

Regaining 501

Chapter 501: Take Us With You

"Xu Family siblings are clever; they catch on quickly and they also look good," said Lin Wei's mother with a smile. She had been married to Teacher Lin for decades and this was the first time she had seen him praise students so highly, not to mention that Nianhua's class had the highest number of university admits.

Each time Teacher Lin spoke about it, he was exceptionally proud.

"Really? Teacher Lin actually praised us," Xu Nianhua said somewhat amused as she chatted with Lin Wei's mother for a while.

"Yes."

Although it was Lin Wei's mother's first time meeting Xu Nianhua, she felt that this girl was particularly nice. Her smile was especially radiant, making people feel fond of her.

"Nianhua, have some fruit," said Lin Wei, who brought out the chessboard and then went into the kitchen.

The bustling lunch was quickly prepared and was especially lively thanks to the addition of the Xu siblings.

Teacher Lin, who the Xu siblings insisted should not drink, held up his wine glass and drank steadily, his face flushed with joy, looking exceptionally happy.

In the afternoon, Teacher Lin and Xu Nian'an had a chat and enjoyed themselves tremendously.

Lin Wei's mother was knitting a sweater, which judging by the color, seemed to be for Teacher Lin. Xu Nianhua whispered to Lin Wei, "Sis Wei, are you going out tonight?"

Lin Wei was somewhat surprised and subconsciously glanced at her mom. She pulled Xu Nianhua aside and whispered, "Nianhua, you mustn't tell my mom, okay?"

"Your boyfriend?" Xu Nianhua whispered back inquisitively.

Lin Wei blushed slightly and said, "We just started dating, so I haven't told my parents yet. Nianhua, you'll keep it a secret for me, right?"

"Hmm..."

Xu Nianhua pondered for a moment, then with a playful twinkle in her eye, she said, "How about taking us with you?"

"Ah..."

Lin Wei seemed surprised by Xu Nianhua's suggestion.

"Sis Wei, I'm just curious about the kind of impressive guy who has won your heart." Xu Nianhua didn't want to be an intrusive third wheel, but Lin Wei's safety could not be taken lightly, so even if it was awkward, she'd steel herself and go.

"Okay," Lin Wei agreed instantly. Then, hesitating a bit, she said, "Nianhua, it's enough if we go. Your older brother..." Maybe not.

Before she could finish, Xu Nianhua interrupted, "Sis Wei, my older brother won't be comfortable with me going out late at night, so don't worry, he won't bother you. Just think of him as... a bodyguard?"

"Pfft."

Lin Wei couldn't help but laugh at Xu Nianhua's words. "Nianhua, your brother would be upset if he heard that. Besides, our county is very safe."

"No way, he'll be happy about it." Xu Nianhua continued, "Sis Wei, it's settled then for tonight, don't you back out on me."

"Okay."

Lin Wei affirmed, then got up to add more coal to the fire.

Xu Nianhua watched her leave and sighed inwardly: Sis Wei, our county isn't completely safe.

That night.

Xu Nian'an was stunned by Xu Nianhua's maneuvers; their little sister wasn't a foolish person, so why did her actions seem so... indescribable.

"Little sister, it's their date, we... why are we tagging along?" Xu Nian'an cleared his throat awkwardly saying, "Little sister, maybe we shouldn't go."

He and Lin Wei were barely acquainted, and by imposing on them, he'd be a third wheel—the very thought made Xu Nian'an cringe.

Chapter 502: Lin Wei's Partner is an Acquaintance

"No way, second brother, we're just going to check out Sister Wei's partner, why can't we?" Xu Nianhua was very insistent on this point and said, "Second brother, it's late at night, and I'm scared when we return later."

"Are you not afraid of something happening to me late at night outside?" Xu Nianhua blinked at Xu Nian'an.

"Um..."

Xu Nian'an paused for a moment. Late at night, if Xu Nianhua was really outside alone, he felt genuinely uneasy. Considering how pretty his little sister was, there indeed might be safety concerns should someone with bad intentions come across her.

"Alright," Xu Nian'an compromised.

By evening, they had made plans to go out for dinner together.

On the surface, Xu Nianhua was chatting with Lin Wei, but in reality, she was quite puzzled. Wouldn't Sister Wei's partner send her home at night?

"He'll arrive soon, we've agreed to meet here."

Lin Wei brought Xu Nianhua to a restaurant which was not very luxurious, but quiet and elegant, and it looked clean.

"Sister Wei, what does your boyfriend do?" Xu Nianhua asked curiously.

Lin Wei was a bit shy and said, "He's also a teacher, and he's in Lianxin Village as well."

"Then you'll have a lot in common in the future, both being teachers."

Xu Nianhua and Lin Wei chatted, and through the conversation, Nianhua found out that Lin Wei was going to be transferred back to the county next year. She asked, "Sister Wei, why don't you tell Mr. Lin?"

"We are planning to tell my parents next year," Lin Wei said with a smile, her eyes sparkling and her lips curved into a happy smile. It was evident that she was a woman in love, blissfully so.

"Weimei."

A tall man hurried in, apologizing as soon as he entered, "Sorry, something came up at home, I'm late."

"It's okay, please have a seat," Lin Wei's eyes lit up the moment she saw him.

After entering, the man was somewhat surprised to find that, besides Lin Wei, there were others in the private room.

"Let me introduce, my father's two proudest students, Xu Nianhua and her brother Xu Nian'an," Lin Wei stood up and introducing with a smile, "This is... my boyfriend, Liao Wenjie."

Lin Wei introduced him bashfully.

Lianxin Village, Liao Wenjie, teacher.

When Xu Nianhua first heard of Lianxin Village, it sounded familiar but she didn't think much about it. However, Liao Wenjie, teacher—her memories surged like a tide.

After she became a teacher, her mother seemed to have introduced her to a match, and that match was Liao Wenjie.

She had a distinct impression because Liao Wenjie had several younger siblings, and after his parents had an accident, Liao Wenjie alone had taken up the responsibility of the family. He hadn't married for many years, which had delayed him to the age suitable for arranged meetings.

Though she had declined, she still had a profound impression of him; she always sensed a sadness in his eyes.

Before, she just felt he had a story, but now, she might know what his story was.

Maybe, it was because Sister Wei had had a misfortune that Liao Wenjie...

"Hello."

Liao Wenjie greeted with a smile, handling the order, all the while accommodating Lin Wei's preferences.

Especially when he looked at Lin Wei, his eyes glimmered with love, which he couldn't hide at all.

The dinner was very enjoyable, and Xu Nianhua prayed in her heart, hoping that after today's ordeal, Sister Wei would be safe and sound.

As the night deepened, after they finished dinner and were strolling, they encountered an acquaintance of Liao Wenjie who anxiously reported that Liao Wenjie's mother had an accident. Liao Wenjie immediately became anxious.

Chapter 503: Drunkard

"Wenjie, you should head back now, I'll go home by myself in a bit," Lin Wei urged Liao Wenjie to go back quickly.

Liao Wenjie was worried and reiterated to Lin Wei, "Weimei, be careful on your way home."

"Please, help escort Weimei home," Liao Wenjie requested with a look towards Xu Nian'an, "I don't feel at ease with her going home alone."

"Don't worry, we will escort Wei Sister home," Xu Nian'an said with certainty.

Xu Nianhua listened to their conversation and began to understand why Wei Sister had encountered trouble on her way home alone even though she had seen Liao Wenjie earlier.

Usually, Liao Wenjie would escort Wei Sister home, but just this once, something had happened to her.

No wonder Liao Wenjie felt so remorseful at the time, telling her that he didn't wish to go to the blind date; he was only pressured by his younger brother to come.

On the way back, Xu Nianhua deliberately said, "Second Brother, I've heard that the county is not safe at all at night."

"Ah..." Xu Nian'an was taken aback for a moment, looking at Xu Nianhua with a puzzled face before nodding and saying, "Yes, it's indeed not very safe for girls to go out alone at night, especially pretty girls like you. What if you encounter street thugs or drunk people..."

Before Xu Nian'an finished speaking, a few drunkards blocked their path.

"What do you want?" Xu Nian'an shouted fiercely, seeing that the drunkards were about to bump into them, and immediately protected his younger sister behind him.

"This chick looks good, come play with the bros, huh."

The drunkards were so drunk they could hardly walk straight, but their eyes were still bold and presumptuous as they gazed at Xu Nianhua and Lin Wei, with a gaze that was so overt it was disgusting.

"Nianhua." Lin Wei quietly held Xu Nianhua's hand, the previous perception that the county was very safe had now vanished, and she realized she had been naive before.

"Don't be afraid, Wei Sister, my Second Brother is here."

Xu Nianhua comforted softly, her gaze steady on the drunken men as she looked around. It was already 9:30 in the evening and there weren't many pedestrians on the streets. These drunkards didn't seem like good people at first glance.

"Sister, you take Wei Sister and go first," Xu Nian'an said with a stern face, shielding Xu Nianhua behind him, especially disliking the way the drunkards were looking at his younger sister.

"Be careful, Second Brother."

Xu Nianhua, holding Lin Wei, started to back away; she needed to find help.

"Don't worry, these punks are no match for me," Xu Nian'an had barely finished speaking when the drunkards, staggering, chased after Xu Nianhua and Lin Wei. Xu Nian'an acted immediately.

Back in the village, Xu Nian'an was known as the little overlord, often getting into fights and doing arduous work like chopping wood. He might look tall and slender, but he actually had explosive strength.

Moreover, knowing that Ling Dong was very skilled, and having been taught by Ling Dong himself, these jelly-legged shrimps were no big deal in Xu Nian'an's eyes.

Xu Nianhua and Lin Wei hadn't gone far before Xu Nian'an had taken down the drunkards.

The Xu Nianhua, who had been intending to find help, immediately stopped in her tracks.

"Your Second Brother is amazing," Lin Wei witnessed the scene, her eyes wide with disbelief. Xu Nian'an fighting against three?

"Of course, not only is my Second Brother good at studying, but his physical skills are also not bad," Xu Nianhua smiled broadly, pulling Lin Wei back to the scene. Xu Nian'an gave the drunkards a warning and they scuttled away, tumbling and crawling.

Chapter 504: I'm Scared to Death

"Lin Wei, were you scared today?" Xu Nianhua suddenly asked.

Lin Wei nodded firmly and said, "Yes, luckily you were with me to go home together, otherwise, if I had encountered it alone..."

Just thinking about that scenario made Lin Wei tremble. If she really had been alone, she wouldn't have been able to outrun them, right?

What would have happened then?

Lin Wei was no longer a young girl of fifteen or sixteen. Once they tangled with her, could she have returned home safely and soundly?

If something really had happened, how could she have faced Wenjie?

The more she thought about it, the stronger the feeling of fear grew in Lin Wei's heart.

"If I had encountered it alone, I definitely couldn't have outrun them." Xu Nianhua took the opportunity to say, "Luckily my elder brother was with me, otherwise, I would have been scared to death."

Xu Nianhua exaggeratedly patted her chest, and that scared look made Lin Wei wholeheartedly agree and say, "Nianhua, you're right, I would have been scared to death if I were alone. From now on, I won't dare to go home alone at night."

"Mr. Liao will take you home." Xu Nianhua was satisfied to hear Lin Wei's words and, seeing the fear in her eyes, knew she would definitely be cautious.

Although they had avoided trouble this time, what about the future?

Xu Nianhua couldn't always be by Lin Wei's side, and this matter still needed Lin Wei to take it seriously.

"Yes, he always takes me home, it's just that today there was trouble at his house." Lin Wei arrived home with her heart in her throat and was extremely grateful to Xu Nianhua and Xu Nian'an.

Xu Nian'an felt embarrassed by her thanks, saying, "Lin Wei, you are Mr. Lin's only daughter, it was merely a small effort; don't worry about it."

Even though Xu Nian'an said this, Lin Wei still felt deeply grateful.

On the way leaving the Lin Family's home, Xu Nian'an kept glancing at Xu Nianhua, his curious and puzzled gaze making it hard for Xu Nianhua to ignore.

"Elder brother, you were really impressive today."

Xu Nianhua smiled ingratiatingly, praising, "You knocked those guys down in just a few movements, how did you do that?"

As Xu Nianhua spoke, she mimicked Xu Nian'an's movements. Although Xu Nian'an's movements were sharp and fierce, when Xu Nianhua replicated them, her soft demeanor made it look more like she was dancing than fighting.

"Pfft."

Xu Nian'an couldn't help but laugh at her antics and corrected her after a few attempts, but even then, the movements looked rather comical.

"Little sister, this isn't your cup of tea," Xu Nian'an said, shaking his head, "you better not learn this, I'll protect you in the future."

"Elder brother, that's really disheartening. How can you say I can't do it?" Xu Nianhua grumbled all the way home. She thought the way her elder brother fought today was so cool, defeating those drunkards so fluently. She wished she could do the same.

During the trip, Xu Nianhua pestered Xu Nian'an to teach her, but he didn't hasten to agree. Instead, he looked at her slight figure and said, "Little sister, if you want to learn this, physical fitness is very important. It's normal to run a kilometer or two every morning. Do you think you can handle it?"

"A kilometer or two? Does it have to be running? Couldn't I train my physical fitness in another way?" Xu Nianhua's legs turned to jelly just hearing that.

She worked out regularly, and her favorite activity was yoga, but running... perhaps it really wasn't for her.

"Of course. If you want to train in self-defense, how could you not run? What if you encounter a bad person and you can't even run, do you think you could beat them?" Xu Nian'an countered.

Chapter 505: Eat Less Tomorrow

Ji Ying awkwardly touched her nose and said, "Then I'd better not."

"Little sis, running is good for your health. I think you should take this opportunity to get some exercise." Xu Nian'an, who had found it too hard before and didn't want her to learn, now encouraged her to start running when he saw she could barely jog.

"No."

Ji Ying shook her head repeatedly and said, "Big brother, I'm not running. As soon as I start running, I can't catch my breath. I feel like if I need to exercise, I can do some other sport."

Ji Ying exaggerated a yawn and hurried into the house, saying, "I can't do it, big brother. I'm sleepy; I'm going back to my room to sleep."

No sooner had she said it than Ji Ying disappeared into the house.

Xu Nian'an shook his head helplessly; his little sister really would make any excuse to avoid exercising, even pretending to be sleepy.

As soon as he got back to his room and lay down on the bed, Xu Nian'an suddenly sat up. Something wasn't right!

Just now, his little sister had been laughing and changing the subject.

Why did he always feel like she had deliberately eaten with Sister Wei today?

Could it be that those drunken idiots were something she had foreseen?

Impossible.

Xu Nian'an furrowed his brow, feeling something was off, but he couldn't figure out what.

...

After the Kitchen God's Day, the festive atmosphere became even stronger.

Shuanghe Village was not poor in previous years, and when it was time to buy New Year's goods, everyone would carry large and small bags home. This year was no exception.

Not only did many people follow to the chili sauce factory and the furniture factory, but there were also quite a few who followed Xu Zhihao to the canned food factory. With more money earned, people were more willing to spend lavishly on New Year's preparations.

Even the New Year's pig slaughtering added one more pig than the previous year.

Inside the kitchen, Ji Ying was frying crispy pork. The aroma of the crispy pork could be smelled even before entering the kitchen.

"Auntie Ji, am I in for a treat again?" Pei Yining had been staying in her grandfather's clinic for several days now and the moment Ji Ying had some free time, she immediately paid a visit.

"Yes, of course you're in for a treat. Today you can have crispy pork, and tonight we're stewing pig's head meat."

Ji Ying, while scooping up the golden fried crispy pork, told Pei Yining to go to the living room to warm up by the fire.

"Ji Ying, I feel like I'm going to gain another round of weight after this New Year." Pei Yining touched her round belly, feeling too happy at the Xu's, where every visit almost burst her stomach.

"You're already thin; gaining some weight won't hurt."

Ji Ying, also patting her round belly, contentedly burped. Although the school canteen was not bad, it couldn't compare to the food cooked by her parents.

"I can't do this anymore, I must eat less tomorrow."

No sooner had Pei Yining spoken than Ji Ying made lion's head meatballs the next day.

Each the size of an egg, Pei Yining could eat five or six lion's head meatballs without surprise, and she overate again.

On the 27th of the twelfth lunar month, there were fried pastries and taro rice cakes.

Pei Yining overate once more.

This pattern continued until the 29th of the twelfth lunar month.

The next day would be New Year's Eve, and every household had put up couplets and the character "Fu," which brought a joyous atmosphere just by looking at it.

Considering that Du Chang's family only had him and Pei Yining, Xu Qinghe specifically invited them over to celebrate the New Year with their family and liven up the festivities.

The Xu family was bustling with noise and excitement. Even if the house was a bit old, that sense of exhilaration was not diminished in the slightest.

Ji Ying was directing Xu Nian'an on how to hang the couplets, but she was so preoccupied with directing that she accidentally stepped on Little Shitou, causing her to topple over to the side.

Chapter 506: Be Careful

"Be careful."

A strong arm supported Xu Nianhua, preventing her from falling to the ground.

Xu Nianhua instinctively grabbed that hand and, lifting her head, she saw a handsome face. His deep, pitch-black eyes were captivating, and the concern in them was like a surging wave about to drown her.

"You..."

Her lips moved slightly, but as she began to speak, she realized she didn't know what to say.

"I'm back," Pei Yicheng's calm voice resonated in her ear.

Xu Nianhua once thought that those phrases in romance novels about ears getting pregnant were just too exaggerated, but experiencing it firsthand, she discovered it was true, not false!

The sound of Pei Yicheng's voice was really pleasant to the ear, so pleasant that she wanted to hear it over and over again.

"It's just in time for us to celebrate the New Year together," Xu Nianhua subconsciously responded to Pei Yicheng, not considering at all what kind of "return" he was referring to.

Given their current relationship, even if he returned, it would be to his grandfather's place or to the Xu family's home—it wouldn't be right to say he was returning to her.

In her flurry and panic, Xu Nianhua didn't pay attention to any of that.

"Little sister, are you all right?" Xu Nian'an heard the noise and turned his head just in time to see that Xu Nianhua had nearly tripped, luckily Pei Yicheng had arrived in time.

However, once Xu Nianhua was safe, Xu Nian'an realized the scene seemed somewhat idyllic.

Even though their backdrop was just the most ordinary countryside, why did the scene seem so delightful?

Knowing his little sister's beauty very well, Xu Nian'an had to admit, aside from Pei Yicheng, he truly hadn't found anyone else who could stand beside Xu Nianhua without being overshadowed.

"I'm fine."

Hearing her older brother's voice, Xu Nianhua quickly stood up; she looked at the couplets that were nicely put up and hurriedly made an excuse to go inside.

"Yicheng, did you just arrive?" Xu Nian'an noticed his travel-worn appearance, seemingly having just rushed back by train.

"Yes."

Pei Yicheng answered, saying, "I heard from grandfather that I would spend New Year's with your family, I hope I'm not imposing."

Xu Nian'an didn't reply and instead sized up Pei Yicheng, feeling especially irked at the thought that this big bad wolf was about to take his little sister away.

"Regarding the shop space, I've found a good one for you." Pei Yicheng handed over a lease contract to Xu Nian'an.

Xu Nian'an was stunned for a moment, not knowing how to react.

He looked down at the lease contract; the shop's location was right next to their university, an exceptionally good spot, and the rent... was less than he expected.

"How did you manage this?" A surprised Xu Nian'an asked after a while. Ever since he had this plan in mind, he had inquired about it, but this particular location—he hadn't even considered it, not because he hadn't thought about it, but because the owners simply wouldn't lease it out to anyone.

"Luck."

Pei Yicheng lowered his head to clear his throat and did not mention that the shop was something his mother had left him. Since he had nothing to do with it, he hadn't bothered about the shop until he knew Xu Nian'an was interested, at which point Pei Yicheng naturally took it back.

His grandfather's family had been wealthy back in Ningbei, with all the ancestral property left to his mother and ultimately falling into his hands.

He still didn't understand why his grandfather had insisted on settling down in a small place like Gaoliang County, staying there for decades.

Now, he was grateful his grandfather had lived there because otherwise, how would Xu Nianhua have burst into his life that fateful summer?

Chapter 507: Sugar-Coated Cannonball

"Is the rent too low?" Xu Nian'an asked doubtfully.

Pei Yicheng: "..."

Others would kill for rent that might as well be free, yet Xu Nian'an seemed to think it was too little?

Xu Nian'an explained, "Brother Cheng, I've inquired about several shops before, and each one was either exorbitantly expensive to take over, or they flat-out refused to transfer the shop."

"Maybe..." Pei Yicheng paused, then said, "I'm handsome."

Xu Nian'an's mouth twitched, and he almost reflexively retorted, but when he looked up and saw Pei Yicheng's stern face, he swallowed his words.

"Brother Cheng, let's go inside first. I'll give you the rent stated in the contract in a moment," Xu Nian'an said as he led Pei Yicheng into the house, then asked, "By the way, where's Ling Dong? Wasn't he with you? We can't just leave him alone."

"He's still behind," said Pei Yicheng, and just as his voice fell, Ling Dong drove in.

Two men, two cars, were they showing off their vehicles?

Xu Nian'an mumbled to himself and quickly realized that Ling Dong was driving a truck, a truck that was parked outside the furniture factory.

"Brother Cheng, the goods have been brought here," Ling Dong said as he opened up the truck, which was full of glass and mirrors, along with top-quality hardware pieces.

"I found out about these a few days ago during a chat with your uncle. There's a shortage of glass in the county, and mirrors too, and they're expensive. I happened to know some people, so I helped bring in a truckload. Nian'an, hurry and get some people to unload, and be careful," Pei Yicheng reminded.

Xu Nian'an slowly came back to his senses, looking at Pei Yicheng with a complex expression and thinking to himself: this was a sugar-coated shell.

But Pei Yicheng did all this from the heart, as if it was perfectly natural for him to do these things. Xu Nian'an thought this too was Pei Yicheng's sincerity, his unmistakable desire to help. They couldn't push it away, they had to find another way to repay this kindness, no matter what, they couldn't let his little sister be moved by all these favors.

As the cold wind howled, he quickly went back into the house to call for help.

With the truck parked outside the furniture factory, Xu Yuchun's family also came over, and upon knowing that the glass and mirrors had been brought in specially, all three sturdy laborers in Xu Yuchun's family came to help.

After Xu Qinghe and Xu Yuchun explained, Xu Yuchun quickly expressed his gratitude, "Qinghe, we really have to thank him properly. The quality is better than what we bought before, and the price is quite a bit cheaper."

"Yicheng is a good kid," Xu Qinghe praised. Ever since the talk with Ji Ying about Pei Yicheng, Xu Qinghe always felt a bit uneasy whenever he saw him.

Yet, with Pei Yicheng considering so much for their factory, and also for the matters at the Chili Factory, Xu Qinghe felt, the kid really put his heart into it.

The unloading was done quickly, and Xu Yuchun even warmly invited them to his home to celebrate the New Year together. Knowing that Xu Qinghe's family had invited Nian'an's master and his family, they didn't say much else, but kept thanking Pei Yicheng sincerely.

The New Year's Eve dinner, a big round table laden with dishes, steaming hot, the light not particularly bright, yet exceptionally warm and cozy.

Du Chang was happy, holding his cup and clinking it with Xu Qinghe's from time to time. Since his partner passed, the house felt particularly lonely every holiday.

New Year's was better; although Yining wasn't around, Yicheng always spent the season with him year after year.

But during Dragon Boat Festival and Mid-Autumn Festival, it got lonely, with just him, an old man, by himself. Now, seeing a table full of people, it had been a long time since he had seen such a scene.

Chapter 508: Confession Under the Fireworks

Xu Nianhua was also very happy, the family was together, complete and united. The future seemed more promising, no longer fragmented and shrouded in shadows as before, like struggling desperately in a storm.

"I'll show you something nice tonight," Pei Yicheng whispered in her ear while taking the chance to toast, and before Xu Nianhua could ask what it was, Pei Yicheng had already moved on to clink glasses with Ji Ying.

Pei Yining looked on with a hint of sourness at Xu Nianhua, but with Aunt Ji and Sister-in-law Xu present, she didn't say much, afraid that her brother might be kicked out of the house before he could even win his crush's heart.

Right now, she was just engrossed in savoring the delicious food.

Braised lion's head meatballs, tasty taro rice pudding, stir-fried bacon with winter bamboo shoots, homemade sausages by Ji Ying's own hands, duck soup, rice dumplings, and many other dishes made Pei Yining feel that her stomach was too small.

A table full of delicious food that was different from the exquisite meals she used to have at home. These homestyle dishes actually made her enjoy them even more.

Aside from Zhuangzhuang, who was still being held, the men had all drunk wine. The scene of their chattering, though noisy, was festive.

After dinner, Ling Dong stealthily went out.

"Grandpa, Uncle Xu, there's something nice to see. Please come to the courtyard," said Pei Yicheng suddenly, catching everyone off guard. It was the middle of winter, go out to the courtyard?

Xu Nianhua seemed to sense something and followed everyone to the courtyard. As soon as they stepped outside, dazzling fireworks soared into the sky, painting beautiful colors onto the black canvas of the night.

"So beautiful!"

Exclamations kept rising up.

The villagers, hearing the noise, all came out of their houses. Everyone did the same thing: looked up at the beautiful night sky.

Xu Nianhua had seen many fireworks in later generations, many of which were more splendid than these, but today, they seemed especially bright and beautiful.

"Do you like it?" Pei Yicheng had approached her side at some point.

Xu Nianhua looked away from the sky and saw that her parents and the others had moved outside the yard to watch the fireworks. At the doorway, only Xu Nianhua and Pei Yicheng stood side by side.

"It's beautiful," affirmed Xu Nianhua with a nod.

"From now on, I'll buy fireworks every year to show you, is that okay?" Pei Yicheng gazed at her sincerely and seeing her surprised expression, couldn't resist lifting his hand to brush aside the hair on her forehead ruffled by the wind, saying, "I like you, I want to spend every New Year's with you, I want to have a lifetime with you."

Pei Yicheng's sudden confession startled Xu Nianhua.

When she had rejected Amos before, Xu Nianhua had changed the subject and avoided it; later, when she was injured, Pei Yicheng hadn't said anything either.

The fireworks erupted beside them, splendid and gorgeous. Pei Yicheng leaned in closer and said, "No matter what your answer is, I'll wait for you." Wait for the day you fall in love with me.

Xu Nianhua's heart instantly became turbulent.

She thought, no one could resist his deep affection; her heart throbbed wildly, like the splendid fireworks in the sky, striking directly at her heart.

"Little sister, what's wrong, you seem lost in thought?" After seeing off Pei Yicheng and the others, Xu Nian'an looked at Xu Nianhua with a puzzled face, feeling that Xu Nianhua was a bit distracted.

"No, not really," Xu Nianhua shook her head and asked, "By the way, what was in... the envelope you gave him?"

Having just been confessed to, Xu Nianhua was too embarrassed to even say his name, as if speaking would give something away, making her especially nervous. Fortunately, everyone was cheerful today, and with the fire burning brightly in the room, everyone's faces were flushed, so it wasn't very noticeable.

Chapter 509: Better Not to Marry

"Money," Xu Nian'an replied without a second thought. He stood up, and in a moment he came over with a file folder in hand, stating, "Nianhua, look, Brother Cheng is really impressive, he has already helped me rent this shop, and its location is especially great."

"No way, hasn't it been only a short while since you guys discussed opening a shop?" Xu Nianhua closely examined the lease agreement, and although she didn't know where it was, Nian'an's explanation made her understand instantly.

The location of the shop was particularly good; if they sold hair clips, scarves, earrings, and the like, they could definitely make a profit.

They would follow a boutique approach, but they had thought they would have to wait until after the New Year to set it up. Who knew they'd manage to lease the premises before the New Year?

This greatly saved their time, and when they went to Ningbei after the New Year, they could stock up and be ready to open for business.

"So, I think Brother Cheng is really thoughtful," Xu Nian'an remarked with feeling.

Xu Nianhua: "..."

She felt her face getting even redder.

"Yicheng is indeed a good kid," Ji Ying praised Pei Yicheng generously. She said, "Nianhua, look how good Yicheng is, don't you have any feelings for him?"

"..."

Xu Nianhua's face turned as red as a boiled shrimp.

"Tomorrow, it will be the year '81, and you're already twenty-one years old. It's normal to have someone you like and be in a relationship," Ji Ying considered herself quite progressive as she said, "Nianhua, someone like Yicheng, with good looks, a nice personality, and sense, you should settle down early. What if someone else snatches him away?"

Encouraging her, Ji Ying looked at Pei Yicheng as a prospective mother-in-law would a son-in-law, the more she looked, the more satisfied she became. In her view, regardless of Xu Nianhua's achievements in the future, she would eventually have to get married.

Passing up on a good man like Pei Yicheng would be quite a pity.

"Yingzi, not every mom acts like you," Xu Qinghe quickly interrupted Ji Ying as she seemed to get more and more carried away, saying, "Nianhua, don't mind her, your mom is just too idle."

"I'm also thinking of Nianhua's best interests. Wherever Yicheng is, he's definitely on someone's mind," Ji Ying felt that her intuition wasn't wrong, that Pei Yicheng liked Nianhua, and he liked her sincerely.

"Mom, if it's so easy for someone to be snatched away or lured away, then it's better not to marry at all," Xu Nianhua assertively declared, knowing she needed to seriously consider her relationship with Pei Yicheng.

...

The New Year approached with bursts of firecracker sounds, officially ushering in the year 1981.

Since Xu Nianhua's rebirth in the summer of 1979, a year and a half had already passed.

Xu Nianhua went to bed late and, because of Pei Yicheng's confession, her mind was a mess. She woke up before dawn and started pondering, what exactly did she feel?

After thinking all night without clarity, the following day she was practically yawning non-stop as she accompanied others on New Year's visits.

"Little sister, did you not sleep well last night?"

Xu Nian'an, finding some free time in the afternoon, quietly asked Xu Nianhua, who was constantly yawning, "What did Brother Cheng say to you yesterday?"

Xu Nianhua's sleepiness vanished on the spot.

"I saw it yesterday, during the fireworks. The two of you were whispering to each other," Xu Nian'an said with an air of knowing it all. He continued, "Let me guess, he set off so many fireworks, was it to confess his feelings for you?"

Xu Nianhua: "... When did her second brother become a detective?"

"So, what do you think?" Xu Nian'an could tell he had guessed correctly by her reaction.

Xu Nianhua shook her head.

Chapter 510: Different

Xu Nian'an asked, "You don't like him?"

In his tone, there was surprise, for after all, Pei Yicheng, just as Ji Ying had said, was indeed very outstanding.

"I don't know," Xu Nianhua spread her hands.

Xu Nian'an scrutinized Xu Nianhua, seemingly incredulous; seeing she truly seemed clueless, he thought, how could his little sister be aware that he liked Su Xi when she had yet to come to her senses?

"Little sister, how did you feel when Chen Hu confessed?" Xu Nian'an's topic shift left Xu Nianhua perplexed for quite a while.

Without even thinking, Xu Nianhua replied, "I didn't feel anything, I just rejected him directly."

"Then why does Brother Cheng's confession keep you up at night, still unsure of what to think?" Xu Nian'an, as an outside observer, saw clearly. His little sister treated all men with indifference. If she truly didn't like Pei Yicheng, she wouldn't have lost sleep over his confession.

"Really?"

Reminded by him like this, Xu Nianhua felt that indeed it was the case. In high school and university, there were not a few who confessed to her, and she was always able to calmly refuse without feeling troubled.

Why did it become different with Pei Yicheng? Could it be...

Xu Nianhua furrowed her brows and asked, "Second brother, what do you think, are we suitable? Am I worthy of him?"

"Of course, you are; my little sister is so outstanding, how can she not be worthy." Xu Nian'an said, then realized something was amiss. Wasn't he encouraging his little sister to date, just like their mother?

"Little sister, think it over. School is about to start soon. I plan to go to Ningbei on the fifth day to stock up and try to open the shop as soon as possible," Xu Nian'an subtly changed the subject.

"I'll go with you," Xu Nianhua said.

On the second day of the first lunar month, Xu Qinghe and his family hurried to the county to pay a New Year visit to Du Chang.

Du Chang was Xu Nian'an's master, and indeed they should have visited him early to pay their respects.

After paying their respects to Du Chang, the group continued their journey to South City by car.

Their entire extended family went to South City.

It was Ji Ying's first time bringing her entire family to pay a New Year visit to her father, and her heart swelled with excitement.

Since Ji Xinghua went to South City, Ji Ying had scarcely had the chance to wish him a Happy New Year, let alone see him; visits throughout the year were few and far between.

"We've brought everything with us, Dad will definitely like it," Xu Qinghe whispered in Ji Ying's ear, "I'm sorry."

For all those years, to save a few bus fares, he had never accompanied Ji Ying to visit her father-in-law.

"No," Ji Ying gently shook her head and said, "We're husband and wife; let's not talk about this."

Yesterday, during New Year's Day, Liu Sanmei flaunted her own grandson and kept finding fault with Ji Ying, even criticizing her for earning money as a married woman.

Xu Qinghe firmly and strongly protected her, even choosing to eat lunch at Xu Yuchun's home, rather than at Xu Zhong's.

The support Xu Qinghe provided made Ji Ying feel blessed.

On the bus, Xu Nianhua thought back to the recent New Year visit at Du Chang's house. Pei Yicheng wasn't there, and the tension in her heart eased once again.

Pei Yining had explained to her that Pei Yicheng had a slight issue with a design draft that needed confirmation, and that was why he took the train back to Ningbei on the first day of the lunar New Year.

Had he come back specifically to see his grandfather and her?

Xu Nianhua pondered for a long time, swaying all the way to South City.

Since the school term started, it had been half a year since Xu Nianhua had seen her grandfather, Ji Xinghua. Although the occasional phone call informed her that Ji Xinghua's illness had improved and his health was better, she couldn't be at ease without seeing him in person.