

Regaining 491

Chapter 491: There

"Nianhua, what's going on with Second Brother Xu? Why does he seem so strange?" When Pei Yining came to play with Xu Nianhua, she encountered Xu Nian'an heading to the medical hall and felt that something was off about him today.

Usually, Xu Nian'an was good to Xu Nianhua, but today, something just didn't feel right.

"It's nothing, Yining, where have you been these past few days?" Xu Nianhua diverted the question.

"Oh, I followed my brother to the Western Market to thank Doctor Hu for healing my brother's leg," Pei Yining said with a bright smile as she recounted the last couple of days.

There had also been big changes at Doctor Hu's place; the road had been nicely repaired, and an additional building had been constructed for the medical residence. Doctor Hu's reputation had grown even larger.

"That's good, is your brother's leg alright now?" Xu Nianhua inquired.

"It's fine, Doctor Hu checked it again. My brother's leg is completely healed," Pei Yining said happily as she tugged at Xu Nianhua, "Nianhua, where shall we go to play today?"

"Hmm..."

As Xu Nianhua was thinking about where to go, suddenly, she spotted a familiar figure.

"Nianhua."

When Zheng Jin saw Xu Nianhua, she ran towards her and said, "I was just about to come find you today. When did you get back?"

"I came back a couple of days ago." Xu Nianhua introduced, "This is Yining, my high school classmate, Zheng Jin."

"Hello." Pei Yining greeted with a smile that lit up her cute face and made her particularly endearing.

Zheng Jin had been worried that Pei Yining, with her impressive family background, would look down on her, but hearing her friendly greeting, she immediately shook her hand happily and replied, "Hello, I'm Zheng Jin."

"You two were high school classmates? Was Nianhua really amazing back in high school?" Pei Yining asked with a face full of curiosity.

"Yes, Nianhua was that type who always came first in exams," Zheng Jin started with endless stories, saying, "Nianhua even taught us study methods. Without her, so many of us in our class wouldn't have made it to university."

Even now, Zheng Jin remained grateful to Xu Nianhua. Without her, Zheng Jin wouldn't have been able to get into a teacher training college.

"As expected, Nianhua is still topping the charts at school," Pei Yining admired genuinely. The thought of topping even once was as tough as reaching the heavens for her, let alone consistently.

"So..." Pei Yining paused, then sneakily looked at Zheng Jin and asked, "Does Nianhua have a lot of admirers at school?"

Pei Yining blinked, her expression seeming to imply an "you know what I mean."

She needed to gather some intelligence for her brother.

"Yes."

Zheng Jin nodded affirmatively.

Xu Nianhua raised her hand to her forehead, no longer interested in Pei Yining's gossip, and turned to look around. Suddenly, she saw another couple entering her view.

It was Zou Yaru and Gu Junhe.

The newlyweds appeared exceptionally happy. Although Zou Yaru didn't say it, her face looked quite content.

Xu Nianhua immediately turned away, thinking that in the future, Zou Yaru was bound to regret it. How could Gu Junhe be faithful to only Zou Yaru?

Seeing her, Xu Nianhua couldn't help but think of Ningbei's Cheng Hao. Even though he was now wholeheartedly managing Liunian Factory, busy all day long, she could still sense that Cheng Hao hadn't completely moved on; he was just numbing himself with work.

Suddenly, a figure caught Xu Nianhua's eye, causing her to freeze for a second. After a long look, once she was sure she wasn't mistaken, she hurriedly chased after it.

Chapter 492: The Appointment on Chinese New Year's Eve

"Lin Wei," Xu Nianhua called out while chasing.

Lin Wei stopped when she heard her name.

"Wei-jie (Sister Wei)."

Xu Nianhua called out sweetly.

"It's Nianhua." Lin Wei, with a smile on her lips gentle as a spring breeze, gave a warm feeling. She said, "It's been a long time, hasn't it? My dad often talks about you, says you were one of his brightest students."

"I've only been back for a few days and haven't visited Mr. Lin yet," Xu Nianhua replied with a smile. She asked, "Wei-jie, where are you working now?"

"Still teaching in Lianxin Village. What about you? I heard from my dad that you got into Beijing University in Ningbei. How's that going? You've changed since going to college, becoming more and more beautiful," Lin Wei, who used to live in the school dormitory with her dad, was fairly familiar with Xu Nianhua, as Nianhua was one of the students her father most valued.

"Not at all. Wei-jie is the one who's become more beautiful," Xu Nianhua said with a light smile. She hadn't thought of it earlier, but now, seeing Lin Wei, she remembered something very important.

It was the eve of Chinese New Year's Eve in 1980, in other words, it was the eve of Chinese New Year's Eve in 1981, when Wei-jie had an accident.

At that time, she had moved on to teaching at a primary school in the county with Mr. Lin's help. When Wei-jie had the accident, Mr. Lin seemed to age ten years overnight. And since it was the eve of Chinese New Year's Eve, the incident was particularly memorable for her.

"Right, Wei-jie, are you up to something today?" Xu Nianhua inquired, noting the clothes Lin Wei was carrying, which were clearly men's garments, yet not Mr. Lin's.

"Yes."

Lin Wei glanced at Xu Nianhua, a bit embarrassed.

Xu Nianhua didn't press the issue, only suggesting, "How about this, Wei-jie, I'll come see you at noon on New Year's Eve."

"Sure," Lin Wei agreed without hesitation, not knowing why Xu Nianhua specifically chose the New Year's Eve, but she didn't have any plans for that day.

"Wei-jie, then it's settled. We'll come visit you on New Year's Eve," Xu Nianhua reminded her repeatedly, "Wei-jie, you can't forget about me."

"I won't. I'll ask my mom to make something delicious for you," Lin Wei assured, indicating that she had taken note.

Only then did Xu Nianhua say goodbye to Lin Wei.

Pei Yining looked curiously at Xu Nianhua, who explained, "That's my teacher's daughter. I know her well, Lin Wei, Wei-jie."

"Oh," Pei Yining nodded and then didn't say anything more, only taking Ji Nianhua and Zheng Jin around for some shopping. At noon, they deliberately chose a restaurant to eat.

Pei Yining tried the spicy diced fish head and fell in love with it at first bite.

The red "Xiaomila" chili pepper mixed with the pickled chili, not only vibrant in color but also a taste she had never experienced before, sour and spicy, with the fish meat particularly tender.

"Nianhua, I love this," Pei Yining declared, giving a thumbs up.

"Then next year when we come back to Beining, we'll bring some pickled chili. I can make it too," Xu Nianhua said.

Her words immediately brightened Pei Yining's eyes, who said, "Nianhua, you're so good."

Xu Nianhua: "..."

Just for making a dish, she's 'so good'?

...

"Brother, there used to be so many people chasing after Nianhua in school. But, I feel like they didn't deserve her," Pei Yining said as soon as she got home, sharing the news she had gathered. "Brother, when are you going to chase after Nianhua? If you don't hurry, Nianhua will belong to someone else."

Pei Yining was getting anxious!

Chapter 493: The Light in His Eyes

"You say no one is good enough for Nianhua, but do you think Nianhua would be interested in them?" Pei Yicheng countered without answering.

Pei Yining thought seriously for a moment. Not to mention her former high school classmates, but even within Beining University, many openly and secretly sought Nianhua's affection. Some had even confessed their feelings, yet Nianhua had always disregarded them, never taking them to heart. Thinking this through, it seemed her brother was right.

Pei Yicheng cleared his throat, "You should focus on your studies. See how diligent Nianhua is? Don't keep bothering her, understand?"

"Oh," said Pei Yining, disheartened by the idea of not being able to see Xu Nianhua every day, like an eggplant hit by frost. "Alright, I will help grandpa tomorrow."

As soon as Pei Yining left, the room suddenly became quiet. Pei Yicheng, who was busy sorting herbal medicines, stopped abruptly.

He hadn't said a single false word when he replied to Pei Yining just now.

Xu Nianhua would never be interested in them, but there was another half of the sentence he hadn't said: he felt as if Xu Nianhua had no thoughts about romance at all.

Was he not excellent enough?

Thinking this, Pei Yicheng decided to make himself even more outstanding. He kept himself busy once again. Xiyue Hotel had won the bid, and there were many matters to handle. A day later, Pei Yicheng

returned to Ningbei, deliberately not saying goodbye to Xu Nianhua, fearing she might think he came back just for them.

Yet, the next day, Xu Nianhua accidentally learned about it from Xu Nianji.

"Brother Cheng is as busy as a spinning top. I saw him sitting in the car, still looking at blueprints," said Xu Nianji, who was the same age as Pei Yicheng, but Pei Yicheng was far ahead of him.

"Xiyue Hotel is indeed Brother Cheng's design. It's about to be constructed; no wonder he was looking at the blueprints in the car," said Xu Nianhua. If she still didn't realize that Pei Yicheng came back just for them, then she would be a fool.

Sigh.

Xu Nianhua sighed deeply.

Xu Nianan came to know of this and purposely found a secluded spot to ask quietly, "Little sister, Brother Cheng stayed a few extra days in the county, afraid we would worry that he came back just for you. When he left, he didn't even tell us, just so we wouldn't feel burdened. Brother Cheng... really did put his heart into it."

Xu Nianhua gave him a look and did not respond.

Xu Nian'an continued, "Little sister, what are you thinking?"

"Didn't you say to focus on my studies and not dwell on romantic affairs?" Xu Nianhua countered without answering.

Xu Nian'an was at a loss for words and said somewhat awkwardly, "Little sister, I'm just concerned about you, asking about your situation."

"You'd be better off figuring out how to pursue Su Xi," Xu Nianhua shot back. "I think Su Xi has a good temperament and is attractive. Although I haven't interacted with her much, her gaze is gentle yet serene when she looks at people. Sometimes she seems like a child who hasn't grown up. She won't look down on our family."

"Little sister, the master told me to memorize medical texts," said Xu Nian'an as he fled.

"Big brother, can't you be a bit more ambitious?"

Xu Nianhua yelled after his retreating figure, murmuring to herself, "Our family won't always be this poor. Big brother will definitely be an excellent doctor in the future. If he really likes her, why shouldn't he pursue her?"

It was the first time she had seen her brother mention a girl and be so... shy.

It was also the first time she saw that when her brother looked at a girl, there was a light in his eyes.

Chapter 494: Isn't it Xiaojing's?

"Mom, I don't want to die!"

In South City, at the hospital, Gu Mingzhu held the report that had just been handed to her. She should have been happy, yet, when she saw the blood type, she felt upset.

"Mingzhu, don't panic, let's talk this through clearly," Fang Yue rushed over after receiving a call from Gu Mingzhu.

"Mom, look."

Gu Mingzhu handed over the report.

Fang Yue skimmed it quickly, then looked down at her stomach and asked, "Could it be that it's not Xiaojing's?"

Gu Mingzhu was already worried and after hearing her words, looked at her incredulously as if the person who had spoken wasn't her own mother.

Gu Mingzhu, both embarrassed and annoyed, retorted, "Mom, what are you talking about?"

Fang Yue sighed in relief. The next moment, her eyes filled with laughter. She raised her hand to smooth Gu Mingzhu's hair by her cheek and said, "This is good news; you and Xiaojing are engaged. Although having a child before getting married isn't ideal, this is the Jiang Family's grandchild. The matriarch of Jiang Family, who is keen on having a grandchild, will definitely be happy."

"Mom, take a closer look," Gu Mingzhu sighed exasperatedly, feeling like she could never really talk with her own mother. She explained, "The doctor said my blood type is the rare Panda Blood. It's terrifying; what if I bleed heavily during childbirth? Would I still be alive then?"

"The doctor said that during childbirth, it's best to have someone with the same blood type present, or to prepare a blood source in advance to guard against emergencies."

"But, the doctor also said that people with this blood type are extremely rare, and this blood can't be stored for long. Mom, I don't want to have this child."

Gu Mingzhu anxiously raked her fingers through her hair. It was just a slipup with Jiang Jing once, and unexpectedly, she got pregnant.

"It's okay, your mom is here." Fang Yue made a special trip to ask the doctor again and knew that Panda Blood was indeed very special. She had her blood tested, and although the blood type was the same, it wasn't Panda Blood.

Fang Yue, worried about Gu Mingzhu, particularly urged her husband, Gu Hai, to come to the hospital for a blood test. The result showed that neither of them had Panda Blood.

Fang Yue's heart skipped a beat. Instinctively, she glanced at Gu Mingzhu. Gu Mingzhu resembled her closely when she was young, how could she not be her daughter?

Gu Hai's brow furrowed as he met Fang Yue's gaze, almost as if he wanted to devour her alive.

"Doctor, could there be some mistake? Mingzhu is our biological daughter. How could our blood types be different?" Fang Yue said tremulously, certain that Mingzhu was their daughter. How could the blood types not match?

The doctor patiently explained, "It's possible for the child to have Panda Blood even if the parents don't. Perhaps this gene was carried in your family, and your daughter just happened to have it."

"I see," Fang Yue breathed a sigh of relief. Gu Hai was type AB, and so was Gu Mingzhu; it was just that one was positive and the other negative.

Gu Hai eyed Gu Mingzhu without any further suspicion. He said, "Then in a few days, when Mingcheng comes back, we'll have him tested too."

Upon returning home, Gu Hai said, "Mingzhu, take good care of yourself during the pregnancy. We'll hold the wedding with the Jiang Family next January."

After finishing, Gu Hai contacted the Jiang Family.

When Jiang Jing heard that Gu Mingzhu was pregnant, he rushed over to the Gu Family, elated.

Fang Yue instructed Gu Mingzhu not to mention the Panda Blood for now.

After Fang Yue entered the kitchen, she recalled the year when she went back to Gaoliang County to visit relatives and gave birth to her daughter. That daughter she abandoned, could possibly have had Panda Blood?

Chapter 495: Issue an Extra Month's Salary

"I remember mom always gives out stuff for the New Year." Xu Nian'an said, not asking for specifics but aware that Ji Ying never shortchanged the factory workers during the three major festivals.

Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Festival, and New Year.

"Maybe mom has already prepared something." Xu Nianhua said in agreement.

Right on cue, Ji Ying came over, specifically calling them to have a meal. She said, "Everyone has left, are you siblings planning to stay at the factory overnight?"

"Mom, you came at the perfect time. Here is the final account we've tallied, take a look. The money we've made today, it's a lot." Xu Nian'an looked at Ji Ying with an eager face, saying with a flattering tone, "Mom, should the red envelope money be a little more generous this year?"

"What, you think the red envelope I give is too small?" Ji Ying raised her hand to thump him, flipped through the ledger; she had attended primary school and could recognize most of the characters. When she saw the final amount, she was indeed taken aback.

The money she earned each day, after setting aside funds for turnover, was all saved in a passbook.

As the passbook balance grew, Ji Ying became numb to it; she knew how much was in there, but didn't know exactly how much she had made over the whole year.

Now, with the detailed figures laid out in front of her, Ji Ying was genuinely surprised. She glanced at the numbers, then said, "Tomorrow I'll transfer this money to Yicheng. Right, make another copy of this summary page and send it to Yicheng as well."

"Okay." Xu Nianhua quickly agreed.

Ji Ying said, "Originally, I planned to give each staff member a box of chili sauce, two pounds of rice, and two pounds of meat. Now, I think we can give a little more."

Earning more money than expected, Ji Ying felt a sense of unease, as if the money she provided was too little, somewhat unfair to the workers who worked hard for her.

"Mom, you could give out an additional month's salary." Xu Nianhua suggested, perceiving Ji Ying's thoughts, and spoke out, "There's definitely a bigger earning being an owner rather than a worker. If it's not more, then what's the point of being an owner? We can't just look at the work the employees do; think about it, is what you do every day any less?"

"From production to final sales, you need to handle everything. Moreover, our chili sauce sells more and more because of everyone's collective effort. In the past, Cheng Hao used to run around the market, and now brother goes everywhere to deliver goods, almost wearing out his lips. What's more crucial is that if anything goes wrong with the Chili Factory, we could be at a loss."

Xu Nianhua, thinking of this, also remembered the issues with food quality. She said, "Mom, no matter when, we must assure quality and quantity, ensure cleanliness, and when entering the workshop, we must wear protective gear, masks, and hats to ensure our chili sauce is clean and good."

"Don't worry about that, I check every day to guarantee our chili sauce is clean and of good quality." Ji Ying thought for a moment, then said, "Okay, give everyone an extra month's salary, and add two pounds of apples."

"Mom, having a boss like you is really too good." Xu Nianhua gave her a thumbs up.

On January 25, 1981, the 20th of December in the lunar calendar, the Chili Factory officially closed for the holidays. That day, which was also payday, saw not too many people at the factory, but each person's share of two pounds of meat, two pounds of rice, and two pounds of apples, alongside a box of chili sauce, made quite an eye-catching pile when grouped together.

Chapter 496: I'm Getting Engaged

"Something is not right with this salary," Xihua was the first to be paid, and as soon as she had it in her hand, she felt something was off. She counted it three times and said, "Ji Ying, did you calculate this wrong?"

"No, it's correct."

For over a year, Ji Ying had been managing the Chili Sauce Factory, and gradually, her personality changed. Before, she had been somewhat weak and even timid, especially in front of her mother-in-law Liu Sanmei. When faced with issues, she never dared to resist.

But the Ji Ying now was completely different in spirit, decisive and efficient in her actions, displaying the demeanor of a strong businesswoman.

"With the New Year almost upon us, everyone has worked hard for the factory all year. The boss has decided to give everyone an extra month's salary. Next year, if we handle our tasks well, the boss will not fail to reward everyone," Ji Ying declared with forceful and resonant conviction, like a boulder thrown into still waters.

In everyone's eyes, the Chili Sauce Factory was Pei Yicheng's, with Ji Ying merely managing affairs.

"Great!"

Someone initiated, and soon, the workshop erupted into loud applause—an extra month's salary!

Not to mention a box of chili sauce, rice, meat, and apples—adding all these together, the benefits were indeed much more than what those canning or textile factories earned.

Everyone excitedly received their extra month's salary and benefits, all thinking the same thing: to work well at the factory next year.

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Shuanghe Village.

After settling issues at the Chili Sauce Factory, siblings Xu Nianhua and Xu Nian'an started going through the furniture factory accounts.

The furniture factory had been open for over half a year and had received many orders. Many businesses directly purchased goods from the factory. The staff had continually increased from just a few to now over a dozen employees, most from the village with robust labor, some recommended by relatives.

"Xu Feng, I remember you also graduated from high school. Let's go through these accounts together," Xu Nian'an invited Xu Feng, who sold bean sprouts, specifically to help with the accounting.

Since the furniture factory belonged to two families, it was crucial to have clear and transparent accounts without any ambiguities over financial matters.

"Nian'an, I'd better not. I'd stick with my dad selling bean sprouts." Xu Feng scratched his head, feeling a headache coming on at the sight of so many numbers. He had graduated from high school merely by luck, always among the last few, otherwise, he wouldn't have made it into high school.

Unfortunately, he was finding it harder to learn as time went on.

"Don't you keep accounts when you sell bean sprouts?" Xu Nian'an countered.

Xu Feng replied confidently, "I remember how much money I make each day, how much soybeans I buy, all of it's easy to remember."

He kept track every day, and it was not difficult at all.

Xu Nian'an: "..."

In the end, Xu Feng hurried off to the county to sell bean sprouts, leaving the accounting work to Xu Yuchun.

Xu Nian'an and Xu Yuchun worked on the accounts together, while Xu Nianhua was busy taking inventory.

"Nianhua?" Brother Cai Feng had been working alongside Xu Qinghe for a long time now.

"Brother Cai Feng."

Xu Nianhua held a notebook, recording the remaining wood and hardware pieces, along with the furniture made and so on.

"Congratulations, Brother Cai Feng, are you about to get engaged? I heard from my mom that Aunt Cai has arranged a match for you." Xu Nianhua congratulated Cai Feng, who was about the same age as his older brother Xu Nianji and was indeed of marrying age.

"Yes, I'm getting engaged." Cai Feng, looking at her bright smile, suddenly felt that he should seriously consider the match his mother had arranged for him.

Chapter 497: Worry About Yourself

"Mom, I'm willing to consider the match." As soon as Cai Feng got home, he told his Aunt Cai and Zhang Meixiang about it.

Zhang Meixiang was so happy she almost wanted to notify the matchmaker right away, but then she remembered that today Xu Nianhua and her family should have returned.

Zhang Meixiang paused and asked, "You, were you rejected when you confessed?"

"Mom, what are you talking about? Confess? I didn't confess," Cai Feng said, a bit embarrassed.

"Then tell me, why all of a sudden are you willing to consider the match after saying you didn't want to before?" Zhang Meixiang needed to understand the reason, and she said seriously, "Xiaofeng, after the matchmaking meeting, if both sides are satisfied, you can get engaged, but, once you're engaged, and after you get married, she will be your wife, your spouse, and you can't still have someone else in your heart while harming another girl."

"Mom, am I that kind of person?" Cai Feng's ears turned bright red. It was just his one-sided admiration, so how could it be...

Cai Feng took a deep breath and said, "Mom, I understand what you mean. If I really agree to marry someone, I will definitely treat her well, like dad treats you, alright?"

"That's more like it." Zhang Meixiang was reassured and went to find the matchmaker. She could tell that her foolish son had finally come around.

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"Dad, you've lost weight. I made this mutton soup especially for you. Try it?" Xu Nianhua brought forward a steaming bowl of mutton soup.

Xu Qinghe held the steaming bowl of mutton soup, his heart felt just like this soup.

Although Xu Nianhua's origins had been exposed, the family didn't become overly cautious; they interacted just as they had before.

No, they cherished each other even more than before.

"It tastes good."

Xu Qinghe genuinely praised, "Having a bowl of mutton soup stewed by my daughter is priceless."

"Dad, if you like it, I'll make it for you more often," Xu Nianhua said cheerfully. "By the way, I've settled the accounts for the furniture factory. I think we can build a new house next year."

"Good, after next year's Lunar New Year, we'll start building the new house and reserve a big room for our Nianhua, how about that?" Xu Qinghe had earned some money, and his confidence soared. Although he was still honest and straightforward, sometimes when he spoke, it was with firm conviction.

"Mhm, I want to live on the second floor," Xu Nianhua said eagerly. "I want a wall-to-wall closet, a pink big bed, a white dressing table, and a natural wood desk!"

When Xu Nianhua was poor, she had even lived in a basement; after finally making some money and growing older, what she liked was cold and old-fashioned.

Now, she quite liked a pink and tender room, it made her feel young, it gave her the feeling of being cherished and treated like a little princess.

"As you wish," Xu Qinghe said after finishing his soup and immediately set about designing their house.

In Xu Qinghe's home, there was a harmonious and lively atmosphere.

In another Xu Family, however, it was noisy and chaotic.

"Mom, please talk to big brother," Xu Zhiyuan came home fuming and started talking to Zhao Juxiang right away.

"Didn't you just come back from your brother and sister-in-law's place?" Zhao Juxiang focused on Xu Zhiyuan and asked, "What happened, did your brother do something? Did he bully you?"

"Big brother, he..." Xu Zhiyuan thought about the scene he had witnessed and felt it wasn't good to speak of it; he said tactfully, "Nothing, it's just that sister-in-law is very nice. She takes very good care of Xiaoxu, who is chubby and adorable. When I was there, sister-in-law took good care of me too. My brother is very busy, often too busy to be home, so it's just Jiaojiao, sister-in-law and me at home. I think, mom, you should talk to my brother."

Chapter 498: Why Build Two Houses?

Zhao Juxiang fixed her gaze on Xu Zhiyuan, her face full of displeasure as she said, "Your sister-in-law has been good to you guys, hasn't she? Your older brother is busy with important matters. A grown man can't just stay at home all the time."

Zhao Juxiang didn't care at all. Previously, when she and her mother-in-law, Liu Sanmei, visited, although Shen Qiuyun was inwardly displeased, didn't she still serve them happily?

Every time they went to the city to see their grandson, their great-grandson, didn't Shen Qiuyun still take care of them with delicious foods and drinks?

So what if they were city folks?

Her son was promising after all.

Zhao Juxiang felt that Shen Qiuyun's actions were only right.

Xu Zhiyuan felt a headache coming on. He couldn't communicate with his own mother, so he sighed, turned around, and went inside to read.

After enrolling in university, his course load had become heavier, and in order to secure a good job placement in the future, Xu Zhiyuan knew he needed to study even harder. He hadn't understood before, but as he grew older, he had increasingly realized the importance of education.

His elder brother...

Xu Zhiyuan thought back to the day he went to the factory to find his older brother. His brother, who was supposed to be working overtime at the factory, was instead meeting secretly with a woman, and they were kissing so passionately that it was hard for them to part. Xu Zhiyuan had always thought that his brother and sister-in-law were very loving toward each other. Who could have known that his brother...

He couldn't accept this scene, and he had ended up arguing with his brother on the spot. His brother apologized profusely, insisting he had been bewitched and promising to treat his sister-in-law well from then on.

After returning home, Xu Zhihao indeed started coming home early every day.

Xu Zhiyuan, afraid of showing any sign of what he knew, made an excuse and went back home.

...

"Dad, we haven't split the household, so why are there two entrances to the house?" Xu Nianji, accompanied by Zhou He and Zhuangzhuang, had returned home, and naturally, everyone started discussing plans for building a new house next year.

However, even though Xu Nianji was not familiar with design plans, he knew that the plan was for two side-by-side houses, each with its own entrance, which made it look like two separate families.

"I know we haven't split the household, but, you're married now. It's not good for us to all live together. Of course," Xu Qinghe added, "Your mother and I thought it over, and we think it's fine to eat meals together. We just won't live together. Besides, it gives you young couples some individual space."

"Our houses will be connected, and we'll still be one family," Ji Ying added.

Xu Qinghe nodded in agreement, saying, "Yes, your mother and I have discussed it. Next year, we'll start with two houses, and in a few years, we'll build another one for Nian'an. That way, we'll be together while still maintaining a bit of distance."

As the children grew up and got married, Xu Qinghe didn't want to continue living as before, all crammed into one big household, with everyone calculating against each other.

Even though the eldest and the second sons did not think this way at the moment, and the brotherly love was strong—even the eldest daughter-in-law, since entering the Xu Family, was very gentle and generous—since the second son was not yet married, there didn't seem to be any discord. But as time goes by and once the second son also gets married, there will be long days ahead. If they live together for too long, there will inevitably be some sort of conflict.

He and Ji Ying both felt it would be better to separate early on rather than damaging their father-son and brotherly bonds later on.

"In the future, when you brothers each have your own smaller family, your mother and I will also have our own place to live. As for Nianhua, our second floor will go to Nianhua," Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying had everything well planned out.

"Mom, then in the future, the second floor will all be mine," Xu Nianhua said playfully, as she agreed with her parents' approach. It's not about being inseparable and living together forever; sometimes, having a bit of distance can actually make the relationship better.

Chapter 499: Buy Something

Xu Nian'an immediately said, "Little sis, you still have me now."

Xu Nian'an wore an expression that begged 'please don't leave me behind,' which made everyone burst into laughter, and Xu Nianhua said, "That's fine, seeing as Second Brother hasn't found a Second Sister-in-law yet, we will all live on the second floor, and you better not bully me!"

"In all conscience, when have I ever bullied my little sis?" Xu Nian'an exclaimed dramatically, making everyone laugh even more, their mouths unable to close from amusement.

Night.

Xu Nianji and his wife Zhou He were also talking about the house-building affairs of the day, with Zhou He saying somewhat nervously, "Nianji, please talk to mom and dad. I really don't have any thoughts of separating."

She truly considered Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying her own parents.

No, even closer than her own parents.

"Xiaohe." Xu Nianji comforted her, patting her shoulder to ease her anxiety, "I understand what mom and dad mean. They also hope we'll live in harmony in the future. Even if we live apart, we will only be next door."

Xu Nianji pulled her into his arms, "From childhood to adulthood, mom and dad have suffered a lot, so when they are capable, they don't want the hardships they've endured to be experienced by us again."

"Mom and dad always think of us first, Xiaohe, I..." Xu Nianji didn't even know how to express his feelings at that moment.

"In the future, we will properly honor our parents," Zhou He said earnestly, looking up, with the memory of their parents' kindness etched in her heart, vowing to honor them from now on.

"Mhm."

Xu Nianji nodded affirmatively. Under the flickering candlelight, Zhou He's face appeared soft and hazy, warming Xu Nianji's heart, and he bent down to kiss her.

...

Small New Year.

"Nianhua, aren't you coming home for Small New Year today?" Ji Ying had chopped a lot of streaky pork and leg meat today, planning to make cured meat and sausage, and had also set aside a few pounds of streaky pork, to make crispy pork.

With New Year fast approaching, there were still no preparations made for the festive goods, and the cured dishes had not yet been started. Ji Ying had been incredibly busy as soon as she got home.

"Mom, I have made plans with Sister Wei today, that's our teacher's daughter, to celebrate together," Xu Nianhua explained, "Second Brother, let's go visit Teacher Lin together."

"Ah..."

"Oh."

Xu Nian'an looked at Xu Nianhua with a puzzled face, not understanding why she chose Small New Year's Day to visit their teacher.

"Little sis, won't the teacher be upset if we visit his home during Small New Year?" Xu Nian'an asked as he followed Xu Nianhua on foot to the county. On the way, he expressed his doubts.

"Why would he be? It's just the three of them in Teacher Lin's family. Our visit will make it more lively."

Xu Nianhua said confidently, knowing this because after the incident years ago, both Teacher Lin and Madam Lin fell ill, and she heard many people say that due to Lin Wei's incident, a happy home had just fallen apart.

"What should we buy to take with us?" Xu Nian'an's first thought was alcohol, but he immediately shook his head and said, "No, alcohol won't do, Teacher Lin doesn't seem to drink."

"I think Teacher Lin will drink, but as for Madam Lin..."

Xu Nianhua paused, then said, "If we bring expensive gifts, Madam Lin won't accept them. It would be better to bring something practical that she can't refuse."

"What would that be?"

"Meat," Xu Nianhua replied without hesitation, "Once you buy the meat, can you return it? And isn't it something you can leave for a dish at noon?"

Chapter 500: What Are You Complimenting Us For?

"Nianhua, Nian'an, you've finally arrived." Lin Wei had been eagerly waiting at the intersection. When she told her parents about this, they didn't believe her at all. They insisted she had gotten the date wrong or was just joking.

"Sister Wei." Xu Nianhua smiled as she handed over a bag, saying, "Sister Wei, these are scarves and hairpins my brother sells himself. You can't find them in our county."

"Isn't your brother studying in Ningbei?" Lin Wei looked at Xu Nian'an with a surprised expression. If she remembered correctly, her father had mentioned that the siblings were at a university in Ningbei, Xu Nianhua at Beijing University and Xu Nian'an at Ningbei Medical University.

"Sister Wei." Xu Nian'an greeted with a hint of embarrassment, as Lin Wei's gaze seemed to question: You're supposed to be in university, why are you selling things?

"I, well, I sell things in my free time," Xu Nian'an explained.

Lin Wei nodded in understanding. In fact, it was understandable, just like some classmates who also worked somewhere else while in school.

"Come on in. My dad was so happy to hear you were coming."

When Lin Wei brought Xu Nian'an and Xu Nianhua, it gave Lin's mom and dad quite a scare. They thought Lin Wei was joking—how could it be that they had actually come?

"Mr. Lin, Mrs. Lin." Xu Nianhua and Xu Nian'an greeted with smiles.

"Come in and have a seat."

Mr. Lin warmly stood up and led them inside to warm up by the fire.

Mrs. Lin hurriedly poured tea and started preparing the noon meal, thankful it was a day for celebrating the Minor New Year, otherwise there wouldn't have been much food at home, which would have been really embarrassing.

"Mrs. Lin, let me help," said Xu Nianhua as she handed over the big bag, saying, "Mrs. Lin, this bag contains cabbage, radish, bamboo shoots, and wood ear mushrooms. Except for the bamboo shoots, everything else is from our own garden."

"The bamboo shoots were freshly dug by my dad from the mountains."

Xu Nianhua arranged the vegetables one by one on the cutting board, smiling as she said, "Mrs. Lin, please don't mind."

"Look at you, bringing so much food. What, do you think Mrs. Lin can't even afford to buy vegetables?" Mrs. Lin, looking at the vegetables and the two pounds of unmentioned meat, was rather speechless. It wasn't like the old days when people might go hungry. Nowadays, people don't bring their own food when visiting someone's home.

"No, no, Mrs. Lin, please don't misunderstand. Today is the Minor New Year, and my parents said it wouldn't be good to come empty-handed. It was all thanks to your husband's excellent teaching that we managed to get into good universities. This time, we just wanted to bring some vegetables as a gesture of our appreciation," Xu Nianhua hurriedly explained, "Please don't mind, Mrs. Lin."

Xu Nianhua, who already had a pleasing appearance, looked even more pitiable when anxious, making one think she was being bullied.

Mrs. Lin smiled and said, "I don't mind at all. Next time you come, don't bring anything, alright?"

"Mhm," Xu Nianhua nodded vigorously, thinking that next time she should buy something Mrs. Lin would particularly like.

"Mrs. Lin, let me help with washing the vegetables."

Xu Nianhua rolled up her sleeves, ready to wash the vegetables.

Mrs. Lin quickly stopped her, saying, "No, no, no. I can handle this. You go outside and keep your teacher company. He often speaks highly of you and your brother at home."

"Really? What has the teacher said about us?" Xu Nianhua appeared somewhat surprised, as Mr. Lin was usually very strict and rarely praised anyone.