

Regaining 61

Chapter 61: Discussing Marriage Proposal

Shuangzhu Village.

The Xu Family became the talk of the town because of Xu Jiaojiao's affair, and Zhao Juxiang was so angry she got into an argument with someone and stormed back home.

In Xu Nianhua's family, nobody said anything, but those gossipy old women wouldn't stop yapping, which was driving everyone mad.

"Second sister-in-law is back," Xu Qinghu greeted Zhao Juxiang with a smile and said, "Who upset second sister-in-law to make her so angry?"

Speaking of Xu Qinghu, the youngest girl in the family, the Xu family had one daughter and two sons regardless if it was Xu Qinghe or Xu Qingjiang, the brothers, or Xu Qinghu the sister, they each had three children, two sons, and one daughter.

"It's nothing," Zhao Juxiang originally came back fuming, but how could she possibly share the foolish things Xu Jiaojiao had done?

She definitely wouldn't mention her own son not getting into university, and said indifferently, "Why didn't you bring the kids back with you?"

"Well, there was an issue, and I was worried about disturbing Mom," Xu Qinghu replied cheerfully, looking much younger than Zhao Juxiang despite being a few years younger. She wore pristine clothes, crisp and clean, and a pair of shiny small leather shoes on her feet.

Xu Qinghu had her hair cut short and styled in a currently fashionable curly haircut, and her face seemed to have snow cream on it, giving off a fragrant scent.

Comparing people could really make one frustrated to death.

Thinking about her son not getting into university made Zhao Juxiang's heart ache.

"Second sister-in-law, it's alright that Zhiyuan didn't get into university this time. There's always next year, right?" Xu Qinghu consoled her.

Her heart already ached, and with Xu Qinghu's words, Zhao Juxiang felt the pain even more. She started to peel the edamame she had picked, saying, "The college entrance exam has just been reinstated; it's not so easy to fail, is it? Not to speak of my Zhiyuan, even Nian'an didn't get in, right?"

"Right, Zhiyuan will definitely get in next year," Xu Qinghu went along with her, praising, before disclosing to Liu Sanmei the purpose of her visit.

"Mom, where's eldest sister-in-law?" Xu Qinghu was not aware of the separation and had thought that after sitting for a while, she would see the eldest sister-in-law Ji Ying. However, after waiting for quite a while, Ji Ying was nowhere to be seen.

"They have moved out."

Thinking about how much more comfortable the house had become after the separation, and how they even left a room for Zhihao and his wife, Liu Sanmei felt that the separation had been a good decision.

"Ah?" Xu Qinghu looked towards Liu Sanmei in surprise.

"Your eldest brother and sister-in-law think our temple is too small and have moved to the old house," Liu Sanmei didn't want to talk about Ji Ying's family.

Xu Qinghu's eyes shifted, not knowing the reason for the separation, but sure that the honest eldest brother and sister-in-law wouldn't have been the ones to initiate it. Perhaps an incident had occurred, but what did it have to do with her?

"Mom, it's like this. I came back today to propose marriage for Nianhua," Xu Qinghu just explained her reason for coming.

Zhao Juxiang and Liu Sanmei both looked at Xu Qinghu in shock.

"Mom, it's a good thing this time," Xu Qinghu said with a beaming smile. "Isn't Fu Song working at the brick factory? The owner of the brick factory has a son who took a fancy to Nianhua. They asked me, as her aunt, to play matchmaker, and I thought it was a good thing. So, I made a special trip back to talk about it."

"Eldest sister-in-law isn't home, so I'll go directly to her place." As soon as Xu Qinghu finished speaking, Liu Sanmei said, "Hold on, come inside first."

Zhao Juxiang, all ears and eager to hear more, was suddenly cut off by Liu Sanmei's interjection and thought indignantly, Oh, are they trying to keep something from her?

Chapter 62: Five Hundred Bucks

"Out of the blue, why start talking about finding a match for Nianhua, that girl?"

As soon as she stepped into the house, Liu Sanmei scrutinized her own daughter, who had given birth to two sons for her husband's family. Although the mother-in-law was somewhat difficult, things were quite good for Xu Qinghu considering her two grandsons.

"Mom, they took a fancy to Nianhua." Xu Qinghu herself wasn't very clear about it, except that the boss's son had taken a liking to her, which was naturally what she thought.

"Has he seen Nianhua?" Liu Sanmei thought about the recent times when Xu Nianhua and her siblings often went to the county town to sell plums.

Could those sour and astringent plums really sell?

"Isn't Nianji working at the brick factory? Maybe when Nianhua went to see Nianji, she ran into him." Xu Qinghu guessed, holding Liu Sanmei's hand, saying, "Mom, if this works out, your son-in-law could be promoted to team leader, and then his salary could increase by ten yuan every month."

"After that, we can truly take better care of you." Xu Qinghu looked at Liu Sanmei with a grin, her expression ingratiating.

"I don't get a say in this matter; schmoozing me is useless, your eldest brother and sister-in-law have to agree." Liu Sanmei looked at her daughter's well-preserved face, asking, "How old is the son of the brick factory owner?"

"Thirty," Xu Qinghu paused, then added, "A bit more."

"How much more?" Liu Sanmei asked frowning.

"Thirty-five."

Xu Qinghu added, "However, his family is especially wealthy, they even have several houses. The Yue Family said that as long as Nianhua is willing to marry over, they will let the couple live in the county town, separate from the family, and they're offering a generous dowry too—five hundred yuan."

Xu Qinghu felt that although the man was a bit older, an older age could mean more tenderness, right? And there were the houses, the town household registration, and a five hundred yuan dowry. Once the match was made, the Yue Family had also promised to give her fifty yuan for matchmaker's fees. With such a good opportunity, she didn't delay a moment and immediately returned to her maternal home.

"The age difference is too much." Liu Sanmei shook her head, saying, "Your eldest brother adores his daughter, and he originally wanted Nianhua to go to college. How could he agree to marry Nianhua off so early, especially to someone so much older?"

Five hundred yuan was a lot of money, and even Liu Sanmei felt her heart sway slightly, but could she agree to marry off Xu Qinghe's cherished daughter?

"Mom, an older man will be more caring, and besides, when a girl is of age, she should marry. No matter how much she has studied, won't she eventually marry off anyway? Now that she's met someone with good conditions, why not marry?" Xu Qinghu urged, "Mom, please help me out. You're Nianhua's grandmother, if you step in and say something, others would dream of such a good opportunity."

Liu Sanmei gave her a look but said nothing.

If it's indeed such a sought-after opportunity, why are you pleading with me? Why not directly approach Ji Ying instead?

"Mom, after it's all settled, there's an additional benefit fee of thirty yuan, all of which I'll give to you." Xu Qinghu said this.

Liu Sanmei pondered for a long while and then said, "This matter..."

"Mom, look around our village, whose daughter-in-law's dowry could reach five hundred yuan? Not to mention, five hundred, even three hundred is considered a lot." Xu Qinghu added, "The Yue Family agreed, besides the five hundred yuan dowry, there are the 'three rounds and one resounding shot' plus 'thirty-six sturdy legs', all complete."

"The house has been divided; I can't make decisions for your elder brother's household." Liu Sanmei had a lot on her mind, but she still refused. Xu Qinghu praised the Yue Family to the skies, but it was this very exaggeration that made Liu Sanmei feel uneasy. With the Yue Family being so wealthy, what kind of daughter-in-law couldn't they find?

Chapter 63: Act First, Report Later

"Mom," Xu Qinghu still wanted to say something.

Liu Sanmei asked, "He's thirty-five, the same age as you. Has he been married? Does he have any children?"

"No children, but..." Xu Qinghu hesitated, then said, "He's been divorced twice."

"You..." Liu Sanmei was so angry she didn't know what to say.

With her head bowed, Xu Qinghu said, "Mom, marrying the son of the brick factory owner, she's sure to live a life of luxury."

"Do you want others to point fingers at the Xu family's backbone, saying that the Xu family is selling their daughter?" Liu Sanmei certainly didn't want to carry the reputation of the Xu family selling their daughter, how would the grandsons of the Xu family find good girls to marry in the future?

A thirty-five-year-old man, twice divorced, and wealthy, should have no trouble finding a wife.

"Leave this matter concerning Xu Qinghu alone," Liu Sanmei knew that not to mention Xu Qinghe's disagreement, even Xu Zhong wouldn't agree; Xu Zhong cared a lot about face.

The situation in Xu Qinghe's family was no longer as easily influenced as before, and there was Xu Nianhua—her look in her eyes that day when Xu Jiaojiao's incident occurred was chillingly resolute. It was clear they both intended to repeat their final year of high school and take the university entrance exam next year.

Because of the separation, Xu Zhong already had some complaints against her, and if she caused a stir with this marriage proposal, wouldn't Xu Zhong blame her for losing the Xu family's face?

These days, there had been enough jokes made at the expense of the Xu family.

"Mom."

Xu Qinghu wanted to say more but was scolded by Liu Sanmei and sent outside.

Xu Qinghu felt wronged, ah, what was not good about the Yue family's man, despite the slight difference in age?

"Qinghu, what's wrong?" Zhao Juxiang was sitting in the yard, picking edamame beans, planning to stir-fry them with chili for lunch.

"Second sister-in-law."

Xu Qinghu felt wronged, wondering how such a good opportunity had resulted in a scolding from her own mother.

After she told Zhao Juxiang what had happened, Zhao Juxiang moved closer to Xu Qinghu and comforted her, saying, "We've separated from the family; it's really not good to try to meddle in Nianhua's marriage."

"But why miss out on such a good marriage?" Xu Qinghu thought about the betrothal gifts and dowry, which were more generous than any local wedding.

"Maybe Mom feels it's not quite right," Zhao Juxiang's eyes darted around, inwardly despising Xu Qinghu's reasoning—what good marriage, it was just about getting more benefits. But if Xu Nianhua really married such a man...

A glint flickered in Zhao Juxiang's eyes, she said, "Qinghu, actually, there is a way to make this marriage happen."

"What way?" Xu Qinghu lowered her voice, afraid of being overheard by Liu Sanmei, and asked, "Second sister-in-law, how can we get my big sister-in-law to agree?"

Your big sister-in-law would never agree to it.

This was what Zhao Juxiang thought to herself, but she replied, "You can present a fait accompli."

How to present a fait accompli?

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"These herbs and a black-bone chicken. If you don't have a black-bone chicken, just use a home-raised chicken to stew. After that, eat more nourishing food regularly, and you'll be fine," Du Chang handed over the prescribed medicine to Xu Nian'an, charging only for the cost of the herbs without a consultation fee.

"Xu Nian'an, do you have any full-grown chickens at home?" Pei Yicheng suddenly asked.

Xu Nianhua's eyelids twitched, remembering Pei Yicheng's recent offer to bring a chicken, just as he was about to speak, Xu Nian'an had already responded, "No, we only have chicks at home."

It was true the Xu family had chickens, but they had adopted a brood of chicks and ducklings, offering them care until they grew up; they had no full-grown chickens.

"Older brother, let's keep this medicine and wait to take it after autumn, by which time the chicks at home will have grown up," Xu Nianhua quickly chimed in, anxious to preclude Pei Yicheng from offering chickens again.

Chapter 64: Brother-in-law

"Dr. Du, thank you for the medicine you prescribed for me," Xu Nianhua gratefully looked at Dr. Du, who charged very little, probably cheaper than other clinics.

"I'm a doctor."

Dr. Du Chang smiled as he spoke, then told Xu Nianhua, as long as the wound didn't inflame again, to remove the gauze in three days, and her arm should be fine.

"Thank you, Dr. Du."

Just as Xu Nianhua and her brother Xu Nian'an had left, Du Chang sat in front of Pei Yicheng, looked at the chicken in the corner, and couldn't help but laugh—from a slight chuckle at first to a louder laugh later, he said, "Yicheng, that's not how you pursue a girl, who gives a chicken as a gift?"

Pei Yicheng pursed his lips, correcting him, "I wasn't pursuing her."

"Not pursuing her and yet you want to give her a chicken to nourish her body?" Du Chang knew Pei Yicheng gave the gift because he had commented on how thin she was and she had overheard, but Du Chang felt this version of his grandson, unlike his usual cold self, was much better.

"Spoke out of turn."

Pei Yicheng pinched the bridge of his nose, he wasn't one to talk too much.

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In August, even though the start of autumn had passed, the sun still blazed, seemingly intent on melting everyone.

Taking advantage of the hot summer not yet over, Xu Nianhua and her brother planned to sell more Mung Bean Jelly, to make a bit more money and feel more secure.

Fortunately, the Mung Bean Jelly they sold was not only well-made but also served in generous portions with brown sugar water, which was ample and sweet, making their stall quite popular even though there were many others selling Mung Bean Jelly in the town.

Another busy day went by, and after several days of waiting, the soybean sprouts finally came out, and Xu Nianhua breathed a sigh of relief; it seemed her previous hard work wasn't in vain.

"Mom, let's have stir-fried bean sprouts tonight," Xu Nianhua said happily, ready to prepare them in large quantities as long as they tasted good.

Well, they still had to wait for Dad to make the bean sprout buckets.

Busy days always pass quickly.

On the tenth day of August, the brick factory paid their wages, and with thirty yuan in hand, Xu Nianji felt thrilled and excited.

"Xu Nianji, you're not short of this bit of wage, why are you so happy?"

"Exactly, soon you'll be Yue Hongliang's brother-in-law, aren't you short of money?"

"What are you talking about?"

Just as Xu Nianji was thinking about going home that evening to hand the money to his parents and also make sure they let Nian'an and Nianhua continue their schooling, he heard his coworkers' words and, completely baffled, said, "What brother-in-law? My sister is still a student."

In Xu Nianji's heart, his little sister was still very young, far too young to be married.

"That's not right, aren't you all already engaged? Haven't you received the betrothal gifts?" One coworker looked skeptically at Xu Nianji, who had just happened to see Yue Hongliang rushing the driver to deliver the betrothal gifts.

"Impossible, how could I not know about such a big event as my sister getting married?" Xu Nianji instantly denied.

Just then, Yue Hongliang arrived at the factory, planning to visit the Xu family with Xu Nianji. He had only seen from a distance before and wanted to have a closer look at his prospective bride, but hearing Xu Nianji's emphatic denial, Yue Hongliang's face darkened and he said, "Xu Nianji, perhaps you are unaware of the news in the brick factory, but your family has already received the betrothal gifts, and soon, you will be my brother-in-law."

Chapter 65: Bringing Home (Part 1)

"What's going on here?"

After Ji Ying saw Xu Qinghu out, she always felt something was off.

In just three days, Xu Qinghu had come over twice, each time sitting at home and chatting with Ji Ying about household matters without discussing anything else. When she left, she always did so with a smile.

What was she really selling in her gourd?

Full of doubts, Ji Ying went off to get busy. It was the chili pepper season, and each year the Xu family would grow a lot of chilies. Some were dried to make dried chilies, while others were simply turned into chili sauce.

Sometimes, when there was not much else to eat, chili sauce was a real treat; just mixing it with rice could help one consume two bowls of it.

"Mom, we are back." Xu Nianhua and Xu Nian'an, the siblings, had sold out all the Mung Bean Jelly and also bought some spare ribs.

"You're back."

Ji Ying was making chili sauce, chopping up all the chilies—although it wasn't difficult, the sheer quantity made it a laborious chore.

"Did you sell everything today?" Ji Ying asked, looking at the bucket they brought back, filled with the spare ribs she had bought.

Now, thanks to the money that Xu Nianhua and her brother were earning, the family's meals had greatly improved from before. Although they did not eat meat every day, they could have it every few days.

"Yes, I bought the spare ribs since brother is coming back today. It's perfect to nourish him," Xu Nianhua remembered clearly. Every month on this day, her big brother would come back.

As soon as Xu Nianhua arrived home, she got busy in the kitchen, first stewing the spare ribs. There were fresh snap beans at home, which, after being blanched, were stewed with the spare ribs to create a delicious flavor.

Because her big brother was coming home, Xu Nianhua didn't buy pipe bones but chose spare ribs instead, and she also purposefully bought a pound of spare ribs and a pound of pork belly. The spare ribs were for the soup, and the pork belly was intended for making braised pork.

Her brother worked at a brick factory, doing physically demanding labor, and their father too worked hard as a carpenter outside.

Xu Nian'an put down the purchases and went to chop wood on the hill behind their house. There was too little firewood at home, and even though Xu Nian'an managed to chop some every day, it was barely enough.

At night, Xu Qinghe, who worked outside, returned home, and Xu Nian'an, who had been chopping wood on the mountain, also came back. On the stove, stewed aromatic spare ribs simmered, their fragrance and meaty aroma filling the air.

"One of these days, we really should go thank Doctor Du properly. His medicine is indeed effective," Ji Ying said, looking at her daughter who seemed rounder than before.

In the past, Xu Nianhua was so skinny that she seemed almost like a stick, her face so gaunt that she looked as if she was all bones and could topple over with a gust of wind.

In just a few days, she had visibly gained some weight.

"Doctor Du is really good, it's just that the medicine is a bit bitter," Xu Nianhua knew her body was weaker than normal, exacerbated by an accident in which she had fallen into water when she was younger. Every time her period came, she'd be in so much pain that she couldn't get out of bed. Doctor Du's medicine was to nourish her body, and she believed it would make her feel better after taking it.

"Good medicine tastes bitter," Ji Ying said, looking somewhat guilty, "I should have taken you to the doctor sooner."

Previously, in the Xu family, every penny they earned had to be handed over. They had no spare money, and although Ji Ying wanted to take Xu Nianhua to see a doctor, Liu Sanmei had said that women just had to get through these things naturally. Taking medicine without necessity could harm a perfectly healthy body.

Not just Xu Nianhua, Ji Ying herself had experienced pain before, though not as severely, and thus hadn't taken it seriously.

Chapter 66: Bringing Home (Part 2)

"It's nothing serious," Xu Nianhua assured Ji Ying, not wanting her to feel guilty. "Dr. Du said that with the medicine he prescribed and some good rest, everything will be fine." She then changed the subject, "By the way, why hasn't big brother come home yet? Usually, by this time, he should have been back already, right?"

For some reason, Xu Nianhua felt a persistent twitch in her eyelid all day.

"He might have been held up by something," Xu Nian'an answered as he and Xu Qinghe were busy chopping the firewood they had dragged home into pieces in the yard.

As they waited, another half hour passed. Just when they were growing worried that something might have happened, a commotion came from outside.

"Uncle Xu, Auntie Xu."

"Uncle Xu."

The voices of Cai Gen and Yao Feng rang out.

"Eh, isn't that Brother Yao Feng and Brother Cai Gen?" Xu Nian'an listened carefully, put down his ax, and went to look outside.

To his shock, the two men appeared to be carrying something.

"Big brother!"

Xu Nian'an called out excitedly, even though it was already dark outside, the moonlight was still shining brightly.

When Yao Feng and Cai Gen brought Xu Nianji home, it gave the Xu family quite the scare. Xu Qinghe and Xu Nian'an fumbled to carry Xu Nianji into the room.

"Little sister, don't marry him."

Xu Nianji, barely clinging to life after being beaten, held onto Xu Qinghe's hand tightly, his main concern being this very matter.

"What happened? What's this about not marrying? Who did you offend?" Ji Ying was on the verge of tears as she looked at her son, beaten until his face was swollen and black and blue. His feet were bloody, which was why he couldn't walk, and had to be carried home.

But, as Xu Nianji tried to speak, the pain was so intense that every word made him break out in a cold sweat.

"Big brother, drink some water, have a little water."

Xu Nianhua tenderly offered water, feeding it to Xu Nianji bit by bit, "Big brother, don't talk right now. Let's ask Brother Yao Feng what exactly happened."

Yao Feng and Cai Gen took turns explaining the situation.

It all started because Yue Hongliang claimed he had arranged an engagement with Xu Nianhua. Xu Nianji naturally didn't believe it and unequivocally denied it. Yue Hongliang said he had already paid a betrothal gift of three hundred, and the rest would be given once the marriage had been formalized.

Xu Nianji felt Yue Hongliang was deceiving everyone. He was sure his parents would never agree to marry Xu Nianhua to Yue Hongliang. He thought Yue Hongliang was merely intent on destroying his little sister's reputation.

A woman's reputation, how important could that be?

So, Xu Nianji and Yue Hongliang got into a dispute. Xu Nianji knew Yue Hongliang had already lost two wives and believed that even if his parents were desperate for money, they would never marry his sister to someone like that, especially not now that the family had earned some money. How could it be possible to still marry little sister to Yue Hongliang?

Their loud argument escalated until Yue Hongliang cursed Xu Nianji for his ingratitude. Yue Hongliang taking a liking to Xu Nianhua should have been considered an honor for the Xu family. Xu Nianji's firm declarations that he would never allow his sister to marry Yue Hongliang finally enraged the man.

Yue Hongliang then resorted to violence, and chaos erupted on the construction site.

Xu Nianji, just an ordinary brick mover at the brick factory, how could he have more people than Yue Hongliang?

Sure enough, Xu Nianji was brutally beaten, and even Yao Feng and Cai Gen got caught up and took a few blows themselves.

Xu Nianji's foot had been smashed by a brick. They had initially intended to take him to the hospital, but Xu Nianji refused, insisting on going home no matter what.

Chapter 67: Borrowing a Handcart (Part One)

"There's no such thing, we never agreed to any marriage with the Yue Family, nor did we accept any dowry," Xu Qinghe asserted firmly upon hearing about the dowry.

Ji Ying felt that something was amiss and subconsciously thought of Xu Qinghu, who had been unusually diligent at home these past few days.

"Xu Brother, I do not believe you would marry Nianhua to Yue Hongliang either, considering Yue Hongliang has already lost two wives," Yao Feng added, saying, "That's why, Xu Brother, you fought with them."

"Exactly, this matter, perhaps it's all a misunderstanding," Cai Gen said as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Uncle Xu, Aunt Xu, we must be getting home, so we'll take our leave now."

"Why don't you stay and have the meal with us?" Ji Ying invited. It had been a hard task for the two of them to carry Xu Nianji back from the brick kiln.

"No need, my mother is waiting for me at home."

Yao Feng and Cai Gen repeatedly excused themselves.

Ji Ying did not insist further but only asked them to come over for a meal another day to properly thank them.

After sending Yao Feng and the others off, Ji Ying and Xu Qinghe exchanged a glance and decided to first check on Xu Nianji's condition. Apart from the bruising from the beating, the most grievous sight was his foot, bloodied by a brick, looking starkly alarming.

"Big brother, we should go to the hospital," Xu Nianhua said, looking at the wound, her heart kept racing, thinking that her brother had gotten hurt because of her.

Such incidents had never occurred before.

"No."

Xu Nianji had lain for a while and, after drinking some water, found the strength to speak. He said, "This wound looks worse than it is, it's not a big deal. Let dad prepare some hemostatic herbs for me to apply, and it'll be fine."

"Don't worry," Xu Nianji reassured her as he saw her red-rimmed eyes. "Mom and dad adore you the most, they definitely wouldn't marry you off so young."

Not to mention to Yue Hongliang; it's not marrying off a daughter, it's selling a daughter, it's pushing a daughter into a pit of fire.

"Big brother is right, little sister, don't worry," Xu Nian'an said, his hand resting on Xu Nianhua's shoulder. He added, "Dad, mom, big brother's wound is quite severe, we need to get to a hospital to clean it properly to avoid infection. What if it becomes inflamed?"

"I'll clean Nianji's wound first, let's finish the dinner, borrow a handcart, and then take Nianji to the hospital," Xu Qinghe decided firmly.

Xu Nian'an quickly gathered some herbs and cold water the family had on hand. Regardless, he wanted to clean Xu Nianji's foot wound first.

There was also medicinal wine, which was needed to rub out the bruises on Xu Nianji. If not massaged out today, the blood clots might worsen and cause severe swelling tomorrow.

Xu Nian'an and Xu Qinghe, father and son, were busy, one cleaning the wound and the other rubbing the bruised areas with medicinal wine.

Ji Ying and Xu Nianhua, mother and daughter, prepared dinner: pork ribs stew with flat beans, braised pork, and stir-fried bean sprouts, three dishes ample enough to fill up the five adults.

With pork rib soup and braised pork, a treat that in the past was only enjoyed during New Year's, was now a delicacy they could enjoy every now and again.

Because of Xu Nianji's injury, what should have been a happy, united family day was overshadowed, with no one in the mood for jokes or laughter during the meal, all were eager to finish eating, borrow a handcart, and then take Xu Nianji to the town.

"Dad, I'll go with you."

As Xu Qinghe left to borrow the handcart, Xu Nianhua followed him.

Chapter 68: Borrowing a Handcart (Part Two)

"What do you need the cart for so late at night?" Liu Sanmei muttered, looking at Xu Qinghe.

Because Xu Nianji was only carried home after dark, everyone was home eating dinner by then, and there were not many people on the street, so not many knew about Xu Nianji's injury.

"Nianji is injured, I need to take him to the county,"

Xu Qinghe replied coldly. As soon as he entered the courtyard, he had quickly made his way to the storeroom and dragged out the cart, kicking the wheels into place as he did so.

"Wasn't Nianji at the brick factory? How did he get injured?" Xu Zhong, upon hearing his grandson had been injured, immediately asked.

After all, that was his eldest grandson.

"It was the son of the owner of the brick factory, the Yue Family's son. He insisted that he was engaged to our Nianhua. Nianji didn't believe it, and they started arguing, which led to a fight. Luckily, Yao Feng and the others were there, otherwise, who knows what would have happened to Nianji,"

Just thinking about it made Xu Qinghe feel blocked up inside; his son had almost been beaten to death.

"Dad, I know you've never liked me ever since I was little; you've always favored Qingjiang, and I never said a word about it, but I will never agree to marrying Nianhua off to the Yue Family's son, not even if it kills me."

Xu Qinghe took a deep breath and turned to Liu Sanmei, "I don't care how much dowry you've taken or what promises you've made, but I am not marrying Nianhua off to the Yue Family! If someone must marry into the Yue family, let it be you all, it has nothing to do with my Nianhua."

Xu Qinghe was unusually authoritative and spoke rapidly, leaving no room for anyone to respond. He started pushing the cart outside, as Nianji was still waiting for him.

The people who came with Xu Nianhua were still worried that Xu Qinghe couldn't handle it, but it turned out he was quite imposing.

Xu Nianhua quietly applauded Xu Qinghe, and hastened to follow him.

Xu Zhong hadn't yet recovered from what Xu Qinghe had said when Xu Qinghe was already far away, pushing the cart.

"What Yue Family? What engagement? What dowry?" Xu Zhong turned to Liu Sanmei and yelled, "The eldest branch of the family has already separated; why are you still meddling in Nianhua's marriage?"

"What kind of person is that son of Mr. Yue? How much money did you take from them?"

Xu Zhong was extremely upset; he knew nothing about this!

He was, after all, the head of the family!

"None," Liu Sanmei denied.

However, Xu Zhong didn't believe her, thinking, who else but Liu Sanmei, the grandmother, would have taken charge of Xu Nianhua's marriage?

Liu Sanmei stood in front of Xu Zhong with a cold face and, pointing at his nose, she scolded, "Xu Zhong, I'm telling you, this has nothing to do with me. Don't try to throw your dirt on me."

"Aside from you, who else would dare to meddle in Nianhua's marriage?" Xu Zhong's gaze fell on Zhao Juxiang, questioning, "Second son's wife, did you also know about this?"

"I..." Zhao Juxiang stammered, "I didn't know about this."

"I don't care who did it, just return the dowry," Xu Zhong said sternly, his face dark as he swatted away Liu Sanmei's pointing hand, "Don't point at my nose, Liu Sanmei, is your brain muddled? How could you agree to this?"

"Never mind whether the Yue family is good or not, just look at how much the eldest son loves his daughter. Would he marry her off so early?"

"Not to mention, the Yue Family doesn't sound good. Do you want the eldest son to hate me for life or do you want to anger me to death? If the villagers found out, wouldn't they stab me in the back, saying that the Xu family is selling off their daughter?"

Xu Zhong, thinking about how the usually weak Xu Qinghe had also become assertive, and worried about the village finding out, for they would drown him with their spit.

Chapter 69: Too Late

"Everyone in the village knows," Zhao Juxiang's words completely ignited Xu Zhong's fury.

Xu Zhong had just drunk a little alcohol, and now his blood boiled with anger, shoving Liu Sanmei.

Liu Sanmei, even though she knew this matter probably involved her daughter Xu Qinghu, hadn't expected Xu Qinghu to audaciously accept the betrothal gift without discussing it with Xu Qinghe's family.

These past few days, Xu Qinghu had gone to Ji Ying's house, leaving each time with a cheerful smile. Adding to that, the village gossip claimed that because Xu Qinghe's family was poor, they agreed to marry their daughter to Yue Family. Liu Sanmei had looked down on the couple for a long time.

Usually pretending to love their daughter dearly, who would have thought that for that five hundred yuan betrothal gift, they would still marry off their daughter?

But today, the incident with Xu Qinghe made Liu Sanmei instantly realize that her daughter Xu Qinghu might have acted first without approval, which also agitated her.

Xu Zhong's shoving action completely infuriated Liu Sanmei, and the couple instantly started fighting.

Xu Qingjiang hadn't even understood what was happening when he saw his parents fighting. Xu Qingjiang looked at Zhao Juxiang, who was still stunned on the side, and shouted, "What are you dazing at? Pull mom and dad apart!"

The Xu Family was in total chaos.

The Xu Qinghe family had already prepared the straw. Xu Qinghe came with the cart, laid the straw on it, found a mattress, and carefully lifted Xu Nianji onto the cart.

When it was time to go to the county, Xu Nianhua and Ji Ying were supposed to stay home, but Ji Ying disagreed, insisting on making sure Xu Nianji's injuries were treated.

Xu Nianhua didn't dare stay home alone, so the family of five set out for the county, heading straight for the county hospital.

After some turmoil at the county hospital, it was already past ten. Xu Nianji's wound was professionally cleaned and dressed, and once it was clear he had no other issues, everyone felt relieved.

Xu Nianji's condition didn't require hospitalization. After everyone had gathered themselves, they headed back home, especially since it was summer and the weather was very hot.

The family of five walked home from the county. Despite some stumbles, they were not scared.

By the time they reached home, it was already twelve.

"Mom, you don't have to worry about me, I'm fine," Xu Nianhua said to Ji Ying, who came over with a pillow, smiling, "I wasn't scared."

"Silly girl."

Ji Ying sat upright on the bed and said, "Don't worry, we're still planning for you to go to college, we definitely won't let you marry off so early."

"Mm."

Xu Nianhua nodded obediently, never doubting the love her parents had for her, the kind that was even more than what one would have for their own child.

"When I earn money, I'll take good care of you and dad. I think I'll stay single for life and stay by your side, accompanying you," Xu Nianhua said, cuddling up to Ji Ying while falling asleep, her voice cooing. In her previous life, she had been lonely all her life; this lifetime, being able to stay with her parents, she felt very content.

Not to mention her older and younger brothers were doing well!

She didn't want to marry, nor had she ever thought of marriage.

"Silly girl, what nonsense are you talking about?"

Ji Ying reached out and stroked her hair, the soft strands slipping through her fingers. Unconsciously, her daughter had grown so much, tall and elegant.

She remembered the first time she saw Nianhua, how small and skinny she was, just like a little monkey.

It was unimaginable how quickly she had grown up, her lips curling into a smile, she said, "It's natural for a man to marry and a woman to wed, but don't worry. Wait until you go to college. By then, our Nianhua will be a college student, and sure enough, there will be many boys who like her. Then, we will pick carefully."

Chapter 70: You Can't Go Back on Your Word

"Mom, who said that girls must get married?" Xu Nianhua pouted, having seen many women lose their confidence after marriage, gradually worn down by life, living very miserable days.

She didn't want to get married at all. Just like in her previous life, she wanted to live alone and then, when she was capable, continue to help those in need, earn more money, and provide her parents with a big house, living happier days than anyone else.

Ji Ying smiled and said no more, thinking that the girl had not yet met someone she liked. If she ever met someone she liked, she would no longer hold these current thoughts.

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As dawn broke, Dazhu Village had suddenly become lively.

After Yao Feng and Cai Gen returned home, arriving late naturally led their family elders to question what had happened.

They knew nothing until they asked, which gave them a shock.

The mothers of Cai Gen and Yao Feng couldn't believe the truth when they learned it. They were aware of the recent rumors but thought that Ji Ying's family was struggling and marrying the son of the brick factory owner was a good match.

However, when Cai Gen and Yao Feng talked about the son of the brick factory owner, their mothers realized that this was not a marriage; it was selling a girl into a fire pit!

Over thirty, having lost two wives, and now in a new era, regardless of the notion of 'wife-cursing', just the fact that Yue Hongliang beat his wives when drunk says no one who cares even slightly for a girl would dare send her to such a household!

Let alone the Xu Qinghe family who adored their daughter.

When Cai Gen's mother and Yao Feng's mother knew the truth, they immediately went out to find Ji Ying. Along the way, they met many people and spoke of the marriage, a matter of great curiosity, so naturally, others followed them.

When they arrived at the Xu family, Ji Ying was cooking noodles, curious about the crowd that included Cai Gen's mother, wondering what the matter was. When she understood their intentions, Ji Ying immediately made her stance clear, saying, "Sister-in-law Cai, Sister-in-law Yao, we have not promised any marital arrangements, and as for that Yue family, I don't even recognize them."

"We knew nothing about this marriage," Ji Ying added, her eyes reddening as she thought about it. They had already moved into an old house, so why wouldn't they leave her family alone?

"But Xu Qinghu has been coming to your house these days, claiming that you were discussing the marriage," asked Cai Gen's mother, looking at Ji Ying.

It was precisely because Xu Qinghu had been coming over so often, each time happily talking about the marriage. One time, as Ji Ying saw Xu Qinghe out the door, the two were laughing and chatting, which made everyone believe the rumors.

Now at Ji Ying's, it seemed not to be the case at all.

"Absolutely not," Ji Ying swore, saying, "Qing Lake has come over several times, but he never mentioned the Yue family or marriage. I was actually puzzled, wondering how she, who wouldn't visit more than twice a year, had suddenly started to come by so frequently."

Ji Ying, thinking about this, gritted her teeth in anger. She knew something was off. It turned out they had dug a huge pit, intending to push her daughter into it!

"Sister-in-law, you clearly agreed to it, you can't go back on your word now!" Xu Qinghu arrived just in time to hear Ji Ying's words. While wiping her tears, she said, "Sister-in-law, haven't these past few days been about discussing the marriage with you?"

"Xu Qinghu, don't talk nonsense," Ji Ying, seeing Xu Qinghu arrive, stepped forward, grabbed her hand, and demanded, "What exactly is the deal with the Yue family? When did we ever agree to marry Nianhua to them?"