

Regaining 521

Chapter 521: You Have Another Sister

"Hey, kid, instead of studying properly, why are you asking what my little sister's name is? How old are you? Are you even an adult?" Xu Nian'an looked down at him from a position of superiority, his demeanor full of guard as if Gu Mingcheng was going to snatch Xu Nianhua away.

With Gu Mingcheng still looking immature, he should take a good look at himself in the mirror. How could he possibly match up to his talented and beautiful little sister?

"So studying means I can't ask for her name?" Gu Mingcheng was particularly stubborn about this point as he looked at Xu Nianhua and said, "I like you."

"Hey, kid, are you looking for a beating?"

Xu Nian'an was furious upon hearing this.

Xu Nianhua hurriedly grabbed him, also surprised. Gu Mingcheng actually said that? Counting on his fingers, was this their first meeting?

No, Gu Mingcheng said he had seen her before at Huaming Lake, so at most this was their second meeting?

"No, I mean, your appearance inspires me a lot. I want to paint you, may I?" Gu Mingcheng's eyes were pure, devoid of any impurities or ulterior motives. His admiration was simple and pure, just like his desire to paint her.

"What do you mean?" Xu Nian'an felt his brain wasn't quite up to speed as he looked at Gu Mingcheng as if he were looking at an idiot. This silly kid must be out of his mind, right?

"I mean, you could model for me, let me paint you."

Gu Mingcheng hurriedly explained, "My paintings are really good; my teacher always says they're impressive, and I definitely won't make you look bad."

"Xu Nianhua, my name is Xu Nianhua." Xu Nianhua introduced herself.

"Yixian Yizhu reminds of Nianhua?" Gu Mingcheng's voice rang out crisply.

Xu Nianhua nodded.

"Nice name, your parents really knew how to choose a name," Gu Mingcheng praised.

"Don't try to flatter me."

Xu Nian'an watched as they chatted more and more happily, looking displeased. This foolish kid looked stupider by the minute.

"I'm telling the truth," Gu Mingcheng insisted stubbornly. "Xu Nianhua, I study in Hangzhou City, I'm studying painting. I just want to ask you to be my model; you really inspire me when I see you."

Gu Mingcheng's eyes sparkled as he looked at Xu Nian'an.

"Okay," Xu Nianhua didn't refuse.

"Then when should we meet? Today..." Gu Mingcheng hesitated a moment, remembering the stern reminder from his mother that he had to go home today, and he felt the timing wasn't quite right. He changed his mind and said, "Let's make it tomorrow then."

"Okay."

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"Little sister, why would you agree to model for that silly kid?"

Xu Nian'an looked at Xu Nianhua questioningly. That fool, he simply couldn't stand the sight of him. Could it be that he had some ulterior motive behind his request to paint?

"He has his own dreams, why shouldn't I help him?" Xu Nianhua countered.

For one, because of Gu Mingcheng's pure-heartedness, which had helped her before.

And another, because he genuinely just wanted to paint and had no other intentions.

"As long as you're happy," Xu Nian'an said, thinking if this foolish kid had any malicious intent, he would definitely knock him down.

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"Mom, we must bring sister back." Gu Mingzhu said caringly with the demeanor of a responsible older sister: "My sister was taken away by that damned thief, and I don't know how much she has suffered."

Gu Mingzhu wiped the tears that squeezed out from the corners of her eyes. Since she was her biological sister, the chances that their blood types were similar must be quite high.

"What sister?"

Gu Mingcheng, who was happy about having arranged to paint with Xu Nianhua tomorrow, had just entered the house, his smile still fading, when he heard Gu Mingzhu and Fang Yue talking.

"Mingcheng, you're back just in time, you have another sister," Fang Yue said happily.

Chapter 522: Do You Still See Me as Your Mother?

Gu Mingcheng was stunned, looked at Gu Mingzhu, and then at Fang Yue, saying, "Mom, sis, what are you talking about?"

Gu Mingzhu explained, "Twenty-one years ago, mom gave birth to a daughter, but she was stolen by a despicable thief right after she was born."

"Why haven't I heard about this before?" Gu Mingcheng looked blankly at Fang Yue.

If his sister was stolen, how come no one ever mentioned it?

"Mom looked for her but couldn't find her, and she didn't dare to tell dad, so..." Gu Mingzhu explained for Fang Yue, "Mom was alone in Gaoliang County at that time, just after giving birth, later, dad thought the sister was gone, and mom dared not reveal the actual truth."

"Over these years, Mom has been tormented by the matter of the missing sister," Gu Mingzhu filled in all the words Fang Yue didn't know how to say.

Fang Yue silently praised her own daughter's intelligence; she clutched her chest with a remorseful look and said, "It's all my fault, if it weren't for me, your sister wouldn't have... I don't even know how she's doing now, whether she's well or not."

Gu Mingcheng just stood there dazed, the smile on the corners of his mouth, which had frozen the moment he heard the news.

He'd never seen his mother appear tormented over that... sister, nor had he ever heard her mentioned.

Stolen, yet not telling dad, asking dad to look for her, while keeping it a secret, was this something a real mother would do?

Now, twenty-one years later, suddenly wanting to find the sister?

So many years had passed, the chances of finding her were extremely slim.

Could it be...

Gu Mingcheng glanced at Gu Mingzhu beside him, remembering earlier in the year because Gu Mingzhu was Panda Blood, the whole family, including his uncle's family, had gone for blood tests, just to check if anyone else had Panda Blood.

At this critical juncture, Mom wants to find her sister?

Gu Mingcheng couldn't help but feel it was too coincidental.

Is she really doing this out of remorse, or does she want to use her sister to save Mingzhu?

Gu Mingcheng felt it was more likely the latter.

The thought of the sister he had never met, stolen from birth, and Mom wanting to bring her back home but because she needed her blood, to save Mingzhu, how cold must her heart feel?

If it weren't for Mingzhu's illness, would Mom still want to bring her back? Would she even reveal this matter?

Looking at Fang Yue, Gu Mingcheng suddenly felt she was extremely strange. Was this still his mother?

"Mingcheng." Fang Yue sensed the increasing strangeness in Gu Mingcheng's gaze and hastily said, "Mingcheng, I really didn't do it on purpose, I also feel terrible, I spend every night, all night long, unable to sleep, my heart is full of regret, I..."

Fang Yue hadn't finished speaking her next words.

Gu Mingcheng interrupted, "Mom, if my sister didn't have special blood, would you even remember this... my sister that I've never known or seen?"

His words were unusually direct.

Fang Yue was at a loss for words, as this was indeed the true reason, otherwise, how could she possibly remember the daughter she had abandoned?

Thinking about it, Fang Yue felt guilty.

"Mingcheng." Fang Yue's face hardened, regardless of whether it was the truth, but she is Mingcheng's own mother. She said unhappily, "In your heart, am I really such a person?"

Gu Mingcheng pursed his lips and did not speak. Whether it was true or not, he knew it in his heart.

"Mingcheng, where are you going?"

As Fang Yue watched him run toward the stairs, her chest hurt with anger, and she said, "Mingzhu, look at your brother, does he even see me as his mother anymore?"

Chapter 523: Silly Boy

"Mom, don't be angry, Mingcheng just can't accept it yet," Gu Mingzhu gently patted Fang Yue's back, comforting her. "Mom, don't worry, both your children were raised by you, and we remember all the good you've done. Once Mingcheng figures it out, he will understand your difficulties."

"I hope so," Fang Yue's towering anger calmed down with Gu Mingzhu's comfort. She said, "Mingzhu, you're pregnant now, you need to take good care of yourself."

Fang Yue paused before recalling another matter, "Mingzhu, what do you think about the marriage?"

"What do you mean what do I think?" Gu Mingzhu asked.

Fang Yue glanced at her belly and said, "The Jiang Family is worried that a wedding would be too exhausting, so they want to get the marriage certificate first and hold the wedding after the child is born. What about you?"

"No, that's too shameful," Gu Mingzhu pursed her lips, unhappy. "Mom, it's not for me, but for you and Dad. You and Dad are well-known in South City, and if I have a child before getting married, wouldn't everyone laugh at you?"

"Mom, I'm sorry, it's caused you trouble," Gu Mingzhu timely showed her vulnerability.

This only made Fang Yue more heartbroken. Her daughter was so thoughtful, always considering them in everything she did. She said, "Alright, I had the same thought too. The ceremony can be simple, but it must be held. Don't worry, I'll remember this."

"Mom, you are so kind," Gu Mingzhu smiled and snuggled next to her, obediently obedient.

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"The last time I was here, I saw you on the boat," Gu Mingcheng said as he intentionally brought the painting over and stood in the same spot.

Xu Nian'an held the painting and, from his amateur perspective, appreciated that it was a good painting. The little sister depicted was also very pretty. He looked at the painting and then at Gu Mingcheng and asked, "Did you paint this?"

"Of course," Gu Mingcheng nodded affirmatively.

"My little sister's beauty isn't captured even one-tenth in this," Xu Nian'an criticized.

Gu Mingcheng's face blushed.

Xu Nianhua changed the subject, "Didn't you say you wanted to paint? We only have today, as we are returning tomorrow."

"Oh, okay," Gu Mingcheng immediately started packing up his stuff and became busy. When he painted, he was exceptionally focused.

Today, Xu Nianhua wore a bright red coat to match the cold winter day, specifically to accommodate his painting.

Gu Mingcheng didn't ask Xu Nianhua to pose. Xu Nianhua leaned against the railing, gazing into the distance, her black hair dancing in the cold wind, occasionally turning back with a smile that could topple cities and countries.

Such a sight of Xu Nianhua made Gu Mingcheng's heart beat furiously, and his paintbrush moved faster. His focused appearance even made Xu Nian'an see him in a new light. This silly kid, could he really be a painter?

"Little sister, do you think the silly kid was too excited yesterday, which is why he has dark circles under his eyes?" Xu Nian'an quietly mentioned near her ear.

Xu Nianhua rolled her eyes and responded, "It's just painting; what's there to be excited about? Maybe he had something else on his mind."

"Also, stop calling him a silly kid; it doesn't seem polite," Xu Nianhua cleared her throat. She turned and looked at Gu Mingcheng, engrossed in his painting, a complex emotion flashing in her eyes.

"But doesn't he look silly?" Xu Nian'an felt unconcerned. Daring to fancy his little sister, calling him 'silly kid' was a sign of respect.

Chapter 524: Not Finished Yet

"Are you finished painting?"

"The wind by the lake is strong, it's very cold."

"What if you catch a cold because of the wind?"

Xu Nian'an had been urging Gu Mingcheng.

Gu Mingcheng's attention was entirely focused on his creation, treating Xu Nian'an's words as if they were the wind passing by his ears.

When changing brushes, Gu Mingcheng sometimes held the brush in his mouth, which looked a bit comical.

"Eldest brother, stop urging him," Xu Nianhua reminded, smiling at Gu Mingcheng's concentration and said, "Maybe he will finish it soon."

"Yeah right, I feel like it's already painted very well, but he keeps painting and painting!" Xu Nian'an said with full resentment, putting the black scarf from around his neck on hers, adding, "You, when I told you to wear a scarf when you left the house, you didn't. If you catch a cold, mom will surely scold me to death."

"It's fine, my clothes are very thick." Xu Nianhua tugged at her clothing, feeling the warmth of the scarf, attempting to give it back, but Xu Nian'an tied it securely, ordering, "Don't take it off."

"Done."

Gu Mingcheng looked at the painting before him with satisfaction. The girl in red leaning on the balustrade, turning around with a smile, was devastatingly beautiful.

He admired the painting, his eyes filled with amazement and pride.

This was the best painting he had done so far; looking at it, it seemed as if the girl in red was about to step out of the picture.

Gu Mingcheng was so engrossed in the painting of Xu Nianhua that it seemed as though he could hear the throbbing of his own heart: thump, thump, thump.

"How is the painting?" Seeing that he had stopped, Xu Nianhua approached to see what she had been turned into.

In the distance, mountains layered upon each other, the sunlight was bright and cheery. Closer, there was a small boat passing over the surface of the lake, and her leaning on the balustrade gave Xu Nianhua the illusion, was that really her?

"Huh, I've captured one-fifth of my little sister's beauty."

Xu Nian'an took another look at Gu Mingcheng, thinking the foolish youngster really had some skill.

"Eldest brother," Xu Nianhua tugged at his sleeve softly, her own eldest brother was a bit too narcissistic, she herself almost didn't recognize the person in the painting.

"Little sister, let's frame this painting and hang it in your room," Xu Nian'an said disdainfully, but he still approved of the painting, it was especially pretty.

"Um..."

Gu Mingcheng suddenly spoke, hanging his head and scratching it, he said, "This painting still has a little left unfinished, is it okay if I give it to you later?"

"Hey, silly boy, what do you mean by this?" Xu Nian'an looked at Gu Mingcheng dissatisfiedly, as he had spoken clearly the day before, just helping with a painting, the painting would belong to her, and he merely wanted to practice his brushwork.

Why was it that after finishing it, he seemed to be renegeing on his word?

Xu Nian'an reached out as if to take the painting.

Gu Mingcheng hurriedly explained, "I'm not saying I won't give it to you, it's just that the painting lacks a final touch."

"Alright, then you can mail it to my school later." Xu Nianhua left the school's address.

"Oh, you're attending university in Ningbei?" Gu Mingcheng said with surprise, carefully storing the address, "Rest assured, I will definitely mail the painting to you."

"Mm."

Xu Nianhua nodded, having been in the cold wind all morning, and even though the sun felt warm, she felt a bit chilly now.

As Gu Mingcheng packed up his things, he said, "It's noon, let me treat you to lunch."

"No need," Xu Nian'an kept a distance between them, saying, "Just remember to send the painting."

As he said this, Xu Nian'an grabbed his sister and prepared to leave. He paused for a moment, pulled out a red packet from his pocket, and handed it to Gu Mingcheng, "Thank you for painting my little sister, this is for the postage."

Chapter 525: Can't Lose

"I have money," Gu Mingcheng looked at the red envelope, his instinct was to give it back, but by the time he wanted to catch up, Xu Nian'an had already taken Xu Nianhua and run off.

Gu Mingcheng watched as they disappeared into the crowd and could only helplessly return to pack up his things.

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"Little sister, you shouldn't have given him your school's address just now," Xu Nian'an had wanted to stop her, but Xu Nianhua spoke too quickly, not giving him a chance to interject.

"It's fine."

Xu Nianhua said indifferently, "Even if he travels thousands of miles to find my school, what can he do, eat me?"

"Brother, don't worry about it. He's just a boy around seventeen or eighteen, probably inspired to paint because he thinks I'm pretty," Xu Nianhua said vainly, touching her face, which was the same as in her previous life. Yet, the confident her sometimes couldn't help but marvel at her reflection in the mirror, wondering how she could have been so foolish in the past.

"Little sister, when did you become so vain?" Xu Nian'an was just drinking water when he heard her boast and ended up spraying all of it out in shock.

"What, am I not stating the facts?" Xu Nianhua glanced sideways, playfully blinking her eyes.

Her features were delicate, her skin fair and rosy, and her big round eyes were lively and sparkling.

Xu Nian'an: "..."

Could he, in good conscience, say that his little sister wasn't pretty?

Seeing the raised little fist of his little sister, if he dared to say she wasn't pretty, the fist wasn't the scary part. If his little sister got angry, that would hurt his feelings.

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"Nianhua, Nian'an, when are you going to Ningbei? Make sure to come and visit us," Uncle Ji Lin said warmly, "Not to say too much, but there will definitely be food for you."

"Right, we're all family, so don't be a stranger," Cai Jianhong said, but he only gave a vague direction.

"Uncle, Aunt, if we have time, we will definitely come," Xu Nianhua replied with a bright smile, not revealing specifically when they would head to Ningbei.

"Mom, we'll go home tomorrow. I'll go have a chat with Grandpa."

With that, Xu Nianhua stood up. Rather than listening to Uncle brag about how great he was in Ningbei, she'd rather spend more time chatting with Grandpa.

In Grandpa's room, Ji Xinghua was listening to Xu Nian'an and Ji Shuyuan chattering away, clearly engrossed in the conversation, in the cozy little room.

"Grandpa, not to change the subject, but I've been selling hair clips and scarves in Ningbei myself, and have made quite a bit of money," Xu Nian'an said. His intention wasn't to flaunt, but to put Grandpa's mind at ease.

With Grandpa being so old, he still worried about the younger generation's problems.

To the children in Xu Nian'an's generation, Ji Shuyuan was the closest to Grandpa.

If Ji Shuyuan were doing poorly or losing money, Grandpa would surely feel bad.

"Great! Our Nian'an is really smart," Ji Xinghua praised, then exhorted, "Shuyuan, when Nian'an sends the goods, sell them well. It's okay if you make a loss."

"Grandpa, it won't be a loss."

Xu Nian'an might as well have thumped his chest in assurance, "If Shuyuan can't sell them, just send them back to me."

"Nian'an, thank you," Ji Shuyuan said sincerely.

"Brother, Shuyuan, stop with the thanks already, you're not tired of it, but I am," Xu Nianhua said with a light laugh, "Grandpa, just wait to enjoy your blessings in the future. Shuyuan will surely make something of himself."

Chapter 526: Motion Sickness

Gu Family.

As soon as Gu Mingcheng returned home, he rushed into his room and began unraveling the rolled-up painting, hanging it on the easel.

He held his breath and focused intensely. With each inch the painting unfurled, the amazement in his heart grew.

By the time the painting was fully spread out and he saw the woman in red depicted in it, Gu Mingcheng was utterly mesmerized.

This was the first time he had captured a character's spirit so vividly, even exuding a lifelike aura.

Just looking at this painting, one could almost feel the woman's smile, as gentle as a spring breeze touching the face.

Gu Mingcheng slowly reached out, but just as his fingers were about to touch the paper, he drew his hand back and quickly spread out another sheet of paper next to it.

Back at Huaming Lake, Gu Mingcheng had lied.

He had finished this painting, but he couldn't bear to give it to Xu Nianhua.

Privately, he wanted to keep this painting for himself. While looking at it, he planned to paint another identical one, one to send to Xu Nianhua, and one to keep for himself.

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On the fifth day of the first lunar month, the entire Xu Qinghe family returned to Gaoliang County. They warmly invited Ji Lin and his wife, who declined citing motion sickness as the reason.

Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying didn't say much else, only mentioned that they could meet again when there was time.

"Motion sickness? She clearly just looks down on our family." Xu Nian'an, sitting in the car, didn't have a good impression of this aunt at all. He said, "Dad, Mom, when we build our new house this year, let's not invite their family over."

"Nian'an."

Xu Qinghe spoke seriously, "Your aunt grew up in a big city. She's not used to our countryside lifestyle which is understandable. Back then, your uncle even lent us money. You should not speak about the elders like that. People will say you're ungrateful and lack manners."

"Dad, that was so many years ago. Besides, you and Mom have already paid back that money," Xu Nian'an quickly added.

If we're talking about kindness, the second uncle and the youngest uncle have done much more than the eldest.

The wives of the second and youngest uncles might be a bit stingy, but they wouldn't ignore us in times of need.

"What, Xu Nian'an, have you grown up thinking that only those who treat you well are your relatives?" Xu Qinghe said coldly, "If he helps you, it's a favor; if he doesn't, it's his right. Just because he doesn't help you, does that mean he isn't your uncle anymore?"

"I didn't say that." Xu Nian'an pouted, his original point about Cai Jianhong looking down on their family had somehow turned into a discussion about who to consider family.

"Mom, I'm just being factual, nothing else," Xu Nian'an looked towards Ji Ying, hoping his mother wouldn't misunderstand him.

Ji Ying nodded understandingly and said, "Okay, I know Nian'an isn't like that."

"You always side with him." Xu Qinghe glared harshly at Xu Nian'an, then closed his eyes again. Now on the bus, it would still take over two more hours to reach the county.

He remembered back when he had just married Ji Ying. They were very poor. His brother-in-law Ji Lin and Chen Jianhong had also just married. That year, Ji Lin earned some money, whereas they were so poor they couldn't even make ends meet, and when their child got sick and they had no money for medical treatment, it was Ji Lin who secretly gave him three yuan to take the child to the doctor.

Three yuan, in those days, was quite a lot of money, and he would always remember that kindness.

"Brother, dad must be thinking of the past. If our eldest aunt and uncle don't want to come, let it be. Our house is too small for them now, isn't it?" Xu Nianhua quietly consoled, "I know that's not what brother meant. The way brother always finds ways to help Shuyuan proves that."

Chapter 527: Helping Shuyuan is Also Helping Grandpa

"Little sister really understands me." Xu Nian'an felt much more comfortable after Xu Nianhua's comforting words. He said, "Little sister, helping Shuyuan is also for grandpa. Grandpa is getting old, and my uncle's family is struggling, squeezing into such a small house. If Shuyuan makes money, he'll definitely not let grandpa suffer in the future."

"Mmm-hmm," Xu Nianhua nodded in agreement.

Xu Nian'an continued, "Shuhong from my second uncle's family, and the two cousins, they're all so indifferent toward us. We can't even hold a conversation these days. I think, once Shuyuan starts earning money, they'll surely change their mind."

"As for my eldest uncle, seeing the bright red fur coat that my aunt wore, I think they must be living well and don't need our help." Xu Nian'an's words were also meant for Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying, especially Xu Qinghe. Xu Nian'an was afraid of being misunderstood by his own father.

It's not that he sees as relatives only those who are nice to him.

Yet, kindness is reciprocal; nobody wants to warm up to a cold backside, right?

"Nian'an, I thank you on behalf of Shuyuan and grandpa," Ji Ying said, looking at her son with pride swelling in her face.

"Mom, he's my grandpa too."

Xu Nian'an felt the grievances in his heart dissipate entirely after being praised by his mom.

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Night.

"What? You're going back to Ningbei tomorrow?"

Ji Ying exclaimed, looking at Xu Nian'an and then at Xu Nianhua, asking, "When did you make this decision? This is too sudden, isn't it? There are still more than ten days before school starts!"

"Mom, didn't we talk about opening a store earlier? The shop's rent is all paid up. If we don't go early, how can we stock the store? Yesterday, I discussed it with Shuyuan. Once we arrive in Ningbei, we'll ship goods to him. That way, with express shipping, Shuyuan can receive the goods around the 10th and start selling."

"But why didn't anyone tell me?" Ji Ying glanced around; it seemed everyone knew but her. She sat down huffily.

"Mom."

Xu Nianhua stepped forward, holding Ji Ying's arm, saying, "Going to Ningbei is very convenient now. You can take Big Brother's car into town, then directly catch the train. After getting off the train, me and Second Brother will pick you up. You can come to see us whenever you want."

With a gentle, soothing voice and a face brimming with smiles, Xu Nianhua made Ji Ying's heart turn from discomfort to reluctance. She gently touched her nose and said, "Your dad and I are swamped at home, never touching the ground. When do we have the time to visit you?"

Between the furniture factory and the Chili Sauce Factory, they were incredibly busy; they simply couldn't get away. And that was before the work had even started; once it began, how would she have time to sit idly at home?

"Mom, I didn't mean to keep it from you. I thought... I thought you knew," Xu Nian'an said, feeling somewhat guilty.

During the previous discussions about the store, he genuinely thought Ji Ying knew they would leave early.

"It's my fault; I forgot to tell you," Xu Qinghe said reproachfully. During the New Year break, he and Ji Ying finally had some rare rest time, naturally spent with family. In South City, Ji Ying was almost always with Ji Xinghua, walking and browsing around, and she simply forgot about it.

"Then I'll go pack your things."

Ji Ying got up and started getting busy, packing delicious treats for her children and some local specialties for their dorm mates.

The children hadn't been home long, and in the blink of an eye, they were about to leave again.

Chapter 528: Heading Straight to the Store

Clutching a few thousand yuan in his hands, Xu Nian'an traveled all the way to Ningbei without closing his eyes even once, fearing that if he did, the money might grow wings and fly away, or be stolen by someone.

This amused Xu Nianhua greatly, who also felt a mix of admiration and sympathy.

She admired the convenience of future generations and felt sorry for her brother, Xu Nian'an, who had not slept all night.

"Second Brother, after we get off the train, should we go check out the store first, or find a place to rest?" Xu Nianhua asked.

Pei Yining had returned to Ningbei on the second day of the lunar new year, and this time, it was just the two siblings going back to Ningbei.

"Let's go to the store first." At this time, Xu Nian'an had no intention of resting.

"Alright."

As soon as they got off the train, Xu Nianhua and her brother headed straight for Xu Nian'an's Ningbei Medical University.

School hadn't started yet, and among the row of stores at the entrance, there were hardly a few that were open.

"We should be this one." Xu Nian'an glanced at one of the stationery stores, and after he and Xu Nianhua confirmed once again that it was indeed the right one, they used the key left by Pei Yicheng to open the door.

The emptied store, which seemed to have been cleared out, was a desolate space, clearly visible as a rectangular room, with a narrow stairway at the back leading upstairs.

"Is there an attic up here?" Xu Nian'an was quite pleased with the storefront. He set down his luggage and headed straight for the narrow staircase. Sure enough, there was an attic upstairs.

"Little Sister, we could fit a bed up here; we could even live here," he said excitedly, looking at the spacious attic.

"I could save on accommodation fees in the future."

"Second Brother, you're not really planning to live here, are you?"

Xu Nianhua moved some stuff inside and climbed the stairs to the attic which wasn't very high—Xu Nian'an, standing straight, couldn't tiptoe without bumping his head, and in the shortest part, he had to bend over to fit.

Though there was a large window, weren't the conditions in the attic a bit too basic?

"Yeah, if we put in a bed, it would be livable, right?" Xu Nian'an thought it was fantastic, saying enthusiastically, "We can even put up some bookshelves afterwards; I just don't know if the floorboards are sturdy enough."

As he said this, he deliberately stomped on the floorboards.

'Thud, thud'

The floorboards trembled.

Xu Nianhua's heart did as well, as she cautioned, "Second Brother, be careful not to break the floorboards."

"They're sturdy; they won't break," Xu Nian'an replied with a grin. His fatigue from the train journey had completely vanished. Excitedly, he started arranging everything he could on the attic, saying, "I saw some furniture at the old furniture market before, so new yet so cheap."

"Second Brother, how about bathing here, and going to the toilet is also a problem," Xu Nianhua pointed out practical difficulties. Living here was fine, but going to the toilet and bathing would be inconvenient.

Xu Nian'an paused, then ran down the stairs, out of the store, and after walking around outside for a bit, he said, "I've looked around, there's a public toilet not far away, and I can go to the school's public bathhouse for showers."

"The walls are a bit old, even our hair clips wouldn't look good against them." As Xu Nian'an spoke, he looked up and added, "I hope the ceiling won't drop dust, right?"

"Little Sister, how can we make these walls and the ceiling look white and nice both quickly and efficiently?" Xu Nian'an looked at Xu Nianhua, puzzled.

Xu Nianhua playfully blinked and replied, "Second Brother, find craftsmen who specialize in this, and I believe it can be done before school starts."

"Right."

As Xu Nian'an spoke, he ran outside, but Xu Nianhua hurriedly called after him, watching his back as she shouted, "Second Brother, you didn't sleep at all last night."

Chapter 529: It's Still Your Eye for Good Things

"No worries, just wait, I'll be back soon," Xu Nian'an called out, waving his hand as he did.

This was the school entrance and it was very safe. Xu Nian'an knew where to find a specialist for plastering walls, but he had to go early to catch them.

Inside the store, Xu Nianhua was left alone looking at the bare space. She shook her head helplessly, then went to a nearby department store to buy a basin and a broom. She left the shop's door slightly ajar and began to clean up the attic after filling the basin with water.

When the previous owner left, they had cleaned the place quite thoroughly, so all she needed to do was wipe away the dust.

While Xu Nianhua was cleaning, she heard the door being opened again. She rushed downstairs to find Xu Nian'an directing a group of workers.

"Thank you for your hard work, sirs," she said.

After Xu Nian'an gave his instructions to them, he handed over the breakfast he had bought to Xu Nianhua.

"Little sister, it's time for breakfast," he said.

Xu Nianhua was already hungry. Before she could ask, she heard Xu Nian'an explain, "They said they can finish painting the walls in two days. As for the attic, we'll go buy some stock this afternoon and maybe get some furniture too, how does that sound?"

"Sounds good," Xu Nianhua nodded.

Xu Nian'an continued, "Today we'll send the goods to Shuyuan. In a few days, Shuyuan should receive them. But, we need to make the unit prices clear on the invoice, or else Shuyuan will be totally confused. Remember to bring a notebook and pen, so we can jot everything down accurately."

"Okay," she replied.

Xu Nianhua glanced at their luggage and asked, "What about our stuff?"

"It's fine, just leave it in the attic. There's nothing valuable," Xu Nian'an reassured her as he carried items upstairs. He even specifically mentioned to the workers to take care of their stuff, to which the craftsmen readily agreed, "Don't worry, we won't go up to the attic. Your belongings will be safe."

"Thank you," she said gratefully.

Xu Nian'an, in return, felt grateful, but the craftsmen, seeming a bit embarrassed, said to him, "We should be thanking you."

After all, Xu Nian'an was offering them a salary significantly higher than what others would give.

Once they had discussed the shop, Xu Nian'an dragged Xu Nianhua back out. That morning, he took her to the wholesale market.

"This is the wholesale market?"

Xu Nianhua felt like she was broadening her horizons—she couldn't fathom how each tiny shop could contain such an enormous range of items.

"Yep, I'll take you to a store I frequently visit," Xu Nian'an said as he led Xu Nianhua through the market with ease, finally stopping at a shop run by a somewhat plump auntie.

"Plump Auntie, happy New Year, wishing you prosperity," Xu Nian'an greeted her warmly.

"Happy New Year, young man," the plump auntie responded with a cheerful smile that was particularly friendly, her eyes landing on Xu Nianhua.

Xu Nian'an introduced her, "This is my younger sister, Xu Nianhua. School hasn't started yet and she can't go anyway, so she's here to help."

After exchanging greetings, Xu Nian'an began selecting the new stock. His banter with the plump auntie was quite an eye-opener for Xu Nianhua.

At the same time, it made Xu Nianhua appreciate the hard work of her elder brother. Purchasing wasn't just about having a good eye; it also required care and patience.

The sight of him, a tall man nearly six feet in height, picking out girlish items like hair clips and earrings... well, that was quite a picture.

Xu Nianhua quietly offered her suggestions from the sidelines about what girls would definitely like. Xu Nian'an frequently praised her, "Little sis, you do have a better eye."

Chapter 530: Can't Be Wrong

Ji Shuyuan's goods were all prepared by Xu Nian'an, sorted and packed by price. Xu Nianhua wrote down the purchase price and the selling price, worried that Ji Shuyuan would set the prices too low.

The second brother didn't add any extra money, everything was sent at purchase price, even the shipping costs were paid out of pocket.

This batch of goods, being shipped from Ningbei back to South City, would not be worth it if Ji Shuyuan sold them too cheaply.

Upon leaving the post office, Xu Nian'an made a call to Ji Ying at the Chili Sauce Factory, firstly to report that he was safe, and secondly to let his elder brother know that he was going to South City and to inform Ji Shuyuan that the goods had been sent, reminding him to receive them.

"Alright, rest assured, I will definitely tell your big brother. You and your sister should stay safe in Ningbei. If anything happens, call home right away, and don't keep things from me like last year,"

Ji Ying repeatedly urged, and added, "Even though your little sister's leg has healed, she still needs to eat nourishing food. As her brother, you must take good care of her, do you hear me?"

"Mom, don't worry, I will definitely take good care of my little sister," Xu Nian'an swore with sincerity.

Ji Ying gave several reminders and spoke with Xu Nianhua for a while before hanging up the phone, reluctant to let go.

"Sigh."

Ji Ying let out a long sigh. Others envied her for having both children admitted to universities in Ningbei, seeing them as very promising, but she wished they attended universities in South City, closer to home, where she could see them in just a day's trip.

But going to Ningbei would take at least three days.

In her heart, Ji Ying missed her children terribly but did not want to hold them back. They had grown up, and she couldn't force them to follow her wishes just because she missed them.

"Ring."

The phone rang again.

Thinking it was Xu Nian'an with something he had forgotten to say, Ji Ying asked, "What is it, did you forget to mention something?"

"Aunt Ji, it's Pei Yicheng," Pei Yicheng's voice came through, calm and composed, a stark contrast to Xu Nian'an's vivacity, conveying a sense of reliability.

With a light laugh, Ji Ying said, "Oh, it's Yicheng. I thought Nian'an had left something out."

"Have Nian'an and the others arrived in Ningbei?" Pei Yicheng continued smoothly.

"Yes, they went to Ningbei yesterday. They just called to let me know they're safe," replied Ji Ying.

"Thank you, Aunt Ji," said Pei Yicheng, and promptly hung up the phone.

"Beep... beep... beep..."

Listening to the dial tone, Ji Ying, belatedly realizing, wondered if Pei Yicheng had called just to ask about Nian'an.

Or could it be to inquire about Nianhua?

The idea that Pei Yicheng might fancy her daughter pleased Ji Ying. If the two could really make it work, she would be relieved as a mother. She thought highly of Yicheng.

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"Second brother, where is the second-hand furniture market you mentioned?" Xu Nianhua inquired. She had been in Ningbei for half a year but hadn't gone to many places and didn't know where the second-hand furniture market was.

"It's already noon, let's eat something first. Don't starve yourself," he said.

Rather than leading her directly to the second-hand furniture market, Xu Nian'an took Xu Nianhua to a small diner first to fill their stomachs and then headed to the second-hand furniture market.

"Second brother, I like this one."

Xu Nianhua spotted a set of rosewood sofas she liked at first glance. After asking the price, she gazed at Xu Nian'an with eager eyes, clearly wanting it.