

Switched M 101

Chapter 101 Bizarre

"How can that be okay? I know city kids are precious, and your two are so smart, they might end up like Mr. Bai, going to college. We can't let my Jingjing ruin them, impacting their future studies."

"No need to be so serious, really, don't be polite."

"Sister-in-law Song, you city folks are really nice. If we were in the countryside, people might even demand compensation. I know you wouldn't miss these two bucks from me, take these veggies for your dinner tonight since Mr. Qin and his family are coming over."

"Really, you should keep it..."

Both were being polite, and then Lin Chuxia heard a man's voice, probably Bai Xiaoming and Qin Yang returning, so she stepped out of the kitchen.

She saw not only Bai Xiaoming and Qin Yang, but Feng Dajun had also come with them.

When Qin Yang saw Lin Chuxia, he couldn't take his eyes off her and walked straight towards her, while the others were still chatting at the door.

Lin Chuxia gave him a look, asking what was going on, why was Da Jun here?

"On the way back, we bumped into Engineer Feng. He said a neighbor left him a message that his daughter had broken Bai Tian, and he came to check," Qin Yang briefly explained.

Lin Chuxia nodded, and without much comment, stood with Qin Yang watching the two parties discuss.

Generally speaking, Sister-in-law Feng was being very polite, Mr. Bai and Sister-in-law Song didn't take it seriously, and Feng Dajun awkwardly apologized.

After a few exchanges, the matter seemed to be settled. Since they were colleagues, as Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia stood in the courtyard, Bai Xiaoming politely invited Da Jun and his family to stay for dinner.

Da Jun politely declined and left with Sister-in-law Feng and Feng Jingjing, but Lin Chuxia clearly saw Sister-in-law Feng's eyes light up when Bai Xiaoming invited them.

What a peculiar woman.

The food was almost ready, especially the braised pork, which was just coming off the stove.

The red and glistening braised pork, with its rich aroma, trembled in the plate with layers of fat and lean meat, making one's mouth water.

"Mom, is this the braised pork made by Aunt Lin?"

Bai Liang and Bai Tian were guarding this pot of braised pork and hadn't moved, now swallowing their saliva as they watched.

Sister-in-law Song hadn't expected to make such delicious braised pork and smiled somewhat proudly, "What, your mom isn't fit to make this kind of braised pork?"

"It's not about fitting, mom just doesn't know how," Bai Tian corrected without hesitation.

"You little rascal, mom didn't know before, but from today onwards, she will know, and mom will often make this kind of braised pork for you."

"Really?" Bai Tian's eyes sparkled as he looked at Lin Chuxia, "Aunt Lin, you actually taught my mom. You're really our family's lifesaver."

Bai Liang nodded seriously, "Aunt Lin is our family's benefactor, I have to go tell dad this good news."

Lin Chuxia: "..."

Still happy Sister-in-law Song: "..."

Another side, Da Jun Feng walked home with his wife and daughter.

"What exactly happened? You didn't make it clear when you left the message."

"It's just that your daughter accidentally hit Mr. Bai's young son's head. I intended to give a sincere apology, but they didn't accept it," she lifted the vegetables in her hand.

Seeing the wilted vegetables, Da Jun Feng slightly frowned, "If you wanted to sincerely apologize, you should have bought something decent. How do you expect them to accept a bunch of wilted vegetables?"

"We villagers don't have much to offer; these vegetables are the only ones we had, and city folks have seen much better anyway. They say it's the thought that counts, but I think they just look down on us."

Hearing this, Da Jun Feng looked around warily and then glared at her discontentedly.

He didn't dare to speak further outside and went straight home.

By this time, it was the dinner hour; other families were already having their meals, but their home was still cold and empty.

Sister-in-law Feng took the vegetables to the kitchen and continued to grumble to Da Jun Feng, "You see, when Mrs. Qin came, Mr. Bai and his wife invited them over for dinner. When Jingjing and I first arrived, no one invited us."

Da Jun Feng didn't think much of it, "We're not in the same project group anyway; I don't have that kind of rapport with Mr. Qin or Mr. Bai. Why should they invite us?"

Sister-in-law Feng thought differently, "Rapport is built by interaction. If we don't interact, how can we build rapport? I think they just look down on us because we come from a rural area. If we were from the city, I bet they would treat us differently."

"Just stop overthinking. Everyone is here to work; who cares where you are from? Work is about individual ability. As long as you're capable, it doesn't matter if you're from the countryside or the city."

Sister-in-law Feng looked at Da Jun Feng helplessly shaking her head, "Da Jun, how can you think like that? Thinking this way, you're forgetting your roots. We are from the countryside. Jingjing, myself, and our family back home are still living off agriculture. If it weren't for your father finding you this opportunity, could you have access to commercial food? Are your words fair to your father?"

Da Jun Feng lost his patience, "It's you who feels inferior coming from the village, why blame me?"

"I'm not blaming you, I just want to remind you to never forget that we are different from them. They look down on Jingjing and me, which means they are looking down on you too. What good is it if you do your job well?"

Da Jun Feng felt like it was impossible to communicate with his wife and simply gave up.

Seeing him grab his jacket and head for the door, Sister-in-law Feng quickly asked, "Where are you going?"

"I'm going out for a walk," he said, leaving the house.

Sister-in-law Feng watched him until his silhouette disappeared from view before finally withdrawing her gaze.

She turned to her daughter, who had been silent the whole time, and gently touched her head.

"You see how stubborn your dad is? He doesn't realize we're different from them. Jingjing, remember, we are rural people, and we'll never be equal to city folk. We are inherently lower. Even if you deny it,

they will only mock you. You dream big but your fate is fragile. Don't be like your dad; don't forget your roots after living in the city for a few days, understand?"

Jingjing nodded, somewhat understanding, "I understand, Mom."

"That's right. Tomorrow, if you run into Bai Liang and Bai Tian, go and apologize again. Bai Tian is about your age, try to please him a bit. Whatever you have, if he wants it, you give it to him."

Jingjing hesitated, "But... I don't want to give it to him," referring to her two beloved toys given by her father, what if Bai Tian wanted them?

Chapter 102 Good Kids and Good Men Are All Praised into Being

Sister-in-law Feng tapped her forehead lightly, "I've been talking to you for a long time, why do you just not understand? Bai Liang and Bai Tian are both children from the city, if they fancy anything of yours, it's all due to the good karma you've cultivated. What's there to be reluctant to part with? Do you really think having a couple of toys makes you a city dweller? Remember where you come from, a rural area, and you're only fit to play with soil."

"I'm your mother, would I harm you? If you don't listen to me, then don't call me mom, and I'll send you back to your hometown, to let you see what you truly deserve."

Upon hearing that she would be sent back to her hometown, Feng Jingjing's eyes immediately reddened, "Mom, I'll listen to you, please don't abandon me..."

Finally satisfied, Sister-in-law Feng nodded, "That's my good girl. Remember, it's because of you that your father and I couldn't have a son. If you dare to disobey me, I'll sell you and try for a son again."

Feng Jingjing nodded forcefully, tears streaming down her small face, "I will definitely listen to mom..."

No matter how reluctant she felt, Lin Chuxia had to return to her hometown.

On the first day, Qin Yang took leave from his superior; according to Lin Chuxia's wishes, there was no need for him to accompany her. With this fool by her side, many things would be inconvenient.

But Qin Yang, eager to spend more time with his wife, didn't heed her words—how could he let her go without seeing her off?

However, one benefit of Qin Yang's accompaniment was that he borrowed the company's official car, so they didn't have to lug their bags to crowd onto public buses.

Stepping out of the house, Qin Yang pulled Lin Chuxia's hand and stuffed a thick stack of money into it.

It was substantial, amounting to several hundred yuan.

"Where did you get so much money? Do you have a secret fund?"

Qin Yang didn't know what to do with her and pinched her cheek.

He had wanted to do this for a long time.

"No secret fund, it's all yours. This was the money I previously sent to the Liu Family, but after resolving the issue, my workplace reimbursed me. In total, it's five hundred and twenty yuan, all for you, don't hesitate to spend it."

The wife was right, indeed a woman was a man's motivation to earn money.

Seeing how astonished she was holding the money, he yearned to make more just for her to spend.

Lin Chuxia smacked her lips, "That's quite a lot indeed."

It's no wonder that with Qin Yang's monthly salary of over sixty yuan, he still fell into debt upon marriage—one month's salary of over sixty yuan, twenty for the Liu Family, another twenty for Mr. Qin's medical costs, barely leaving anything for himself.

And that was his current salary, which must have been even less in the previous years.

"Hey," she sighed, "we really did wrong by my brother and sister-in-law, your foolish kindness led to them helping us cover our debts, how can you live with yourself?"

Qin Yang truly hadn't thought about this before. At that time, he wasn't even planning to get married and only intended to fulfill his promise regardless of the situation.

Now looking back, he admitted that he had indeed been too kind-hearted.

"I won't do it again," he said shamefacedly.

However, Lin Chuxia smiled, "I know you had no choice back then, but we must learn from it and rectify our shortcomings. We can't let our kindness be used as a weapon against us by others."

"Got it, wife."

Seeing his dejected look, Lin Chuxia took the initiative to give him a hug, "I believe in Qin Yang, in my heart you are a true, stand-up man."

That hug instantly filled Qin Yang with energy.

His wife said he was a stand-up man.

Sister-in-law Song knew Lin Chuxia was leaving today and came over early with her two kids to see her off.

After bidding farewell to Sister-in-law Song, Bai Liang, and Bai Tian, Lin Chuxia saw Sister-in-law Feng leading her children in the distance.

With just one glance, she silently retracted her gaze and said to the man beside her, "Let's drive."

Upon hearing his wife's command, Qin Yang didn't hesitate to put the car in gear, release the handbrake, and step on the accelerator.

Sister-in-law Feng, who had just wanted to squeeze in, stood there: "..."

Lin Chuxia had a morning train, and Qin Yang insisted on buying a platform ticket while purchasing her ticket.

Lin Chuxia said she could manage on her own, yet Qin Yang gave a pout, "Listen to me, I'll feel at ease only after seeing you onto the train," wishing he could escort her all the way home if it weren't for the difficulty in getting leave from work.

His wife was so beautiful and seemed like a weak and gentle woman—how could he feel at ease with her traveling alone on such a long train journey?

Lin Chuxia had no choice but to indulge him.

He gave a bunch of instructions on the train, concerning safety, to be wary of strangers, to write to him after reaching home, not to overwork herself with the Bun Shop business, and to quit if it became too much. He would work hard to make money for a better life for her.

Lin Chuxia was deeply moved, "I'll remember everything, don't worry. You also take care of yourself. You're my man; I'm well if you're well."

If it were the old Qin Yang, perhaps he couldn't comprehend what Lin Chuxia meant by those words, but after deep interaction with her this time, he saw the meaning more clearly.

His deep eyes earnestly spoke, "Rest assured, I won't disappoint you."

Lin Chuxia smiled contentedly; indeed, both good children and good men are encouraged by praise.

As the time for the train to depart was nearing, she urged Qin Yang to head back.

After seeing Qin Yang looking back three steps at a time before getting off the train, Lin Chuxia didn't dare to delay and, carrying her luggage, she walked in the opposite direction and got off the train a few carriages away.

As the train whistle blew a long note and began to move slowly, Lin Chuxia saw Qin Yang craning his neck, looking constantly into the carriages, even jogging alongside the moving train, silently giving him another point for his effort.

Despite the points, she had no intention of letting him find her, and she stepped out of the train station with her suitcase.

Finding a secluded spot, she put her luggage into the space, waiting until Qin Yang drove away before confidently walking onto the main street.

She had just seen that man selling silver bracelets on the street again, at the same spot, seeming to sell something else.

She approached the man's side and saw that he was selling a jadeite thumb ring. Lin Chuxia slid the bracelet off her wrist and placed it in front of the man.

"You told me previously the origin of this thing was passed down by your ancestors, how do you explain now? Refund me, I don't want this anymore. After wearing it for two days, it's truly unlucky."

The man, seeing Lin Chuxia and then the bracelet, immediately became flustered.

"I... I'm telling the truth, it was handed down by my ancestors, I didn't lie to you," having sold the silver bracelet with difficulty, the money already spent on medicine for his mother, what could he refund?

Lin Chuxia obviously didn't believe his words. "You told me the bracelet was a family heirloom. What about the jade thumb ring in your hand, surely that can't be a family heirloom as well? I think these items have an unsavory origin. If you don't refund the money, let's go to the police station and see how long you can keep up your defiance."

Chapter 103: Guilty Conscience

Upon hearing they were going to see the public security, the man became even more urgent.

Without caring about anything else, he took the jadeite ring and turned to run.

How could Lin Chuxia let him run? She grabbed the man's arm in one swift motion.

"Guilty conscience makes you want to run? Let's go, we're going to the police station to see the public security."

Her voice wasn't loud, and the area was secluded, not drawing the attention of others; however, it was enough to scare the man terribly.

He struggled, trying to run, but for some reason, though the woman seemed slender, she had surprising strength. Being pulled by her like this, he simply couldn't escape.

"Miss, please spare me, this thing really is an heirloom passed down from my ancestors, I'm not lying to you, I swear to heaven. If it weren't for my old mother being gravely ill and in need of money, I wouldn't have taken this out to sell, and I definitely couldn't go with you to see the public security..."

The man squatted on the ground, visibly scared and looking like he was about to cry.

Lin Chuxia had already noticed that the man seemed sincere and simple. She had merely intended to scare him a bit to hear the truth but hadn't expected him to be so faint-hearted.

"Alright then, tell me where this thing came from. If you tell the truth, not only will I not take you to see the public security, but I will also buy your jadeite ring."

The man watched her warily, as if weighing the situation, and finally gritted his teeth and spoke up.

These items really were ancestral possessions. His family had fallen on hard times, but they had retained quite a few valuable pieces, just that in the past he dared not take them out – all were buried

underground. Now that the policy had changed and coinciding with his old mother falling sick and urgently needing money, he had no choice but to take them out to exchange for money.

"I'm telling the truth. I can't go to see the public security. If they find out we still have things at home that weren't turned in..."

"Alright, since you've told the truth, I'll keep my word. How much do you want to sell the jadeite ring for?"

Lin Chuxia picked up the jadeite ring and looked at it. The quality of the jade wasn't exceptionally good, but such antique jade still held considerable value for collectors, especially since this jadeite ring had two traditional characters carved inside it.

The man timidly extended two fingers, "20 dollars," he said, then hastily added, "Miss, I'm really not asking for an exorbitant price. This ring has a history. My grandmother told me it was passed down from my great-grandfather. It's a family treasure. I still need 20 dollars for my mother's treatment; otherwise, I wouldn't sell it."

Selling a family heirloom for just 20 dollars, Lin Chuxia didn't know whether to admire his filial piety or... well, his filial piety.

If his ancestors knew, they might be unable to rest in peace in their coffins.

She didn't bargain and took out 20 dollars from her bag to give to him.

Seeing her agree so readily, the man thanked her profusely.

Lin Chuxia secured the item, "Don't thank me just yet. Do you have any other items to sell? Bring them all out at once. It'll save you from squatting here every day. You've been trying to sell the bracelets for several days now. If you hadn't run into me, who knows when you might have been able to sell this ring. It's better if you sell everything you want to sell to me."

The man was slightly startled by her words, watching her with caution.

Lin Chuxia laughed outright, "Don't worry. You're in need of money, and I want the items. It's a perfect match; you have the items, I have the money. There are no hidden tricks. You can tell from my accent I'm not a local. I was actually about to catch that train earlier, but because I saw you selling things, I missed it. If you have anything else you want to sell, bring it to me these next two days. I'll be staying at the guesthouse nearby. But make sure to come by before this time tomorrow at the latest. If I miss today's train, I have to catch tomorrow's."

After Lin Chuxia had finished speaking, she did not dally any longer and went to the guesthouse not far away with her possessions.

The owner still remembered Lin Chuxia and greeted her with a smile as she came to stay again.

Lin Chuxia booked a room and went upstairs with her luggage.

In her own space, she had enough food and drink and didn't need to leave her room at all. However, she didn't have to wait long; the man came looking for her in the evening.

When the employee informed her that someone was at the front desk looking for her, Lin Chuxia went downstairs and saw the man sitting there, glancing around uneasily and seeming a bit guilty, she knew she had him.

Seeing Lin Chuxia, the man stood up abruptly.

"Let's talk outside."

Although discussing the following matters in her room would be more discreet and convenient, this was a guesthouse, and Lin Chuxia could not possibly bring a man into her room.

In such times, even more so in this era, people's words could be frightening.

The two went to the same alley where the man had been selling his items before. Seeing that there was no one around, the man pulled out a small cloth bag from his chest. Accompanying his movements, a crisp sound of jade striking jade could be heard.

Unwrapping the cloth bag revealed several pieces of jewelry.

A pure white jade hairpin, two jade bracelets – one green and one red, an agate bracelet, and a golden hairpin.

Lin Chuxia examined them one by one, their quality varied.

Having bought many fine items in her previous life, she was quite knowledgeable. The white jade hairpin and the jade bracelet had particularly good luster.

"How much do you want for these?"

The man really was honest, and upon Lin Chuxia's question, he seemed a bit uncertain.

Before, he had inquired around and understood that the most valuable things were gold and Silver. This was why he first attempted to sell a pair of silver bracelets.

Items like jade bracelets weren't worth much, except for the golden hairpin which was made of gold but not solid throughout.

Even less to say if he didn't run into Lin Chuxia, he wouldn't dare to sell these items openly.

He first raised one finger and then formed an eight with his hands, "Give me one... oh no, give me 80 dollars. For 80 dollars, I'll give all these to you," nearly three months' wages for a worker without eating or drinking; it was a significant amount.

Lin Chuxia raised her eyebrows; she had expected the price to be low, but not this low.

However, she quickly understood why; the Northwest was impoverished, people couldn't even solve their basic needs for food and warmth, let alone spare money for ornaments.

Moreover, with tomb robbers rampant in this area, even if the items the man held were indeed ancestral, it would not be easy to sell them in such a chaotic market.

Seeing her silent for a long time, the man grew anxious, "80 dollars really is the lowest I can go. My whole family is counting on this money to live a better life for a while."

Lin Chuxia took his cloth bag and packed it up again, "I'll take them all. Seeing as you're so earnest, I'll give you 100 dollars," giving any less would weigh on her conscience.

She took out the banknotes Qin Yang had given her and counted out ten of them to give away.

The man was stunned for a moment until the money was physically handed to him by Lin Chuxia, and he snapped back to reality.

Almost trembling, he took the money from her hands, his eyes filled with gratitude, "Thank you, thank you so much. You're truly a good person. Our whole family will remember your kindness."

Lin Chuxia waved her hand dismissively, "I'll say it again, this is simply a business transaction. Money for goods – now we're even, and you don't need to thank me for anything."

I just hope your family is thanking me now, and not cursing me later.

Chapter 104: Quite a Broad Business

Lin Chuxia returned to the hostel and took out the things she had bought.

No woman dislikes jewelry, Lin Chuxia liked Chinese-style dresses and also had some knowledge about accessories.

The jade bracelet had a rich hue; such quality would cost at least a six-figure amount in the future, and while the red jade bracelet was somewhat inferior, it would still start at a five-figure price.

She couldn't make out the inscription on the thumb ring, the traditional characters inside were too small to read, and it looked quaint and mysterious.

Often, it's hard to estimate the value of such items.

She hadn't expected to gain so much from this trip; truly, it was a huge profit.

She placed the items directly into her space, saw that it was getting late, Lin Chuxia had a full meal, took a hot shower, and then comfortably went to bed.

She had a dreamless night; the next day after washing up and having breakfast, she checked out and headed for the train station.

The train was delayed yesterday, hence tickets had to be re-purchased today.

Regrettably, she wasn't able to buy a sleeper ticket.

As Lin Chuxia turned around with her ticket, she saw a familiar figure not far away; by the time she tried to get a clearer look, everything was a blur of moving figures. Where was the familiar figure now?

She thought her eyes were playing tricks on her and didn't take it to heart.

She took the first train for over eight hours, and in the afternoon switched to the second train.

This train was evidently more crowded than the last, almost packed to the brim; pickpockets thrived in such situations.

Back at the hostel, Lin Chuxia had already put everything into her space, and she only carried an empty suitcase in her hand. Her bag was light, containing only a bottle filled with spiritual spring water, a few pork buns, and tea eggs.

Even if she encountered thieves, there wasn't much on her to steal.

Just as she was thinking this, a beam of light flashed; a bald man with luggage squeezed past, followed a few meters behind by a skinny man.

Lin Chuxia narrowed her eyes; it seemed she hadn't been mistaken at the train station while buying her ticket.

At that moment, cries of alarm sounded not far away, "My wallet is gone, a thief has stolen my wallet, someone catch the thief! That's the money for my child's medical fees, someone heartless... this is putting our lives in danger..."

A woman was shouting and looking around in tears; amidst her crying and accusations, an unprepossessing man quickly ducked his head and hurried through the crowd.

Even though they suspected he might be a thief, the passengers in the car seemed eager to avoid him, fearing getting involved, and even deliberately cleared a path for him.

Lin Chuxia frowned slightly, just as she was about to step forward to help, a tall man directly grabbed the suspect's wrist.

Of course, the suspect didn't surrender willingly, but after a couple of moves, he was pinned down on the compartment floor.

"What are you doing? Can you just hit people in broad daylight, is there no King's Law anymore?"

At that moment, the woman also caught up, profusely thanking the man, then she slapped the thief twice, "Return my money, you damned thief, give my money back..."

The man pinned down could hardly speak, "Who's the thief? How can you wrongfully accuse an innocent person? I'll report this to the police."

With that, the man controlling him hesitated as well, "Sister, are you sure he's the one who stole your money?"

The woman still looked indignant, "It was him; I realized my money was gone and saw him sneaking into the crowd, if not him then who?"

By this time, a train attendant arrived to maintain order; knowing they had caught a supposed thief, he took it seriously, but hearing the other party denying being a thief and accusing them of randomly grabbing people, he wasn't sure what to do for a moment.

To prove his innocence, the man turned out all his pockets for everyone to see, and even brought his only luggage, a worn-out bag, for Big Sister to search.

After searching, Big Sister looked utterly devastated; her lost money was nowhere to be found.

"It must be you who hid the money, where did you hide my money?"

The man, looking innocent, spread his hands and looked at the conductor, even appearing a bit wronged, "How would I know where your money is? I was just walking along when this man hit me and she accused me of being a thief. Who can I even talk to about this?"

Without solid evidence and knowing that train thieves usually operate in groups, there was nothing they could do to this man.

Since Big Sister's money was indeed lost, the conductor had no choice but to take both Big Sister and the man to be interrogated by the train police.

Everyone's gaze was fixated on a few people, but Lin Chuxia walked through the crowd and directly approached a man, casually patting him on the shoulder.

The man, engrossed in the excitement, spoke discontentedly when his shoulder was tapped, "Who's that..."

When he saw Lin Chuxia, his expression changed, "Li... little madam, why are you here?"

While speaking, he nudged Bald beside him, who also tensed up when he saw Lin Chuxia.

Despite being two grown men, they suddenly acted as obedient as elementary school students.

It was indeed Bald and Houzi who had robbed Lin Chuxia back in Ancheng County.

However, there were three of them that day, and now there were only Bald and Houzi; the hoodlum wasn't here.

Lin Chuxia nodded towards the crowd, "Are you with them? Quite the broad business, running all the way to the Northwest."

The already nervous man's face turned pale immediately.

"No... no, we don't know them."

"Really, we are just here to watch the excitement."

"Yeah, madam, we've really turned over a new leaf, honestly, we haven't committed a single crime since that day."

"You see how we are dressed now, if we were still in this business, would we be this miserable?"

One was wearing an old jacket that was neither new nor old, and the other wore a faded Chinese tunic suit, indeed looking very shabby, a far cry from the flamboyant attire they wore back then.

However, Lin Chuxia clearly did not believe their words, considering their attire proved nothing.

Bald, realizing what Lin Chuxia was thinking, pulled her over to his seat, lowering his voice.

"You might not know, but our line of work has its own rules; we rarely overstep boundaries. You see us dominating in An City, but we're not qualified to operate on the railways, even if you asked me to, I wouldn't dare."

Houzi nodded repeatedly, affirming that was the case.

Lin Chuxia had heard of such rules, and asked further, "Then what are you doing in the Northwest, surely not sightseeing?"

Bald and Houzi looked at each other, and one nodded, "You tell her."

Houzi rubbed his palms, seemingly uneasy about what to say next.

"After coming back from the city that day, I discussed with Brother Liang, and we really decided to quit, not hiding it from you, it's not easy for us to be in this business..."

Lin Chuxia gave him a sidelong glance, complaining about the hardships of thievery?

Embarrassed, Houzi scratched his head, "Really, that's how it is, nobody's got much money, and if things go wrong, it ends up like that day, you get beaten up, and being idle all day doesn't do good for our reputation, our families even want to cut ties with us over this."

Chapter 105: Recruiting a Husband

"That day I went back and discussed with Brother Liang for a long time. We decided to quit crime and start anew. Since we didn't want to do it anymore, we wanted to say farewell to our past. One of our close brothers had been imprisoned and was now in the Northwest Farm for reform, and we came here specifically to visit him and give him a message."

"Wow, I didn't see that coming, you're really loyal and faithful!"

Houzi spoke earnestly, "We're not inherently bad, it's just that circumstances forced us..."

"Stop," Lin Chuxia interrupted him, "Being forced by circumstances isn't used that way. There are many oppressed by life, but you don't see many of them taking the crooked path. Is it really that hard to admit your wrongs?"

Houzi shook his head hastily, "Not hard, not hard, it's not life's compulsion. It was our own crooked thoughts, our fault."

"That's right, a fault is a fault. Turning from bad to good is commendable, isn't there a saying? 'A prodigal who returns is more precious than gold.' You and..."

Lin Chuxia turned to Bald, who immediately nodded slightly, "Jia Liang, my name is Jia Liang."

Lin Chuxia couldn't help but almost burst out laughing, looking meaningfully at his bald head, "I do think you are truly 'Liang' (bright)."

This eased the atmosphere among them a bit.

For the rest of the journey, Lin Chuxia didn't interact much with the two, returning to her own seat.

When night fell, there was a disturbance in the train car. Police reportedly caught two pickpockets, one of whom was the person who stole from a woman earlier. The man caught earlier indeed turned out to be their accomplice.

People sighed over how quickly the thieves' gang operated. The woman responded quickly enough, identifying the criminal, yet he still managed to transfer the stolen money.

Everyone clutched their wallets tighter, fearing there might be other gangs on the train.

Sitting in her seat, Lin Chuxia, with nothing better to do, took out a notebook to write and draw, not minding other matters. By the time she got off, a full management plan for a store had formed in her notebook.

The train station was close to the Bun Shop, so Lin Chuxia went there first.

Sun Lanlan saw Lin Chuxia from afar, carrying her suitcase, and hastened to welcome her, "Chuxia, you're back," she approached and whispered, "So, did you get so happy with your little lover that you forgot about home? Did you not want to come back?"

Lin Chuxia lifted her chin proudly, "What about it? Jealous? If you're jealous, hurry up and find someone. When the Bun Shop hires more staff, I'll let you handle it. We'll recruit according to your taste in aesthetics, interests, family background—must meet your criteria. Then you'll have a whole bunch of male staff under you, and you can pick whichever one you fancy..."

Sun Lanlan turned beet red from her teasing, "Are you trying to kill me?" What she suggested was not just hiring male staff, but practically finding a husband.

Lin Chuxia laughed heartily, "I think it's a great idea, Lanlan, think about it, we have this privilege."

"I'm not listening to you anymore," Sun Lanlan chided with a laugh and ran back to the shop.

Lin Chuxia followed her in, laughing, and felt an inexplicable sense of peace upon seeing the familiar Bun Shop.

The next instant, through the glass window of the Bun Shop, she saw the old man sitting inside.

Lin Chuxia casually placed her suitcase aside and sat smilingly opposite the old man.

"Master, did you miss me during these few days when I was away? Did you miss me so much that you had to come and wait at the Bun Shop every day? How else could I see you as soon as I returned?"

Old Master He grunted without looking at her, "Who missed you? You have no idea how peaceful it's been these days without you. Your return has disrupted all my peace, you're such an eyesore."

"Really? Then maybe I should just leave," Lin Chuxia pretended to stand up to leave.

Sun Lanlan brought out several steamers of buns from the kitchen, ruthlessly revealing the truth.

"Chuxia, you might not believe it, but Grandpa He came to the Bun Shop every day while you were gone. He always chose a seat by the window, sitting there for a long time, looking in the direction of the train station, probably hoping for your return."

Her siblings at home had always been partial, and she never received much affection from the elders since she was young.

Now, having an old master so concerned about her, Sun Lanlan also understood why Lin Chuxia insisted on acknowledging this lonely old man as her master.

Every relationship is mutual.

Upon hearing Sun Lanlan's words, Lin Chuxia's eyes became slightly moist.

She probably knew what Old Master He was thinking; his son had left by train and never returned. He feared she might not return either.

Suppressing her emotions, she teased the old master, "I knew it, I'm like a little padded jacket to Master, without me, you must be uncomfortable. That's why I only stayed in the Northwest for three days before rushing back. Master, I'm filial, right?"

Old Master He, unable to bear looking at her acting like this, but also worried by her words.

"Why did you come back after just three days? Did that Qin boy bully you?"

He knew about Lin Chuxia's marriage to Qin Yang arranged by the elders. They'd only been together for a few days before living separately.

Normally, a young couple reunited should be inseparable, loath to leave each other.

Three days were barely enough for anything.

He couldn't even imagine having a grandchild in his arms.

If Lin Chuxia knew what Old Master He was thinking, she might have doused him with cold water.

"There was nothing fun there, so I came back. I was also missing Master, you see."

She bent down to open her suitcase, "Look what I've brought you? The local specialty, sorghum liquor. How's that? Didn't I keep you waiting in vain?"

"You do have a conscience."

Old Master He took the bottle, opened the cap, and immediately couldn't help but indulge.

"Get me a cup, let me have a taste."

"Right away."

Lin Chuxia got a liquor cup for the old man and also prepared two dishes to accompany the drink, and the two of them chatted leisurely face to face.

After a while, Su Wensong also came over, pleased to see Lin Chuxia, "Boss, you're back."

Lin Chuxia nodded and pointed to a spot beside her, "If you're free, tell me about the shop these past few days."

Sun Lanlan briefly summarized the Bun Shop's situation, overall, there wasn't much to report.

Su Wensong not only managed the cooked food section but also kept an eye on the overall affairs of the Bun Shop, having a more comprehensive view than Sun Lanlan, who was only stationed at the shop.

Sure enough, Su Wensong not only talked about the small courtyard but also mentioned that with the weather getting cooler, the poultry farm was thinking of culling some of the egg-laying hens and offered them to him.

Everyone knows that hens that lay eggs aren't as tender as younger chickens, so Su Wensong didn't agree immediately, only asking them to stay tuned.

There was also news from the vegetable depot where Li Jian said they planned to purchase a large quantity of cabbages for winter storage. This might lead to higher vegetable prices in the market, and he asked if she wanted to stock up a little.

Lastly, he also looked at several storefronts as per Lin Chuxia's instructions, all of which were in good locations.

Chapter 106: Elder Brother and Sister-in-law Join In

Chuxia Lin was extremely satisfied with Wensong Su's work ability and showed him the management plan for the Bun Shop and the prepared food courtyard that she had written on the train.

"Let's check out the storefront tomorrow, and at the same time we can begin arranging for staff. Once the Bun Shop opens, the staff can be transferred there directly and be ready to work. My eldest brother and sister-in-law will come over if there are no accidents. As for the chicken farm, tell them that we can take hens less than two years old for the store, but not any older," it affects the taste.

Although she has ways to process them until they're tender and soft, the process is cumbersome and they don't have the time for it.

"My eldest brother and sister-in-law count as two people; after the new store opens, we'll need to hire at least four more people. I plan to increase the supply of cooked food; the weather's getting colder, and it's easier to preserve food."

Currently, the most troublesome issue is preservation – it's not easy to get a refrigerator these days.

She never considered using the space for such purposes. If she were to rely on the space for everything, what would be the point of living this life again?

Might as well just lay down and give up.

The space is merely a boost for her business development, not everything.

In life, what one pursues is not solely an outcome. The energy and joy provided in the process are irreplaceable by a simple result.

After arranging everything, Chuxia Lin only then noticed that Old Sir He was slightly intoxicated.

"Master, why do you indulge in drinking so much? I was only distracted for a moment and you've already had half a bottle, which is almost 250 grams."

Old Master He waved his hand nonchalantly, "It's nothing. This is just a bit. When I was young, I could drink a full 500 grams."

"People say that heroes don't boast about their past bravery. You're at an age where you shouldn't compare yourself to the young."

She called Sun Bingnan over to take Old Master He home.

Old Master He was reluctant to leave and before doing so, he even tried to pocket the remaining wine in the bottle to take home.

Chuxia Lin directly confiscated it, "If you want to drink, come to the shop. We'll have drinks and dishes ready for you at any time."

Old Master He complained helplessly to Sun Bingnan, "Look at this, she manages everything. Who's the apprentice here? She's my master!"

Despite his complaints, he still left cheerfully with Sun Bingnan.

Seeing that there was nothing urgent at the Bun Shop, Chuxia Lin greeted Sun Lanlan and returned to the Qin Family.

Mrs. Qin was both happy and sad to see Chuxia Lin coming back. She was delighted that her daughter-in-law always had them in mind, even buying so many things for them after being out on a trip.

Especially that sheepskin, which looked very warm.

Her husband suffered from cold legs, and even though they had a warm kang bed, it would become cold by the second half of the night, causing discomfort. Now, with a sheepskin mattress, it would stay warm all night.

And with a sheepskin coat made, they wouldn't fear going out in winter.

The sad part was that her daughter-in-law had returned after just a few days. Could she be pregnant in just those few days? She also wondered if her son was competent enough.

Qin Han and Zhang Guilan came back early today, and when they saw Chuxia Lin had returned, they both came over to offer warm greetings. After all, she had been out on a long journey; in their minds, even getting outside the county was not easy, let alone spending several days on a train.

"Perfect, eldest brother and sister-in-law, I brought some prepared food back from the shop, let's eat together tonight."

Upon returning, Chuxia Lin had to start managing matters related to the new branch. She wondered how Qin Han and his wife had considered the matter.

She thought her eldest brother should have understood what she meant last time.

Seeing that they had planted wheat in the fields, she had a rough idea in her mind.

Sure enough, Qin Han's eyes lit up, "That's right, you can say that. The cooked food from your shop does taste amazing. No wonder it sells so well. When I go to the vegetable station to drop off produce, I've heard people talking about selling their veggies and heading straight to your place to buy cooked food."

After sitting on the train for several days, Zhang Guilan wouldn't let Lin Chuxia step into the kitchen. Mrs. Qin also said dinner was easy to fix and asked her to rest. Having no choice, Chuxia returned to her room.

After dinner, which she wasn't required to help clean up, Lin Chuxia could only follow Zhang Guilan around, keeping her company to relieve some boredom.

As Zhang Guilan washed the dishes, she was trying to figure out how to bring up the next topic.

During dinner, her sister-in-law had brought up the idea of opening a branch again. They would start looking for a location tomorrow, and undoubtedly more staff would be needed. She had already mentioned this to her husband before, but she hesitated again when it came time for her to speak up. After all, they had previously declined the kind invitation to join the venture.

"Sister-in-law..." Zhang Guilan hesitantly called out.

"Hmm?"

Meeting those clear eyes, Zhang Guilan smoothed her hair, "I just heard you talking about the new branch needing more hands. I've discussed it with your brother, and if you don't mind, both of us can come over to help..."

Lin Chuxia smiled, "Sister-in-law, I'd be delighted if you and my brother could come. If you're available, feel free to stop by the shop to look into it. I might be too busy these next few days, but I can arrange for someone in the shop to guide you two."

With Chuxia saying that, Zhang Guilan's concerns disappeared, and she smiled back, "That's settled then. There isn't much left to do in the fields, so your brother and I will come by the shop tomorrow. Just don't mind our rough edges."

"Sister-in-law, having family in the shop makes me feel more at ease."

Qin Han and Zhang Guilan weren't selfish people. Since getting married, Chuxia could feel that they really treated her like a younger sister, caring for her in every possible way, even worrying about her safety and picking her up when she was late.

How could she not trust such people in her shop?

"For the salary, brother will get 40 a month, and sister-in-law, you'll get 30. That's the standard wage for our shop's staff. Others may have a probation period, but you two won't need that."

"We're all family, no need to talk about money," Zhang Guilan said nonchalantly, yet she felt that her sister-in-law was very prudent in handling affairs, leaving no room for criticism.

That night, Zhang Guilan went back to her room and discussed it with Qin Han.

Qin Han knew that as long as they mentioned it, their sister-in-law wouldn't reject them.

"Isn't the salary a bit high? I heard that Qin Wen makes only 35.50 working the counter at the Hardware Company."

A wage of 40 was beyond their wildest dreams.

Together, they would earn 70 a month, which meant selling a lot of vegetables.

Zhang Guilan also realized that the offered wage seemed overly generous.

"Sister-in-law mentioned that's the regular wage in their shop, and that we don't need a probation period. Oh, let's not dwell on it. If you think the pay is too high, we'll just work harder, make sure that the sister-in-law feels it's money well spent."

Qin Han thought so too. Now that their sister-in-law had broached the subject, it would be rather inappropriate to keep fussing over this matter.

As the sister-in-law didn't play formalities with them, they should treat the shop's affairs as their own once they joined.

With the matter decided, the couple was in high spirits. Qin Han even felt a bit frisky looking at his wife.

Zhang Guilan slapped away Qin Han's hand, "Go to sleep, we need to start early tomorrow. I need to properly learn how to make those buns that sister-in-law brought looking like works of art."

Qin Han twiddled his fingers regretfully, seeing his wife's fighting spirit, he couldn't bear to dampen her mood, and so he resigned himself to his fate.

Chapter 107: New Storefront

The next morning, Lin Chuxia called on Su Wensong, and the two went together to look at shops.

In the 1980s, the area of Ancheng County wasn't large, the main city area had only one street, with three longitudinal streets around the main street, which neatly divided the entire county.

Further from these surrounding streets, the main city area and urban villages were clearly delineated, forming a loop with the longitudinal streets, and some factories and residential compounds were also around the loop.

Before heading to the northwest, Lin Chuxia asked Su Wensong to pay attention to the storefronts, and she marked out a specific location.

Since they wanted to open a Bun Shop in the county, naturally the busier the area, the better.

Su Wensong looked at two storefronts; one was on the main street, and the other was in the night market, both meeting Lin Chuxia's requirements.

Both storefronts faced the street, were larger than the ones near the train station, and were much more expensive.

Especially the face-front stores in the main city area, where the monthly rent alone was 30 yuan, payable annually.

After viewing the two storefronts, Lin Chuxia inwardly sighed; no matter the era, real estate was fundamental.

Thirty yuan a month was equivalent to someone's salary.

However, most of the property rights of storefronts in this era weren't private. Like the row of storefronts on the main street, most of them were owned by the county's Housing Management Bureau.

The location near the night market was also not bad and relatively cheaper, but the property rights of that storefront were privately owned.

Lin Chuxia first eliminated the option near the night market.

Having worked with Lin Chuxia for a while, Su Wensong had a good understanding of her style.

"Boss, do you think renting a privately-owned storefront is troublesome?"

"Somewhat."

Private property can change unpredictably; seeing your business doing well and raising rent is trivial. Others might sublet to your competitors after the lease or, seeing you earning well, decide to keep the place and continue the business under your name. Anything could happen.

Even with a contract in place, once it's over, you're still at the mercy of the landlord.

Rather than that, it's better to rent from a state-owned entity; it's much less complicated.

They were in the food business, which values reputation and regular customers; they planned for long-term operations.

Moreover, these state-owned properties will eventually fall into private hands as the markets liberalize; Lin Chuxia, knowing market development trends, naturally wanted to gain the upper hand.

However, the location on the main street was not particularly ideal, even Su Wensong, while recommending it, emphasized the night market.

As the two were leaving the night market and reaching the corner of Main Street, Lin Chuxia suddenly stopped.

Following her gaze, Su Wensong saw a nearby storefront for rent and said, "This place has been for rent for a while because it's two stories and the rent is more expensive, so it has been vacant for a long time. It used to be a sales outlet for the cotton mill, but now the mill isn't doing well and the outlet isn't selling much, so it closed down. For a Bun Shop, isn't the space a bit too large?"

The Bun Shop near the train station was only about fifty to sixty square meters, and this one on a single floor was over a hundred square meters.

When he first came by, he only took one look and felt the space was too large, unsuitable for their Bun Shop, so he didn't mention it to Lin Chuxia.

Moreover...

He pointed not far across, "That's a sales point for the food factory, mainly selling prepared foods. Previously, it was the only deli in Ancheng County. Whether it was the State-Owned Restaurant, canteens of major factories, or individuals, everyone was used to buying prepared foods from there."

The boss wanted to increase the production of prepared foods, aiming to boost sales in the new shop. If they opened the shop here, their deli sales would definitely be impacted.

Lin Chuxia squinted at the sales point across the street. It was close to noon, and the window of the sales point was surrounded by several people buying cooked food.

"Which management does this storefront property belong to?"

Such a large storefront property certainly isn't privately owned.

"It belongs to the textile mill. Initially, the textile mill bought the land here and built the property themselves; they own it entirely."

Upon hearing this, Su Wensong understood that Lin Chuxia wanted to rent this place.

"The rent for this place is 50 yuan a month, and the other party requires payment to be made annually, which would be 600 yuan a year."

Even though their bun shop is doing well, this expense is still significant.

Besides, in Su Wensong's opinion, they only sell buns and cooked food; they really don't need such a large shop.

Lin Chuxia glanced through the glass into the inside, then tapped her hands, "Who is in charge at the textile mill? Who should we talk to if we want to rent this place?"

"There's a Director Kang at the textile mill; he should be there right now."

"Let's go and have a look."

The two went to the textile mill, and as soon as it was known they wanted to rent the storefront, someone immediately took them to Director Kang's office.

Kang Yong was initially pleased to hear that they wanted to rent the property, but frowned slightly upon hearing it was for a restaurant.

"You know, this property was originally a sales point for the textile mill. Recently, they only rented it out because the mill's efficiency decreased. If the mill's efficiency improves and there's a need, they would take back the property to continue using it. You might want to look elsewhere."

Restaurants are different from other industries; they generate a lot of greasy fumes. If really rented to them, would the property still be usable when taken back?

On the way there, Lin Chuxia had only thought about further negotiating the rent down and had not anticipated that the textile mill would refuse to rent out the property.

Hearing their reason, she suddenly felt too dependent on her previous thoughts.

She only thought that the property could be rented now and would definitely be sold later, perhaps before the textile mill even closed.

How had she forgotten that people's attitudes had not really changed yet, especially some traditionalists still harboring unrealistic dreams.

Given the current efficiency and development situation of the textile mill, they still had hopes?

Of course, Lin Chuxia shouldn't discriminate against this; leaders who have hopes for the mill are good leaders.

However, she now had to change her previous plan.

"Director Kang, not to hide it from you, but after much consideration, we are particularly interested in this property of the textile mill. Although we do run a restaurant and only sell buns, the impact on the premises will not be significant. If you really have concerns, we could sign a contract ensuring that if we damage the property, we will repair it before returning it on the day the textile mill takes it back. How about that?"

Kang Yong did not expect Lin Chuxia to be so persistent, and her proposal seemed reasonable.

Lin Chuxia seized the moment to continue, "Moreover, this property has been idle for over a month now, each idle day is a day of lost income. It might be better to rent it to us; we can pay the rent and sign the contract immediately."

Kang Yong pondered for a moment, "Let me think about it a bit more. First of all, if we rent it out, the contract must be drafted by us. Come back tomorrow, and I will have a definite answer for you."

After leaving the textile mill, Su Wensong was still somewhat worried, "Boss, should we look at other properties?"

"No need, these next few days you should look for some workers. If we rent the property, it will need renovations. You can delegate the responsibilities of the cooked food section to Pang Yongli and Sun Bingnan, but you will be primarily in charge of the renovations here."

In this regard, Lin Chuxia had great trust in Su Wensong.

Chapter 108: Eating a Free Meal by Force

Although he didn't understand why the boss was so persistent about that storefront, Su Wensong didn't say anything more.

Lin Chuxia told him to go back to the Bun Shop first, while she took a detour to the deli at the night market.

There were still quite a few people around. Chuxia lined up and then bought a bit of each type of prepared food.

She ended up carrying a huge bag of assorted items before heading back.

She only walked a few steps before stopping, looking down at a little puppy by her feet.

She had noticed this little puppy earlier. It had been following her ever since she separated from Su Wensong, and it had stayed not far from the deli, following her again after she bought the food.

The little puppy was just an ordinary Shiba Inu, looking about a month old, dirty all over, with one of its hind legs seemingly injured, limping as it walked.

Seeing Lin Chuxia stop, the puppy immediately lifted its little head and wagged its small tail non-stop, appearing rather ingratiating.

"Whose dog are you? Did you get lost or were you abandoned?"

Lin Chuxia crouched down and touched its little head, and the puppy immediately lay down, revealing its belly, while its little tail continued to wag vigorously.

"You're quite charming, aren't you? Are you hungry?"

She took a piece of pork head and gave it to the puppy.

"This meat is too salty for you, just have a small piece to satisfy your craving, then hurry home after eating."

Lin Chuxia planned to leave while the puppy was busy eating, but after walking only a few steps, the puppy chased after her with the meat in its mouth.

"You little rascal, do you want to follow me?"

Lin Chuxia looked around. They were already two streets away from where she first encountered the puppy. Moreover, the puppy was dirty and thin, most likely an unwanted stray dog.

"Forget it, if you want to follow me, then follow me. If you regret it on the way, you can leave anytime."

Lin Chuxia finished speaking and continued on her way to the Bun Shop without paying further attention to the puppy, which followed her all the way there.

It seemed this little fellow had really taken a liking to her.

"Lanlan, guess what I brought back?"

As Lin Chuxia entered, she called out to Sun Lanlan, but upon entering the Bun Shop, she realized that although it was past mealtime, there were still people inside, and the atmosphere was a bit strange.

Sun Lanlan, Granny Sun, and Su Wensong were all in the lobby, surrounding a man who was eating.

Even while sitting, it was clear that the man was not tall, had a short neck and a large head, and his eyes were somewhat far apart. If it wasn't for the fact that his height just passed the minimum standard for an adult, he would be a dwarfism patient.

The man's eyes flashed with surprise when he saw Lin Chuxia enter, and then he turned his head to look at Su Wensong.

"I say, Su Wensong, you really have some skills. Truly, absence makes the heart grow fonder. This Bun Shop of yours has no shortage of beautiful women. Here comes another - you're going to be surrounded by beauties?"

"Su Wenmao, watch your mouth. If you keep spouting nonsense, don't blame me for being rude. Have you eaten? If you've finished, pay up and get lost."

Su Wensong, looking at the man in front of him, clenched his fists. If it weren't for the reputation of their Bun Shop, he would have been tempted to throw the man out.

Su Wenmao didn't mind Su Wensong's attitude at all, "What's the matter? We're all close relatives, coming here to eat your buns and you still want to charge me? You're really being too stingy."

After he said that, he ordered Sun Lanlan around, "Go get me another 20 buns, I want the ones with all meat filling, and pack some of your ready-to-eat foods too, some pig head meat, roast chicken, put them all in a bag for me. You waitresses are really clueless, I've already told you, Su Wensong and I are brothers, and you still make a big deal out of a few buns."

Sun Lanlan sneered, "I've been selling buns for so long, I've seen all sorts, but I've never come across someone so shameless and thick-faced. If I were you, I would settle the bill and leave now, to avoid embarrassing yourself in front of others."

Granny Sun also chimed in, "I remember just now you were mocking Wensong for being a loser, selling buns here. If you're so successful, why can't you even afford to pay for your buns?"

Su Wenmao couldn't save face and became angry with embarrassment, "What I say to him is none of your business. Su Wensong, you really are a loser, depending on women to stand up for you, no wonder you end up selling buns here."

Su Wensong stepped forward to stand in front of Sun Lanlan and Granny Sun, his face grim, "The reason I'm selling buns here is all thanks to you. But I have to thank you, for making me recognize who these people are. I don't want to resort to violence today, so if you know what's good for you, you better leave."

He glanced at Lin Chuxia, his eyes filled with apology.

Su Wenmao wanted to say something else, but Lin Chuxia spoke up, "What's going on here? Someone's trying to dine and dash?"

Sun Lanlan said loudly, "Yep, we've been running this shop for so long, we really have encountered all sorts. Granny Sun, isn't Brother Sun Hao on duty today? I think it's better to call him over, dealing with this kind of rascal requires the comrades from the police."

Granny Sun sighed, "Look at my memory, my son's in the police force, why should I be afraid of him? You wait, I'll go call him now. Just yesterday, he said that even though he's on duty every day, he hasn't made any notable contribution. The police are cracking down hard recently, and he's keen to make an achievement."

Su Wenmao panicked when he heard this, "Who... who's dining and dashing? This is the Su family's shop. I'm Su Wensong's brother."

Su Wensong sneered, "I don't have a brother like you. Xiao Sun, how much money did he eat? Report it all to the police, we can't let him get away with it."

"Six buns, two servings of cold dishes, two servings of ready-to-eat food, that'll be four yuan and twenty cents. He also broke a bowl in the shop, charge him thirty cents for that, makes a total of four yuan and fifty cents," Sun Lanlan quickly calculated the bill.

Seeing that Granny Sun was about to go out, Su Wenmao couldn't stay still any longer. He took out a handful of money from his pocket, counted it all, and placed it on the table, his eyes filled with malice, "You're ruthless, Su Wensong. You just wait."

After saying that, he ran straight outside, passing by Lin Chuxia. Lin Chuxia, with a quick move of her leg, skillfully brought the little dog that was following behind her to the front, tripping the man and causing him to fall on the ground.

With a "thud," Su Wenmao fell face-first, and looked furiously at the main culprit.

"I was just afraid you'd step on my dog," Lin Chuxia explained emotionlessly.

Su Wenmao's face clouded over as he stood up, glaring fiercely at the people inside the Bun Shop, "You all wait, every single one of you wait..."

After the man had left, Su Wensong apologized to everyone with a sorry face, "I'm really sorry for making you go through this trouble because of me. Sun Lanlan, Granny Sun, thank you."

Lin Chuxia had returned late and was still confused.

"What happened?"

Su Wensong began, "Speaking of which, that man is actually a distant cousin of mine. He's my uncle's son."

"Is that the one who took away your job?"

When Lin Chuxia first interacted with Su Wensong, she had learned a bit about him.

He had been arranged a job when the educated youth were sent back to the cities, but it had been snatched away by one of his uncles or cousins.

Su Wensong nodded, "That's him."

"Pah, what a shameless person," Sun Lanlan said indignantly, "He not only snatched Brother Su's job, but also has the audacity to freeload here."

Chapter 109: It's This Pretty Boy

When Su Wenmao came to the shop to eat, Sun Lanlan became extra cautious. This guy was dining alone but ordered a whole table's worth of dishes. He dawdled over his meal for ages and even inquired why Su Wensong wasn't there.

At first, Sun Lanlan thought he knew Su Wensong, so she told him that Su Wensong wasn't usually here. But then, the guy started saying some odd things, and ultimately, he plainly did not want to pay for his food.

To eat so much and then not want to pay, let alone having a connection with Su Wensong, even Su Wensong himself had never done such a thing.

Sun Lanlan wouldn't let him leave, and during their argument, Su Wensong came back.

Seeing Su Wensong, the man started to mock and look down on him, criticizing his choice to work for himself, saying something like, "What a grown man, selling buns."

While looking down on him, he still wanted Su Wensong to let him eat for free; he really had no shame.

"Next time this person comes, you guys don't need to serve him. Whether or not he pays, our bun shop won't do business with him," Lin Chuxia stated directly.

"Boss, won't this create a bad impression? If Su Wenmao really starts behaving like a scoundrel, it could be bad for the bun shop."

Su Wensong knew Lin Chuxia was doing this for him, yet he didn't want to affect the shop's reputation because of him.

"No worries, we still have Granny Sun, don't we? Granny Sun's son is a police officer. If he dares to cause a fuss, we'll go find Officer Sun," Sun Lanlan said.

Granny Sun also chimed in, "Exactly, we're not afraid of him. I'll give my son a heads-up when I get home today; I'm worried he won't even dare to come."

Su Wensong looked at them, a big man who was moved to the verge of tears.

He remembered when he had just returned to the city. His circumstances led to his uncles taking away the job that had been arranged for him. Whether it was the neighborhood committee or a factory, he had gone to them numerous times but not one person was willing to speak up for him with justice.

Back then, he was alone and helpless, and he felt that everyone's gaze was cold and indifferent. Except for his grandma, he couldn't feel a shred of warmth.

But now, not only did he have a decent income and led a fulfilling life every day, but he had also met so many kind-hearted colleagues.

Even when he wasn't at the shop, Sun Lanlan and Granny Sun didn't just ignore the situation indifferently; they preserved his face and dignity in front of Su Wenmao.

Even after he returned, Sun Lanlan, a young girl, still stood up for him without hesitation.

And then there was Lin Chuxia, Granny Sun, who all considered his feelings and defended him in every situation.

"Wow, Chuxia, is this the little dog you brought back?"

Sun Lanlan saw the little puppy at Lin Chuxia's feet and exclaimed, diverting everyone's attention.

"It's a stray I found on the street. No one seemed to want it, but it was so clever, and it kept following me, so I brought it back. Lanlan, go get it a piece of bun to eat."

Sun Lanlan obediently went to get a meat bun, broke it into small pieces, and fed it to the puppy.

Granny Sun watched and clicked her tongue in amazement, "Goodness, little one, you sure know how to live the good life. You didn't follow anyone else, just stuck with Boss Lin." In anyone else's home, who would be willing to feed a dog meat buns, huh?

Su Wensong got his emotions in check and prepared to do the tasks Lin Chuxia had assigned him.

The boss treated him so well; he had to do his job well.

Just as he stepped out of the door, he ran into someone he knew and warmly greeted Qin Han, the husband in the couple, "Brother, are you here to see the Boss?"

Qin Han was startled by the address of "Brother", and seeing Su Wensong's flower-like smile, especially the way he said "Boss", it sounded so different coming from him.

He nodded cautiously, "Is she in?"

"In, Boss, Brother Qin is here," Su Wensong called into the bun shop, then stepped out the door.

Qin Han glanced at his retreating figure and gave his wife, Zhang Guilan, a meaningful look. "See that? That's the pretty boy."

Zhang Guilan wasn't as sensitive as Qin Han. Even though Su Wensong, just like her husband had described, looked quite refined, he spoke frankly and didn't seem to harbor any ulterior motives towards their sister-in-law.

The way he called out "boss" was with genuine respect from the heart.

"Alright, let's focus on why we're here. Don't spend all day eyeing up these things; you'll make it hard for our sister-in-law to work."

By this time, she had already seen Lin Chuxia and entered the room ahead.

Following his wife, Qin Han thought that while they needed to get the work done, it was still necessary to keep an eye on these men.

Their sister-in-law was not only their younger brother's wife but also the Qin Family's lucky star, his sister-in-law.

Not one of these titles could be missing; he wouldn't let anyone snatch them away.

This morning, Qin Han and Zhang Guilan had agreed with Lin Chuxia that once they had taken care of things at home, they would come over.

Lin Chuxia introduced Sun Lanlan and Granny Sun to them first. Knowing that they were the family members of the boss, Granny Sun was very courteous to Zhang Guilan.

Sun Lanlan, needless to say, had met Qin Yang and knew from Qin Han's appearance that he was part of the Qin Family.

Since they were family members on her sister's husband's side, she, as family on her sister's mother's side, could not let her sister lose face.

And Zhang Guilan, knowing that Sun Lanlan had been Lin Chuxia's playmate since childhood, felt an added closeness to the younger girl.

It was easy to arrange Zhang Guilan's work; she was to learn how to make buns at the Bun Shop.

Sun Bingnan was at the courtyard today. After arranging for Zhang Guilan, Lin Chuxia took Qin Han and the puppy to the courtyard.

Once the house is rented out, and Su Wensong runs off to take care of the renovations, Sun Bingnan will have to look after some of the work at the courtyard. It would be an excellent opportunity for Qin Han to learn more.

Having arranged everything, Lin Chuxia looked down at the small milk puppy that had been following at her feet.

It seemed that walking with her for so long had worsened its limp, and it was so tired that its little tongue was sticking out.

She carried it back to the office, filled a basin with water, and gave it a bath; then she took it to see Old Sir He.

As soon as she entered, she started shouting, "Master, Master, old man... Look what I've brought you..."

Old Sir He, who was fiddling with a basin of unknown plants or flowers on the kang bed, didn't even lift his head.

Lin Chuxia placed the puppy right in front of him, "Master, look how cute it is, right?"

Old Master He finally spared a glance at the little pup and said indifferently, "What's the matter? Are you planning to make dog meat buns at your shop? Cooked some and thought to send a few over to me."

"Master, how could you have the heart to eat it when it's this cute?"

Lin Chuxia countered discontentedly, sitting on the edge of the kang bed and lifting the puppy's leg for Old Master He on the kang bed to see.

"Its leg here seems injured; it limps when it walks. Master, can you take a look at it for me, whether it's congenital or acquired, and if it can be cured?"

Old Master He immediately glared at her. "You want me to treat a little puppy?"

"Ah, but you don't want to treat people anymore, right? Since you're not treating people, why not have a look at this one, so your medical skills won't go to waste."

Old Master He was almost amused by her matter-of-fact tone. That girl, daring to speak to him like that, even daring to bring a little puppy for him to treat.

In all the world, only she would dare do such a thing.

Chapter 110: Malice and Intransigence

"Hurry up and take it away. If you say one more word, I'll stew that dog. You're so disrespectful, a mere animal dares to climb onto my heated brick bed."

"Didn't you grow flowers on this very bed? What's the big deal about putting a dog there?" Lin Chuxia pouted. "You really won't take a look at it? Are you over being a doctor already? Once you miss this chance, there won't be another shop like it."

"You think you're so capable, do you? Then why do you need this old man to look after it? Just give it some of your vitamin pills, those seem very effective, supposedly a cure-all."

The conversation was getting nowhere. Lin Chuxia felt a bit guilty and put the puppy on the floor, then watched Old Master He fuss over his plant.

That plant had been there for quite some time, raised by Old Master He after she became his apprentice. Initially, it was half alive, and now as the weather had gotten colder, he'd moved it onto the heated brick bed, where it seemed more lively.

"Master, what plant is this? It doesn't really look like a plant, are you actually raising a weed for fun?"

Old Master He gave her a sidelong glance. "You'd rather use the medical books I gave you to start a fire? If you want to know, go read the books."

Lin Chuxia scratched her head. "It's just that I haven't had time. When I do, I'll definitely read them."

"You don't need to, what with your vitamin pills."

Lin Chuxia: "...Master, you'll hurt our master-apprentice relationship if you keep talking this way. Fine, I'll stop, I'll go back and read the books then, okay?"

Lin Chuxia left huffily with the little milk dog in her arms.

Old Master He watched her indignant back without a sound and laughed, then his gaze fell onto the bag of apples Lin Chuxia brought. He picked one up, casually wiped it, and took a bite. Truly sweet!

Lin Chuxia returned to the small courtyard's office, not having made this trip in vain. Since Old Master He said what he said, the puppy's leg wasn't congenitally disabled.

She took out some spiritual spring water from her space and gave it to the puppy to drink. She couldn't tell if the little milk dog was really thirsty or if it was just because the spiritual spring water was so sweet, but it lapped up more than half a bowl of water, its belly becoming round and taut.

"You really are greedy," Lin Chuxia said while rubbing its belly, pondering. "Should I give you a name? Given how round your belly is, how about calling you Yuan Bao? May you bring wealth and treasure my way."

The little milk dog was covered in light yellow fur, comfortably stretched out, letting Lin Chuxia pet its belly, really resembling a golden Yuan Bao.

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In a courtyard two streets away, Mrs. Su quickly put down the half-washed clothes upon seeing Su Wenmao limping back.

"Where have you been all afternoon? What happened to your leg? Don't tell me you got beaten up? Who did this? Tell me, and I'll settle the score with them."

Su Wenmao ignored his mother's interrogation and asked, "Where's Dad?"

"He's inside taking a nap, not sure if he's awake yet. Right, go find your dad, let him avenge you."

Su Wenmao walked into the room, where Su Dazhuang was still snoring on the heated brick bed. Su Wenmao shook him awake without hesitation.

"Dad, do you know that Su Wensong has opened a Bun Shop?"

Su Dazhuang, still groggy, muttered, "Why are you always fixated on him? A grown man selling buns, how does that look? It's not nearly as good as your iron rice bowl at the machinery factory."

"He opened a Bun Shop, using their family's side room. Do you know how close their house is to the train station? How many people buy his buns coming and going? He doesn't even have to lift a finger; he's hired a bunch of people, both old and young. Now he's a boss."

Hearing this, Su Dazhuang immediately sobered up. "He can be a boss?"

"Why not? I saw it with my own eyes. The people at the Bun Shop are very polite to him, always backing him up and flattering him. If he wasn't the boss, would those people need to suck up to him?"

Su Wenmao thought about it and still felt infuriated. He was just a minor apprentice at the machinery factory, where anyone could step on him, and here was Su Wensong, suddenly becoming a boss.

"I stayed at the shop for the whole afternoon and saw them sell twenty or thirty baskets of buns. Calculating the day's sales, they could make at least a few tens. If we had such a shop, who would worry about Cuicui's job, and I wouldn't have to take that crap at the machinery factory. Wouldn't it be better for our family to run a small shop and be the bosses? We should have taken over that house back then."

Evil and resentment filled his eyes.

Su Dazhuang sat up from the bed, his murky eyes gleaming with calculation. "The Bun Shop really makes that much money?"

"Don't believe me? Go see for yourself. Not to mention the Bun Shop, you've heard of Qin's Cooked Food, haven't you?"

Su Dazhuang nodded. "I've heard it's even tastier than the stuff from the Old Food Factory," but what's that got to do with anything?

"Qin's Cooked Food is also sold at his Bun Shop, you tell me if they're making money?"

This time Su Dazhuang truly believed his son. Indeed, making a few tens a day wouldn't be a problem if that was the case.

"Dad, haven't you always wanted me to get married early so you could hold a grandchild? Whether Cuicui and I can make it depends on you. Her family said either give her a job or a hefty dowry. If you can take over Su Wensong's Bun Shop for me, we'd have nothing to worry about."

Wouldn't that cover both a job and the cash for a hefty dowry?

Later he and Cuicui could open a husband-and-wife shop, just thinking about it made him quite pleased.

Su Dazhuang nodded. His son was already twenty-five or twenty-six without a love interest, but this year, with the job at the machinery factory, matchmakers started coming. However, given his son's circumstances... if he hadn't demanded such a high dowry, he wouldn't have gotten any suitors.

A few years earlier, arranging a job for his son would have been no issue, but now he was barely scrapping by himself. If he had been that capable, would his son have been jobless for so many years?

As for a hefty dowry, that was out of the question. His wife didn't work, and over the years, they relied on his meager salary; where would they get the money for that?

Yet indeed, they couldn't procrastinate any longer on his son's matter. If things were as his son said, and they had their own shop...

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The next day, it was Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong again who went to the cotton mill together.

On the way, Lin Chuxia asked Su Wensong, "Did you prepare the red envelope I asked you to?"

"I've got it all ready. Does the boss need it now?"

"Hand it over to me."

Lin Chuxia took the item Su Wensong passed to her, checked to make sure there were no problems, and put it into her bag.

When they arrived at Kang Yong's office, he already had the contract prepared.

This time, the contract was just a simple agreement, not as formal as those in later times. It was drafted on a piece of the cotton mill's headed notepaper, listing the content agreed upon by both parties, and then stamped with the cotton mill's official seal at the end.

Both parties needed to sign it, and Lin Chuxia, as party B, had to apply her thumbprint.

However, even at that time, this had legal effect and was recognized if shown.

Lin Chuxia glanced at it and confirmed that it was the content they had agreed upon yesterday. The lease period mentioned in the document was one year.