

Regaining 71

Chapter 71: She Really is my Aunt

"Wasn't it just the day before yesterday, when I came to your house, that you agreed?" Xu Qinghu blatantly lied, and he did it convincingly, saying, "Sister-in-law, at first you were not so agreeable, but after the Yue Family promised a 500 yuan bride price and also agreed to provide 'Three Turns and One Sound' and 'Thirty-six Legs', you agreed!"

What!

A 500 yuan bride price?

'Three Turns and One Sound'?

And 'Thirty-six Legs'?

Oh my goodness.

In all of Shuangzhu Village, no one's ever seen such a generous bride price for their daughter.

The Yue Family, I heard they own a brick factory, they have money.

Suddenly, those who were originally on Ji Ying's side began to waver.

Who knows what the truth of the matter is?

The dowry offered by the Yue Family, maybe they really will agree to it?

Ji Ying only felt dizzy, her eyes reddened as she said, "In these past few days you've never mentioned anything about the Yue Family, let alone anything about a bride price, Xu Qinghu, you are Nianhua's own aunt after all."

"It's precisely because I am Nianhua's own aunt that I am considering what's best for her," Xu Qinghu continued with Ji Ying's words, "Yue Hongliang is good-looking and comes from a wealthy family. The Yue Family also said that as soon as Nianhua marries into their family, they will provide a separate house for the young couple, so they don't have to live with the in-laws. Isn't that the very reason you agreed to marry Nianhua off to them?"

"Sister-in-law, you can't just regret it now because you can't bear to marry off your daughter!" Xu Qinghu said with a concerned look as though worried Ji Ying would back out, "The bride price has been accepted, and we've already agreed to the engagement with the Yue Family, who have even picked the date. There's no backing out now!"

"When have I ever backed out?" Ji Ying was about to say that she had never agreed to any of this from the beginning.

But before she could finish, Xu Qinghu happily said, "Sister-in-law, I'm glad you aren't backing out. I came today to discuss Nianhua's engagement date with you. The 2nd day of August is an auspicious day. The Yue Family said that on that day, we'll go to Gaoliang County's hotel, hold a few banquet tables, invite our own family over for a meal, and formally acknowledge our relations.

"Once Nianhua is married into the county, her days ahead will surely be good."

Xu Qinghu was smooth with her words, speaking quickly and pulling Ji Ying along, giving her no chance to retort. Xu Qinghu turned to the onlookers in the courtyard, smiling as she said, "It was supposed to be a joyful occasion, yet it's turned into a farce—please bear with us. My sister-in-law here just can't bear to part with her daughter."

Xu Qinghu's words sounded beautiful, throughout the conversation she maintained a calm smile, giving the impression that things were exactly as she said—the truth was just as she described it.

Not to mention strangers who were not familiar with Ji Ying, even Cai Gen's mother and Yao Feng's mother began to doubt.

"Not true," Ji Ying protested urgently, "I haven't backed out, I never..." agreed.

Xu Qinghu interrupted her, "Sister-in-law, it's good you haven't backed out; this matter is settled then. On the 2nd day of August, the Yue Family will drive over to pick us up. I must congratulate you, sister-in-law, for gaining such a fine son-in-law."

Xu Qinghu looked at Ji Ying with a beaming smile. She leaned in close and whispered in Ji Ying's ear, "Sister-in-law, the whole village knows about this now. If we call off the engagement, Nianhua really won't have any way out."

Ji Ying's face turned pale in an instant, she shook off Xu Qinghu's hand and stared wide-eyed at her.

"Aunt, you really are my dear aunt," Nianhua walked out of the room. She was wearing a plaid shirt and a simple ponytail today, exuding youthful vigor. Even though her bangs covered her smooth forehead, they couldn't hide her beautiful features and her bright, expressive eyes.

Chapter 72: Can You?

"Nianhua, are you so happy you've gone foolish? Of course, I'm your real aunt."

Xu Qinghu forced a smile, not knowing why, but whenever she looked at the cheerful Xu Nianhua, she couldn't shake a sense of unease.

The plan was foolproof.

She knew the temperament of the elder brother and his wife; they loved their daughter, no doubt, but now, who in the village didn't know that a marriage had been arranged with the Yue Family?

Even if the elder brother and his wife wanted to break off the marriage, Nianhua's reputation would be ruined regardless.

If she continued to persuade them, they would surely agree to marry Xu Nianhua off, not to mention the sizable dowry that came with it.

"Really?" Xu Nianhua's voice was crisp, but her tone was less than pleasant. She saw a familiar face and said, "Auntie Yao, you have a daughter too, right?"

Auntie Yao Feng was initially confused, but upon hearing Xu Nianhua's question, she nodded subconsciously and said, "Of course, I do."

Besides Yao Feng, she also had a daughter, Yao Jia.

"Yue Hongliang is thirty-five this year, and he's had two wives die on him. Although they say it was from illness, I've heard it was because they were beaten to death by a drunken Yue Hongliang. If it were you, would you marry your daughter off to him?" Xu Nianhua asked, tilting her head as she looked into Auntie Yao Feng's eyes with her own clear and bright ones.

At first, Auntie Yao Feng was confused, but when she heard Xu Nianhua's question, she understood her meaning and shook her head, saying, "I wouldn't."

Perhaps it was the clear gaze of Xu Nianhua's eyes, or perhaps because she, too, had a daughter, that Auntie Yao Feng responded with sympathy and pity for Xu Nianhua. She added, "Even if the Yue Family offered a fortune, I would never push my daughter into the fire."

"What about you, Auntie Cai?" Xu Nianhua turned to look at Cai Gen's mother.

Cai Gen's mother had a much more explosive temperament. She said through gritted teeth, "If anyone dared push my daughter into the fire, I'd fight them to the death!"

"Auntie, you see, both Auntie Cai and Auntie Yao disagree. Do you think my mother would push me into the fire?" Xu Nianhua spoke calmly, her voice as gentle as people always found her to be, and she was very good at studying.

Her words convinced the wavering villagers, who involuntarily believed in Xu Nianhua.

Not to mention, the way that Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying doted on their daughter made it clear that they would never push her into the fire.

"Auntie, I didn't get into university this year because of Jiaojiao, but my parents are preparing for me to retake the exams. I'm sure I can pass them next year," Xu Nianhua added.

The onlooking villagers thought to themselves, yes, Xu Nianhua's grades were good. Getting into university should be no problem for her. The Xu family was about to have a college student; why not let her attend university and secure a good future rather than having her marry now?

The son of the brick factory owner, previously unaware of the details, thought the marriage wasn't a bad idea. After all, she'd have to marry someone after university, and if she could find such a good match, it would not be strange for the Xu Family to marry off Xu Nianhua.

But if what Xu Nianhua said was true and the man was one to beat his wife, how could the loving parents, Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying, possibly push Xu Nianhua into the fire?

"Nianhua, even after university, you'll still have to marry. I'm only thinking of your best interests. Not everyone can secure such a desirable match," Xu Qinghu said, though she felt the villagers' glances were strange. But thinking of the benefits of the marriage going through, she pretended not to notice.

Chapter 73: Raising Her for a Lifetime

"Nianhua, all women eventually have to marry, and although he's a bit older than you, isn't an older man more caring?"

Xu Qinghu tried hard to persuade her, saying, "Once you marry him, you'll be a city dweller. You'll have a house in the city, and your elder brother's marriage expenses will be covered. Plus, you can continue to care for your parents. Look how good life will be for you afterward?"

"Who knows, maybe by next year you'll start building a new house."

With an appearance of concern for Xu Nianhua, Xu Qinghu just made Nianhua feel utterly disgusted. Subtly, she took a step back.

"Even if I remain a bachelor my whole life, I won't allow my little sister to be ruined!" Xu Nianji, leaning on a stick, limped out and shouted at Xu Qinghu.

"Nianji, I'm your aunt. I'm only thinking of your best interests. Why are you raising your voice at me?" Xu Qinghu spoke discontentedly.

"If you truly were my aunt, you'd never do such a thing!"

Xu Nianji was beyond furious. Their family had always treated the little sister like a treasure, holding her in the palm of their hands. Yet what about Xu Qinghu?

She might as well have weighed Xu Nianhua and sold her by the kilo!

"Xu Qinghu, whether Xu Nianji marries or can afford to build a new house, it's none of your concern. And as for this marriage proposal, we do not agree." Xu Qinghe stated as he came back carrying a bundle of firewood, and the onlooking villagers spontaneously cleared a path for him.

"If you think the Yue Family is so great, go marry off your daughter Tingting!" Xu Qinghe said as he put down the firewood and began shooing people away.

The moment his own daughter Fu Ting was mentioned, Xu Qinghu reacted like a cat whose tail had been stepped on, screaming, "Big brother, what are you talking about? Tingting is only sixteen."

"Wait two more years, and she will be old enough to marry, won't she?" Xu Qinghe said while pushing people out.

Nowadays, girls could get married at eighteen.

"Big Brother, the one they want is Nianhua."

"What if they wanted Tingting? Would you marry her off then?"

Xu Qinghe's words instantly choked all the responses Xu Qinghu had out of her throat.

Xu Qinghe's expression darkened as he said, "You can't even bear to marry off your own daughter, yet you want to marry off my Nianhua. Let me tell you, Xu Qinghu, I have no sister like you. My home does not welcome you!"

Xu Qinghe, who was always easygoing and regarded as the good guy, for the first time expressed his disdain and disgust so undisguisedly!

Being the eldest, with a sister several years his junior, bluntly said, he practically raised his little sister by hand. When Xu Qinghu got married, all the furniture and cabinets were made by him alone, without ever charging a penny. Xu Qinghe thought, they were all family and never counted these things too carefully.

But now, Xu Qinghe felt he had been wrong. Some people, no matter how well you treat them, only care about money.

"Big Brother." Xu Qinghu, having been pushed out, then realized the gravity of the situation.

"Big Brother, please just hear me out. Everyone already knows about this, and if Nianhua doesn't marry into the Yue Family, who else could she marry?" Xu Qinghu attempted one last effort.

Xu Qinghe's furious voice came through, "And whose fault is that if not for what you, her own aunt, have done? If Nianhua can't marry off, I'll support her for the rest of her life!"

"Aunt, please. If because of this Nian'an and I cannot find wives, I'd rather be a bachelor all my life." Xu Nian'an stood at the entrance of the yard, akin to a Door God, guarding strictly, refusing to let Xu Qinghu set foot in the yard again.

"Exactly," Xu Nianji affirmed in agreement, looking at Xu Nianhua with guilt and remorse, and said, "Little sister, I'm sorry."

Chapter 74: Let's Talk It Over

If it hadn't been for the younger sister's visits to the brick factory, Yue Hongliang would never have bumped into her, nor would he have developed designs on her.

Ultimately, he, the elder brother, had dragged her into this.

"Big brother, the one who should apologize is me. It's my fault you got hurt." Xu Nianji, supported by Xu Nianhua, spoke in a gentle voice, "Don't be angry, go back to your room to rest. You should lie down more so your foot can heal."

Xu Nianhua's gaze was calm, his emotions stable, not at all saddened, infuriated, or distressed by the affairs involving Xu Qinghu.

"You're not angry?" Xu Nianji obediently returned to his room, perplexed, feeling his younger sister was too calm, eerily calm.

"Why should I be angry? What is there to be angry about?"

Xu Nianhua countered. Outside was noisy, but, their father Xu Qinghe had hardened his stance; the match was definitely not going to happen.

"Big brother, Aunt took matters into her own hands. How to explain things to the Yue Family is their business, not ours." Xu Nianhua said, smiling, "As long as you focus on healing and your wounds recover quickly, that's all that matters."

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"I've lived half my life and this is the first time I've ever seen such a shameless aunt, pushing her own niece into the fire pit!" Cai Gen's mother looked at Xu Qinghu disdainfully.

Once, Liu Sanmei had boasted fiercely because of Xu Qinghu's marriage to someone in the county town.

Yao Feng's mother added, "Indeed, she must be desperate for money, willing to do anything. Who knows how much the Yue Family gave as a matchmaker's fee?"

"It must be a considerable amount. The bride price was five hundred after all."

With Cai Gen's mother and Yao Feng's mother starting the conversation, the excited villagers joined in, chattering away.

Xu Qinghu blushed and paled by turns under their words and slunk away.

Xu Qinghu didn't return to the county town but first went to the Xu Family home. As she approached the entrance, she was stopped by her sister-in-law Zhao Juxiang, who asked, "Qinghu, are you here to see our parents?"

"Sister-in-law, I came to see you." The moment Xu Qinghu saw Zhao Juxiang, she felt as if she'd seen a savior, pulling at her arm and pleading, "Sister-in-law, the method you mentioned last time didn't work. Both elder brother and sister-in-law don't acknowledge the marriage, what should I do? The Yue Family has already agreed!"

Upon hearing this, Zhao Juxiang pushed her hand away, saying, "Qinghu, I didn't tell you any method."

"Sister-in-law." Xu Qinghu, having just been humiliated at Xu Qinghe's house and losing face there, returned to the Xu house to find Zhao Juxiang denying her words, and her face darkened, her voice cooling as she said, "Sister-in-law, if you helped me remedy this, I would still give you the ten yuan I promised. But if you don't agree, sister-in-law, if you think my days are tough, do you think your days will be any better?"

"I know that Zhiyuan works at the Supply and Marketing Cooperative; relying on his father-in-law, he has become a manager there. But if this matter breaks out, it doesn't matter if I lose face – I could always go to Zhiyuan, after all, he's my nephew. He surely won't just watch as his aunt gets harmed like this by her own mother."

Xu Qinghu's speech carried a threat.

Zhao Juxiang's face changed. Originally, she hoped to watch Xu Qinghe's family struggle while benefiting on the side, but now she was being threatened by Xu Qinghu instead.

"Qinghu, let's talk this out nicely. What's the situation now?" Zhao Juxiang pulled Xu Qinghu toward her room, saying as they walked, "What's the situation now?"

Chapter 75: Can you help big brother find a job?

Xu Qinghu recounted what had just occurred at Xu Qinghe's house and looked towards Zhao Juxiang, asking, "Second sister-in-law, now that my eldest brother and sister-in-law refuse to acknowledge this marriage, what can I do? Didn't you say that once this matter is known by all, even for the sake of Nianhua's reputation, my brother and sister-in-law would have to accept it?"

"You mean the son from the Yue Family who lost two wives and even beats people when he's drunk?" Zhao Juxiang's gaze seemed to convey that this was a tough subject.

She had thought that although the man was older and had some flaws, she hadn't expected that he was actually...

"That's all false, in fact, it was just his two wives being unreasonable and themselves frail. If it were Nianhua, he would undoubtedly cherish and care for her in the palm of his hand," explained Xu Qinghu.

However, anyone slightly intelligent knew that these were just excuses, and the most important thing was that Xu Qinghu was reluctant to part with the matchmaker's fee.

Considering someone who could afford a bride price of five hundred yuan, and also bring a lot, that matchmaker's fee must have been substantial.

"Second sister-in-law, you need to think of a solution quickly. If this marriage is called off, I won't know how to explain it to the Yue Family," Xu Qinghu was a bit anxious. If the marriage fell through, could Fu Song still work properly in the brick factory?

Zhao Juxiang pondered for a long while, then whispered a few words into Xu Qinghu's ear, and Xu Qinghu's eyes instantly lit up.

"Second sister-in-law, your mind really works wonders." Xu Qinghu smiled at Zhao Juxiang, noticeably more relaxed than before. Anxious to give an answer to the Yue Family, and knowing her parents were resting, she didn't go in to see them, and simply left.

Liu Sanmei had been waiting for Xu Qinghu to enter the house, intending to reprimand her severely for the trouble she caused.

But, after waiting left and right, Liu Sanmei couldn't get Xu Qinghu to come inside. When she asked Zhao Juxiang about it and knew that Xu Qinghu had already left, Liu Sanmei was so angry she didn't know what to do. She looked fiercely at Zhao Juxiang and asked, "Does this have anything to do with you?"

"No." Zhao Juxiang replied quickly, without a hint of hesitation. She added, "I even advised Qinghu earlier, but sadly, Qinghu thought this marriage proposal was excellent."

At the word "excellent", Zhao Juxiang's tone conveyed that it was hard to express everything.

"Hmph."

Liu Sanmei snorted coldly, "It better not have."

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Xu Qinghe nagged that Ji Ying and the others should not go anywhere and just stay at home. If anything occurred, they were just to shout, and they would be chopping wood on the back mountain.

"Come on, it's broad daylight, what could happen?"

Ji Ying was extremely relieved by Xu Qinghe's unwavering protection of her daughter this time.

Once Xu Qinghe and his son went to the back mountain to chop wood, Ji Ying's brows furrowed tightly. She was worried about both her daughter and her son.

Although the cancellation of the engagement didn't directly involve them, such an incident raised concerns. What if someone looked down on their daughter because of this?

And their son, Xu Nianji, whose marriage to the Zhou Family had already been delayed for a year. With this incident now, he definitely couldn't continue working at the brick factory. Having offended the Yue Family, where could he find a job that would pay thirty yuan a month?

What would the Zhou Family do if they knew about this?

Ji Ying's mind was in chaos, and then she thought of her daughter making mung bean jelly. If it could be just like that, no, even if it could just bring in thirty yuan a month, that could alleviate the Xu Family's predicament.

"Big brother, about the brick factory..." Xu Nianhua just started.

They definitely couldn't go back to the brick factory.

Xu Nianji knew it clearly. He said, "I won't go to the brick factory anymore. Little sister, you're the smartest, can you help your brother find some work?"

Chapter 76: Forgot Something

"It's good that you didn't go; the brick factory is so tough. It's perfect timing, the bean sprouts I grew, the ones we ate yesterday, how were they? If we took them to market, could we make some money off of them?" Xu Nianhua thought about it when she was growing the bean sprouts. She and Xu Nian'an still needed to go to school, so they would need to find someone to handle the bean sprout business.

"Bean sprouts?" Xu Nianji recalled the crunchy sprouts they had eaten the previous day, which were quite tasty. He said, "They were delicious, but does anyone else sell them?"

"It doesn't matter if others sell them. Look at all the different kinds of shops around; there are so many. You can't expect only one person to be selling any given item. With so many people, there is a lot of demand for everything," Nianhua explained.

"There's also mung bean jelly. When second brother and I first started selling it, no one else did. Now, there are plenty of people selling it, but the mung bean jelly we make every day still sells out," she said.

Xu Nianhua had an optimistic perspective—the entire county had a large population, and bean sprouts were a common dish that were inexpensive, so there would be many buyers.

"You always think so fast," Xu Nianji praised, his gaze falling on Xu Nianhua. She had the same familiar face, but the confidence and calm in her eyes were different from before.

Could it be because of the setback in her college entrance exams? Had that changed her somehow?

Xu Nianhua felt uncomfortable under his stare, her eyes flickered as she touched her face, and said, "Big brother, do I have something on my face?"

"No," Xu Nianji said with a laugh. "Little sister, you are still as pretty as ever, but you seem different from before."

Xu Nianhua's heart skipped a beat.

Xu Nianji continued to praise her, "Little sister, you seem more lively than before, which is great. You used to be too quiet."

Xu Nianhua's heart sank a little, and she lifted the corners of her lips into a smile, saying, "Big brother, people have to grow up."

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In the town.

"Brother Cheng, this batch of herbs, they all sold overseas. The foreigners seem to really like our herbs and want to establish a long-term partnership with us," Ling Dong thought about the recent collaboration with the foreigners and was still very excited.

In this era, foreigners were not common.

"It's fine to establish a business partnership, but we can't budge on the price," Pei Yicheng warned. "Did you forget something?"

"What?" Ling Dong looked at Pei Yicheng, puzzled.

He was an orphan who, after getting injured while hunting, was saved by Pei Yicheng, and had been following him ever since.

After Pei Yicheng's incident, Ling Dong followed him to Gaoliang County.

Initially, Pei Yicheng had no desire to do business—in fact, he didn't want to do anything and was very dejected. But one day, he had a change of heart, he started a business selling herbal medicines, using what was available locally.

Now that they had sold this batch of herbs and received the payment, and the partnership with Mr. Angel was set, all that was left was to get Mr. Angel's contract translated!

Ling Dong thought hard but couldn't think of what he might have forgotten.

Pei Yicheng cleared his throat and said, "Mung bean jelly."

Ling Dong was supposed to bring him a bowl of mung bean jelly every day, but today he came empty-handed.

"Oh, that!"

Ling Dong slapped his forehead. These days, Pei Yicheng had him buy several bowls of mung bean jelly to bring back. Ling Dong had been so preoccupied with Mr. Angel's contract that he'd forgotten all about it.

"Today, the Xu family didn't sell mung bean jelly," Ling Dong said somewhat puzzled. "They come almost every day. I'm not sure why they didn't come today, so I didn't buy any."

Chapter 77: The Yue Family Comes

After Xu Qinghu returned to the county, he told the Yue Family about the incident, half-truths and half-lies.

Upon hearing this, the Yue Family was immediately furious!

It was true that Xu Nianji was injured, but Yue Hongliang was also hurt.

Yue Hongliang, the precious darling of the Yue Family, was someone they couldn't bear even to touch on normal days, but now he had been beaten up by Xu Nianji.

The Yue Family had initially wanted to confront the Xu Family right then and there.

However, Yue Hongliang still had thoughts about Xu Nianji's sister, so he suppressed the matter and let Xu Qinghu step in.

Now, with Xu Qinghu's half-truths, claiming that the Xu Family wanted to back out of the marriage, the dissatisfaction in the Yue Family's hearts grew even bigger.

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The same night.

At Xu Qinghe's house, it was bustling and warm.

Even with the incident involving the Yue Family, the gathering of the family was still a very joyous occasion.

Xu Qinghe assured, "Nianhua, don't worry, I will absolutely not let you marry into the Yue Family."

"Right." Ji Ying nodded affirmatively.

"Little sister, if anyone despises you because of this, I'll support you for a lifetime," Xu Nianji said.

"And me."

Xu Nian'an patted his chest, also expressing his stance that even if he remained a bachelor his whole life, he would not push his sister into a pit of fire.

"If someone despises me for this, then he has no taste, isn't a good person, and doesn't deserve my lifelong commitment," Xu Nianhua said seriously, a gentle smile always present on her face. "Besides, I have hands and feet, I can support myself. Big brother, Second brother, you guys aren't in a hurry to get married, I still want a sister-in-law and a second sister-in-law!"

Her slightly playful words made everyone burst into laughter.

Xu Nian'an was fine, but in Xu Nianji's eyes, a fleeting shadow passed by, so quickly that it was hard to catch, then it disappeared.

He believed that Zhou He would definitely not despise him because of this matter, but as for Zhou He's parents...

"Big brother, you were hurt like this by the Yue Family, how about we call the police?" Xu Nianhua wanted to say this yesterday, but it was very late, so she didn't bring it up then.

"I hit him too," Xu Nianji replied, looking somewhat surprised at Xu Nianhua, as if he hadn't expected her to say that.

"You were defending yourself. They outnumbered and hurt you like this; why should they bear no responsibility?" Xu Nianhua thought of the bloody wound she saw yesterday and felt heartache.

It was all because of her that her big brother was injured.

Thinking of the last time his little sister was hurt and how Gao Jianshe kept hiding at Zhong Juan's grandmother's house and did not come back, Xu Nian'an sneered.

Hmph, may he never come back if he's so capable.

"Let's see what the Yue Family says," Xu Nianji said, with no immediate plan to escalate the issue.

If the Yue Family gives up on this marriage, then let it be, but if they still refuse to let go of his little sister, he definitely wouldn't just let it go.

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The next day, the Yue Family came over, bringing a brand new bicycle and sewing machine with them.

The Yue Family arrived in a tractor, with the bicycle and sewing machine decorated with big red flowers, as if they feared people wouldn't know the purpose of these gifts.

Xu Qinghe, fearing the Yue Family's visit, had deliberately stayed in and was on high alert when he saw them.

"That one in the white shirt, that's Yue Hongliang,"

Limping with a cane, Xu Nianji stood beside Xu Qinghe and said.

Today, Yue Hongliang was dressed in a white shirt and crisply ironed trousers, stepping in shiny leather shoes, his short, cropped hair slick and glossy with mousse. No matter how neatly he was dressed, it couldn't hide his fierce square face. Already thirty-five, he naturally looked older, seeming not much younger than Xu Qinghe.

Chapter 78: The Barefoot are not Afraid of Those Wearing Shoes

As soon as Xu Nian'an heard that the Yue Family had arrived, he immediately rushed out and stood by Xu Nianji, becoming even more convinced when he saw Yue Hongliang, that there could be no compromise.

The father and sons stood at the entrance, clearly not intending to let anyone into the courtyard.

"Big brother, this is Yue Hongliang. Look, doesn't he seem impressive?" Xu Qinghu got out of the car, smiling as he said, "Look, they even brought the dowry gifts deliberately, all three rounds and then one sound, they brought everything today."

Xu Qinghu's voice was loud, and together with the tractor entering the village, carrying a sewing machine and a bicycle tied with big red flowers, it looked as if they were marrying off a daughter, attracting everyone in the village.

"Big brother, they mentioned about the thirty-six legs, saying that at the time of marriage, they will make sure all are placed in their bridal room." Xu Qinghu said with a smile, stepping forward to whisper something to Xu Qinghe.

But Xu Qinghe defensively backed away.

"In-laws,"

As soon as Yue father began,

Xu Qinghe corrected, "Mr. Yue, we certainly cannot climb high enough to affiliate with your Yue Family."

The expression on Yue father's face changed; he was the brick factory boss, a ten-thousand-yuan household in this era, wearing a silver watch and a large gold necklace, flaunting his wealth everywhere.

He had never been so publicly snubbed before.

"Big brother, let's talk nicely," seeing the awkward situation, Xu Qinghu immediately stepped forward, smiling and saying, "Let's talk inside, it's embarrassing with so many people watching."

"We have nothing to discuss," Xu Qinghe said coldly, "We are not marrying off a daughter, naturally, we can't accept the dowry."

"Big brother, give me some face, now that the people are here, anyhow, let's talk inside first." Xu Qinghu said in a lowered voice, standing in front of Xu Qinghe.

Once they were inside, she was certain she could finalize the marriage.

Xu Nian'an and Xu Nianji not only did not make way but instead moved forward, staunchly guarding the gate, preventing the Yue Family from entering the courtyard.

"Why should it concern me since you invited these people?" Xu Qinghe clearly refused to give Xu Qinghu face.

He was easy to talk to, but if he gave face to Xu Qinghu, who would look after Nianhua's well-being?

"Xu Nianji, the matter of you injuring my son Hongliang, I haven't settled yet. Considering we're about to become relatives, Hongliang will let it go. In the future, as Hongliang's uncle, he will surely promote you to be a team captain, and your salary could well double," Yue father said with a forceful voice, only making the trip because Yue Hongliang had taken a liking to Xu Nianji's sister.

After all, he had only this one son.

"Mr. Yue, it was Yue Hongliang who started the fight that day. Even if there's a case to answer, I'm not afraid," Xu Nianji straightened his back and said firmly, "Please, Mr. Yue, pay me the rest of my salary, I'm quitting."

Yue father's face grew stern, not expecting that the Xu family would be so ungrateful.

Yue Hongliang, considering himself quite familiar with Xu Nianji, stepped forward and said, "Nianji, I genuinely like your sister. If you're not satisfied with the dowry, I can add... two hundred more." Yue Hongliang initially wanted to say five hundred, but a nudge from Yue mother changed it to two hundred. His gaze kept moving inside, but Xu Qinghe and the others were blocking the front, and Nianhua did not appear.

Yue Hongliang extended his hand to pat Xu Nianji's shoulder but was dodged by Xu Nianji, and Yue Hongliang's hand fell through, his face souring slightly, but remembering he was Nianhua's brother, he still said, "I will treat your sister well in the future. Our families' marriage is known all over the village, you've already received the dowry, you surely can't go back on your word, right?"

Chapter 79: The End

"Elder brother, what the Yue Family said is right. Once you accept the dowry, even if you want to go back on your word, you can't..." Xu Qinghu hadn't finished speaking when Xu Nian'an cut her off, "Auntie."

"Huh?"

Xu Qinghu looked at Xu Nian'an somewhat surprised, only to see him take a step forward and say, "Auntie, we haven't taken any dowry. Otherwise, why don't you search our house? If you can find the so-called dowry you mentioned, then I lose."

Xu Qinghu's eyes lit up instantly, and she ran inside, visibly excited.

Xu Nian'an tried to hold back Xu Qinghu, but as he did so, something seemed to fall out of her pocket.

"Oh, Auntie, isn't this your money pouch?" Xu Nian'an picked up the bright red money pouch from the ground, deliberately waving it in front of all the onlooking aunts.

Cai Gen's mother said, "That's your auntie's money pouch."

When Xu Qinghu saw the money pouch, her eyelids twitched involuntarily, feeling that something was amiss.

"Oh my, Auntie, your pouch has five hundred pieces in it!" Xu Nian'an said, looking at Xu Qinghu with a face of shock. "Auntie, you have been deceiving both sides! Lying to the Yue Family by saying we agreed to the engagement and accepted the dowry, and deceiving our family without mentioning a word about the engagement. Auntie, what exactly did you benefit from this?"

"I understand now, Uncle works at the brick factory, could it be that the Yue Family promised to raise his salary?"

From the moment Xu Nian'an picked up the money pouch, his mouth hadn't stopped talking for a second.

The five hundred pieces in the money pouch that Xu Qinghu dropped seemed to serve as evidence of her deceit on both ends.

"Mr. Yue, there seems to have been a misunderstanding regarding this matter," Xu Qinghe said decisively. No matter how much Xu Qinghu protested, in one sentence, he aimed to call off the engagement.

"Your auntie had good intentions..." Before Yue's father could finish speaking,

Xu Qinghe spoke with righteous indignation and an air of integrity, "Mr. Yue, your son is a fine young man who could marry any girl he desires. Our Nianhua is still young; my wife and I are still providing for her to go to college. We only have this one daughter and intend to keep her with us for a few more years. We have no plans to marry her off within these years."

Xu Qinghe's words flattered Yue's father.

"Mr. Yue, our family is just ordinary folks. My son was injured, and you, as a boss, took the time to visit, which really... we are so thankful."

Xu Qinghe's sudden warmth seemed to offer Yue's father a way out. He said with a stern face, "As he is a part of the brick factory, it is only proper for me to visit when he is injured."

After pondering for a moment, Yue's father took out fifty pieces of money and said, "Since he no longer wishes to continue working at the brick factory, I have given him his full wages. The extra is for him to recover from his injuries."

With that, Yue's father turned around and left.

Yue Hongliang, seeing the engagement going down the drain, was reluctant to leave.

Yue's mother promptly dragged Yue Hongliang away, whispering in his ear, "Aren't you embarrassed enough?"

"Mom." Yue Hongliang couldn't bear to look back at the Xu Family. Yue's mother, frustrated at his stubbornness, stepped on his foot and led him away. On the tractor, the bicycle and sewing machine, which were meant for showing off, now looked garish with their bright red decorations.

Chugging along, the Yue Family left on their tractor. Xu Qinghu stared as the tractor departed, thinking to herself, everything is over now.

Chapter 80: Can't be alone

"Big brother."

Just as Xu Qinghu began to speak, Xu Qinghe coldly interrupted, "I'm not your big brother, I don't have such a capable sister."

"I'm sorry for making a spectacle,"

Xu Qinghe awkwardly apologized to the on-looking aunts, effectively dispersing the farce that had unfolded.

Xu Qinghu's reputation in Shuangzhu Village was completely ruined.

Lost and dejected, Xu Qinghu returned to the Xu Family, unable to comprehend how the money she had stealthily placed under her sister-in-law's bed had ended up falling from her own person.

The two great-uncles of the Xu Family were thoroughly chastising Xu Zhong, painting him black and blue with their words. The Xu Family was a reputable name in Shuangzhu Village, always united, but this continuous string of incidents had utterly disgraced them.

These two great-uncles were the eldest living elders of the Xu Family, and Xu Zhong didn't dare talk back. If he provoked them into an incident, his male cousins wouldn't let him off the hook, would they?

It was at this moment that Xu Qinghu returned home.

Xu Zhong immediately dragged Xu Qinghu over; he, as her father, had endured enough scolding on her behalf.

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"What should we do with this fifty dollars?" Xu Qinghe, holding the fifty dollars, turned to Xu Nianji.

"Keep it. I haven't received my wages for a month, and I'm still owed twenty dollars. Consider it payment for medical expenses," said Xu Nianji, thinking of Yue Hongliang's lingering affection for his little sister, which left a bitter taste in his mouth. Although the marriage arrangement had fallen through, the Yue Family would undoubtedly hold a grudge against the Xu Family.

Although the owner of the brick factory wasn't the only one, he had invested the least, which is why he managed affairs there. They hoped to live their simple lives without trouble from the boss of the brick factory — he couldn't possibly seek revenge on them, could he?

Considering this, Xu Nianji said, "Little sister, don't go to the county anymore."

No sooner had he spoken than he corrected himself, "No matter when, you must have me or your second brother with you, you cannot go alone."

Xu Nianji was still unaware of what had nearly happened to Xu Nianhua in the past. Had he known that Xu Nianhua was almost violated by Gao Jianren, he would have been driven to murder.

"Big brother, second brother, don't worry. In broad daylight, under the watchful eyes of heaven, they can't do anything," Xu Nianhua assured them cheerfully. Besides, if she remembered correctly, the brick factory would close by the end of the year, and the boss would be in trouble.

Although it wasn't the end of the year yet, she felt that the boss must be too preoccupied with his own troubles to concern himself with theirs.

And after all, it wasn't their fault—they could only blame Xu Qinghu's excessive greed.

"Nianhua, listen to your big brother. From now on, when you go to the county, make sure you have your big brother or second brother with you. It's the only way we'll have peace of mind," Ji Ying said with lingering fear, recalling the morning's events. They had discussed the possibility of the Yue Family intervening just the night before, yet they hadn't anticipated Yue Hongliang's parents showing up.

"Nian'an, you think fast. Otherwise, we would have completely offended the Yue Family today," praised Ji Ying.

"You don't know how nervous I was, my palms were sweaty," Xu Qinghe admitted, still shaken by the earlier incident. The words he had used were all taught to him by Xu Nian'an—to retreat from the marriage, yet leave the Yue Family with face. If the Yue Family had turned hostile on the spot...

With their current situation, it was best to offend as few people as possible.

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"Yicheng, they didn't sell mung bean jelly today either. Could something have happened?" Since yesterday when Pei Yicheng had asked about those two siblings, Ling Dong went early to their usual spot where they sold mung bean jelly.