

Regaining 361

Chapter 361: Huaming Lake

"Your grandpa is recovering well, and your aunt is kind," Pei Yining said as she held Xu Nianhua's hand and walked toward Huaming Lake.

"Yes, grandpa is indeed recovering well."

This was Xu Nianhua's greatest relief. As for Aunt Deng Juan, she didn't say much—Deng Juan was no doubt enthusiastic after seeing the gifts from Pei Yining.

Though Deng Juan was a bit greedy and sometimes petty, Xu Nianhua was grateful that she was willing to contribute financially when grandpa was in trouble. She no longer minded Deng Juan's minor flaws—nobody is perfect after all.

Huaming Lake, a gathering place of spiritual essence, was bathed in sunlight even though it was only eight thirty in the morning. Looking into the distance, the green waters of the lake shone like flawless jade.

As the wind brushed past, it stirred up layers of ripples.

Pei Yining had already asked around about how essential it was to experience this lake via boat to fully embrace the beauty along its shores.

"Wow, it's so beautiful."

Standing on the boat, the wind whipped through their hair, revealing the beautiful scenery on both sides. Pei Yining was delighted like a child.

Xu Nianhua sat down, enjoying the scenery, thinking that she would bring her parents to visit soon. It would be a waste not to see such a beautiful spot like Huaming Lake.

She should have some time during the winter break.

With her mind wandering, Xu Nianhua looked up to see Pei Yining's joyful face, which made one inevitably smile.

After fully experiencing Huaming Lake, Pei Yining saw many vendors along the shore and instructed the boatman to dock. Even if she couldn't buy anything, it was still nice to enjoy the bustling scene.

"Be careful not to fall into the lake," Xu Nianhua said, watching Pei Yining moving about and craning her neck, worried she might accidentally fall in.

"Tsk, tsk, tsk." Pei Yining pursed her lips unhappily and said, "Can't you say something nice?"

Xu Nianhua chuckled but said no more, instead gazing at the distant woodlands.

On the shore, a young man was painting. Huaming Lake was so beautiful that today was his third visit; each time he came here, he captured different sceneries in his artwork.

Suddenly, a white figure on a nearby boat caught his attention.

Her position was right behind the sunlight; the light filtered through the lake and occasionally fell on her face, adding a halo around her visage. The wind lifted her hair, and the way she casually brushed it back was so effortlessly graceful it was captivating.

The man tore off his unsatisfactory drawing and, seizing this inspiration, his brush moved as if divinely guided.

"Yining, let's go back, it's getting late." Xu Nianhua looked at her watch—they had already drifted on the lake for over two hours.

"Just a little longer." Pei Yining still wanted to buy candied haws, and she couldn't wait to dock the boat.

"If you like this place, we can come back after getting off the boat," Xu Nianhua suggested.

"Really?"

Pei Yining's eyes brightened instantly. She obediently sat back down in the boat, signaling the boatman to head back.

The boat slowly departed.

"Don't go."

A male voice called out. Xu Nianhua turned around and was stunned when she saw the man—she hadn't expected to encounter him.

Gu Mingcheng.

Chapter 362: Thanking Auntie on Behalf of Xiaoyong

"Don't go!"

Gu Mingcheng's painting was almost finished. Suddenly, he saw the boat leaving and hurried to the shore, waving at them. His anxious appearance made it seem as if he knew them.

"Hey, it seems like someone is calling us," Pei Yining said curiously. She asked, "Nianhua, do you recognize him?"

"I don't know him."

Xu Nianhua withdrew her gaze and responded.

"I don't recognize him either. Boatman, do you know him?" Pei Yining asked the boatman.

The boatman shook his head and said, "I don't recognize him."

"Then let's hurry on," Pei Yining was thinking about playing some more, so she was eager to get ashore.

"Don't you leave."

Gu Mingcheng watched their departing figures and sighed deeply before returning to his painting to finish the mostly completed work, which was still slightly lacking.

Relying on memory, Gu Mingcheng further refined the painting. Except for the profile which couldn't be more side-on, the artistic conception of the entire painting was still very good.

If he had a little more time, it could have been even more perfect.

Gu Mingcheng thought to himself as he carefully put away the painting and glanced at the time on his wristwatch. His sister had said he needed to be home by eleven-thirty because there were important guests at home today.

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"I had so much fun today," Pei Yining said happily, reluctantly pulling Xu Nianhua along, "I'm going back tomorrow, and I really don't want to leave."

"It's alright, I'll come to visit you in Ningbei in September," Xu Nianhua comforted her, patting her, and added, "Your dad is sick, so you should go back."

"My dad probably just wants me to come home. If he were really sick, he'd probably hide it and not tell me, rather than have someone fetch me like this," Pei Yining understood her father's thoughts very clearly.

"As parents, isn't it natural to think about their child?" Xu Nianhua explained with a smile, "If my parents don't see me for a month, they'd probably come to visit me too, wouldn't they?"

She thought that if she were studying in Ningbei, her parents surely wouldn't be at ease.

"Nianhua, whenever you come to Ningbei, call me in advance or send a telegram. I'll pick you up at the train station," Pei Yining looked at her earnestly and repeatedly instructed, "You must come to visit me."

"Okay," Xu Nianhua replied.

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"Nianhua, isn't your friend coming over for dinner?" Deng Juan immediately asked when she saw Xu Nianhua returning alone.

"Aunt, Yining has to go back to Ningbei today, so she won't be coming to dinner," Xu Nianhua explained, looking at the untouched gifts on the table, somewhat surprised.

"Your grandfather said he must wait for you to come back," Deng Juan indeed wanted to open them to see what they contained, but Ji Xinghua had emphasized repeatedly that these were gifts from Nianhua's friend.

Deng Juan could only look at them.

"It's okay, the tonics can go to grandfather, and things like malted milk can go to Xiaoyong," Xu Nianhua said.

Ji Yong, Ji Shuming's seven-year-old son.

"And these things, Aunt, you can handle them," Xu Nianhua looked at the gifts, thinking about what gifts to prepare the next time she saw Yining.

"Nianhua, that's settled then, I'll thank auntie on behalf of Xiaoyong," Deng Juan's expression softened as she listened to Xu Nianhua, happy that in addition to the tonics, there were also many snacks and fruit, and the malted milk was indeed a good supplement to nourish Xiaoyong.

Chapter 363: Mom Loves Me the Most

South City, the Gu Family, a quaint two-story Western-style house that looked both imposing and spacious.

"Mingcheng, you're back?" Fang Yue's eyes curved into smiles as she saw Gu Mingcheng. Today, she was dressed in a traditional cheongsam, with her makeup subtly applied, and a pearl necklace adorning her neck, the very image of a well-to-do lady.

"Mom." Gu Mingcheng, carrying a portfolio of paintings, furrowed his brows uncontrollably as he looked at the joy-filled face of Gu Mingzhu in the house.

Amidst the crowd, Gu Mingzhu was dressed to the nines. Since childhood, the Gu Family's standard of living had been better than most, even during tough times, his parents had shielded them from hardship.

In recent years, as the family's situation had improved, Gu Mingzhu developed a love for gold—gold necklaces, bracelets, earrings, rings—she seemed like she couldn't wait to adorn her entire body in golden jewelry.

Whether at school, at home, or out with friends, Gu Mingzhu was generous with her money and, with her keen sense of style, often flaunted her wealth in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

Especially after Gu Mingzhu and Jiang Jing got together, her ostentatious behavior only escalated.

Every time he heard Gu Mingzhu boasting about buying a beautiful piece of jewelry, or an expensive dress, or perfumes brought from abroad, he felt a particular dislike.

"Mingcheng, today is your sister and brother-in-law's big day. Why did you go out to paint?" Fang Yue couldn't bring herself to scold her son, only pushing Gu Mingcheng upstairs quickly and forcibly making him change his clothes.

"Mom, what's wrong with my clothes?" Gu Mingcheng felt his attire was fine—a light green Zhongshan suit and black pants. Wasn't it stylish to dress like this nowadays?

"It's not okay. Look, your shirt is wrinkled."

Fang Yue rummaged through his wardrobe and pulled out a brand-new white shirt, pristine and crisp with straight seams.

"Mingcheng, you shouldn't spend all your days just painting. You should properly learn from your father. In the future, you're sure to be successful." Fang Yue cherished this son immensely, doting on him from a young age, wishing she could give him all the best things in the world.

"Mom, I like to paint. I don't want to learn from Dad." Gu Mingcheng, while changing his clothes, said, "Mom, please talk to Dad. Let me go to Zhuang City next year."

Zhuang City, with its exceptionally beautiful scenery, was especially suited for painting.

"No." Fang Yue refused instinctively. She wanted to keep her only son by her side.

"Mom, please. I want to go to Zhuang City." Gu Mingcheng knew exactly how to exploit his mother's soft spot—the difficulty she had in resisting his entreaties. With a sincere look on his face, he said, "I really want to go to Zhuang City. I love painting. In my whole life, the thing I love the most is painting. If I have to follow Dad and get involved in the business, I might as well die."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk."

Fang Yue quickly spat three times and said sternly, "Hasten to spit it out. What kind of talk is that on such a good day?"

"Ptui." Gu Mingcheng complied with Fang Yue, his pleading expression looking at her, which made the mother who doted on her son unable to resist. She waved her hand helplessly and said, "Fine, I'll discuss it with your father."

"Thank you, Mom. You're so good."

The smile on Gu Mingcheng's face deepened instantly as he hugged Fang Yue, his excitement clear as he said, "I knew you loved me the most."

Catching Fang Yue off guard with such a hug made her feel a bit embarrassed, but her heart was laced with sweetness as she said, "Alright, alright, alright, not helping you would mean I don't love you, right?"

"Hurry downstairs. Don't miss the auspicious hour." Fang Yue urged him on.

Chapter 364: Dreaming Back (1)

The scorching sun baked the earth while Xu Nianhua lay in her room, planning to take a nap. However, as she drifted into a light sleep, she fell into a dream.

"Dad, Nianhua is my sister too. I know elder sister is sick and needs second sister, but, over time, second sister has donated blood for elder sister several times. She's your daughter too, don't you feel sorry for her?"

Gu Mingcheng watched Xu Nianhua lying on the bed, weakened from excessive blood loss, and he didn't approve of Gu Hai's actions at all.

"Mingcheng, do you really want to watch Mingzhu die?" Gu Hai said sternly. Gu Mingzhu had a natural gift in business and was intelligent, having helped him through several crises.

Unlike Gu Mingcheng, who only wanted to paint. Could painting feed you?

One daughter had helped him through many difficulties, and the other had only just been acknowledged by the family. In Gu Hai's heart, naturally, Gu Mingzhu took precedence.

"But, there are so many people in this world, why does it have to be Nianhua?" Gu Mingcheng couldn't bear it; his second sister had suffered hardships outside since childhood. After coming home, she continued to donate blood to her elder sister, and now, she even had to donate a kidney.

Indeed, when elder sister became ill, the only one in their family who was a match was Xu Nianhua.

"What are you talking about? It's destiny that Nianhua can match with Mingzhu. Besides, it's not like she's going to die. What are you worried about?" Gu Hai didn't like Gu Mingcheng's interrogative tone, as if he had done something utterly unforgivable.

He said, "Just treat Nianhua better in the future, compensate the Xu family more, wouldn't that make things right?"

Gu Mingcheng didn't speak, and just silently stayed in the hospital room where Xu Nianhua was staying.

"Mingcheng?" Xu Nianhua woke up in a daze and saw Gu Mingcheng sitting at the side of the hospital room. Propping herself up, she leaned on the hospital bed and asked, "What's wrong? Argued with dad again? You know, don't be so stubborn, talk properly with dad, he still loves you."

"I know you love painting, just paint to your heart's content. I believe that in the future, you will become a great painter, and I will be proud of you, big sister will be proud of you," Xu Nianhua gently encouraged, always looking at him with such supportive eyes.

"Second sister," Gu Mingcheng wanted to tell her to refuse, but once he thought of Gu Mingzhu, he sighed deeply.

"Don't worry, I heard from the doctor, being short of a kidney won't kill me. I can still live well, and if it can help elder sister survive, I feel happy," Xu Nianhua, seeing his worried and conflicted eyes, knew that his kind heart must be concerned for her.

"Thank you," she said sincerely. In this family, the only one who truly accepted her, besides Gu Mingcheng, was there anyone else?

Gu Hai didn't cheat her of money as a daughter, but when it came to familial affection, it was far less.

Compared to Xu Qinghe, who was brimming with fatherly love, Xu Nianhua preferred Xu Qinghe. From childhood to adulthood, Xu Qinghe's love for her was something money could never compare to.

To Fang Yue, her mother, aside from the son Gu Mingcheng and Gu Mingzhu, her daughter was like a blemish to her.

Gu Mingzhu seemed close, but Xu Nianhua knew that Gu Mingzhu looked down on her.

She might be simple, but that didn't mean she was stupid. She knew very well who was good to her, who wasn't, and whether they were truly sincere.

"Second sister."

As Gu Mingcheng listened to her grateful words, he felt even more guilty. He said, "Second sister, you can refuse. There are so many people in the world, there must be someone else who is a match. Didn't the doctor say, if there's an accident and someone passes away, there might still be a chance?"

Chapter 365: Dreaming Back (2)

"Mingcheng, Mingzhu can't wait any longer," Xu Nianhua said faintly. She was very clear, Gu Mingzhu didn't have the time to wait any longer.

Looking at Gu Mingcheng's guilty eyes, she smiled and said, "Mingcheng, it's okay. They helped my elder brother and found good jobs for my parents. I'm not even done thanking them yet. I owe them. I'm doing this willingly."

Although her elder brother had died unexpectedly, she was still grateful that the Gu Family had supported him back then, giving him dignity and not letting him die a criminal.

"Nianji," Gu Mingcheng felt even more conflicted after hearing her words. His reason told him he should reveal the truth, but Gu Mingzhu was also his sister. If he told the truth, could his elder sister and Nianji really get along well in the future?

That day, he too had only found out about Xu Nianji's accident afterwards. If he had known earlier that the one sleeping in that room was the drunk Xu Nianji, he definitely wouldn't have just watched Ai Jiixin enter the room, only for an accident to happen afterward.

"Mingcheng, thank you for caring so much about me. Your school is about to start soon, hurry home and rest. You don't need to keep watch over me," Xu Nianhua always considered Gu Mingcheng's feelings and said, "Make sure to pack everything, and don't leave anything behind. I made some chili sauce for you; you like it a lot, don't you? Take a few bottles with you this time, and when you run out, I'll make more for you."

Such a good Nianji, such a truth, should it really be kept from her?

But, Nianji's elder brother was no longer in this world. What good would it do for Nianji to know the truth?

Gu Mingcheng was nearly torn apart by his own contradictions, with two lines of thought continuously clashing in his mind, not knowing what to do.

He remained troubled until just before school started, and in the end, Gu Mingcheng left Xu Nianhua a letter.

Xu Nianhua thought Gu Mingcheng couldn't bear to leave her, his Nianji. When she opened it, her face changed instantly.

She raced out after him, but Gu Mingcheng had already boarded the train. He had made sure to leave discreetly; how could Xu Nianhua possibly catch up?

She read the letter over and over. She couldn't understand why Gu Mingzhu would plot to frame her brother.

What good did it do to her brother?

Ai Jiaxin ended up marrying her brother, and she had met her a few times. Her brother and Ai Jiaxin, if not exactly on good terms, at least treated each other with mutual respect, a harmonious relationship on the surface.

Until her brother's death...

Xu Nianhua felt a twitch in her eyelid; an uncontrollable thought arose, but she quickly denied it. When her brother had his accident, the police came too. They specifically checked and confirmed that her brother's drowning was accidental, not a murder.

Gu Mingzhu, why would Gu Mingzhu do such a thing?

Xu Nianhua's heart was filled with tens of thousands of whys.

"Nianhua, are you having trouble sleeping?"

Gu Mingzhu came in with a glass of milk. Even sick, her face still had a light makeup, and she was wearing a silk nightgown, outlining her beautiful figure. If one hadn't seen it with their own eyes, it would be hard to believe she had borne a child.

"No, just sitting for a while," Xu Nianhua subconsciously tucked away the letter.

But Gu Mingzhu was one step ahead and snatched the letter, saying, "Who wrote you a letter? Is it a boy who has a crush on you? Let me have a look, which boy has such good taste to fall for my beautiful sister?"

Gu Mingzhu's words were sweet, but as she unfolded the letter, she saw the familiar handwriting.

Chapter 366: Dreaming Back (3)

"You have misunderstood."

Xu Nianhua instinctively wanted to snatch back the letter, but, Gu Mingzhu had already recognized that it was in Gu Mingcheng's handwriting.

"That little rascal Mingcheng, secretly writing you letters? And not writing any to me." Gu Mingzhu turned around, gripping the letter tightly in her hand.

Xu Nianhua failed to grab the letter and felt annoyed. She should have hidden the letter—how could she let Gu Mingzhu find it?

"Mingcheng he..." Xu Nianhua stuttered, trying to explain.

"That little rascal Mingcheng, all he ever does is doodle and write every day. Now he has even started making up stories about me." Gu Mingzhu said with an unhappy face, promptly tearing the letter into shreds. She then looked at Xu Nianhua with a smile, saying, "Nianhua, you don't believe his nonsense, do you? I'm your biological sister, why would I plot against your elder brother, right?"

"The incident that day was an accident. It's all my fault—if I hadn't held that party, such a thing wouldn't have happened."

Gu Mingzhu took the blame upon herself, guiltily. As she observed Xu Nianhua's reaction, seeing her silent and not speaking, she continued guiltily, "Nianhua, I'm sorry, it's all my fault."

"Mingzhu." Xu Nianhua looked at her, so sincere and full of guilt, and in her mind, she wondered if there might have been some misunderstanding. But the details of that day's incident were clearly written in the letter by Gu Mingcheng.

Gu Mingcheng loved to paint, and because of his interest in art, he had many quarrels with Gu Hai. Although younger by three years than she was, he was pure and innocent, never one to tell lies.

"Is what happened to my elder brother really like what Mingcheng described?"

If Gu Mingzhu hadn't seen the letter, Xu Nianhua might have hesitated, might have been uncertain whether to ask—or whether to ask now. But since she had seen it, Xu Nianhua naturally wouldn't pretend to know nothing.

Some truths might be cruel, but she wanted to know; she didn't want to be kept in the dark like a fool.

"Mingcheng is talking nonsense." Gu Mingzhu flatly denied it, saying, "He has been distant from me since we were young; he must have misunderstood."

"But why did you arrange for my elder brother to go to that room and not one next to Mingcheng's room?" Xu Nianhua questioned, her usual gentle demeanor giving way to a rare assertiveness.

"That, that's because that room was closer, and your elder brother had been drinking—it was a few steps shorter." Gu Mingzhu explained awkwardly, cursing Gu Mingcheng bitterly in her heart. Was this a brother or an enemy?

What was so special about Xu Nianhua? In just two years with the family, she had become more favored by Gu Mingcheng than his own sister!

It infuriated her.

Gu Mingzhu was angry at heart, but her expression was one of grief at being misunderstood. She said, "Nianhua, you are my dear sister. There's no reason or motive for me to harm him, is there?"

"Besides, after Jiaxin married your elder brother, it resulted in a pleasant marriage. Aren't they living happily together?"

"If there really was a plot, then I also helped your elder brother find a wife. It is just unfortunate that your elder brother has such a thin fortune." Gu Mingzhu spoke with seemingly open honesty, making it hard to discern if her words were truthful.

Xu Nianhua was baffled; she spoke no more, remaining silent. The next day, using the excuse of needing to see her foster parents before undergoing surgery, Xu Nianhua boarded the bus heading back to Gaoliang County.

Chapter 367: Dreaming Back (4)

"Mom, you have to help me." After Gu Mingzhu sent Xu Nianhua away, her heart just couldn't settle.

"What's wrong?"

Fang Yue had been worn out recently due to Gu Mingzhu's illness. Seeing Gu Mingzhu's anxious demeanor, she thought there was some discomfort again and hurriedly asked, "What's wrong, are you feeling unwell somewhere?"

"Xu Nianhua found out about the plot against Xu Nianji back then."

Gu Mingzhu nervously explained the situation.

Fang Yue furrowed her brows, puzzled, and asked, "How did she find out?"

It had been so long already, why bring up that matter now?

"Who else but my excellent son, my dear brother?" Gu Mingzhu said through clenched teeth. Whenever she mentioned this, she couldn't help but feel irritated, saying, "He's no brother of mine, almost like an enemy!"

Gu Mingzhu explained what was in Gu Mingcheng's letter, which clearly described the events of that day.

"This kid, who is he closer to?" Fang Yue said angrily.

"Mom, don't get angry just yet. I think Xu Nianhua going back to the county might mean she won't want to help me anymore. Mom, I'm still young, I don't want to die." Gu Mingzhu looked pitifully at Fang Yue,

having always been by Fang Yue's side from a young age, she knew well what Fang Yue found most unbearable was seeing her and Mingcheng acting like a spoiled child.

"I can't die, I haven't reconciled with Jing Ge yet, the kids can't be without a mother."

Gu Mingzhu appealed emotionally and logically, almost making the wrong seem right. With a pitiful tone, she said, "Mom, I've grown up by your side since I was little, and I will definitely take good care of you in the future. Besides, the doctor also said that Nianhua won't die, Mom, please help me."

Fang Yue hesitated only a moment before asking, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Mom, you're the best." Gu Mingzhu immediately smiled radiantly and leaned closer to whisper in Fang Yue's ear.

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Gaoliang County, Xu Nianhua went again to investigate the incident of Xu Nianji's accident, and confirmed once more that Xu Nianji's death was indeed an accident.

Xu Nianhua could only return fruitlessly. Having originally had a family of five, now only three remained. Xu Nianhua kept a smile on her face and did not discuss her experiences in South City, choosing instead to share only the pleasant parts.

"Nianhua, you really don't need to come back to see us, your dad and I are fine," Ji Ying said, worried that Xu Nianhua visiting often would displease the Gu family. They had already lost their son, and this only daughter of theirs, though not biological, was dearer than their own.

As long as Xu Nianhua kept them in her thoughts and occasionally called, that was enough to make them happy.

"Dad, Mom, I missed you. I don't have a job anymore, so I have lots of time," Xu Nianhua said endlessly, as if trying to catch up on all the conversations missed over the long period.

Xu Nianhua stayed at home for a day before returning to South City the next day.

Later, the incident at the Xu family occurred, and Xu Nianhua only found out about it half a month later.

She overheard it; a fire had broken out at her parents Xu's house. Despite being rushed to the hospital by neighbors, they still passed away.

Perhaps it was divine pity that let her eavesdrop on the truth.

The truth gave her an impulse to drag all the Gu family to their deaths.

Her own mom, Fang Yue.

Her own sister, Gu Mingzhu.

Together they conspired to deceive her, all to make her save Gu Mingzhu, claiming they only intended for Xu's parents to have an accident, then the Gu family would play the role of lifesavers, making her feel grateful and indebted to save Gu Mingzhu.

Chapter 368: Dreaming Back (5)

Oh.

Last night, Xu Nianhua hid in her room and cried all night. She wasn't impulsive, but she did something to the blood she had donated. She wanted Gu Mingzhu to be disappointed, she wanted the Gu family's most cherished Gu Mingzhu to not survive.

A raging fire, the flames fiercely rushing at one's face as if to bake someone into a dry husk.

"Do you think Gu Mingzhu really can survive?"

Xu Nianhua leapt, plunging into the sea of fire.

The scorching flames burnt her painfully, drenched in cold sweat, she instantly opened her eyes.

Xu Nianhua opened her eyes, those pitch-black eyes moving around, with a feeling of not knowing what year or month it was now.

A strange room.

Where is this?

Xu Nianhua's heart was still beating violently; she stared blankly for a long time before she realized this was her aunt's house.

"Nianhua, did you have a nightmare?" Deng Juan heard the sound, pushed the door open, and seeing her pale face and the beads of sweat on her forehead, hurriedly said, "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Xu Nianhua shook her head and said, "I had a nightmare and it scared me awake, thank you for your concern, Aunt."

Xu Nianhua took a deep breath and slowly calmed her emotions.

"Don't be scared, it was just a bad dream, all of that is not real," Deng Juan said, looking at her and feeling reassured, she went out to respond to Ji Xinghua.

Xu Nianhua looked down at her well-maintained hands, thinking: She certainly won't let the nightmare happen again.

"Grandpa, I... want to go back," Xu Nianhua especially wanted to go home to see her dad and mom, as well as her elder and second brothers.

"It's time to go back."

Ji Xinghua was reluctant to let her go, but he also knew that Xu Nianhua had spent such a long time with him, an old man; it was indeed time for her to return.

That very afternoon, Xu Nianhua took a ride back home.

When she arrived at the county, it was already past five in the evening. She ran all the way to the food factory and when she saw Ji Ying washing bottles in the courtyard, her eyes instantly reddened, and she sprinted forward, throwing herself into Ji Ying's arms.

Thank goodness, it was just a dream.

"Nianhua is back?" Ji Ying, surprised, looked at Xu Nianhua, feeling the tight embrace and the pinch of pain, she said with a smile, "What's this? After not seeing each other for so long, you've started to act spoiled?"

"I am your daughter, what's wrong with a daughter being affectionate with her mother?" After calming her emotions, Xu Nianhua smiled and said, "Mom, I've missed you all so much. Where's dad? Is he in the factory?"

"Where else could he be but in the factory? The factory is very busy now; the delivery date is approaching, and your dad has been delayed for so many days. These days, he must catch up on the work he fell behind on." Ji Ying answered with a smile, then asked, "How is your grandfather?"

"Grandfather is doing well, his recovery is also very good. He can now walk on his own, and his wound has healed nicely," Xu Nianhua replied in a rush, answering all the questions Ji Ying was about to ask, and added, "What about elder brother and second brother?"

Xu Nianhua couldn't wait to see them all.

"We will all have dinner together tonight. You have been sitting on the bus for so long, take a seat and rest for a while."

Ji Ying looked at her, as if she hadn't seen her for a long time and couldn't help but smile; she was still such a child. Not seeing her for barely half a month and she missed home this much, what would happen when she went to Ningbei University and only returned home once every half year?

Ji Ying looked at her worriedly.

Xu Nianhua immediately said, "Second brother and I are both in Ningbei, so we can look out for each other."

"Yes, yes, you're both smart for enrolling in schools in the same place, but surely the schools aren't right next to each other, are they?"

Chapter 369: Let My Second Brother Look at Me a Few More Times

Ji Ying, thinking about the upcoming school term, felt particularly reluctant to let go.

"There's the shuttle bus, right? Once I get there, I'll know what it's like. If anything, I'll just have to trouble my second brother to visit me more often." Xu Nianhua said playfully as she squatted down to help wash the bottles.

"Alright, alright, your second brother is a boy; it's fine for him to take the bus to see you more often."

Going along with her, Ji Ying finished drying the last few bottles before saying, "I'm going back to cook. The others should be coming home soon."

That evening, the whole family, except for Xu Qinghe who was in the village, all gathered together.

Having not seen each other for a long time, they seemed to have endless topics to discuss.

"Sister-in-law, why do I feel like your belly has grown even bigger?" Xu Nianhua looked at Zhou He's stomach, which seemed to have grown a notch since she had been to South City.

"It'll grow even more towards the end." Zhou He touched her belly with a gentle gaze, feeling the baby move every day. She was looking forward to the day the baby would be born.

"By the way, big brother, sister-in-law, there's something I'd like to discuss with you."

Xu Nianhua remembered what Pei Yicheng had mentioned. Over the phone, it was inconvenient to talk about it. Now that she was back, naturally, she wanted to bring it up at the first opportunity.

"Nianhua, we're siblings; just speak plainly, no need for all this talk of 'discussing' things," Xu Nianji said directly.

Zhou He chimed in, "Your big brother's right. We're all family here."

"It's like this, Cheng Hao has gone back to Ningbei." No sooner had Xu Nianhua finished speaking than Xu Nian'an interjected with a puzzled look, "When's he coming back?"

"He won't be coming back for now."

Xu Nianhua didn't know how to explain Cheng Hao's situation, so she glossed over it and continued, "Cheng Hao's gone, and now there's no one to deliver the goods. So, Yicheng's thinking was to ask for big brother's opinion on this."

"I can't do it."

Xu Nianji reflexively shook his head in refusal.

"Why can't you?" Xu Nianhua retorted.

Xu Nianji paused for a moment before replying, "Firstly, I don't know how to drive, and secondly, delivering goods isn't just about the delivery; you also need to be quick-witted."

"You can learn to drive; it's quite simple. As for being quick-witted, well, I think big brother is just as capable as anyone else. Why would that be an issue?" Xu Nianhua had high hopes for her eldest brother. She explained, "Driving to deliver goods is tough now, but in the long run, it has great potential for development. As the factory grows, big brother can also go and learn more about managing it."

Once the factory expanded, Ji Ying alone would certainly not be enough.

"Nianhua, let's drop this issue. Mom is managing the factory just fine, and it's better for Yicheng to find somebody else for this," Xu Nianji said and added, "It would be best for Yicheng to find his own people."

"Big brother, Yicheng and I discussed this. What are you worried about?"

Xu Nianhua understood his concerns, continuing, "The factory's accounts are very clear. We haven't hired an accountant yet, but we will need to soon. Otherwise, we won't be able to keep the accounts straight. So, you really don't have to worry about this matter. I think what you're more worried about is not being able to come home for several days at a time."

Xu Nianhua's gaze fell on Zhou He's pregnant belly. Her sister-in-law was about to give birth, and if her big brother took over the delivery work, he would certainly not be able to take care of his wife as well.

"Let's discuss this," Xu Nianji didn't agree immediately but decided to talk it over with Zhou He.

Chapter 370: Who to Entrust the Bean Sprout Business To?

Xu Nianji and Zhou He's discussion led to the decision to go ahead with their plan.

It seemed like a more profitable venture than selling bean sprouts, and more importantly, it had better prospects for development.

"What about your sister-in-law..." Xu Nianhua was most worried about his sister-in-law Zhou He.

"Your sister-in-law said that when there's a chance to make money, we should make as much as we can. That way, the children could have a better life in the future." Xu Nianji was initially hesitant, thinking about taking care of the family while working in the county.

But Zhou He persuaded him to go, saying, "Such a good opportunity must not be missed."

"Your sister-in-law also said she could take care of the child herself once it's born."

Xu Nianji relayed Zhou He's exact words, saying, "Which man only stays at home to look after children? It's not like it's half a year or a year without seeing each other. It's just a few days, so he should focus on his work with peace of mind."

"With your sister-in-law supporting you like this, big brother, you have even more reason to do well," Xu Nianhua encouraged. "I believe in you, big brother. You will definitely do well. Ling Dong will be with you, and driving is really simple. I'm sure you'll learn it quickly."

"You make it sound like you know how to drive," Xu Nianji listened to her casual words, feeling somewhat daunted, and couldn't help wondering, could he really learn to drive?

Xu Nianhua: "..."

How was she supposed to respond to this topic?

Her past self certainly could drive—female drivers were a dime a dozen in her subsequent life.

But now?

Not to mention female drivers, even finding someone who knew how to drive was difficult, let alone driving. In the village, they might not even see a car.

"By the way, big brother, what will happen to the bean sprouts business if you stop doing it?" Xu Nianhua changed the subject.

Looking at Xu Nianhua, Xu Nianji was silent for a long time before saying, "That's something we need to discuss together."

Selling bean sprouts was still profitable, more so than a day job.

That day, Xu Nianhua went to see Pei Yicheng and after two hours of conversation, he was fully resolved to learn driving and to follow Ling Dong in delivery.

That day, all of the Xu family gathered together, even Xu Qinghe, who was busy with work, came to the county.

Upon learning that Xu Nianji was preparing to learn to drive and deliver goods in the future, Xu Qinghe greatly respected his son's decision, saying, "If you want to go, then go. Learning to drive is a valuable skill."

"What about the bean sprouts?" Ji Ying also brought up this concern.

"That depends on mom and dad," Xu Nianji said, passing the decision back to his elders.

According to his thinking, the bean sprouts business should naturally be given to the closest and most helpful people.

"Then..." After a discussion between Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying, they decided to let Xu Yuchun's younger son, Xu Feng, give it a try.

Xu Feng, younger even than Xu Nianhua, wasn't good at studying and spent his days doing hard labor with the forestry workers, unskilled in other tasks.

"I have no objections," Xu Nianji thought of Xu Feng as well.

When making the decision, Xu Nianji had considered Zhou He's brother, but he knew all too well what kind of person he was—lazy, always ready to extend a hand for money. Giving him the bean sprouts business would be a waste.

Therefore, Xu Nianji specifically explained this to Zhou He.

Zhou He knew all too well what her brother was like and therefore had no objections to Xu Nianji's approach.

"What, teach Xiaofeng to sell bean sprouts?" Xu Yuchun and Xiong Xihua were utterly shocked when they heard about this.