

Regaining 51

Chapter 51: Xu Family's Little Princess

"Nian'an, what are you doing buying so much soybeans? Even if you wanted tofu, you wouldn't need this much," Ji Ying looked at the soybeans they brought back, estimating at least a dozen or more pounds!

"We're not making tofu, of course. I'm going to use them to grow bean sprouts and then make money," Xu Nianhua said cheerfully. Upon returning home, the first thing she did was grab a big handful of soybeans to try it out.

In her previous life, she had established her own business. Her severely disfigured face, always hidden behind a mask, later underwent plastic surgery when she had the money. Though her face became presentable, it was still a bit ugly.

The Gu Family had driven themselves to ruin, and with her added push, her enemies were gone.

Xu Nianhua then devoted herself to charitable efforts, traveling from place to place, mostly to impoverished, backward mountain areas.

This method of growing bean sprouts was something she learned by chance from an old lady. Sometimes when she was home, she would grow them herself, and it was always successful.

Thus, with this method in mind, Xu Nianhua went ahead and bought twenty pounds of soybeans.

Growing bean sprouts is simple. The old lady had also taught her the method, and every time, the bean sprouts she grew were especially good.

"Nianhua, I know you want to make money for school, but can these bean sprouts really be sold for money?"

Ji Ying hesitantly asked Xu Nianhua, "There are people selling bean sprouts in the county, can you really make money off this?"

"There are so many people in the county, why can't it make money?" Xu Nianhua washed the soybeans, found a basin, and soaked them directly.

"Mom, don't worry, these bean sprouts will definitely make money," she assured.

Xu Nianhua confidently said as if she was just short of thumping her chest to guarantee it.

That night, Xu Qinghe came home. Xu Nianhua pestered Xu Qinghe to make a large wooden barrel, then inside, she had him install dividing boards one layer up from another, similar to the small compartments used in a steaming basket, so that when the beans were spread on top, they wouldn't hold water and could be easily watered.

Xu Nianhua, worried Xu Qinghe might not understand, even drew a rough sketch for him.

Xu Qinghe had been a carpenter for half his life now. Although his daughter's sketch was simple, once she explained it to him, he understood immediately what she wanted to do. He said, "Nianhua, what have you come up with now? Why did you think of using this to grow bean sprouts?"

Xu Nianhua tilted her head and replied, "It must be because Dad has raised me so well, making me so smart."

This remark caused everyone to burst into laughter.

Night.

Ji Ying and Xu Qinghe discussed this bean sprout selling business.

"It's fine, if she wants to do it, let her do it. I'm used to woodworking, just consider it making a little toy for her," Xu Qinghe pondered, deciding to start it tomorrow.

Ji Ying: "..."

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The next day, Xu Nianhua sold out of the mung bean jelly early and saw someone selling candied hawthorns.

"You wait, I'll buy it for you."

Considering candied hawthorns were not sold every day, Xu Nian'an specially bought two strings.

"Jiaojiao, your mom really treats you well, buying you a new set of clothes too, which look really nice," Liu Mei said enviously, gazing at the new gingham dress on Xu Jiaojiao, which stood out prominently in the crowd with its green and floral design.

"That's right, my mom even said that when my second brother gets into university, she'll buy me clothes again," Xu Jiaojiao said proudly.

Her sweet-talking always made her grandmother and mother very happy. Whether her big brother was getting married or her second brother was entering university, she always managed to get new clothes.

Chapter 52: Stuffed Meat Buns

"Wow, your second brother got into college?" Liu Mei's eyes flashed with envy.

"That's right."

Xu Jiaojiao was even more proud when she mentioned her own brother, saying, "My second brother has especially good grades in school, he's sure to get in."

"Got the admission notice yet?" Liu Mei pressed.

"Not yet, but it might come in the next couple of days."

No sooner had Xu Jiaojiao's words fallen than Liu Mei lavished more praise, saying, "Your second brother is really amazing, he also has good grades in school."

Liu Mei's flattery made Xu Jiaojiao exceptionally happy.

Standing to one side and overhearing the conversation, she couldn't help but curl her lips. How could Xu Jiaojiao have the audacity to claim that Xu Zhiyuan's grades were especially good?

But, was her diarrhea attack during the toilet break related to Liu Mei?

Xu Nianhua could not remember such a distant incident clearly, but seeing their conversation just now, she felt it might be related.

When Liu Mei mentioned Xu Zhiyuan, her eyes were full of admiration. As for her praise for Xu Jiaojiao, it made even her skin crawl.

No sooner had Liu Mei left than Xu Nianhua immediately blocked Xu Jiaojiao's path.

"Xu, Nianhua."

When Xu Jiaojiao saw it was Xu Nianhua, a hint of guilt flashed in her eyes. She instinctively took a step back and forced a smile, her hands tightly clasped together, saying, "You, you've come to the county too, huh."

"Yes," Xu Nianhua said, her gaze intently fixed on Xu Jiaojiao. In the Xu family, both being granddaughters, Xu Jiaojiao was coddled in the palm of their grandparents' hands, while she was treated like a weed.

She had the love of her parents, and that didn't bother her, but...

"Xu Jiaojiao, that day of the foreign language exam, the bun you gave me, the one filled with meat, I haven't had the chance to thank you properly," she said.

On the last day of the college entrance exam, the foreign language section, Xu Nianhua had a bout of diarrhea which ruined her performance. In her previous life, she had been suspicious, but Xu Jiaojiao denied it, and besides, the meat-filled buns were Liu Sanmei's act of kindness, one for each of the four kids.

But the ever-absent Xu Jiaojiao after the exams made Xu Nianhua feel something wasn't right.

Xu Jiaojiao, three years younger than Xu Nianhua and perturbed by the statement, let the guilt flash through her eyes. She said unhappily, "I brought you a bun and it was bad? You don't appreciate kindness, a dog that bites the hand that feeds it."

Xu Jiaojiao's voice was loud, trying to stare back with righteous indignation, yet as she looked up, she met Xu Nianhua's clear black and white eyes, she instinctively avoided her gaze.

"Xu Jiaojiao, you think I don't know?" Xu Nianhua said calmly, her eyes steady as if she had caught Xu Jiaojiao red-handed.

Taken aback by her words, Xu Jiaojiao took another step back, saying, "Don't talk nonsense, don't try to smear me. I'll go home and tell Grandma, claim you ate something bad yourself, and then blame the bun I gave you."

Xu Nianhua didn't say a word, her lips slightly uplifted as she stared unblinkingly at her, as if to say: I know everything, no need to hide it.

"It wasn't me, I didn't do it," Xu Jiaojiao, feeling unnerved by her stare, turned and ran off.

"What happened?" Xu Nian'an came back with candied haws and saw Xu Jiaojiao running off. He looked at Xu Nianhua and asked, "She didn't bully you, did she?"

"What do you think?"

Xu Nianhua rolled her eyes helplessly. How weak must she have been to get bullied by her own cousin, three years her junior?

But, could it really have been Xu Jiaojiao who did it?

Did she think that if she didn't get into college, Xu Zhiyuan would?

She had noted this score to settle.

Chapter 53: The Whole Family Goes

Shuangzhu Village, Xu Family.

"Truly, there is no letter for your family, and definitely no college admission notice." When the mailman passed by the Xu Family's home, Xu Zhiyuan stopped him, insisting that he had lost their admission notice.

"Impossible, my Zhiyuan must have been admitted to college. Did you lose it?" Zhao Juxiang stared at the postal worker's green bag, almost wishing she could search through it herself.

The postal worker, with no other choice, showed them each letter one by one. However, there were many letters, but truly none for the Xu Family.

Xu Zhiyuan was greatly disappointed.

Zhao Juxiang stepped forward and said, "Let me look again."

She snatched the letters and started going through them one by one.

"Hey, don't mess up my letters." The mailman anxiously watched Zhao Juxiang. These letters and notices were extremely important; not a single one could be missed.

Especially the admission notices, they could change someone's life. He double-checked and carefully guarded them, paranoid about any slight mishap.

"How could it not be there?"

As Zhao Juxiang searched, the letters she finished with she threw back to the mailman; some fell to the ground, and he had to pick them up one by one.

"It can't be."

Zhao Juxiang, unwilling to give up, sifted through the letters one by one.

"Don't rifle through the letters, these cannot be lost!" The mailman, panicked, crouched down to pick up the ones that had fallen, constantly glancing at Zhao Juxiang's hands, fearing she would drop more.

"Oh, Zhao Juxiang, did your son get into college?" Auntie from the Yao Family asked with a smile.

"How could that be? If he really had been admitted, wouldn't there be an admission notice? She wouldn't be searching for one like a crazy woman," retorted another auntie from the Cai Family. The two sang in tune, infuriating Zhao Juxiang half to death. She had searched through the letters twice already, but there was still none for the Xu Family.

"Who knows who started bragging so early, saying their family would have a college student soon, that their Zhiyuan was about to go to college."

Auntie from the Yao Family spoke with a smile, but the schadenfreude in her eyes couldn't be hidden.

"My Zhiyuan is definitely going to get in," Zhao Juxiang always thought in her heart. She confidently said, "The admission notice just hasn't arrived yet."

"Hahaha, that's hilarious. Everyone else's notices have arrived, just not your Zhiyuan's, right?" Auntie Cai and Auntie Yao exchanged a look, and one said, "Then just keep waiting, but don't trouble our comrade mailman too much. It's hard work delivering mail. Don't delay his work!"

"Exactly," echoed Auntie Yao.

The mailman, having collected all the letters, cuddled them like treasure and hurried away on his 28-inch bicycle.

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The scene at the Xu Family quickly spread throughout Shuangzhu Village, with everyone secretly laughing at Zhao Juxiang; even though her own son didn't make it, she had given the mailman a hard time.

"That's something Second Aunt would do," Xu Nian'an wasn't surprised in the least. Second Aunt Zhao Juxiang seemed nice enough day-to-day, but when it came to her, she could be extremely fierce. Her character was well-known throughout the village.

"Second brother, tonight, bring the Mung Bean Jelly to Grandpa and Grandma's house," Xu Nianhua suddenly said.

Xu Nian'an was momentarily stunned.

Xu Qinghe, who had finished work early, was busy in the yard preparing the bean sprout bucket Xu Nianhua had mentioned. At this, he immediately responded, "Okay, I will go with you guys later."

"Good," Xu Nianhua responded with a smile, saying, "The whole family will go."

Chapter 54: I Clearly Placed It in the Bowl

Late at night, the Xu Qinghe family came over, and Xu Zhong thought that Xu Qinghe had come around and was going to return to the Xu Family. He couldn't help but smile, although his face had been tense.

These days, Liu Sanmei had been constantly complaining in his ear that she was fed up with working every day in the vegetable garden and at home, wishing the eldest in the family was there.

Yes, usually these chores were done by Ji Ying.

Ji Ying's sister-in-law, Zhao Juxiang, was not nearly as good at these tasks as Ji Ying.

As a mother-in-law, Liu Sanmei naturally had to do more.

"Hmph, they say they won't return to the Xu Family, but look, they've obediently come over, haven't they?"

Thinking this, Liu Sanmei sat in the courtyard enjoying the cool air, imagining that Ji Ying would handle these tasks in the future, and her good days were about to come.

"Dad, Mom." Xu Qinghe's family of five, except the eldest who was far away at the county brick factory, the four of them had all come over.

Ji Ying originally did not want to come, but since the three of them had come, and in case Xu Qinghe really wanted to return to the Xu Family, Ji Ying was determined not to allow it, so she came to see for herself.

"Grandpa, Grandma." Xu Nian'an and Xu Nianhua both greeted them. Xu Nianhua said with a smile, "We made Mung Bean Jelly today and specially brought some for Grandpa to try."

Xu Nianhua brought the Mung Bean Jelly to Xu Zhong.

Upon hearing it was Mung Bean Jelly, Liu Sanmei's eyes lit up. It was excellent for cooling down during the hot summer.

This time, Xu Nianhua had brought six bowls, one each for Xu Zhong and his wife Liu Sanmei, Xu Qingjiang and his wife Zhao Juxiang, and the siblings Xu Zhiyuan and Xu Jiaojiao. As they were on their way, they met quite a few people who knew they were delivering Mung Bean Jelly and praised their filial piety and virtue in repaying wrongdoing with kindness.

Xu Jiaojiao happily ate the Mung Bean Jelly; it was cold and sweetly refreshing, and she loved it so much that she completely forgot about the incident with Xu Nianhua earlier that day.

Suddenly, Xu Nianhua stood in front of Xu Jiaojiao, blocking the moonlight.

Xu Jiaojiao frowned unhappily, "What are you doing? You're blocking my light!"

She had hardly taken two bites of her Mung Bean Jelly.

"Xu Jiaojiao," Xu Nianhua's voice suddenly turned sharp as she called out her cousin's name.

Everyone present was startled by Xu Nianhua's sudden action.

"On the day of my foreign language college entrance examination, you deliberately distracted Grandma to have her make us meat buns, claiming it was to help us perform well, but actually, you tampered with my bun, didn't you?" Xu Nianhua spoke rapidly, barely giving anyone a chance to react, as she confronted her directly.

"No," Xu Jiaojiao denied loudly, feeling guilty.

"Yes, you did." Xu Nianhua didn't give anyone else a chance to interject. She grabbed the Mung Bean Jelly in her hand and splashed it directly onto Xu Jiaojiao's face.

The cold Mung Bean Jelly and the sweet water from brown sugar left Xu Jiaojiao utterly chilled.

Looking down at her with an air of superiority, the authority she had developed after running a training company in later years was evident. She wasn't just any young girl; her piercing gaze was as if she had

seen it with her own eyes. She asserted firmly, "When Grandma and everyone else were not paying attention, you smeared croton oil on my bun because it had been a long time since I had eaten meat buns, and you even tore it open to feed me, so I didn't notice the smell."

"Nonsense, I put it in the bowl." Xu Jiaojiao reflexively argued back, and as she raised her head to reason with Xu Nianhua, her eyes met a pair of fierce ones. She instinctively shrank back. Why had Xu Nianhua suddenly become so frightening?

"Xu Jiaojiao, you actually poisoned your younger sister with croton oil!" Xu Nian'an was the first to react. He dashed forward, itching to give Xu Jiaojiao a good beating.

Chapter 55: Get Out Here

"If it weren't for little sister getting diarrhea, how could she have received no score in foreign language? How could she have failed to get into college?"

Xu Nian'an's heart seethed with anger. He had thought that maybe it was due to not having eaten much oily food usually, and then suddenly eating meat-filled buns, or perhaps her stomach wasn't accustomed to it, which then led to Xu Nianhua getting diarrhea.

But, he never expected that it was because Xu Jiaojiao had tampered with the buns.

"Ah..."

"Mom, save me."

"Grandma, save me!"

Xu Jiaojiao was scared out of her wits, wearing her new green dress today, which had been splashed with mung bean jelly, and now, Xu Nian'an was about to hit her.

When Ji Ying learned that her daughter had not been admitted to college, all because of Xu Jiaojiao, and considering the incident in the back hill last time when she almost lost her daughter, Ji Ying, too, became frenzied and pounced toward Xu Jiaojiao.

The scene quickly descended into chaos.

Xu Jiaojiao, trembling with fear, hid behind Zhao Juxiang. Ji Ying was usually gentle and easy to talk to, but with her daughter's future at stake, Ji Ying didn't care about gentleness—she just wished she could tear the person into pieces. Unable to catch Xu Jiaojiao, she turned her wrath on Zhao Juxiang.

Xu Nianhua stepped forward to help, and did not miss the chance to vent for herself.

"Stop it, all this shouting and brawling, what a disgrace!"

Xu Zhong hadn't expected this situation, and it had happened so suddenly that they all were too late to react. The four women had already started fighting, while Xu Nian'an, who had initially intended to start the altercation, stood to the side, clenching his hands tightly, wishing he could vent for Xu Nianhua.

Liu Sanmei had positioned herself behind Xu Zhong as soon as the fight started—her old bones did not need to get involved.

"Elder brother, second brother, what are you waiting for?"

Xu Zhong looked at Xu Qinghe and Xu Qingjiang standing aside and chastised, "Aren't you going to pull your wives apart?"

"Zhao Juxiang, this is far from over between us."

"My Jiaojiao didn't do this thing, you better not slander my daughter," retorted Zhao Juxiang.

"Pah, Xu Jiaojiao just admitted it."

"Your son Zhiyuan didn't make it to college, and you want my Nianhua to fail too. How can you and your daughter have such dark hearts?"

Today, during the day, Zhao Juxiang grabbed the postman, insisting on finding that notice—she knew all about it.

Zhao Juxiang: "..."

She was already distraught over Xu Zhiyuan's failure to get into college, and now Ji Ying was twisting the knife in her heart!

"Mom, are you okay?"

Xu Nianhua supported Ji Ying and moved her back, worryingly examining Ji Ying. Aside from a few scratch marks on her arm, she was okay.

In the courtyard, amidst the disarray, Xu Zhong barked, "Xu Jiaojiao, get out here."

Zhao Juxiang wanted to speak up for her daughter, but looking up at Xu Zhong's dark, pot-bottomed face, she dare not say anything and just gently patted Xu Jiaojiao's hand.

Xu Jiaojiao, shaking, stood before Xu Zhong, and with Xu Zhong's questioning on top of having just admitted to her deed publicly, Xu Jiaojiao dared not deny it.

Xu Zhong raised his hand and slapped her, saying with a face full of disappointment, "Is this how your mother taught you? Is this how you treat your elder cousin? Go back to your room and don't step foot outside until school starts."

"Grandpa, I..." Xu Jiaojiao, with tears in her eyes, looked at Xu Zhong, but Xu Zhong ignored her completely, and she cried as she ran back to her room.

"Nianhua." Xu Zhong was about to speak when Xu Nianhua, with red-rimmed eyes, said, "Grandpa, failing to get into college is not the end of the world, it's just, I have to study for another year, and it's not easy for dad and mom to make money, so I'm going back home first."

Xu Nianhua turned and ran away, looking as if she had suffered the greatest of injustices.

Xu Nian'an immediately followed her.

Chasing her outside, many neighbors had heard the Xu family's commotion. Xu Nianhua, with a choked voice, talked about her experience of getting diarrhea during the college entrance exams. She didn't explicitly say Xu Jiaojiao had used Badou, but it was implied by her words.

Chapter 56: Scolding Session

Xu Family, the old house.

It was only when Xu Nianhua finally got home that she breathed a sigh of relief. Yang Qi's sweet smile collided with Xu Nian'an's worried expression. She beamed like a blooming flower and said, "Second Brother, now Xu Jiaojiao's reputation is completely ruined."

"And here I was worrying about you." Xu Nian'an looked at his little sister's smile and sighed, "Little Sister, your grades are good. You'll definitely get into university next year. From now on, we won't have a sister named Xu Jiaojiao."

"Second Brother, aren't I the only sister you have?" Xu Nianhua looked at Xu Nian'an, aggrieved and pitiable. Her clear, distinct eyes seemed to ask, "Aren't I your only sister?"

Xu Nian'an was stunned for a moment, then raised his hand and gently fixed her hair, saying, "Right, in the past and in the future, I have only had one sister, Xu Nianhua."

"That's more like it." Xu Nianhua tilted her head up proudly, extending two fingers and gesticulating, "I have two brothers."

Xu Nian'an: "..."

Night.

Ji Ying had been cursing Xu Jiaojiao non-stop, and finally turned her wrath on Zhao Juxiang. In the end, she dragged the whole Xu Qingjiang family into her tirade. She just couldn't relieve the hatred in her heart unless she vented it out!

Nianhua's grades had always been good. There shouldn't have been a problem getting into university, but because of that missing score in the foreign language exam, she missed out on university admission.

Her daughter, ah!

She could have gotten into university!

Every time Ji Ying thought about how this wasn't an accident but someone's doing, she wished she could skin Xu Jiaojiao alive.

Being a university student in that era was a matter of great honor, affecting her daughter's entire life.

Although she could retake the exam next year, who could say whether she would get into university then?

"Xu Qinghe, I'm telling you, from now on, I vow to have nothing to do with Xu Qingjiang and his family. If you still acknowledge him as your brother, then we're getting divorced," Ji Ying said to Xu Qinghe, fuming.

Xu Qinghe, with an unpleasant expression, said, "What nonsense are you talking about, divorce and such? This matter..."

Xu Qinghe paused, then said, "Jiaojiao did wrong, but we should separate the person from the deed. Besides, we've already split from the family. We're just relatives with Qingjiang's family now."

"What relatives, what cousins? Is there a cousin who would harm her own older cousin like that?"

Oh, how furious Ji Ying was in her heart.

In Ji Ying's indignation, Xu Qinghe also breathed a sigh of relief. Thankfully, they had split from the main family. Thankfully, they hadn't gone back to the Xu's. Otherwise...

If Xu Qingjiang didn't punish Xu Jiaojiao, he and Xu Qingjiang would also just be ordinary relatives from then on.

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The next morning, Xu Qingjiang came to apologize.

"Big Brother, I already gave Jiaojiao a harsh scolding yesterday," Xu Qingjiang said as he finished speaking.

Xu Nian'an scoffed coldly, "Uncle, Jiaojiao caused little sister to miss out on university, and all Uncle did was scold her?"

Xu Qingjiang's face twitched with embarrassment, his eyebrows creased with a hint of anger. Even if Xu Jiaojiao did wrong, Xu Nian'an was still the junior, and he was Xu Nian'an's uncle. Where was the sense in a junior criticizing an uncle?

"Nian'an."

Xu Qinghe glared at Xu Nian'an and turned to Xu Qingjiang, "Qingjiang, we are brothers. Jiaojiao and Nianhua grew up together as close cousins. You know how important the college entrance exam is to a person, there's no need for me to explain. Jiaojiao actually smeared Badou on Nianhua's buns, causing Nianhua to miss the foreign language exam."

Even Xu Qinghe felt uncomfortable mentioning it.

What Xu Nian'an said wasn't wrong at all. Nianhua missed out on university because of Xu Jiaojiao, and Xu Qingjiang merely gave a simple scolding?

Chapter 57: The Joke Went Too Far

"Nianhua is smart, she can just take the exam again next year," Xu Qingjiang said with an awkward smile. He added, "Big brother, my Zhiyuan didn't get in either. Next year, they can be each other's company."

"Big brother, it's all because Juxiang has spoiled Jiaojiao too much. Besides, Jiaojiao is young and doesn't know any better, turning such a small matter into this big of a fuss. I thought Nianhua had just gotten an upset stomach from something she ate," Xu Qingjiang said, pushing the blame away from himself with implication after implication. In his view, it was all because his wife hadn't managed their child properly.

"Alas, I didn't have a choice; Jiaojiao is my own daughter. I can't very well kill her, can I?"

Xu Qingjiang lamented, "Zhihao has finally settled down in the county and will start making money. In the future, he will surely be filial to you, his eldest uncle. Big brother, about this matter... could we possibly..."

Even Xu Qingjiang found it hard to say, but for the sake of his daughter, he still had to speak up, "How about we just let it go?"

"Uncle, she caused my little sister to miss out on college, which is a huge setback in one's life!" Xu Nian'an couldn't help feeling outraged as he watched Xu Qingjiang attempt to lightly dismiss the situation.

"Enough," Xu Qinghe said in a solemn voice: "The damage has been done. Talking about it now is of no help. Qingjiang, even though we are half-brothers sharing the same father, in my heart, you're no different from a full brother."

But your actions have deeply disappointed me.

If only Xu Jiaojiao could come in person to apologize to Nianhua, Xu Qinghe would feel somewhat better.

Xu Qingjiang looked at Xu Qinghe awkwardly and immediately responded, "I also see you as my own brother."

Xu Qinghe looked down and remained silent; though he wasn't much of a talker, his thoughts were as clear as a mirror.

"If you truly see me as your brother, have Jiaojiao apologize to Nianhua," Xu Qinghe said directly since Xu Qingjiang hadn't mentioned it.

"Of course, of course," Xu Qingjiang said awkwardly, nodding his head. Thinking about how Xu Jiaojiao had flatly refused to come and apologize today, he felt a headache coming on.

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No sooner had Xu Qingjiang left than Xu Nian'an complained unhappily, "Dad, you're too kind to Uncle. Although little sister's grades are good and she could get into college next year, there's definitely a difference between a year earlier and a year later."

"How can we just let it go when Xu Jiaoyao has wronged my sister?"

"What do you think we should do, then? Beat up Xu Jiaoyao, or let everyone know the whole story? Or do you want Uncle to kill his daughter?" Xu Qinghe asked, looking at Xu Nian'an.

Xu Nian'an hesitated for a long time, not knowing what to say.

"Alas, Nian'an, it's true that Nianhua has been wronged, but family scandals should not be publicized," Xu Qinghe's heart grew cold, and he felt once again fortunate that they had split the family. He even wondered if splitting earlier might have prevented this whole affair.

Xu Qinghe was filled with guilt, realizing that he, as a father, had failed to protect his daughter.

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Upon returning home, as soon as Xu Qingjiang suggested that Xu Jiaojiao apologize to Xu Nianhua, Xu Jiaojiao made a scene with crying, temper tantrums, and threats, stubbornly refusing to apologize.

Zhao Juxiang, protecting her daughter, said, "You've already gone to apologize. What more do you want from my Jiaojiao?"

"Does he not really consider you a brother at all, finding such trivial excuses to trouble you?"

Zhao Juxiang, who favored her daughter the most out of her two sons and one daughter, said exasperatedly, "It was just a girl's playful antics. Are they blaming my Jiaojiao just because some kid didn't get into college?"

In her heart, Zhao Juxiang thought it was merely a joke that had gone a bit too far. What was the big deal?

Chapter 58: Three Encounters

Zhao Juxiang thought, even if she didn't let Jiaojiao apologize, could Xu Qinghe really do anything about her?

Yesterday, that crazy woman Ji Ying dragged her by her hair, and her scalp still hurt fiercely. To think of having her Jiaojiao apologize? Don't even think about it.

"Xu Jiaojiao, in this matter, you too are at fault. Where did you get the Badou?" Zhao Juxiang stared at Xu Jiaojiao lying on the bed and interrogated her.

Xu Jiaojiao, feeling guilty, acted coquettishly and grabbed Zhao Juxiang's hand, saying, "Mom, wasn't I doing it for second brother? Think about it, it's fortunate that Xu Nianhua didn't pass the exam, otherwise, second brother would have..."

Xu Jiaojiao didn't finish her sentence, but Zhao Juxiang knew if Xu Zhiyuan hadn't passed and Xu Nianhua had, she would have been furious.

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The next day, Xu Nian'an went out early in the morning with Xu Nianhua, carrying mung bean jelly to sell.

Today, Xu Nianhua needed to change her dressing.

Once they left, they had no idea about the rumors circulating in Shuangzhu Village.

Last night, the noise from the Xu family was fierce; the voices were loud, and it was nighttime, so the sound carried far. Naturally, people saw it, and later, when Xu Nianhua came out crying, they understood even more about the situation.

Xu Jiaojiao, to prevent Xu Nianhua from going to college, actually made her suffer from diarrhea. Coupled with the previous matter of division in the family, Zhao Juxiang's reputation in the village had become... not so good.

Moreover, Xu Jiaojiao absolutely refused to apologize to Xu Nianhua, making the villagers think even less of the girl's upbringing.

Gaoliang County Town.

The Xu siblings had no idea about these rumors, and even if they had, they wouldn't have paid them any mind.

"Doctor Du." Xu Nianhua, all smiles, offered the mung bean jelly and said, "This is mung bean jelly we made ourselves, just to satisfy a craving."

"That won't do, a bowl of mung bean jelly costs two dimes. If I'm charging you for medicine, that's not right," said Du Chang, who was very fond of Xu Nianhua. Knowing that she would come to change her dressing today, he deliberately didn't go to the clinic.

"Doctor Du, if it wasn't for your help the last time, my younger sister could have been badly hurt. These few bowls of mung bean jelly are nothing," Xu Nian'an, now quite familiar with the place, fetched two clean bowls from the kitchen and served two bowls of mung bean jelly.

"Then I'll prescribe another prescription for your sister to help her strengthen her body," Du Chang said, looking at Xu Nianhua's frail figure with pity. The more he got to know the little girl, the more he liked her.

"Thank you so much, Doctor Du," Xu Nian'an knew his little sister was frail. The family had been too poor before and didn't have the extra money to help her regain her health. Now that Du Chang was willing to prescribe medicine, Xu Nian'an felt they had to buy it, no matter the cost!

After changing her dressing, Xu Nian'an went to the clinic with Du Chang. Originally, Xu Nianhua was supposed to go as well, but Du Chang said he wasn't comfortable leaving Pei Yicheng alone, so Xu Nianhua stayed at the Du family's home.

This was the third time she had seen Pei Yicheng.

The first time, she appeared before him in the most wretched state and thought he was exceedingly handsome, even pitying his inability to walk.

The second time...

Xu Nianhua, thinking about the conversation between him and Doctor Du that time, couldn't help but get angry!

What skinny bones, what dried bean sprouts?

She was not like dried bean sprouts at all!

Xu Nianhua didn't want to speak to Pei Yicheng and let her gaze fall on the persimmon tree instead. Compared to the last time, the immature green persimmons seemed to have grown a bit bigger.

And in the corner, there was a chicken in a cage?

Could it be they caged it to keep the yard clean?

Who would keep just one single chicken?

Chapter 59: I Cannot Accept

"This is for you," Pei Yicheng's voice suddenly echoed in the courtyard.

Confused as to why there was a chicken in the corner of the yard, Ji Ying was caught off guard by Pei Yicheng's voice, and she paused, looking toward him and then behind herself.

Behind her, there was no one, so Pei Yicheng was talking to her?

For her?

Could it be that he was referring to the chicken in the cage?

The look in Ji Ying's eyes became incredibly odd as she glanced at Pei Yicheng. They weren't too familiar with each other, so what did it mean for Pei Yicheng to give her a chicken?

"Ahem."

Pei Yicheng cleared his throat, looked at Ji Ying awkwardly, and confirmed, "The chicken, it's for you."

Pei Yicheng lifted his head, meeting her gaze. Previously, he had thought she was fearless, not at all like a girl.

Lately, after hearing Xu Nian'an praise his little sister, he found her to be very filial.

Really taking a good look at her for the first time, Pei Yicheng noticed her small face, which made her large, round eyes even more luminous. She wore a grey shirt and black trousers, which made her appear even more petite and delicate, just as he had said to his grandfather, she was too thin, so thin a gust of wind might blow her over.

"Why?"

Without thinking, Ji Ying retorted, her gaze toward Pei Yicheng growing even more bizarre.

Pei Yicheng was silent, thinking internally, It's a gift of apology for the last time I misspoke.

The chicken could surely help replenish her health.

"Thank you for your kindness, I appreciate it, but I can't accept," Ji Ying said as she looked into his eyes, seemingly understanding that it must be because of his last remarks.

Unearned wealth should not be enjoyed.

This was the first time Pei Yicheng had ever offered a gift to someone, and it was to make up for his previous slip of the tongue; when Ji Ying rejected it, Pei Yicheng frowned, just about to speak, when Ji Ying already said, "A few days ago, my mom adopted a brood of chicks and ducklings, and I believe in a few months, our home will be teeming with chickens and ducks."

Thinking of her home, Ji Ying's eyes brimmed with happiness. The Xu Family's house might be run-down, with a roof that hadn't been fixed and leaked in several places when it rained hard, and walls made of wood planks with gaps as wide as two fingers, without a single decent piece of furniture, but this was the home Ji Ying would trade anything for.

She used to enter and exit in fancy cars, lived in a small villa, but that lonely home without any relatives, no matter how good the food or the living conditions, she never liked it.

Her eyes shadowed for a moment and quickly came back to life; she smiled and said, "My dad is a carpenter; he even plans on making a few rabbit hutches and raising more rabbits in the future."

"Your family seems to have a very good relationship," Pei Yicheng said, a touch of envy in his eyes. He lifted his head, looking at the green persimmons on the tree, pressing down the emotions swirling within him.

"Yes, my parents have never fought in their entire lives," Ji Ying, thinking of her parents, said. Even if they tended a bit towards being pushovers, their marital relationship was very strong, having only argued a few times during the family split, but never before that.

Her dad had a mild temperament; even if Ji Ying felt a little upset and grumbled, he would let it go. When her dad injured his foot, Ji Ying took care of him tirelessly. The love between her parents was nurturing and deep, thoroughly infused into their very marrow.

Talking about her family, Ji Ying suddenly fell silent, remembering Pei Yicheng's leg injury and the fact he was with his grandfather; she feared...

Chapter 60: Her Eyes Were Shining

Pei Yicheng turned around and saw that she had stopped talking. He knew she was being considerate of his feelings. Such a filial and empathetic girl she was, no wonder his grandfather was so fond of her.

"You didn't pass the exam this year, are you planning to take another year of senior high?" Pei Yicheng asked.

"Yes, my second brother and I will repeat the last year of high school together. Next year, we are sure to get into college," Xu Nianhua said with strong confidence shining in her eyes.

"Are you and your brother twins?" Pei Yicheng sized up Xu Nianhua, feeling that they didn't look alike. Xu Nian'an was handsome, too, but on closer examination, the two didn't look very similar.

"No, my brother is a year older than me. Originally, last year, when the college entrance exams were reinstated, he was going to take it, but because of..." Xu Nianhua paused, as family scandals shouldn't be aired in public.

At that time, because Xu Zhihao was getting married, all the family's money was spent. Even if Xu Nian'an had passed the exam, there was no money to support his education, so he didn't even take part in the test last year.

"Because of some issues, he didn't participate. So, he took the exam with me this year, but unfortunately..." Xu Nianhua sighed and said, "My second brother wanted to give his chance to study to me this year, so he deliberately left many questions unanswered. Otherwise, with his results, he would have definitely got in."

Pei Yicheng was about to offer comfort that money can always be earned, but Xu Nianhua, in the next moment, with bright and sparkling eyes, said, "However, we won't be afraid next year, my second brother and I will both be able to go to college!"

Just from selling mung bean jelly alone, they had managed to save quite a bit of money for the household. In the future, by selling bean sprouts and finding other business opportunities, their lives would surely improve step by step.

When the time comes, not to mention going to college, but even if her elder brother wants to give a bride price to the Zhou Family sister and marry her, or even build a new house, they would have the money for it.

"Mung bean jelly is too seasonal," Pei Yicheng suddenly pointed out, gazing into her sparkling eyes, and wondered what they would do to earn money if they lost the business of mung bean jelly.

"I know, that's why we plan to just save some seed money from selling mung bean jelly."

Xu Nianhua cheerfully answered, perhaps because Pei Yicheng's reminder was so sincere, or maybe his own experiences evoked sympathy, but she now felt inclined to chat. She said, "Fortunes can change. The proverb goes, 'Thirty years in the east, thirty years in the west, don't bully the poor young man.'"

Although Xu Nianhua was petite and slender, and young, the moment she uttered this saying, her spirit soared, and it seemed as if her eyes were filled with light, sparkling and shining.

Pei Yicheng looked at Xu Nianhua anew; she was different from any other girl he had met.

He mused absentmindedly, with Xu Nianhua's crisp and pleasant voice ringing in his ears.

"The days ahead for our family will surely get better and better."

Xu Nianhua's gaze briefly swept over his leg, her lips curling into a smile. She said, "It's said in the books, 'As long as the green mountains remain, one need not fear running out of firewood.' As long as a person is alive, there is hope."

"As long as a person is alive, there is hope." Pei Yicheng softly repeated the phrase to himself, his heart clear as a mirror, knowing that Xu Nianhua was indirectly offering him comfort.

Pei Yicheng's mouth curved into a faint smile and said, "To have survived is already a great fortune for me. Now, it's just that my legs cannot walk..."

He lowered his head. From the accident to the present, there had been times when he couldn't accept it, when his disposition changed drastically, and he resented everything.

Thankfully, his grandfather came and took him to Gaoliang County. Though the place was small, it allowed him to slowly come to terms with the reality of his legs not being able to walk.