao turn into an idiot when he was in love?

Pei Yicheng, seeing that they were on the verge of another argument, stepped in, "Ling Dong, go to the new factory tomorrow. There's a document that needs to be reviewed."

Ling Dong glanced at Cheng Hao and eventually left without saying much. The documents had already been taken care of.

Once Ling Dong was gone, only he and Pei Yicheng remained in the courtyard. He hung his head, looking at his dust-covered leather shoes, and asked, "Yicheng, do you not approve of us either?"

Chapter 297: Man Will Conquer Nature

Pei Yicheng didn't say a word, he just silently sat down in the chair beside him.

"Brother Cheng," Cheng Hao's heart skipped a beat. Ling Dong didn't think highly of him, which he didn't care about; no matter which girlfriend he had, Ling Dong believed none would last long.

But Yicheng was different.

"You love her," Pei Yicheng stated plainly, without a hint of question.

Ever since Cheng Hao had striven to earn money and buy a house just to be with Zou Yaru, Yicheng knew that the once-flirtatious Cheng Hao had truly fallen for someone.

A year ago, in Ningbei, Cheng Hao had been living an easygoing life. Afterward, here, following others to sell chili sauce and earning his first pot of gold, especially after the New Year, Cheng Hao's hard work was clear for all to see.

"Yes."

Without hesitation, Cheng Hao replied; during this half a year, he was very clear that he truly loved her, and said, "I want to marry her, I want to spend my life with her."

"If you want to walk together for a lifetime, then work hard to overcome every difficulty," Pei Yicheng didn't want to say anything that would dishearten him, so he said, "It all depends on the person."

Cheng Hao's eyes lit up with excitement, his previous anxiety and gloom vanished in an instant, replaced by joy, and he said energetically, "Brother Cheng, I knew it, I just knew you would support me."

"Stop," Pei Yicheng interrupted him, "You need to be firm in your conviction. If you truly want to spend your life with her, then you must strive for it. Otherwise, even the best relationships may not last."

Cheng Hao seemed to half understand, but he knew that when it came to matters of the heart, he had to rely on himself. Although he always felt that Yaru was somewhat reluctant to take him to meet her parents, he must not be trying hard enough.

"Brother Cheng, I saw a house on Bado Road a few days ago, it's really nice. A two-story building with a small garden, Yaru will definitely like it. The price isn't too expensive either, I'm thinking of buying it."

"Then, with Brother Cheng here, I could keep you company too," Cheng Hao was filled with hopes for the future.

"If you like it, that's good," Pei Yicheng didn't say much more; from what he could tell, Zou Yaru wasn't entirely devoid of feelings for Cheng Hao.

"Brother Cheng, how is our Liunian Company doing?" Having invested money, Cheng Hao naturally cared about it and said, "If there's anything I can help with, just let me know."

"The company is partly yours too. Even if you didn't mention it, I would have come to you," Pei Yicheng and Cheng Hao discussed the company matters in detail, until ten o'clock at night, before Cheng Hao went home to rest.

Once home, Cheng Hao still felt not the slightest bit tired; he took out his notebook, poked at the savings he had accumulated, and secretly regretted not saving money earlier. Why hadn't he saved diligently in his younger years?

The money for the house was still short; he would have to think of other methods.

The next day.

Cheng Hao rushed to the bottom of Zou Yaru's building early in the morning.

"Cheng Hao, you're here." Zou Yaru was organizing her luggage when she saw Cheng Hao arrive; she ran up to him happily.

"I brought you breakfast, look, there's soy milk you love, and deep-fried dough sticks and meat buns from your favorite shop." Cheng Hao held up the breakfast, and only after entering the room did he realize that Zou Yashi was also there.

"Yashi is here too?" Cheng Hao set the breakfast on the table, saying, "It's just as well, I bought enough."

"I've already eaten."

Zou Yashi had packed all her luggage. Hearing Cheng Hao's words, she declined with a smile; it was better for her not to intrude on their sweet moments.

Chapter 298: Heartache

Zou Yashi and Zou Yaru both went to South City. Along the way, Cheng Hao drove them there, with a truckload of goods behind them.

"Cheng Hao, you've thought of everything." Zou Yaru got carsick easily, but Cheng Hao had specifically prepared some remedy, and after she used it, she felt extremely comfortable and didn't feel carsick at all.

"As long as you're comfortable, that's good. Whenever you come back, I'll come to pick you up," Cheng Hao said with a smile. He used to get carsick as well, but it improved when he started driving. Besides, he drove around every day now and didn't get carsick at all anymore.

"Alright." Zou Yaru smiled radiantly as she said goodbye, adding, "Don't work too hard yourself, you should rest properly too."

Reluctantly, Cheng Hao said goodbye to Zou Yaru and then left to deliver the goods.

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In Gaoliang County, Pei Yicheng personally inspected a factory and bought it on the spot.

Once the factory was secured, they began to renovate it. They needed to make hand cream and perfumes, so the factory had to be absolutely clean.

The hand cream had to be produced and sold by autumn, and that would take time.

Pei Yicheng's leg had just healed, but he paid great attention to this matter, dealing with it every day outside to the point of being hardly seen.

Xu Nian'an returned to the village to pick Fruit Jelly. However, the Fruit Jelly nearby had already been picked by others. Once people realized Fruit Jelly could be sold for money, they went to pick it early, and some even followed Xu Nian'an's lead and sold Mung Bean Jelly.

Xu Nian'an didn't mind. Last year, he roamed the entire mountainside and found many Fruit Jelly trees, though they were quite far away. However, Xu Nian'an didn't mind the distance. As long as he could pick Fruit Jelly and earn money from selling Mung Bean Jelly, what was there to fear?

Xu Nian'an wanted to earn enough to cover his daily expenses in college. Although the tuition was free, he still needed to pay for accommodation and meals, which amounted to a substantial sum each month, including travel costs. He didn't want to always ask his family for money.

His elder brother had just gotten married, and the money earned from selling bean sprouts was still given to the family. He couldn't take it for granted without contributing anything.

"Nian'an, you already have enough Fruit Jelly; why are you still heading up the mountain?" Ji Ying looked at Xu Nian'an, who only got home by dusk, her face full of distress. His clothes were covered in sticky grass, and he had several scratches.

"It's okay, Mom, I'm picking more just in case there won't be any left later," Xu Nian'an said, having roamed the mountainside for three days and picked a lot of Fruit Jelly. Tomorrow, he planned to go to the last place. After that, he would have to wait for more Fruit Jelly to grow on the trees.

"You, don't get too drawn into making money. The family isn't like before; we have no problem supporting your schooling," Ji Ying said, unable to bear seeing her son work so hard.

"Mom, where am I working hard? It's my elder brother who's working hard, getting up at dawn every day to sell bean sprouts and deliver chili sauce to various places in the county. Now that's hard work," Xu Nian'an quickly chimed in, worried that his brother and sister-in-law might get the wrong idea.

"Sigh."

Ji Ying sighed and said, "You brothers really don't give me any peace of mind. Your elder brother too, I tell him not to work so hard, but he doesn't listen at all. Really, it's like none of you listen to me anymore."

"Mom, I'm a man, a bit of hardship doesn't scare me," Xu Nian'an hurriedly consoled, seeing the look on Ji Ying's face.

Ji Ying glared at him, but eventually said nothing more.

Chapter 299: The First to Tell You

Xu Family, lively and warm.

Another Xu Family, however, was noisy and clamorous.

The issue started because of Xu Zhiyuan trying to get into college.

"Zhiyuan, you can definitely get into college this year, right?" Zhao Juxiang had felt it was possible last year, but she waited in vain for the admission letter. This year, she began hoping early.

"Mom, I think I can." Xu Zhiyuan, after repeating a year, had significantly improved his grades, giving him more confidence.

"That's great."

As Zhao Juxiang heard this, she instantly cheered up, saying, "Our Xu family is going to have a college student."

"Nian'an and Nianhua will definitely get in too," Xu Zhiyuan said, pursing his lips.

"Them, how could they possibly get in?"

Upon hearing this, Zhao Juxiang was displeased, and with only the two of them around, she didn't bother to conceal her feelings, saying, "Zhiyuan, it's fine if you get in; forget about them, but make sure they don't outshine you."

"If you ask me, your uncle's family turned their backs on us once they got a bit of money, just because they opened some damn furniture factory! What's so great about that?"

"And your aunt, working at the Chili Factory, just because she made some money? Her eyes are high in the sky now!"

"I heard Nianji is selling some bean sprouts, who knows how much that'll bring in?"

"Hmph, how could they compare to you? You were born to be college material, they don't have such good fortune. Don't look at how well they are doing now; who knows what the future holds?"

"You know your big brother works at the canned food factory, and he's the director!"

Zhao Juxiang demeaned the Xu Qinghe family to the dust, but when she mentioned her eldest son Xu Zhihao, her words were filled with pride and contentment.

"Mom, our uncle's family is doing well; we should be happy for them. Also, Nian'an and Nianhua's grades are really good." Xu Zhiyuan couldn't help but correct her, his mom always disliked seeing others do well.

"Tsk!"

As Zhao Juxiang heard this, she immediately disapproved, saying, "Zhiyuan, you shouldn't be boosting others' morale!"

"It's true," Xu Zhiyuan pouted. If it hadn't been for Nianhua getting so many papers and teaching them foreign language techniques, their grades wouldn't have improved so much.

"Xu Zhiyuan, are you even my son?"

Zhao Juxiang started bickering over this. Xu Zhiyuan, not wanting to argue, returned to his room to read, while Zhao Juxiang continued shouting about how she had wasted her efforts raising this son.

Xu Zhiyuan read his book, wishing he could stuff cotton in his ears. Although he didn't like being overshadowed, it was a fact that Nian'an and Nianhua's good grades, which also helped him improve, were true. Otherwise, his chances of getting into college this year would have been slim again!

...

"Auntie." Ma Xiuhong approached with a cake and some malted milk, saying, "It's been a long time since I saw you, Auntie. I brought some snacks, I hope you like them."

Zhao Juxiang looked at the cake and malted milk, her smile crinkling her eyes even more as she said, "You shouldn't have brought anything, too formal!"

Although she said that, Zhao Juxiang didn't hesitate at all in accepting the gifts.

"Of course, Auntie isn't lacking these, but it's just a small token of my appreciation," Ma Xiuhong said with a pleasing smile, deliberately mentioning her sister-in-law, Zhao Juxiang's sister, to bring them closer.

Zhao Juxiang understood her intentions, taking the initiative to say, "Xiuhong, the last time I spoke to Zhihao about working at the factory, they didn't need people, but next time there's an opening, I'll tell you first."

Chapter 300: Big Log

"Thank you, Auntie," Ma Xiuhong's eyes instantly lit up. If she could get into the cannery, that really would be too good to be true.

After that, Ma Xiuhong deliberately chose to say things that sounded pleasant, making Zhao Juxiang bloom with happiness, absolutely delighted.

...

In Gaoliang County, Xu Nianhua had been busy perfecting things at the Chili Sauce Factory. Although the chili sauce was selling well, it was still only popular in South City and a few surrounding areas. If he could further expand the business, it would certainly present a whole new scene.

Lately, Nianhua had spent his days planning how to expand the Chili Sauce Factory's operations. He was constantly at the factory, carefully noting any areas that needed improvement.

"Nianhua,"

a familiar voice called out.

Xu Nianhua lifted his head from his notes and, upon seeing that pretty baby face, was immediately stunned.

"Nianhua, you still recognize me after half a year?"

Pei Yining playfully opened her arms and hugged Xu Nianhua, excitedly saying, "I came over right after my exams. I've been on the bus for two days, and I'm so tired!"

"Then how about I take you to my place for dinner tonight?" Xu Nianhua thought about how she loved the dishes his mother cooked, so he made the suggestion.

Pei Yining broke into a smile and said, "Nianhua, you really are my good sister," the future great sister-in-law.

Pei Yining said cheerfully, "I'm sure I'll get into Beining University. I did really well on the foreign language paper, and I feel like I performed much better on the other subjects than before."

"That's great, we'll be alumni then, classmates," Xu Nianhua said with a smile, eyeing Pei Yining's delicate face. Her baby face made her appear younger than she was, her skin full of collagen, her personality lively and cheerful, making her instantly likable.

"Yeah," Pei Yining tilted her head, her eyes full of smiles.

"By the way, did you visit your grandfather?" Xu Nianhua asked.

"I did. I originally wanted to visit my brother, but he went to South City and I missed him," Pei Yining said, her eyes twinkling. "Nianhua, my brother's leg is really healed, right?"

Even though she had confirmed over the phone that her brother's leg was healed, Pei Yining couldn't settle down until she saw it for herself.

"It's healed, absolutely true. He stands up taller than me now," Xu Nianhua replied with a pursed-lip smile, knowing that he really did put a lot of pressure on her by being in front of her.

"That's awesome!"

The smile on Pei Yining's face couldn't be hidden as she joyfully said, "My brother is so tall. I look like a dwarf standing next to him, don't I?"

"Yes, indeed, he's tall," Xu Nianhua agreed.

Pei Yining continued nonchalantly to praise him, "My brother has always been the best since we were kids. In school, a lot of girls like him, but he's never led anyone on. To think about it, he's always been a bit special to you, Nianhua."

"Yining, you're overthinking it. It's just that we're closer because of Second Brother," Xu Nianhua replied without a second thought, not considering other possibilities. "Besides, we are about the same age; perhaps he thinks of me as you."

"Yining, your brother really does dote on you as his sister."

Pei Yining: "..."

She scrutinized Xu Nianhua, noting that she had absolutely no other ideas, and felt a bit disappointed inside, wondering to herself whether her own brother was too clueless about how to chase a girl.