

Regaining 81

Chapter 81: The Girl Selling Mung Bean Jelly

But he had been waiting for two hours and still the siblings hadn't shown up.

Pei Yicheng furrowed his brows.

"Yicheng, it's your day for a follow-up check-up at the hospital," Ling Dong reminded him carefully, aware that what Pei Yicheng disliked the most was precisely these hospital follow-ups.

"I won't go."

Pei Yicheng rejected the suggestion without a second thought.

"Yicheng, Doctor Du will worry," Ling Dong pleaded, "When Doctor Du left for the medical hall, he made me promise a thousand times over that I'd take you to the hospital for your check-up. If he doesn't see the results, he will definitely punish me. Yicheng, please have pity on me..."

Ling Dong looked at Pei Yicheng with a pitiful face. Being punished by Doctor Du meant having to take some bitter medicine, those kinds meant to fortify the body without causing harm. Although they were beneficial, he didn't want to take them at all!

They were just too bitter!

Bitter enough to make one question the meaning of life.

...

"Little sister, you absolutely must not go off by yourself," Xu Nianji once again cautioned her, "Back in the county, I didn't think too much of it, but this time, I'm really too worried with so many people around."

Who knew if the Yue Family would harbor resentment?

"Big brother, I will stick by your side without straying an inch," Xu Nianhua said to her elder brother with both warmth and a touch of helplessness, as if she were being treated like a three-year-old child.

"Little sister, you stay here and look after big brother. I'll go get in line."

Xu Nian'an thought that big brother's arrangement was very good, so he went to line up at the doctor's office. Xu Nianji's wound needed another look from the doctor to confirm there was no pus or anything before they could continue changing the dressing.

"Big brother, how are you feeling? Does the wound still hurt?"

While waiting, Xu Nianhua wasn't idle either, asking Xu Nianji about his foot pain. Since Xu Nianji had difficulty walking, they had still come by the hand-pushed cart, leaving the mung bean jelly entrusted to Grandma Cai's care, and the three siblings headed for the hospital.

Xu Nian'an carried Xu Nianji to the hospital all the way on his back.

"I'm fine, it's just a minor injury, nothing serious," Xu Nianji said nonchalantly, his curiosity piqued about their mung bean jelly vending, "Are we all going to sell mung bean jelly afterwards? Grandma Cai seemed like a very pleasant person."

"Yeah, thank goodness we met Grandma Cai. Otherwise, we wouldn't have had a place to store the jelly."

"You can keep the jelly in the well water, so by the afternoon, it will be icy cold and especially refreshing," Xu Nianhua said with a beaming smile.

"Yicheng, isn't that the girl who sells mung bean jelly?" Ling Dong, who had accompanied Pei Yicheng through all the check-ups, pointed out Xu Nianhua sitting in the hall as they walked out.

Even in the same ordinary clothes, they seemed prettier on Xu Nianhua.

Especially with Xu Nianhua's sweet smile, her eyes as if they could talk. Although Ling Dong had only seen her a few times, he recognized her immediately in the crowd.

Pei Yicheng followed the gaze and saw Xu Nianhua sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with an injured man, her face adorned with a sweet smile, laughter even shining through her eyes.

Xu Nianhua was also diligently offering water to the man; this scene inexplicably furrowed Pei Yicheng's brows.

Was this the first time he saw the girl who wasn't afraid of pain?

So, she could also smile so genuinely, so beautifully.

When Xu Nianji looked up, he saw Pei Yicheng, who despite being on a wheelchair, looked handsome and spirited in a spotless white shirt, compelling attention from others.

Only, why was he frowning at him?

Could it be an enemy?

Xu Nianji tried hard to remember; he didn't know him at all, yet he felt he would never forget his face had he seen it just once.

Chapter 82: It Turns Out to Be the Eldest Brother

"Little sister, do they know you?" Xu Nianji leaned forward and asked in Xu Nianhua's ear after hearing "the girl selling Mung Bean Jelly."

Xu Nianhua followed the gaze and when she saw Pei Yicheng, she thought for a moment and knew it must be because of his leg.

"Big brother, this is Pei Yicheng, Dr. Du's grandson," Xu Nianhua introduced. "This is my big brother, Xu Nianji."

So it's the big brother.

No wonder they seemed so close.

The frown Pei Yicheng had originally sported relaxed instantly, and he resumed his indifferent expression, nodding slightly and saying, "Hello."

"Thank you for your granddad helping my sister," Xu Nianji, caring for his younger sister, naturally knew who Dr. Du was. Previously when Xu Nianhua had accidentally fallen, it was this Dr. Du who had treated her injury.

"You're welcome," Pei Yicheng's gaze landed on Xu Nianji's leg.

Xu Nianji, a bit embarrassed, said, "I fell accidentally."

He definitely didn't want to reveal the issues in their family.

"Oh, Nianji, Nianhua, are you here to get your injuries checked?" Cai Gen's mother's relatives were hospitalized, and she came to visit them. She hadn't expected that, just upon arriving in the lobby, she would run into the Xu siblings.

Cai Gen's mother looked at Xu Nianhua with sympathy and said, "Nianhua, don't take the Yue Family's matters to heart; once you get into university, you are definitely going to meet better people."

"Your aunt really has no sense, to actually push you into such a mess."

"Luckily your dad stood firm this time; you also have two good brothers who care about you. You, you are lucky; maybe next year, you'll even be a university student."

Cai Gen's mother really liked Xu Nianhua, who not only had a gentle nature and a beautiful appearance but was also diligent. Although she wasn't great at farming work, she was exceptionally good at household chores.

"Auntie Cai, thank you for your concern," Xu Nianhua felt a bit awkward. She did not like to talk about her private affairs everywhere, but with Cai Gen's mother speaking like this, it just made things more confusing for others.

Fortunately, Cai Gen's mother had things to attend to and left after speaking a few words.

Pei Yicheng, looking puzzled, turned to Xu Nianhua.

Ling Dong, noticing what Yicheng wanted to ask, very tactfully asked, "Xu big brother, what did your aunt do to push your sister into such a mess?"

Upon thinking, Xu Nianji realized that the situation couldn't be concealed and simply explained the whole story. He sighed and said, "My sister's good reputation was completely ruined by my aunt."

"The person who truly loves your sister won't despise her because of these issues; those who would despise her definitely don't truly love her."

Pei Yicheng spoke earnestly, and although he appeared to be talking to Xu Nianji, it was more like he was indirectly speaking to Xu Nianhua.

"Yicheng is right," Ling Dong echoed, subtly observing Xu Nianhua and thinking about paying more attention to this girl's affairs from now on.

"You said the same thing to my little sister."

Xu Nianji looked surprisingly at Pei Yicheng; although what Xu Nianhua had said wasn't exactly the same, the meaning was.

Pei Yicheng's lips curled faintly, almost imperceptibly, and he said, "Your sister is very smart, clear-headed, and insightful."

"Absolutely, my sister has always been smart, always among the top few in any exam," Xu Nianji said proudly. He had worked extremely hard from a young age but could only hover in the middle ranks, yet his younger brother and sister had always been clever, consistently leading the pack.

"Big brother, the second brother must have arranged things by now," Xu Nianhua hurriedly spoke up to remind him, "The doctor should be ready to change your dressing."

Otherwise, given the chance, her big brother would have started detailing every single score she had ever achieved in her exams.

Chapter 83: The House is Going to be Rented Out

"Alright, don't keep Nian'an waiting," Xu Nianji stopped talking and went to the doctor's office with Xu Nianhua, while at the same time bidding farewell to Pei Yicheng.

As Xu Nianhua supported Xu Nianji, who limped along to the doctor's office, Xu Nianhua whispered, "Big brother, next time, can you not share my grades with others?"

"Why can't I talk about it when your grades are so good?"

The sound of Xu Nianji's disagreement grew fainter and fainter.

Pei Yicheng was silent, watching their retreating figures, and said nothing.

"Yicheng, should we go get the results now?" Ling Dong said quietly, not sure why, but he felt like Yicheng's mood had suddenly dropped.

Pei Yicheng remained silent for a while before finally saying, "Mhm."

Ling Dong happily pushed Pei Yicheng to go get the examination results.

On the other side.

After making sure Xu Nianji's wound hadn't become infected and rebandaging it, the three siblings headed for Granny Cai's house.

"Big brother, let me carry you," Xu Nian'an said, seeing Xu Nianji struggling to walk.

Xu Nianji shook his head and said, "I can walk, just a bit slower."

Though Nian'an was strong enough to carry him, it would be too taxing.

On the way there, Xu Nian'an had been dripping with sweat; the weather was hot, and his shirt had dried by now. If he carried him again, it might get soaked once more.

"Did you take good care of the injury? How is it, no issues with the wound?"

Granny Cai, with her kind face, looked at them, asking with concern.

"Granny Cai, the doctor said my brother's wound is healing very well. In a few days, once the gauze is removed, he'll be fine," Xu Nianhua said cheerfully.

"That's good then."

Granny Cai smiled and nodded, but hesitated to speak further.

Xu Nianhua asked, "Granny Cai, is there something you want to say?"

"I'm really sorry, I... I'm taking my grandson to South City, to my son's place," Granny Cai said somewhat apologetically to Xu Nianhua.

She had grown fond of Xu Nianhua during their time together. Although she only stored Mung Bean Jelly at her place, Xu Nianhua would always leave some for her, and last time, he even gave her a bowl of bean sprouts. He didn't have to give her anything for just storing his items.

And the time before last, when Granny Cai felt unwell, it was Xu Nianhua and his siblings who took her to the hospital.

"That's great news, congratulations, Granny Cai, your family will be reunited." Xu Nianhua said sincerely. Granny Cai, with her grandson in the county, though they had food and clothing, was getting older, and her grandson was too young and ignorant. Occasional county stays were fine, but if she was alone long term and something happened to Granny Cai, would the little grandson be able to help?

"About this house..." Granny Cai looked remorsefully at Xu Nianhua, "I'm afraid I'll have to rent it out."

She would be living in South City permanently, so the house would be empty. Being in the county town, it would definitely find tenants. Renting it out would bring in some money.

However, renting it out meant it would be less convenient for the siblings to store their things.

A thought occurred to Xu Nianhua, who asked, "Granny Cai, how much are you planning to rent out this house for?"

Granny Cai looked at Xu Nianhua in surprise, then at Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an, noting that though they seemed surprised, they didn't voice any objections. She said, "This house is street-facing; it's a bungalow, but it has three rooms, a kitchen, and a living room. I'm not taking anything with me, so the price is a bit high."

"However, if you want to rent it, I can give you a discount—fifty yuan a year." Granny Cai's price was ten yuan cheaper than others', a consideration she had for the good nature of Xu Nianhua and his siblings.

Chapter 84: Certainly Can Make Money

Fifty.

Ji Ying's lips moved as if she wanted to speak, but in the end, she said nothing.

Although she had no idea why her younger sister wanted to rent a house, since her younger sister thought so, she must have her reasons, right?

Xu Nian'an, however, guessed something and quietly asked, "Little sister, are you thinking about selling bean sprouts here?"

"Mhm."

Xu Nianhua nodded vigorously, her eyes lighting up. She looked at Grandma Cai with anticipation and said, "Grandma Cai, could you please not rent out the house yet? Let us go home to discuss it first, and then we will come back to you to rent the house or not."

"No problem."

Seeing how sensible Xu Nianhua was, Grandma Cai nodded in approval and said, "Renting a house is a big decision, and it is indeed something you should discuss with your parents. I was planning to find someone to rent the house before September 1. If it is you who rents it, I'll be at ease, knowing you will take good care of the house and not mess it up."

"Right, right, right."

Xu Nianhua nodded happily. She really liked the house here with its three rooms, which would be spacious enough for her entire family to live in, not to mention that Grandma Cai had left some furniture behind. Although it was old, it was still usable.

Outside the house was the bustling street, which would make selling bean sprouts especially convenient. She would only need to set the bean sprouts out in front of the door to start doing business.

Besides, if they planned to sell bean sprouts long-term, renting a house in the county was necessary.

Although the village was close to the county, a large bucket of bean sprouts had to be made every day, and commuting to and from the village would definitely become known to the villagers.

While it wasn't a business that needed to be hidden, it was better to keep a low profile.

On the way home, Xu Nianhua discussed her thoughts on renting a house and selling bean sprouts with her elder and second brothers.

After weighing the pros and cons, the three siblings had already decided to rent the house before they got home.

"Renting a house?"

Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying exchanged glances, the same thought flashing through both their minds: their child had grown up and had more ideas of her own.

"Fifty yuan a year?" Ji Ying felt the pinch. They had only just split the family household, and they would have liked to stretch every cent into two.

And she had to save money—to get a daughter-in-law!

The marriage arrangement with the Zhou Family had already been dragged on for a year; by the second half of this year, they had to marry Zhou He no matter what.

"Selling bean sprouts is different from selling Mung Bean Jelly. We haven't tried it, and what if no one buys them?"

If they rented the house and it turned out to be of no use at all...

"Dad, I believe it's up to us to make it work. When we started selling Mung Bean Jelly, we never thought that we could make money, did we?" Xu Nian'an felt that renting the house to sell bean sprouts was a good idea and could be developed in the long run!

Not to mention starting to sell Mung Bean Jelly earlier next summer. They could sell not only in the afternoon but also in the evening, surely earning back the money for the rent.

By renting a house in the county, he and his sister wouldn't have to stay at school and could save on accommodation expenses.

Even if they took a step back, the cost of growing bean sprouts was not significant, so it was unlikely they would make a loss. At most, they might just earn a little less money.

"Dad, even if we only make twenty a month, it's still more relaxing than working at the brick factory." Xu Nianji began to persuade, "I think we can definitely make money selling bean sprouts."

"I have an intuition that we will surely make it!"

Xu Nianhua was practically ready to guarantee it by pounding on her chest!

It was the year 1979, and there was gold everywhere. As long as you had the courage, even setting up a street stall could earn you a fortune!

Chapter 85: Future

Xu Nianhua and his two siblings all looked expectantly at Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying. After exchanging glances, the couple decided to support their children.

Since they had decided to rent Grandma Cai's house, Xu Qinghe became even more dedicated to the bean sprout bucket business.

Because of the Yue Family's affairs, Xu Qinghe had missed two days of work; during these days, they had added quite a bit of firewood to the woodpile at home.

The bean sprout bucket Xu Nianhua had requested wasn't complicated to make; within two days, Xu Qinghe had completed it.

Xu Nianhua specifically taught her older and younger brothers how to grow bean sprouts.

Xu Nianji and Xu Nian'an learned with exceptional diligence, especially Xu Nianji. In the future, once Xu Nian'an and Xu Nianhua went to school, the task of growing and selling bean sprouts would fall to him.

He had to do well in growing bean sprouts. Having left the brick factory, he felt somewhat lost, as he knew how to do nothing else.

Yet, now his younger sister had given him an opportunity. Xu Nianji wanted to give it his all; he wanted to earn money, more money, to improve their family's living conditions, and also, Zhou He...

The shy expression of Zhou He surfaced in Xu Nianji's mind; he took a deep breath and, following what he had learned, besides the bean sprouts Xu Nianhua grew, he also decided to try growing a bowl of his own to see.

"Older brother, you don't need to worry so much, actually, growing bean sprouts is really simple," Xu Nianhua reassured him as she noticed his as-if-preparing-for-battle demeanor, "Besides, in the beginning, I'll be there to watch and make sure we don't waste any soybeans."

"Once the soybean sprouts are ready, we can try growing mung bean sprouts too. Selling both types of sprouts should certainly earn us a bit more money."

"Little sister, you really have a great mind. How did you learn to grow bean sprouts?" Xu Nianji praised her, looking at his sister with pride, always thinking she was exceptionally smart.

"Uh..." Xu Nianhua hesitated.

On the side, Xu Nian'an said, "I remember Grandma knew how to do it; little sister always loved following Grandma."

Grandma!

The thought of Grandma instantly brightened Xu Nianhua's eyes; the kind and gentle old lady had always favored her, hiding good things for her to eat ever since she was small.

"Missing Grandma, are you? Sometime we should go visit her," Xu Nianji noted Xu Nianhua's expression and knew she was thinking of Grandma.

"Yeah, and we'll buy some meat to take along."

Xu Nianhua thought about how Grandma's living conditions were not very good, so she said, "After we start making money from selling bean sprouts, life will get better."

"I want to build a new house, to let those people see that even without the Xu Family, our lives can keep getting better."

The three Xu siblings began to imagine a wonderful future.

The next day, they went to confirm the rental deal with Grandma Cai, and they even specifically signed a contract.

Knowing they wanted to rent, Grandma Cai was extremely pleased as her mouth could barely close into a smile; after all, it was the house she had lived in her whole life. Even though she was leaving, she hoped that the renters would take good care of the home.

Xu Nianhua and his siblings were all clean and tidy people. Grandma Cai felt especially reassured renting the house to them.

"Then I'll send a telegram to my son today, to have them come and fetch me when they're free," Grandma Cai said smilingly; her son had always been asking her to come stay with them, but she was reluctant to leave this place. It was only after falling ill last time that she finally agreed as her son insisted on moving her out.

Now, Grandma Cai felt that living alone with her grandson here might be a bit too hard for her, and if something happened, there would be no one to take care of them, so she agreed.

Chapter 86: The Zhou Family Wants to Call Off the Engagement

Grandma Cai had already started packing up, and most of her son's family's belongings had been moved out, leaving behind only some old and useless items.

She and her grandson didn't have much, just the kind that could all be taken away in a single bundle.

Grandma Cai's son received a telegram and came to pick her up the very next day. He heard that it was the Xu family who had helped Grandma Cai last time, and he made a point of expressing his gratitude, also mentioning that renting the house to them made him feel very reassured.

That very day, Grandma Cai and her grandson followed her son to South City.

"Grandma Cai really trusts us!" Xu Nianhua looked at the house. It used to be Grandma Cai's home, but now, it had become the house they rented.

Grandma Cai had said that they could use anything in the house and to dispose of whatever they couldn't, making them feel as if it were their own home.

"It's still early. Shall we start cleaning up?"

Xu Nianhua suggested that since they had finished selling their mung bean jelly and still had time, they might as well clean the place inside and out.

In the evening, the three siblings returned to Shuangzhu Village.

"Dad, Mom, what's wrong?"

Xu Nianhua had wanted to tell them that they had already rented a house and even done a simple cleanup; they could move in as soon as they brought their bedding over. However, when he arrived home, he could sense that something was off.

"Did Aunt Qinghu come again?" Xu Nianji thought it was Xu Qinghu who had arrived.

"No."

Ji Ying hesitated to speak as she looked toward Xu Nianji, her face filled with worry.

Xu Nianhua's heart sank, wondering if it was something to do with his eldest brother, or the Zhou family?

"Nianji, the Zhou family came this morning," Ji Ying took a deep breath, but before she could finish, Xu Nianji interrupted her excitedly, "Mom, why didn't they give us a heads-up before coming? Did Xiaohe come too?"

Xu Nianji's excitement made Ji Ying even more unsure how to break the news, while Xu Qinghe sat quietly to the side.

The over-excited Xu Nianji also realized something wasn't right.

"They came to break off the engagement," Ji Ying sighed, explaining the Zhou family's visit. They said they could not afford the two hundred yuan dowry, after already delaying for a year, they wanted to call off the engagement.

Moreover, with Xu Nianhua's situation, the Zhou family felt even less inclined to marry Zhou He into the Xu family.

Xu Nianji's figure swayed slightly.

"Big brother."

Xu Nianhua quickly stepped forward to support him.

Xu Nianji pursed his lips and gave a smile that was uglier than crying, saying, "I'm fine, I've lost my job, and if they want to call off the engagement, it's the right thing to do."

Although he and Zhou He hadn't spent much time together since their engagement, the thoughts of that shy girl were still dear to Xu Nianji.

He had even thought that after they got married, he would treat Xiaohe well and protect her from being bullied by others.

"Dad, Mom, if we could come up with two hundred yuan now, could we stop the engagement from being broken off?" Xu Nianhua asked.

Just like in the past, the Zhou family still wanted to break off the engagement.

But it was different from before. They had separated from the Xu family, and with time, they could come up with not just two hundred yuan, but even two thousand!

However, what they lacked most now was time.

After all, the marriage with the Zhou family had been dragging on for a year.

"Of course, I didn't agree to the annulment today because I thought that girl, Zhou He, is good and we shouldn't call off the marriage lightly," Ji Ying nodded and then, with a worried face, said, "But where are we going to find two hundred yuan?"

Chapter 87: This is a Family

"The Zhou Family said to give them the money within three days, otherwise, the marriage proposal won't count," Xu Qinghe sighed and said, "I'm afraid even if we give 200, the Zhou Family might not agree to the marriage."

Xu Qinghe was worried. The attitude of the Zhou Family when they came over today didn't seem like they wanted to continue the marriage ties.

It seemed like the Zhou Family had firmly decided to break off the engagement, giving them a deadline of three days to provide 200 was just an excuse to call off the engagement.

"Dad, what do you mean by that?" Xu Nianji had difficulty speaking.

"Today, the attitude of the Zhou Family didn't seem like they wanted to continue the marriage," Xu Qinghe wanted to prepare Xu Nianji in advance so that he could be mentally prepared.

What Xu Qinghe didn't mention was that Mr. Zhou, very dominantly, demanded to break off the engagement. After a good discussion with Ji Ying, they finally set a three-day deadline.

"The money from selling mung bean jelly," Xu Nian'an hurried back to his room and poured out all the money they had earned from selling mung bean jelly. The coins, neat and tidy in denomination, were all laid out as he said, "Except for the fifty yuan for rent, the cost of ingredients, and the daily expenses for groceries, everything is here!"

"Sixty yuan."

Xu Nian'an and they calculated, the duration they had been selling mung bean jelly wasn't long, and he hadn't dared to spend recklessly, hence, he and his younger sister had saved up all the money.

Xu Nianji looked at Xu Nian'an and Xu Nianhua with a moved expression.

"Big brother, as long as it can bring sister-in-law home, if we're out of money, we can earn it again," Xu Nian'an said earnestly. Although he was poor, he had only one older brother and one younger sister.

If his big brother was getting married, he would definitely contribute wherever he could.

"Big brother, just keep it safely and bring sister-in-law home soon," Xu Nianhua said with a beaming smile, knowing that even if they managed to gather 200 yuan, the Zhou Family might still be reluctant, but she believed that the situation was different now, her big brother would definitely fulfill his wish and the tragedy of the past life wouldn't repeat itself.

"I also have a salary. I had received thirty previously, and Mr. Yue gave me my wage yesterday, another seventy-five."

Xu Nianji hurried back to his room and took out all of this money.

The previous fifty yuan given by the Yue Family included forty yuan as Xu Nianji's salary for more than a month. The remaining ten yuan went towards medical expenses for Xu Nianji's injury, leaving only a few yuan.

This was also why Xu Nianji didn't refuse the Yue Family, having sustained injuries, besides the five yuan for medical expenses, he still needed to recover, and taking an extra five yuan made him feel fully justified!

Moreover, considering the trouble the Yue Family had caused his family, Xu Nianji didn't feel there was anything inappropriate about accepting an additional five yuan.

"I have another twenty here, I'll go out again later and make sure I can borrow some money to make up the full 200," Xu Qinghe was somewhat surprised that his daughter and son had managed to save up so much money.

Previously, he and his wife hadn't managed the money they earned from selling mung bean jelly, letting them save it on their own. Although he saw them selling out the mung bean jelly every day, they also bought meat and bones every now and then. He thought even if they were saving, it wouldn't be much, and surprisingly, after paying fifty yuan for rent, they still managed to save up sixty yuan.

Was this all their savings?

"Dad, you go to our grandparents' house later, ask grandpa, grandma, and also uncle and aunt for a loan," Xu Nianhua suddenly spoke up.

Xu Nian'an immediately understood his younger sister's idea and said, "Exactly, they are our closest relatives."

On the word "closest," Xu Nian'an emphasized heavily.

Chapter 88: Borrowing Money

"Okay." Xu Qinghe nodded; he had planned to ask his father and Qingjiang for some money, as the past issues, despite causing some friction with the Xu family, were minor compared to Nianji's wedding, a significant event.

Previously, because Xu Zhihao was marrying a girl from the city, Xu Zhong had said to let Nianji endure for a year and marry a year later.

Xu Qinghe thought that borrowing fifty yuan shouldn't be a problem.

No sooner had Xu Qinghe and his wife Ji Ying left than Xu Nianhua turned and asked, "Do you think Dad can borrow the money?"

"I doubt it." Xu Nian'an had little hope for his grandfather's family.

As for his second uncle?

Getting him to lend money would probably mean facing a pile of excuses once again.

"Grandpa previously promised he'd give a dowry when I get married," said Xu Nianji, not as pessimistic as they were making it sound.

The Xu Family.

Once Xu Qinghe and his wife arrived at the Xu family's home and raised the issue of borrowing money, before Xu Zhong could even respond, Liu Sanmei had already started making excuses, claiming they would give the money but not until after October, despite it only being August.

They came up with a bunch of excuses, like not having the money right now.

In essence, Xu Zhong and his household didn't have the money to lend, and Xu Qingjiang and his wife, having mentioned that Xu Zhihao's wife was pregnant and spending on various supplements, and that Xu Zhiyuan needed money to continue his education, also didn't have the funds.

Xu Qinghe and Ji Ying, having swallowed their pride to ask for money, didn't get a single penny, leaving both in a rather bad mood. They then visited another cousin, Xu Yuchun's home.

This cousin, the son of Xu Qinghe's eldest uncle and someone Xu Qinghe had grown up with, shared a good relationship with him.

Xu Yuchun, upon hearing that it was for Nianji's wedding, immediately agreed to lend twenty yuan.

"Qinghe, it's about time for Nianji at his age to get married," Xu Yuchun said, aware that Nianji's marriage had been delayed for a year. "The Zhou family girl, I hear, is of good character and hardworking—a daughter-in-law this fine shouldn't be missed."

"Exactly, that's why I'm trying to secure this match for Nianji," Xu Qinghe, clutching the twenty yuan borrowed from Xu Yuchun, felt both moved and melancholic.

Leaving Xu Yuchun's house, Xu Qinghe and his wife visited the Cai family and the Yao family, good friends of theirs, and borrowed twenty yuan from each, accumulating a total of sixty yuan. Xu Qinghe thought that with two hundred yuan now gathered, his mind was finally at ease!

However, thinking of Xu Zhong and his father, he still felt disappointed and disheartened.

"Dad, Mom, how did it go?"

Upon returning home and hearing Xu Qinghe talk about not getting any money from Xu Zhong but managing to collect sixty from Xu Yuchun and others to make up two hundred, Xu Nianji's heart slightly settled.

This is his family.

Fearing the longer the delay, the more things could go wrong.

Xu Qinghe and his wife took Xu Nianji the very next day to the Zhou family's place.

The Zhou family lived in another village, quite a distance from Shuangzhu Village, a two-hour walk away.

To make a good impression at the Zhou family's, they even bought a tin of malted milk, a gift that guaranteed honor no matter who received it.

Upon their arrival, Zhou father and Zhou mother were both at home. Seeing the visitors from the Xu family, the threesome, Zhou father said right away, "It's good that you've come, just in time to call off this engagement."

Zhou father never even asked if they had brought enough money.

The old Luo who had just left had said that as long as he could marry Zhou He, he would give three hundred yuan as a betrothal gift!

With that three hundred yuan, his youngest son's marriage would also be set.

Chapter 89: Speak Directly

"In-laws, we've brought the two hundred dollars for the betrothal gift," Xu Qinghe said with a beaming smile, as if he hadn't heard what Zhou's father had just said. He took out the money and continued, "Now, let's discuss the wedding date for the two children."

"You dragged your feet last year about marrying, and now you've suddenly scraped together two hundred?" Zhou's father looked at the scattered two hundred dollars. For a moment, he was tempted, but then he remembered Luo's promise of three hundred dollars and a bicycle, and without thinking, he pushed the money back.

Zhou's father's face was stern, and he said with annoyance, "Last year, I suggested they marry early, but you insisted on delaying until this year. Now, I feel that you have no sincerity in marrying my daughter. This marriage arrangement should just be called off!"

"No, our two families had already agreed on this, and I've brought the money today, how can you say we won't get married just like that?"

For the sake of his son's happiness, Xu Qinghe showed his assertive side. He lowered his stance and spoke kindly, "In-laws, ever since the engagement, we've never missed sending our holiday gifts every year. Although last year... we delayed by a year, it was unavoidable. Our Nianji truly wants to..." Zhou He.

Xu Qinghe had not finished speaking when Zhou's father interrupted, "What true intentions? Last year when we wanted to marry off our daughter, you didn't take her, and now, we don't want to marry her to you anymore! Xiaohe also doesn't want to marry into the Xu family."

"You can leave now; this marriage is no longer valid."

Zhou's father began ushering them out.

Ji Ying wanted to speak, but Zhou's father did not give her a chance, and Zhou's mother sat by silently, as if she were invisible.

"Dad, I want to see Xiaohe."

The silent Xu Nianji suddenly spoke up.

Zhou's father disagreed. Xu Nianji said, "If I can't see Xiaohe, I won't agree to break off the engagement."

When he came here, his younger sister told him, no matter what Zhou's father says, he must see Zhou He and hear her speak for himself.

Though he didn't know why his sister said that, now, Xu Nianji understood.

Zhou's father claimed Xiaohe disagreed, so he had to see Zhou He and hear it from her personally.

"Could there be something going on that we don't know about?" The more Xu Nianji thought about it, the more something seemed off. On the way here, he kept thinking: they had already gathered the money, why would Zhou's father still want to break off the engagement?

"No."

Zhou's father answered quickly. Xu Nianji said, "Then why suddenly break off the engagement? Everyone knew about me and Xiaohe's engagement for the past two years. If it's suddenly called off, what will happen to Xiaohe's reputation? How will she ever marry someone else?"

"There are plenty who want to marry my Xiaohe." Zhou's father thought of Luo, his face proud. He previously felt that having a daughter was a losing deal, but now he felt that raising a daughter could actually be profitable.

"Could there be someone else wanting to marry Xiaohe?"

Xu Nianji was not foolish, he just never assumed the worst in people, but now, Zhou's father's behavior forced Xu Nianji to think the worst.

"In-laws, our marriage was not arranged covertly, nor did we force you into agreeing. Now regardless, let's discuss this matter." Ji Ying couldn't help speaking out now; she really liked Zhou He. The girl was gentle and diligent. Most importantly, her son liked her as well.

"If there's something to say, I'll speak plainly," Zhou's father, not liking Xu Nianji's penetrating gaze, felt as if he was being seen through. He sat down and said to his in-laws, "Someone came to propose, willing to pay three hundred dollars and a bicycle for Xiaohe. If you can match that, next month, we'll let Xiaohe marry into their family."

Chapter 90: Zhou He

Three hundred yuan, and a bicycle too?

This time, the marriage negotiation naturally ended on a discordant note.

Back home, Xu Nianhua couldn't help but click his tongue when he heard the demands. It was the year 1979, and in the village, a marriage gift of two hundred yuan was already quite generous.

But the Zhou Family's father actually wanted three hundred yuan and a bicycle?

Even if they borrowed more money, they could not come up with that much.

A bicycle alone would cost nearly two hundred yuan.

"Big brother, did you mention to Sister Zhou about meeting up in the county?"

Xu Nianhua quietly inquired.

Before leaving, Xu Nianhua had told Xu Nianji to somehow meet with Zhou He and then, find a way to get her to visit the county.

Without meeting, many things were difficult to handle.

"I did," Xu Nianji nodded, saying, "Zhou He's mother was also there at the time, so I couldn't speak too clearly, but I think Xiaohe should be able to understand."

"That's good."

Xu Nianhua felt relieved, deciding to first meet Zhou He before anything else.

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The next day, the three Xu siblings went to the county early, not just to sell Mung Bean Jelly but also in hopes of seeing Zhou He.

Xu Nianji's leg, scabbed over from the wound, looked unsightly, but at least he could walk normally.

Having left the brick factory, he helped Xu Nian'an with chopping firewood in the mornings and evenings and accompanied him to the county to sell Mung Bean Jelly during the day!

Their grown bean sprouts could be sold in two more days.

The rented house also required a final tidy-up, especially the kitchen. Even though Grandma Cai was tidy on a daily basis, as a single person taking care of her grandson, she couldn't attend to everything.

At noon, Xu Nianji helped Xu Nian'an sell Mung Bean Jelly under the big tree opposite their door, while Xu Nianhua waited for Zhou He.

Zhou He's appearance was not much of an impression in her memory, the only thing she recalled was that Zhou He would rather die than marry someone else, having drowned herself in the lake.

"Xiaohe."

As Xu Nianji followed Xu Nian'an, he watched him deftly sell Mung Bean Jelly and found it extremely novel. He secretly practiced, determined to be bold and speak up when it was his turn to sell bean sprouts.

Just then, Xu Nianji spotted Zhou He not far away, looking around in search of someone.

"Brother Xu."

Zhou He's face was flushed as she spotted Xu Nianji, her eyes lit up, and she hurried over. She had come out on the pretext of buying embroidery thread.

She was very skilled at embroidery, often taking embroidered handkerchiefs to the county to sell. Although the earnings were meager, as they say, even a small mosquito is still meat.

"Xiaohe," said Xu Nianji, as he looked at her whom he hadn't seen for a long time, filled with a thousand words to say, but upon seeing her flushed cheeks, he found himself speechless.

"Sister-in-law, have a bowl of Mung Bean Jelly, cool yourself off from the heat."

Xu Nian'an considerately handed a bowl to Zhou He.

Zhou He was about to decline, but Xu Nianji said, "Have some, we made it ourselves. It's very hot outside. My little sister is over there; let me take you to her."

"How have you been lately?" Xu Nianji walked with Zhou He to the rented house and asked. Ever since Zhou He appeared, his gaze had stayed on her face, never shifting away.

"I've been good, how about you? I heard you were injured, are you okay?" Zhou He looked at Xu Nianji with concern, her eyes on his scabbed leg and thinking about the village rumors, she was extremely worried. Seeing him safe and sound now, she could finally ease her worries.

"I'm fine, just a minor scratch on my leg," Xu Nianji said with a grin.

Xu Nianhua had just finished cleaning the room and came out to see them walking side by side in the sunlight. In the sunlight, their contrasting heights formed a complementary silhouette.