

Switched M 121

Chapter 121: Li Hongmei's Husband from Her Past Life

Li Hongmei rolled her eyes, and Chen Chunhua did the same where she couldn't be seen.

Lin Chuxia saw everything clearly but said nothing.

Looking at the shopping net next to Li Hongmei and Li Dongmei, filled with quite some purchases, it seemed they now had money to spend in the city?

In her past life, it was the same—every time she and Li Guangyuan made a bit of money, these two younger sisters-in-law would find every way to pinch pennies from them and once even stole their money.

After she found out, she didn't have an immediate outburst but had Li Guangyuan deposit their money in a term account, only to tell him the next day that the cash set aside for restocking was gone.

The clients had been arranged in advance, and failure to restock on time not only affected their business but also their relations with clients.

Just that once, they lost a considerable sum.

Having been terrified of poverty since childhood, even earning money didn't encourage Li Guangyuan to spend, let alone how he felt about losing money.

Li Guangyuan investigated thoroughly without her needing to say anything and in the end traced it back to the two younger sisters-in-law.

Li Guangyuan flew into a rage. Despite Mrs. Li's protection, it was to no avail; he taught the two a lesson, and they were well-behaved for quite some time afterward.

It's unknown where Li Hongmei and Li Dongmei got the money to spend now; Lin Jiayi wasn't that generous.

Daqing Mountain Village and Xiaoqingshan Village are adjacent; Li Hongmei was only a year younger than Lin Chuxia, and they had met before.

Worried about being recognized, Lin Chuxia didn't go out but just watched through the glass as the two ate a bowl of pickles with eight buns and two bowls of porridge, finishing with a bowl of free plain boiled water from the restaurant.

When leaving, they didn't go empty-handed, taking five meat-filled buns to go.

After a satisfying meal, Li Hongmei with her meat buns and Li Dongmei with her shopping net were ready to leave.

Li Hongmei was gesturing and talking about something with Li Dongmei just as they reached the entrance, they bumped into a man entering.

Li Hongmei's meat bun was knocked out of her grip.

"Ouch! What kind of person are you? Are you blind?"

The man was not old, with tanned skin and a buzz cut, he appeared somewhat simple and sincere.

Seeing he had bumped into someone, he quickly apologized, "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..."

"Just saying sorry and that's it? You knocked my buns onto the ground; these are freshly bought meat buns. How can we eat them after they've fallen? Compensate us!"

The man was just about to bend down to pick up the meat buns off the ground; it was awkward whether to pick them or not.

"Comrade, these buns aren't dirty..."

The meat buns were in a plastic bag and even after falling to the ground, they hadn't been touched by any dirt through the bag.

Li Hongmei didn't even look, "Do you expect us to eat something that fell on the ground? Let me tell you, you must compensate us with new ones today, or I'll accuse you of hooliganism—bumping into a lady in broad daylight, have you no shame?"

Zhang Guilan put down what she was doing, "I'll go out and have a look."

The confrontation outside continued, especially after hearing Li Hongmei's words, the man's face turned beet red with embarrassment.

Zhang Guilan came out wanting to mediate, but the man had already given in, "I'll compensate her. Please pack the same amount of buns; I'll pay for it."

Since that was the case, Gui Lan didn't say anything else and asked Chunhua to pack another portion of pork buns for Hongmei.

Hongmei accepted the pork buns with a cold snort, "You know what's good for you," then bent down to pick up the buns that had fallen on the ground.

Chunhua couldn't help but blurt out, "They've already compensated you with new ones, why are you still picking up the ones from the ground?"

Hongmei responded with an air of entitlement, "I bought these with my own money, of course I am going to pick them up."

"But..."

"Trouble you, big sister, to get me 5 buns and a serving of cold dishes."

Chunhua was about to say something when a man interrupted her, signaling her to just let those two women go, not to fuss over it, clearly eager to avoid them as if they were a plague.

Chunhua didn't say anything more, turned around to get the man 5 buns, and filled a serving of cold dishes.

The sisters, Hongmei and Dongmei, had already left, Chunhua was still feeling indignant, and said to the man, "You really are too honest. Since you've bought them a fresh new bag, the original one should be rightfully yours. I saw it—although they fell on the ground, they didn't get dirty at all, they were still hot from the pot."

Times are hard these days, 5 pork buns are worth 50 cents.

The man gave a toothy grin, "A few pork buns for some peace and quiet," he thought those two women were unreasonable from the look of them. It was just an accidental bump, yet they accused him of being a pervert.

It was better to let them go quickly, he would consider it paying to avoid disaster.

Gui Lan also returned to the back kitchen, having understood roughly what had happened upfront. Although she knew that running a bun shop would entail encountering all sorts of people, she still couldn't help but mutter under her breath in complaint.

Chuxia observed the man eating outside, her gaze was complicated.

Unknown to everyone, this man was Hongmei's husband in her previous life.

Hongmei was arrogant, always longing to marry a city dweller, which caused her to delay marrying until her late twenties, becoming the village's notorious old maid.

Later, when her and Guang Yuan's business started doing well, Hongmei always egged on Mrs. Li to help her look for a prospective husband from the city with a job.

By a stroke of fate, she met Guo Hao who worked on the railway, the very man dining in the hall.

Guo Hao was also a bachelor of advanced age at the time, because his job took him to various places, and in his late twenties, he was still single. It was under these circumstances that he and Hongmei got married.

Guo Hao was an honest man; after marrying Hongmei, he handed over all his wages to her to manage. The family was simple, the in-laws both had pensions, plus with the backing of her natal family like that of Guang Yuan's, Hongmei's life was not too shabby.

Speaking of which, both Hongmei and Dongmei married well in their last life.

Dongmei was younger, and when it was time for her to talk about marriage prospects, Guang Yuan's business had made a name for itself across Ancheng County, and eventually, Dongmei married someone who worked at the Tax Bureau.

Both became true city dwellers.

Corners of her lips twitched with a sarcastic smile; in this lifetime, with a sister-in-law like Jiayi, it was uncertain whether the two haughty sisters, Hongmei and Dongmei, could still fulfill their wishes to marry city men with stable jobs.

At the Li Family in Xiaoqingshan Village

Jiayi looked at Guang Yuan with icy eyes, interrogating, "Are you really not going? Let me tell you, Guang Yuan, this home isn't just yours, nor is it your mother's or your sister's. Without me, would you be able to go out and do business? Now every penny in the house comes from my dowry. They do nothing all day, why should they use my money?"

She discovered today upon returning that her box had been tampered with, and upon checking, another 20 dollars were missing.

It was not enough that they took her dowry last time, this time they actually stole the money.

Chapter 122: Criticize Indirectly

Li Guangyuan coaxed with a gentle voice, "It's not necessarily them who took it. What if you remember it wrong? Both Dongmei and Hongmei are not at home now. What do you want me to say to my mom? If it turns out you remembered wrong, it's going to be so awkward for the whole family."

"I couldn't possibly remember it wrong. I clearly put 120 yuan in here, and now there's only 100 yuan. This is the hard-earned money of us both. We don't even have vegetables to sell now; we are counting on using this money as capital to do other businesses."

Li Guangyuan seemed unconcerned. In this freezing weather, what other business could they possibly do? It's better to have a good rest, stay home for the winter, and wait until spring next year when the vegetables are ready again to continue selling. He's well-versed in that business and can make money, he doesn't want to bother with other things. However, he also knew that if he said this, Lin Jiayi definitely wouldn't agree.

"A hundred yuan is enough to do other businesses."

"It's not about whether it's enough or not, it's that they are stealing my money again. What did you promise me last time, have you forgotten?"

Li Guangyuan got a bit impatient, "I've told you, maybe you remembered wrong. All this talk about stealing, it's so unpleasant when family talks like this."

"When I say stealing, you find it unpleasant. Why didn't you find it distasteful when they did it? I'm their sister-in-law, going through my stuff without my permission is stealing..."

With a loud clank, a noise came from outside followed by Old Mrs. Li in the yard, cursing at the chickens.

The noise just now was from her setting down the chicken feeding pan.

"Day after day, not laying a single egg, yet you still have the face to strut around here? Fed and cared for every day, what more do you want? Are you some kind of golden phoenix or what..."

Lin Jiayi's expression instantly darkened, and pointing outside she said to Li Guangyuan, "Are you just going to stand here and listen to your mom talk in riddles?"

Li Guangyuan was a little irritated, "What do you want now? Where is my mom talking in riddles? Can't she blame the chickens without your interference?"

"Is she really cursing the chickens?"

They had been married for less than half a year, and her stomach showed no sign of a baby, which Old Mrs. Li had been unhappy about for some time.

Previously, when Lin Jiayi and Li Guangyuan were doing business outside and were seldom at home, yet money was coming in, Mrs. Li had been at ease.

Now that there was no work in the fields and no business to attend, the old lady had started making trouble out of nothing.

The scolding was not really about the chickens not laying eggs; it was an indirect criticism of her.

While they were talking, Li Hongmei and Li Dongmei entered from outside, each holding a net bag filled with various goodies and another hand carrying a bag of meat buns.

Entering the courtyard, they said to Old Mrs. Li, "Mom, look, I brought you some meat buns."

Old Mrs. Li immediately beamed with happiness, "My girls are so filial, always thinking of their mother."

"Of course, you are my mom."

Watching the tender mother-daughter moment in the yard, Lin Jiayi couldn't hold back anymore and stormed out.

"Li Hongmei, Li Dongmei, did you two mess with my things?"

Li Dongmei took a step back with a guilty look, while Li Hongmei appeared indifferent, "Who messed with your things? Don't slander good people without evidence."

"Is it a slander? 20 yuan is missing from the purse where I keep my money. If you didn't take it, how did you get the money to buy these things and the meat buns?"

They actually bought two bagfuls; when did their family become so generous?

"Oh, sister-in-law, listen to yourself, when did we ever say we were out of money? We bought these things with the money Mother gave us," she said, then turned to ask Old Mrs. Li, "Mom, isn't that right? The money you gave me?"

Old Mrs. Li, with her eyes narrowed to slits, didn't confirm or deny, her gaze shifting to Lin Jiayi, "I'm talking to you, Guangyuan's wife. Is this how you behave as the older sister-in-law? Blaming your younger sister-in-law without looking for the fault in yourself, how does tarnishing your sister-in-law's reputation benefit you? I'll tell you what, even if Li Dongmei and Li Hongmei did take the money, they have every right to. They're your sisters-in-law; shouldn't they spend some of their brother and sister-in-law's money? You should be giving them pocket money every month."

Li Hongmei and Li Dongmei's eyes lit up when they heard Old Mrs. Li say this. Lately, their brother and sister-in-law had made some money by selling vegetables, yet never handed it over to their mom. If they were given pocket money every month, they would find it acceptable.

Lin Jiayi almost spat out a mouthful of blood, "On what grounds?"

"On the grounds that you are their brother and sister-in-law. I'll say it again, Hongmei and Dongmei are grown up now. You, as their sister-in-law, instead of buying them some clothes to dress up nicely, dress yourself up flamboyantly every day. What are you trying to do? The old lady here isn't dead yet, you're trying to trample on my daughters' reputations?"

After she finished speaking, she directly summoned Li Guangyuan, "Keep your wife in check. She doesn't do anything productive all day and causes turmoil in the household, spoiling the home peace. It's all because you're too lenient with her."

Then, turning around, she put on a different face, smiling and calling her two daughters into the room to talk.

Li Dongmei and Li Hongmei supported Old Mrs. Li from either side, with Li Hongmei even making a face at Lin Jiayi.

Furious, Lin Jiayi stomped her feet, and Li Guangyuan wore a stern face, "Have you caused enough trouble?"

Lin Jiayi looked incredulously at Li Guangyuan; since their marriage, he'd never spoken harshly to her, even when she had conflicts with his mother and sisters, he would always pacify her. But now he was accusing her of causing trouble, when it was clearly their fault.

Li Guangyuan also felt he had been harsh, yet he didn't want to back down and turned to go back to his room.

Lin Jiayi chased after him in a few steps, "Li Guangyuan, explain yourself clearly. Who's causing trouble? You don't care when your sisters steal money, yet you accuse me of causing a scene. Are you even a man?"

"They've already said they didn't take your money."

Li Guangyuan was frustrated, why must families bicker over such trivial things? But Lin Jiayi was always insistent on separating 'yours' and 'mine,' making a big fuss over minor issues.

"So what, are you implying I'm lying?" Lin Jiayi trembled with rage.

Was he unaware of what kind of people his sisters were?

Last time, they had taken her dowry to make clothes for themselves, and now it was clear they had taken their money to buy things.

"I didn't say that, you did," said Li Guangyuan, sitting on the kang bed, not even looking at her.

Lin Jiayi couldn't stand it anymore, rushed over and started to hit him, "Are you even a man? You can't even stand up for your own wife, you good-for-nothing..."

Li Guangyuan's shoulders took a couple of punches, and a glint of coldness flashed through his downcast eyes, his fingertips involuntarily curled.

Just at that moment, Lin Jiayi suddenly cried out "ow," clutching her stomach and crouching on the ground.

Li Guangyuan gave her an indifferent glance, noticing her face had gone deathly pale, and she was breaking out in cold sweat—it didn't look like an act. He then bent down to help her, "What's wrong?"

"My stomach... it hurts so bad..."

Realizing what might be wrong, Li Guangyuan quickly lifted her onto the kang, "Wait here, I'll go and find a doctor."

There was a barefoot doctor in the village, and Li Guangyuan quickly brought the doctor back.

The three people in Old Mrs. Li's room had already been watching through the window as Li Guangyuan rushed out with his bicycle.

Now, seeing him return with the barefoot doctor, Li Dongmei whispered curiously, "What happened?"

Chapter 123: Pregnant

Li Hongmei dismissively curled her lip, "Who knows, it must be his wife who's stirring up drama."

Old Mrs. Li got out of her kang bed to put on shoes, "I'll go have a look."

Even the barefoot doctor charges for a visit.

Li Dongmei and Li Hongmei followed closely behind, clearly in the mood for some excitement.

The barefoot doctor of Xiaoqingshan Village was a female physician who examined Lin Jiayi briefly, asked some questions, and seemed to have an idea in mind, "She's pregnant."

Old Mrs. Li, who had just entered, caught the words, "Pregnant with what?"

The female physician was about to cheerfully speak, "Aunt Li, your daughter-in-law seems to be pregnant. It's still early so I can't be sure, but in a while, have Guangyuan take her to the hospital for confirmation."

Upon hearing that Lin Jiayi was pregnant, Old Mrs. Li's earlier displeasure vanished like smoke, slapping her palm with joy, "Ah, I knew it! They've been married for several months; it's about time for some news."

"Yes, it's early days now, you need to be careful," the female doctor advised.

Old Mrs. Li waved her hand with a smile, "I know, I know. I've had three children myself, I'm quite aware. Besides, us country folks aren't so delicate."

Li Guangyuan was also visibly thrilled to hear Lin Jiayi was pregnant.

After sending everyone off, he held Lin Jiayi's hand with a guilty face, "I was wrong today, and I made you suffer. If my sisters took the money, let them have it. As their brother and sister-in-law, we should give them something when we earn money. Anyway, you have the final say over our finances. Please, don't argue with them over this. Next spring, I'll work hard to make more money for you."

Lin Jiayi, whose tears of grievance were falling, heard Li Guangyuan's words, "We can't wait until next spring. You need to find some other business to do as soon as possible. We can't rely on selling vegetables forever."

How long would she have to sell vegetables before she could drive a car and live in a big house?

Li Guangyuan nodded hastily, "Okay, whatever you say."

"Also, it's time for your two sisters to find husbands; they're not getting any younger. Last time I went home, I asked my mother to help look around. I'll ask her again soon, and if there's a suitable match, we should set it up."

Those two sisters-in-law at home are only good at causing trouble, especially Li Hongmei. Marrying her off early would save trouble at home.

Li Guangyuan paused then nodded after a moment, "Okay."

Knowing she was pregnant made Lin Jiayi feel her spine straighten with pride.

In her past life, she had been a forsaken widow for half a lifetime, and eventually she came around. If Qin Yang could be unkind to her, she would not be blamed for being unjust to him.

He could have a child and expect her to be a stepmother; she could make him wear a cuckold's horns.

But no matter how much she messed around with others, she never dared to get pregnant.

This was the first time she had been pregnant in her two lives, as if the resentment suppressed in her heart for two lifetimes was now released.

Furthermore, she realized that even Li Guangyuan's mother treated her more politely since she became pregnant, and those two sisters-in-law began avoiding her, which gave Lin Jiayi an indescribable sense of superiority.

After resting at home for two days, she packed up and went back to her parents' home in Daqing Mountain Village.

Daqing Mountain Village and Xiaoqingshan Village were very close to each other, just a short distance apart. Li Guangyuan wanted to accompany her out of concern, but Lin Jiayi refused him. Internally, she couldn't help feeling smug.

Upon entering her parental home, her face was full of happy and smug smiles.

Mother Lin was also unspeakably delighted to see her daughter return.

Seeing her daughter's sun-darkened face, even thinner than when she got married, her heart ached once again.

"You really weren't thinking straight, leaving behind the good life at the Qin Family, insisting on marrying Li Guangyuan, selling vegetables every day under the sun and wind, living such a tough life."

She didn't know what life was like for Lin Chuxia after marrying Qin Yang, but seeing Lin Chuxia's skin during the Mid-Autumn Festival, so pale and delicate, even more radiant than when she was at her mother's home, she could tell Lin Chuxia had not suffered.

Lin Jiayi nonchalantly pursed her lips, "What good life could there be marrying into the Qin Family? It's no different from being a widow. Mom, I'm... pregnant..."

She gently caressed her belly with a look of happiness on her face.

Mother Lin was also full of surprise, "Pregnant? That's wonderful."

Isn't the life of a woman all about getting married and having children?

Lin Jiayi had been married for half a year without getting pregnant, her mother was also anxious for her.

Now that she was pregnant, the heavy stone in her heart finally fell to the ground.

Finally, she could stand tall and speak confidently in her husband's family.

In their village, if a woman didn't get pregnant within three months of marriage, there would be gossip.

During this time, listening to all the whispers, she too was anxious for her daughter.

Lin Jiayi also felt very good about it; no matter what, she was stronger than Lin Chuxia in this respect.

Even if Qin Yang was home for three days after the wedding, what would it matter? It's not certain that the two even slept together.

Next year, once she has her own child, and Lin Chuxia brings back an illegitimate child, that will be her time to hold her head high.

"Right, Mom, how's the thing I asked you about last time? Remember, we must find someone suitable for Guangyuan."

Upon hearing this, Mother Lin knew that the Li Family's younger sister was causing trouble again. She patted her daughter's hand, "Don't worry, I've found someone already. One of your aunt's relatives, nearly thirty years old, grew up without a mother. He moved out after his father remarried and had another son. Now he lives alone; I think marrying him would be good, as it means not having to deal with in-laws. Besides, the young man is quite capable; he's raised two pigs."

Seeing her daughter frown slightly as if not quite satisfied, Mother Lin lowered her voice, "Those two pigs are being raised for his father. When the time comes to sell the pigs, the money will go to his father. His house is an old one left by his grandparents, and his uncles have their eyes on it."

Lin Jiayi's face then showed satisfaction, smiling, "I think it's a suitable match. Hongmei has no dad, and the other party has no mom, seems like a match made in heaven."

In her previous life, Lin Chuxia had married off these two younger sisters splendidly. They became city dwellers working for grain rations. She transformed into a city person overnight.

She certainly wouldn't be as foolish as Lin Chuxia had been; crossing her wouldn't end well.

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As the weather cooled, Lin Chuxia fell ill.

Ever since drinking the spiritual spring water, her body had been very healthy, not even bothered by a cold. But Old Master He encountered her, took her pulse, and even prescribed her some traditional medicine.

She originally had no intention of taking it, but hearing from Su Wensong that Old Master He had not treated patients for a long time and had made an exception for her, she gratefully accepted the medication.

Having drank lots of traditional medicine to improve her health in her previous life, she didn't find it hard to drink anymore.

Worried about contagious illness, she hadn't gone to the Bun Shop these days while sick. It was only after she got a bit better that she learned her master had also not been to the Bun Shop during this time.

Wondering what the old man was up to, Lin Chuxia took some fruits and pastries and went to her master's house.

Chapter 124: Want to Discuss a Deal with Boss Lin

A few north winds blew recently, and the temperature has already dropped.

Before that happened, Lin Chuxia had Hou Xiaobao buy some honeycomb coal for heating for her master.

Currently, central heating isn't widespread, so being able to heat with honeycomb coal is considered quite a good situation.

Worried about carbon monoxide poisoning from the coal, they even installed a flue. But even so, not having seen Lin Chuxia for several days, she was still a bit anxious.

Upon entering the yard and glimpsing the shadow of someone moving inside the house through the glass, she felt a bit relieved.

"Master, what are you up to again?" Lin Chuxia shouted as she breezily entered the house.

Old Sir He was on the kang bed fiddling with his plants; it's no longer just a single pot, there are several pots, all of different shapes and sizes.

"What are you doing here again?" Old Sir He glanced up at her and seeing her complexion was fine, returned to what he was doing, "Did you finish taking the medicine?"

"I did, I did. Master, are you secretly hoping I get sick so you can get back at me? I feel like the medicine tastes horrifically bitter; I've never had anything so bitter."

"What revenge? Haven't you heard that good medicine tastes bitter?" Old Sir He glared at her, "If you're really afraid that I'm giving you bitter medicine as payback, there's a solution. How much of the medical book I gave you have you read?"

Lin Chuxia immediately felt guilty and took an apple out of her bag to hand to him, "Master, try this apple, it's very sweet."

Old Sir He snorted coldly but took a bite of the apple.

Lin Chuxia immediately began to playfully help him arrange the plants.

She asked Old Sir He why he hadn't been to the bun shop in the last few days, to which he mercilessly replied that he feared Lin Chuxia would pass her sickness onto him and didn't want to eat virus-infected buns.

Lin Chuxia felt that the only reason their master-disciple relationship could continue was truly because of her good looks and kind heart.

After leaving Old Sir He's place, Lin Chuxia went to Qin's Bun Shop in the city.

It was meal time, and the bun shop was quite busy. Qin Wu and Zhou Hongmei, as a couple, were still selling delivery food, and inside the shop, Qin Lihua and Chen Chunhua were busy working, while Zhang Guilan was at the front desk handling payments.

Even though they were busy with their tasks, their expressions seemed somewhat grave.

Seeing Lin Chuxia come over, Qin Lihua, who was closer to the door, quietly called out, "Auntie Four!"

"What's the matter?" Lin Chuxia also noticed something amiss.

Qin Lihua glanced towards the office inside and shook her head, "I don't know."

Zhang Guilan also saw Lin Chuxia and came over to her, "Little sister-in-law, how are you feeling, any better?"

"I've been fine for a while now," Lin Chuxia responded, "Where's big brother?"

Zhang Guilan took Lin Chuxia to a private spot, "Your brother is in the office. Just a bit earlier, someone from the Food Store came looking for your brother. They already visited a few days ago, asking who was in charge of our shop, and your brother sent him away. Unexpectedly, they came back today; it's probably regarding the cooked food business."

Lin Chuxia nodded, "I'll go take a look."

She went straight to the office and upon entering, she saw a middle-aged man in his forties, dressed in a Zhongshan suit with a pen tucked in the pocket of his jacket.

The Food Store is affiliated with the food factory; unlike their private enterprise, they don't have to deal with products hands-on. The man sat in an office and just made managerial decisions.

This person clearly recognized Lin Chuxia, and after seeing her enter, he didn't rush to get up but smiled and said, "Meeting Boss Lin isn't easy, huh."

Lin Chuxia observed his composure and secretly raised an eyebrow.

True to his position as the head of a state-owned enterprise, his airs were grand indeed.

Despite his older brother Qin Han already standing up, this man remained seated, as stable as Mount Tai.

If Lin Chuxia hadn't guessed wrong, the fact that he sought her out time and time again at their shop meant he needed something from her, or to put it another way, he wanted to negotiate terms with her.

Whichever the case, it was a passive position.

For someone in a passive position to have such an attitude clearly showed that he didn't take their shop, or her, seriously at all.

Lin Chuxia smiled and as she walked into the room, she looked toward Qin Han, "Who might this be?"

Qin Han yielded the main seat and introduced, "This is Director Gao from the Food Store of the food factory."

"Oh!"

Lin Chuxia clearly noticed that when Qin Han mentioned Director Gao, the man slightly puffed up his chest.

She smiled faintly, "Director Gao honors us with his presence. Is there something you need?"

Gao Hui's face twitched coldly, his tone carrying a hint of interrogation, "Boss Lin sure knows how to pick a spot. Opening a shop here, are you aiming to compete with the food factory?"

Originally, they hadn't taken it seriously when they heard that a bun shop was going to open here, let alone that it turned out to be Qin's Buns Shop upon launching.

Even though they had heard that Qin's Cooked Food was quite popular among the common people, they still didn't care.

A small-time entrepreneur, even if setting up shop right across from their Food Store, wouldn't have much of an impact.

Their food factory had decades of foundation, after all.

Yet ever since Qin's Buns Shop opened, their Food Store's business was dwindling by the day, the customers getting fewer with each passing day.

Where they used to sell a hundred and eighty pounds of cooked food a day, now they struggled to even sell sixty pounds.

If things continued this way, he, the director, might face disciplinary action.

"Director Gao flatters me, we're just small individual entrepreneurs, how dare we challenge the food factory," Lin Chuxia certainly didn't play along with his words.

Gao Hui scrutinized the woman before him, a very beautiful woman, young in age, yet her poise was beyond her years, even more steadfast than Qin Han who he had just met.

His words were actually a probe, and the result of this probe was that this woman was not easy to deal with.

He exhaled lightly, "My visit this time is to discuss business with Boss Lin."

Lin Chuxia continued to look at him, saying nothing.

Gao Hui had no choice but to continue, "I've tasted the cooked food from your bun shop, and the flavor is indeed good. The food factory has been working on improving the taste of its products for years, without notable success. Qin's Cooked Food, however, has impressed us, so the food factory has decided to acquire the proprietary recipe from Qin's Cooked Food to enhance the food quality of the factory. It's a great thing for the benefit of the country and the people. Boss Lin can make an offer; as long as the price is reasonable, the food factory will accept it."

Lin Chuxia's smile was meaningful, dressing up the oppression of competitors in such noble terms was something only such a large state-owned factory could do.

Alas, the sense of superiority they had from decades of planned economy should now come to terms with reality.

"Sorry, but I have no plans to sell the recipes."

Gao Hui frowned slightly, "Boss Lin, I hope you think carefully before you speak. Competing with the food factory won't do you any good. Isn't it better for your bun shop to just sell steamed buns?"

"Director Gao, I'll repeat myself, I run my business without the intention of competing with anyone. The state opened up the market to encourage private entrepreneurship and diverse business operations. I sell steamed buns and cooked food without infringing on anyone's interests. If there is any, it's nothing but fair competition."

Chapter 125: Did the Letter Get Lost?

"Slap!"

Gao Hui stood up, his gaze intense, "Boss Lin, I advise you to think it over before you speak. You're young and may not see the crux of the matter. I can give you time. I'll take my leave now."

After Gao Hui left, Qin Han looked worriedly, "Sister-in-law, what does he mean by that? Could it be that they intend to coerce a sale?"

The other party is a county food factory with certain backing; they have no foundation. If the other party intends to force a sale, I'm afraid our food recipe might indeed be taken by them.

Lin Chuxia waved her hand, "No, we live in a society ruled by law," they might use tactics to pressure us, but they won't coerce a sale.

"Big brother, be mindful during this time, whatever moves the food factory makes, let me know immediately."

"Okay, I got it, sister-in-law."

Lin Chuxia had a simple lunch at the Bun Shop, then returned to the small courtyard's office.

She took out medical texts from her space and began transcribing them.

The medical texts contain many traditional characters, and for easier reading, she decided to transcribe them, using a dictionary to convert them into simplified characters.

Although the terms in the medical texts are esoteric, they aren't difficult for Lin Chuxia.

In her previous life, in order to have children, she often dealt with traditional Chinese medicine - suffering from a long illness turns one into a doctor. She knew a lot about herbal medicine and principles, and even added a lot of medicinal ingredients to her culinary recipes.

While writing, she suddenly remembered the letter she had sent to Qin Yang over half a month ago. She usually would have received a reply by now, but this time there was no word.

Could the letter have been lost?

Such occurrences are not uncommon these days.

She didn't think about it anymore and continued to copy the medical texts until evening.

Pang Yongli, Ma Yingzi, and Jia Liang were all busy in the courtyard; Hou Xiaobao had gone down to the chicken farm.

Someone came in at the gate, not entering the courtyard, but shouted in the direction of Ma Yingzi, "Yingzi!"

Seeing the visitor, Ma Yingzi greeted her with a smile, "How come you're here? Looking for Boss Lin?"

Their boss seemed to indeed be in the office today.

Chen Chunhua then walked into the courtyard, glancing towards the direction of the office as she did.

"No, I just came to see you. Ever since I started working at the Bun Shop, we hardly see each other. I finished work early today and came over to chat."

Ma Yingzi handed her a stool to sit on, and Chen Chunhua sat to one side watching her work.

The pot was stewing cooked food, bubbling and steaming, with the fragrance of meat filling the courtyard.

"No wonder our shop's cooked food sells so well. You don't even need to eat the meat; just smelling the aroma can make people salivate."

Chen Chunhua took a deep breath.

"When I get paid this month, I absolutely must buy a couple pounds of pig head meat to satisfy my craving."

Ma Yingzi chuckled, "That will be soon; in three more days, it'll be payday, and you should be getting a raise this month, right?"

Chen Chunhua had been there for over a month, and last month she received half a month's salary, which made her extremely happy.

"Yes, that's why it feels good to spend money you've earned yourself. But even when I do get paid, I can't bring myself to buy two pounds of pig head meat. The New Year is coming; I need to save up for the holiday."

After saying this, she sighed again, "That's why your job is better. You earn a salary and also learn skills. When New Year's comes, you can stew a pot of cooked food at home. Isn't that better than buying it from outside? Yingzi, how about you talk to Boss Lin and let me work on the cooked food with you?"

Ma Yingzi laughed and said, "You're mistaken. Our shop's cooked food has secret recipes. Not to mention me, even Manager Su might not know the secrets of the recipe. If it were so simple that anyone could learn it after a few days, then Qin's Cooked Food wouldn't have such good business."

Chen Chunhua's eyes widened in disbelief, "There are secret recipes? Goodness, it's just stewing meat."

"Of course. I heard the boss's ancestors used to be Imperial Chefs for the Prince, with recipes handed down from generation to generation. Otherwise, why do you think Qin's Cooked Food is so delicious? Those are recipes even the Emperor couldn't get his hands on."

"My goodness, no wonder the food factory came looking..."

Ma Yingzi heard this and interrupted, "What happened?"

Chen Chunhua looked around, lowered her voice, "I don't know the details, just that someone from the food factory's cooked food store was looking for Manager Qin, and later they looked for Boss Lin. I don't know exactly what was discussed, but I think they came because of our cooked food. Our Bun Shop has taken a lot of their business."

Ma Yingzi cautioned after thinking, "If you don't know, don't spread rumors. What do you mean 'taken their business'? Everyone opens their doors for business, and customers decide where they want to go. How can that be called taking?"

These words, if heard by outsiders, might imply that their Bun Shop had used some underhand tactics.

Chen Chunhua nodded repeatedly, "I know, I know. I'm just talking to you. I wouldn't tell anyone else."

.....

A quiet hospital corridor carried the sound of footsteps. Li Wei, carrying a lunch box, appeared in front of the hospital room.

Pushing open the room's door, he saw a man sitting propped up on the hospital bed, gazing out the window, lost in thought.

His right arm was slung across his chest, not diminishing his imposing manner in the slightest.

Placing the lunch box on the bedside cabinet, Li Wei asked, "How are you feeling today?"

Qin Yang withdrew his gaze, replying nonchalantly, "Much better. Tell the chief to start my discharge process..."

"Discharge what? Stay here and recover properly," Li Wei interrupted him irritably, "Do you really think you're that young, not taking your health seriously? Do you have any idea how dangerous it was this time? Your arm was nearly crippled. If only I had stopped you like Mr. Bai did back then."

They had experienced danger in the project before, with Liu Tao losing his life in an accident that time.

Although Liu Tao was to blame for that accident, having altered the blueprints privately without any reporting and even endangering others in the process.

This time, however, the entire team had deliberated deeply, with Qin Yang leading them to conclusions drawn from multiple rehearsals and experiments.

But how could a technological breakthrough come without any risk, especially in their field of engineering?

Each challenge they faced was a millennium-old puzzle.

In a critical moment, Qin Yang turned the tide, ensuring both the project's progress and the workers' safety, but he himself was injured.

"How is Mr. Bai now?" Hearing about Bai Xiaoming, Qin Yang felt a trace of unease.

"What else? All the work has fallen on his shoulders now. But the most difficult time has passed, the project has made a major breakthrough, and the leaders are paying close attention to our project team. Mr. Bai is just dealing with the leadership. When I was leaving, he asked me to tell you to recover well, that he'll take care of everything in the group."

Speaking of their project, Li Wei couldn't help but be moved, "This time, our project team has accomplished a great feat, all thanks to you. The work group from above also claimed this was nearly an impossible challenge to overcome. Journalists want to make a special column about you and are asking when you'll be available."

Chapter 126: It's All Empty Fame

Qin Yang disdainfully looked at the meal that Li Wei was trying to feed him, reaching out to grab the spoon, "Just have Bai Xiaoming deal with it, there's nothing worth seeing anyway."

With the spoon snatched away, Li Wei knew his brother's temper well, and put the lunchbox on the small table in front of him.

"What do you mean 'nothing worth seeing'? This is all your accomplishment. You've shouldered so much pressure and risked so much for today's success. Not to mention anything else, even this arm of yours nearly stayed there forever. If you ask me, the May Day Labor Medal next year and the unit's major breakthrough awards are yours by right."

"It's all just an empty title," Qin Yang said, eating with his head lowered. What he wanted wasn't just these things.

Li Wei pulled over a chair and sat next to him, immediately noticing the letter on the bedside table, with a stack of letter paper and a pen next to it.

"Thinking of replying to your sister-in-law's letter? You want me to ghostwrite it for you? You dictate, I'll write."

He chuckled as he picked up the letter paper and pen, with an air of 'don't be too polite with me'.

Qin Yang gave him a disdainful glare, which amused Li Wei even more.

"What, you're embarrassed? We're both married men, what's there to be shy about with me? Those private words between spouses, you probably don't understand as much as I do. After all, I've been married two years longer than you."

The more Qin Yang listened, the darker his face got, "Shut up now, or get out."

Li Wei laughed even harder, the paper he pinched rustling, "Alright, my good intentions are mistaken for unkindness. But seriously, aren't you planning on telling your sister-in-law about your injury? If I were

you, I would've sent a letter home long ago, having your sis-in-law come to take care of you so that you lovebirds could spend some time together. Yet here you are, keeping her in the dark."

"I'll be better in a few days," Qin Yang put the last bite of rice into his mouth, looking at the lunchbox and said calmly.

"Injuries to muscles and bones take a hundred days to heal, it's not just a matter of a few days. The doctors have said it; if you don't treat that arm properly, even drawing will be a problem in the future. Even with proper care, it's uncertain to what extent it will recover. You know how much the leadership values you, don't be negligent. The good days will just be starting once this project is complete."

Within the entire group, Li Wei and Qin Yang were of similar age, and they had the best relationship. This was truly heart-to-heart advice.

Qin Yang nodded again, "I know."

"I know, I know. You say you know everything, but you don't take yourself seriously. Do you really think you can keep it from the family? Not replying to letters, won't the family suspect something?"

Li Wei had no way to deal with his brother, cleaning up the lunchbox and taking it to the water room to wash.

Qin Yang picked up the letter, gently rubbing it, his deep eyes filled with a touch of tenderness.

She was so busy, she might not even notice whether he had replied to her letters.

Let's wait a few more days. In a few days, maybe he could hold a pen. As long as he could hold the pen, he would write back to her.

As December arrived, the weather day by day grew colder. Lin Chuxia had long adjusted her commuting times; even so, the store's procurement staff were among the hardest working.

When Lin Chuxia arrived at the store, she saw Hou Xiaobao delivering precooked food to the store.

Blowing on his hands while unloading the goods, he was still in the same clothing as when she first met him, which seemed much too thin for this winter cold.

Today the wind was a bit sharper, and even in her thick cotton coat she felt the cold standing outside. What good was that thin clothing?

"Houzi, what time did you get out today?"

When Hou Xiaobao saw it was Lin Chuxia, thinking she was asking about work, he immediately stood up straight.

"I started at 5 AM today, first went to the meat shop to pick up meat, then delivered ready-to-eat food to the train station area; this place is the last stop for delivery. After moving this cargo, I'll make another trip to the chicken farm."

His day's work consists of riding a tricycle between a few stores and the chicken farm.

Life is simple, and the shop takes care of food and lodging; Hou Xiaobao is very satisfied with his current job.

Lin Chuxia slightly frowned; 5 AM is the coldest time of the day.

Hou Xiaobao has been working here for almost a month, and there are still a few days before payday.

She turned her head to Qin Han, "Big brother, take out some money from the account later. Ask sister-in-law to find time to go to the mall to buy three coats, one for each of the shop's delivery staff as a benefit from the shop."

Only now did Hou Xiaobao realize why Lin Chuxia asked him what time he started his day, and he quickly waved his hands, "Mr. Lin, I'm not cold. You may think I'm not wearing much, but once I start pedaling the bike, I don't feel cold."

A military coat costs thirty to forty yuan, a month's salary.

He had planned to save another month's salary and buy one even if it meant biting the bullet, but the boss had noticed.

"Alright, no need to act tough," Lin Chuxia deliberately put on a stern face, "Wear the military coat when you get it. Don't catch a cold; delivery is an important part of the shop's work. If you fall ill, I'll have to find someone else on the spot."

She wonders if Jia Liang and Hou Xiaobao are scared by her, especially Hou Xiaobao, who always seems so timid when speaking to her.

She's not that fierce with her employees.

Hou Xiaobao stood up straight and nodded solemnly, "Yes, Mr. Lin."

He suddenly felt an overwhelming sense of emotion. He had never had anyone care about whether he was cold or hungry. It was as if he had always been the redundant one since childhood.

But Mr. Lin not only provided him with a job, but he was also paid just for sleeping, and now he even worried about whether he was cold, willing to spend a lot of money to buy military coats for them to wear.

He must work hard and not let Mr. Lin down.

In the afternoon, Zhang Gui Lan came with the military coats.

Besides Hou Xiaobao, the other delivery staff included Qin Han and Sun Bingnan.

With four flatbed carts, Qin Han and Sun Bingnan had one each, and there were two for Hou Xiaobao, one for transporting raw meat and one for ready-to-eat food.

Hou Xiaobao happened to be at the shop and immediately put on the military coat, smiling like a fool.

Chen Chunhua remarked on the side, "You guys have it good, monkey. Before even getting your salary, you've already got a military coat to wear."

One military coat is worth a month's salary; this is like doing a month's work and earning two months' salary.

Qin Lihua joked from the side, "Is Aunt Chen considering cycling and delivering goods too? If you did this job, my fourth aunt would surely give you a military coat as well."

Chen Chunhua stiffened and waved her hand, "I can't do that. I can't even ride a bike, let alone a tricycle."

And those goods. Ready-to-eat food is one thing, but hauling raw meat and chickens every day is no light task.

Qin Lihua secretly curled her lips, thinking that Aunt Chen's sour words did not go unnoticed by her, still young. Her fourth aunt's decisions were not for others to judge.

She had seen clear during these days working at the shop. Although the shop belongs to her fourth aunt, it's called Qin's Bun Shop. Her second uncle, second aunt, fifth uncle, and fifth aunt also work there. She's part of the Qin Family. The shop is part of the Old Qin Family's business. If outsiders criticize the shop, it's as if they are criticizing them; she did not stand by idly.

Chapter 127: Forced Buy, Forced Sell?

Lin Chuxia came in from outside and saw a few people surrounding Hou Xiaobao trying on a military coat. She nodded in satisfaction, "Not bad, it fits well, and looks much warmer."

Hou Xiaobao smiled showing his uneven teeth, "Thank you, Mr. Lin."

Lin Chuxia asked Zhang Guilan, "Where's big brother?"

"He's inside going over the accounts with Xiao Su."

Each store has its accounts to settle every month, according to Lin Chuxia's rules.

At this moment, Lin Chuxia also saw Qin Han and Su Wensong inside and walked directly towards them.

"Big brother, let's not worry about this for now. I have a dinner at the State-Owned Restaurant tonight, see if you or Wensong would like to join me."

"A dinner? What kind of dinner?"

It was the first time Qin Han had heard this term and was somewhat puzzled.

But Su Wensong's expression became a bit more serious, "Is it the people from the food factory?"

Lin Chuxia nodded, "It should be a connection facilitated by the vegetable station, it's a gathering organized by Li Jian's group, including Director Liu from the food factory, Director Gao, and Vice Director Feng from the Market Supervision Bureau..."

This incident had passed for half a month now, and she hadn't expected the other party to persist.

Hearing these names, Qin Han's face turned slightly pale, "Are they... planning to force a deal?"

As an ordinary person, the highest official he had ever met was their village chief.

After starting to work with his younger sibling, he also met some minor leaders, but they were at most at the level of Directors like Li Jian.

Now he was about to have a meal at the same table as factory directors and bureau chiefs, aiming at their food formula.

Qin Han really wanted to help his younger sibling, but he also knew his abilities were limited.

"Sister, if it's about fighting, I would spare no effort to help, but when it comes to talking at the dinner table, I'm not articulate and I'm afraid..."

Su Wensong stepped forward, "I will go with Manager Lin."

Lin Chuxia wasn't too concerned about who would accompany her and nodded, "Alright, then go home and change your clothes, I'll wait for you in the office."

Qin Han watched them leave, his heart filled with worry and guilt.

Qin Lihua didn't know the details of the situation since they were standing far away and only heard a little.

She looked enviously at Lin Chuxia as she walked away, exclaiming "Auntie is really capable, being able to dine with factory directors and bureau chiefs. Uncle, you should have gone with her," what a great opportunity, to meet so many important figures.

Zhang Guilan patted her shoulder, "Do your job well, and one day you'll be as capable as your auntie."

Qin Lihua firmly responded and hurried to greet the customers as they arrived.

Zhang Guilan turned her head and saw her husband sitting there, lost in thought with a downcast mood, knowing what he was thinking about.

She went over to comfort him, "This matter isn't trivial, Su Wensong is well-educated and has seen the world, he's suitable for this."

Qin Han sighed, "Initially, when I joined the store, I thought I'd help my younger brother look after the place and assist my younger sibling, thinking that with me around, I definitely wouldn't let anyone take advantage of them. Later, I felt that since my younger sibling opened such a big store, we, as her family, should contribute more. But now it seems, I'm just not capable," of neither keeping people at bay nor of being any help.

Zhang Guilan disagreed, "How can you talk like this? This store is the biggest one your sister has opened, and she entrusted it to us, which shows she trusts your abilities. And whenever she has any issues, she always discusses them with us first. If you think what you're doing isn't enough, then put more thought into everything in the future, observe and learn more, and strive to be able to help your sister when occasions like this arise again."

Qin Han looked down dejectedly and after a long while, suddenly stood up, "Is Houzi back yet? I'm going to check on him and also call Jia Liang. We'll go to the State-Owned Restaurant to stand by."

Although she couldn't accompany her younger brother and sister-in-law to the dinner event, she had to be in the closest place to them.

In case of any matter, they needed to protect her younger brother and sister-in-law immediately.

.....

The dinner event in the evening was at the State-Owned Restaurant. After Lin Chuxia finished her work, she prepared to head out.

Today, she wore a wine-red woolen coat, paired with a black wool sweater inside, low-key yet classy.

She deliberately wore high heels, instantly elevating her already tall stature among the girls, adding a sense of presence.

Her hair was styled in a low bun at the back of her head, unlike the small buns typical of the era; the low ponytail was gathered into a subdued bun, which was both understated and dignified.

As she left the office, Su Wensong was taken aback for a moment by Lin Chuxia's appearance before he greeted, "Mr. Lin."

Lin Chuxia gave a slight nod, "Let's go."

After she walked ahead, Su Wensong looked down at his own clothes.

Today, Lin Chuxia reminded him to change his clothes. This outfit, freshly bought from a shop, was a standard Sun Yat-sen suit, with a fountain pen purposely clipped into the pocket.

He knew he should have bought that jacket, or maybe he should have gone to the city to buy a suit.

Seeing Lin Chuxia was about to reach the door, he quickly strode to catch up.

"Mr. Lin, aren't we a little late for our appointment?"

Lin Chuxia had mentioned before that the dinner was at six o'clock, and it was already five fifty. It would take them twenty minutes to get from their location to the State-Owned Restaurant.

Lin Chuxia glanced at her watch, "Not late, just in time."

As something came to mind, she added two reminders, "Wensong, at the dinner table, merely be alert. Regarding the food factory, there's no need for us to be too deferential; they are the ones seeking us out. As for the other invitees, we know Brother Li well, and we must give face to Brother Li. Vice Director Feng is in charge of our area; we will act accordingly to his demeanor."

As the saying goes, the present official is not as good as the one in charge.

Vice Director Feng was in charge of their area, and the food factory invited guests to suppress them; they should not provoke deliberate conflict nor be intimidated.

Su Wensong nodded in understanding, "I've got it."

They didn't deliberately delay on the road and arrived at the State-Owned Restaurant just before six ten.

The State-Owned Restaurant only had two private rooms, and their location could be easily found after a brief inquiry.

No wonder the phrase 'the waiter's response is based on the customer's appearance' was familiar; during average visits to the State-Owned Restaurant, asking one extra question would cause the waiter to roll their eyes.

But today, with Lin Chuxia dressed so elegantly and entering a private room to dine with a few leaders, the waitstaff's attitude was exemplary, almost meriting the title of Worker of the Year.

As the door of the private room opened, Lin Chuxia clearly saw the people inside; all except them had arrived.

Director Gao was the first to stand up, "Speak of the devil, and he shall appear! Come in, Lin, we've been waiting for you."

Lin Chuxia didn't hurry in but stood at the doorway, taking in the few individuals inside the room.

Director Gao and Li Jian stood up to welcome her, whereas Vice Director Feng glanced at her and seemed apathetic, caught up in conversation with a chubby man as if not minding their arrival.

Vice Director Feng's status meant he naturally did not have to get up to greet her, but if he was deliberately distracted to ignore her, it would be an obvious snub.

The chubby man, the director of the food factory, didn't even offer her a glance, despite their event.

Lin Chuxia also disregarded Director Gao and set her eyes on Li Jian, striding over, "I apologize for being late. There were some last-minute matters at the restaurant. It's rare for Brother Li to show me the ropes. Today is my first time sitting with Director Feng, so I'll have to toast him a couple of rounds later."

Chapter 128: Three Full-time Employee Positions

Su Wensong very considerately pulled out the seat next to Li Jian for Lin Chuxia.

Director Feng Kaiwei, having been called out, couldn't keep pretending alongside Director Liu, so he smiled, nodded, and said, "Mr. Lin, you're too kind."

Lin Chuxia took the seat without hesitation, and only then did she ask Li Jian, "And who might this gentleman across from us be...?"

Liu Guoyi's expression remained indifferent, his piercing gaze scrutinizing the woman in front of him who showed no fear in meeting his eyes.

From the few small actions of the woman as she entered, he received a very bad signal: this woman was not going to be easy to handle.

A mere individual business owner, showing up late to a dinner where everyone else held higher status than her.

Not only was she late, but she only started speaking to him after taking her seat opposite him; was she trying to tell him that they were equals?

He scoffed internally, a small business owner trying to speak of equality with him, what a joke.

Li Jian formally made the introduction, "This is Director Liu of the Food Factory. Both Director Liu and Director Feng have heard that your Bun Shop is doing well; Director Feng is the greatest supporter of private enterprises. Since everyone happened to be free today, we thought we could all sit down together."

Hearing Li Jian's words, Lin Chuxia felt completely relieved.

She knew that Li Jian was dispatched here by Station Chief Yang and was worried how he might handle the situation later.

His words meant he wasn't siding with Director Liu; the decision was left to her.

With a slight smile on her face, she said, "So, it's Director Liu. My apologies for not recognizing you sooner."

Liu Guoyi responded with a mild smile, "I've long heard of Mr. Lin's successful business, didn't expect the pretense to be substantial. It's the first time for both Director Feng and myself to be kept waiting in a private room; since Mr. Lin has arrived late, shouldn't there be some form of penalty?"

Gao Hui immediately brought over some drink cups— three quarter-once cups, filled with liquor—that were placed in front of Lin Chuxia.

Lin Chuxia glanced at the alcohol but did not pick up Director Liu's thread.

Director Liu wasn't in a hurry either; it was now a battle of momentum.

As long as one side could suppress the other in terms of momentum, the following proceedings were likely to turn in their favor.

Lin Chuxia had intentionally arrived late to impose her momentum over him, so he'd turn it back on her by having her drink three cups as a self-punishment.

Lin Chuxia was of course aware of Director Liu's intention. As the atmosphere tensed, Su Wensong stepped in to break the ice, "Our Mr. Lin isn't very good with liquor; I'll take these three cups instead of Mr. Lin."

He picked up a cup and was about to lift it when Director Liu sneered, "Is Mr. Lin looking down on my toast?"

If he really let Lin Chuxia's assistant drink the alcohol, he would have lost this confrontation.

At that moment, Lin Chuxia stood up, lifted a cup and said, "Director Liu, that's not it. This brother of mine just returned from the countryside with a straightforward nature not used to city customs, no offense taken. This cup is a toast to everyone."

Though it wasn't three cups, seeing her down one cup in a single gulp appeased Director Liu's expression somewhat.

He also took a sip of his drink and glanced unintentionally at Li Jian and Vice Director Feng.

Li Jian played with the cup in his hand, not wanting to enter this discussion, but as he had been specifically sent by the station chief, he found it hard to refuse without causing trouble later; thus, he felt obliged to smooth things over.

"Today it's a rare occasion to have both Director Liu and Director Feng; Chuxia, Director Feng mentioned before that your Bun Shop is currently a role model for individual businesses in An City. The end-of-year summary would mention your store as a highlight, so keep up the good work."

This wasn't Lin Chuxia's first time meeting Vice Director Feng, but it was their first encounter at such an event.

Hearing this, she quickly picked up the cup and said with a smile, "Then I'm very thankful to Director Feng, and to the bureau for giving us this opportunity. We will definitely work well in our duties; Director Feng, this cup is to show our commitment, and in the future, Qin's Bun Shop will also rely on your support and promotion."

Lin Chuxia drank her toast, and Feng Kaiwei looked intently at Li Jian.

This guy, clearly with the same agenda for coming here, was now passing the buck to him.

Nevertheless, Feng Kaiwei looked at Lin Chuxia with newfound respect.

This young woman had a keen sense of propriety and her demeanor toward him showed sincerity. She was the kind of woman who, with the right leverage could move mountains, or steps to climb to the sky; Director Liu indeed had a strong opponent.

He picked up his cup and followed Lin Chuxia's gesture, "Mr. Lin is young and capable, worthy of respect. I've heard that not only is Qin's Bun Shop's buns famous, but the cooked dishes are also well-known."

Leading the conversation to cooked food, he was fulfilling his duty for the evening.

"Not that famous, I just cater to the tastes of some people; as the saying goes, it's hard to please everyone."

"It's more than catering to some; our Food Store's business is about to be taken over by Mr. Lin," Director Liu chimed in, and then turned the conversation back to the main topic, "Mr. Lin, since we've come to this point, I think you understand the purpose of today's invitation. To show the sincerity of our Food Factory, we are willing to make a one-time payment for the recipes; you name your price. If you're not interested in a one-time purchase, our Food Factory can offer you three official positions, what do you think?"

Director Gao also spoke up timely, "Mr. Lin, Director Liu's sincerity is evident. You know the weight of three official positions; it's not just about three jobs, it's about the future succession for your children... I've heard that both your maternal and paternal families are from rural areas," three official positions could enable them to break free from the rural life, to leap over a class.

Su Wensong looked towards Lin Chuxia; he had not expected the Food Factory to play such a heavy card to get the recipe.

Three official positions were coveted in times when even temporary jobs were hard to come by.

Thinking of Su Wenmao, who would go to great lengths just for a chance at work.

He looked at Lin Chuxia, knowing her husband was an employee; compared to an individual business owner, might she also long to become an official worker?

Lin Chuxia knew exactly what they were calculating, the three official positions indeed seemed tempting at the moment.

But Lin Chuxia also knew full well that it wouldn't be long before, with the impact of private companies and small traders, state-owned enterprises would have a tougher time.

Especially places like food factories, vegetable distribution centers, and even shops would bear the brunt of the impact and would be among the first to face reforms.

By that time, when state turns into private ownership, a large number of workers will be laid off; not to mention succession by children, even preserving one's own job would be difficult.

"Director Liu is flattering my modest bun shop, I really can't afford three official positions," Lin Chuxia said, still speaking calmly.

From the moment the woman entered, persistently not offering face, Director Liu's expression darkened completely.

What does she mean she can't afford it? This was outright refusal.

All his years as a factory director, wasn't it always the others seeking favors from him?

He had put forward such a large chip as three official positions, and yet the other party was still unappreciative.

And right in front of Director Feng, his prestige was trampled underfoot.

His voice took on a more threatening tone, "Mr. Lin, have a good think about it. There's a saying, 'the common folk don't fight with officials.' As an individual business owner competing with the government for business, isn't that a bit greedy?"

Chapter 129: Spurning the Offered Face

Li Jian saw the atmosphere growing increasingly tense and looked at Lin Chuxia with concern.

He saw that she was fearless, smiling slightly, "Director Liu, you're joking. As you said, how could a small individual like me have such a big appetite? I'm just trying to make a living, and the formula is my capital for eating. I rely on it to eat. You wouldn't deny me even this, would you?"

Director Liu's eyes darkened as he looked at Lin Chuxia. A factory director personally coming to meet a small individual like Lin Chuxia was already giving her enough face.

Vice Director Feng was also someone he had invited. Was she not afraid of offending the Market Management Bureau and having a difficult path ahead?

"Is Mr. Lin indeed intent on embarrassing me, Mr. Liu?"

He almost spat out each word, clearly indicating the suppressed anger in his heart.

Lin Chuxia continued to maintain a polite smile, "Where on earth, Director Liu? I was hoping you would be generous to give me, a small individual, a way to survive..."

"Smash..."

The wine glass shattered as it hit the ground.

Director Liu stood up with a face full of anger and coldly dropped a sentence, "Truly ignorant of the ways of the world, unappreciative of kindness."

He left the private room without regard for anyone else's face, leaving straightforwardly.

Gao Hui immediately stood up, gave Lin Chuxia a cold glance, and followed Director Liu.

The atmosphere in the private room reached freezing point the moment Director Liu slammed the glass. Su Wensong immediately stood up and shielded Lin Chuxia behind him.

Lin Chuxia toyed with the wine glass in her hands, listening to the footsteps fading away, carelessly chuckled lowly, and looked at the other two people.

"I've embarrassed Director Feng and Brother Li today with poor hospitality. Let's change places and I'll make it up to Director Feng with a few good drinks."

Li Jian spoke suitably, "Lin, this situation really isn't good. It's our first time sitting together with Director Feng, and this was indeed inappropriate. You deserve some punishment for this, Director Feng, don't you think?"

Feng Kaiwei indeed wasn't pleased, but he was displeased with Director Liu.

He had merely come today as a favor to the food factory from the bureau's side. And there he was, storming off in a huff, completely disregarding the face of the mediator.

That's the thing with state-owned enterprises; these people have lived too comfortably in the past.

Even with policy changes, they fail to see the situation clearly.

Still acting like they're the lords.

Instead, the two young people here, whether it's the woman Lin Chuxia or the young official Li Jian, were deft and adaptable.

He nodded, "Alright," finding a new interest in these two.

Lin Chuxia's eyes brightened, gratefully glancing at Li Jian. Her brother really proved his strength today.

Without the lowering of status Li Jian facilitated today, she would truly not be in a position to invite Vice Director Feng.

She signaled Su Wensong to make arrangements.

The group moved to a small privately-owned restaurant. It wasn't a big place, but the owner was very hospitable and the food tasted great.

Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong flattered Vice Director Feng, with Li Jian coordinating by their side. It was evident that Vice Director Feng was pleased with the meal.

After a fulfilling meal, Lin Chuxia had Su Wensong accompany Vice Director Feng for a while.

Watching him disappear into the night, Li Jian still felt a lingering fear and sighed, "Let's try to have fewer of these situations in the future."

With Director Liu's demeanor, if Lin Chuxia had shown any weakness, they really might not have been able to keep the formula.

And indeed, Lin Chuxia was astute; if it wasn't for her perceptiveness, today could have not only offended Director Liu but possibly Vice Director Feng as well.

Now, not only did they not offend anyone, but from the conversation over the meal, Vice Director Feng actually seemed quite impressed with Lin Chuxia. This proved the woman was indeed very capable.

Lin Chuxia drank a bit too much alcohol. In this sort of situation, among the few gathered here, she had the least clout, so she could only show sincerity through drinking.

Of course, it's not like you can simply drink more alcohol to get things done; it's all about seizing the opportunity.

If seized, one might soar to great heights in the future, or at the very least, catch a favorable wind.

If missed, such opportunities won't come easily again.

She steadied her forehead but didn't forget to thank Li Jian, "As long as Brother Li is here, I hope for more events like this one."

Seeing Li Jian look back at her, Lin Chuxia smiled genuinely and honestly, "Brother Li, I'll be counting on you to take me along in the future, just like today. Help me out with things, and when Brother Li gets promoted, you've got to include me in your fun."

Li Jian just felt she was drunk and speaking nonsense, "Which eye of yours sees me getting promoted?"

"Sister can tell fortunes, remember?"

She playfully patted Li Jian's shoulder as if slightly intoxicated.

"Believe it or not, I believe you will be promoted. Let's set this straight, when Brother Li gets promoted, you can't leave me behind."

Li Jian chuckled without much heart, "Alright, because of what you said, whether or not I get promoted, I won't forget you. Wherever I can take care of you, I will."

Lin Chuxia was satisfied, "See, if I say you can, then you can."

"Okay, are you all confused from being drunk now?"

Li Jian pointed at Lin Chuxia and spoke to Su Wensong, who had just returned, "Hurry and take your boss home, and you too, being her assistant and not knowing how to hold her drink."

Su Wensong quickly supported Lin Chuxia and nodded, "Got it, Director Li, you be careful on your way home, I won't see you out."

"I'm fine, you guys go ahead."

"Brother Li, you go first; I'll watch you leave, then we'll head off," said Lin Chuxia again.

Helpless, Li Jian saw that they really wouldn't move until he left, so he had to ride his bicycle away first.

Once they could no longer see his figure, Su Wensong supported Lin Chuxia back, "Mr. Lin, let me bike you home," then ride another bike back home.

Lin Chuxia directly pulled her arm back and pushed the bicycle, "I'm fine, let's walk together."

Su Wensong looked at her in surprise, nowhere was the drunkenness from earlier; her gaze was as clear as if she hadn't drunk at all.

"Mr. Lin, you aren't drunk?"

"I drank quite a bit, but not enough to get drunk."

Su Wensong saw she truly didn't seem drunk and realized why she didn't fend off the drinks herself at the table.

Their Mr. Lin really could hold her liquor.

Lin Chuxia didn't quite think that way; in such a setting, she was a small business owner still needing the protective wings of the two big shots at the dinner table. Could she afford to let an assistant drink for her?

She didn't really agree with the mentality that drinking reveals true intentions, but born in this era, she also had to go with the flow.

The culture of the drinking table, you have to understand it too; this is also the foundation for their survival as businessmen.

When they got home, Qin Han and his wife hadn't slept yet and came out when they heard noises.

Worried they'd disturb Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin, Qin Han spoke in a very low voice, "How is your sister-in-law? Is she alright?"

He had guarded the entrance of the State-Owned Restaurant with Jia Liang and Hou Xiaobao, and was truly shaken when he saw the food factory director and Director Gao storming out.

Just as he thought to rush in to check on his sister-in-law and the others, he saw his sister-in-law and Su Wensong coming out laughingly with Li Jian and Vice Director Feng.

His sister-in-law signaled they were fine and told them to go back first, but he was still anxious to know what exactly happened.

Chapter 130: Psychological Issues

"It's all right now, the matter has passed, and the food factory probably won't send anyone to ask for the secret recipe again. However, we might see some actions from Food Store's side, so let's keep an eye on them."

Upon hearing that the secret recipe was safe, Qin Han was completely relieved and nodded seriously at the words of Lin Chuxia, "Don't worry, sister-in-law, I have been keeping an eye on them."

Ever since that visit from Director Gao last time, he has never let his guard down regarding that matter.

Smelling the alcohol on Lin Chuxia, the couple didn't bother her further and let her go back to rest well.

In the following days, there were no significant moves from the food factory side. However, Qin Han lacked his usual vigor and even seemed listless.

Lin Chuxia thought he might be sick due to the cold weather these days; if that was indeed the case, she would give him a few days off to rest properly.

After all, in the catering business, health and safety come first. It's better for the staff to get timely medical treatment and rest to prevent infecting others.

She didn't ask Qin Han directly but spoke to Zhang Guilan about it.

However, after hearing her out, Zhang Guilan straightforwardly said, "He's not sick, sister-in-law, you don't need to bother about him."

Not sick yet listless? If there isn't a physical illness, it must be a psychological issue then.

Lin Chuxia was still thinking about whether to ask more caringly, only to hear Zhang Guilan say, "He's too petty, nothing I say helps. He'll be fine once he sorts himself out. Sister-in-law, don't stoop to his level, I'm keeping an eye on him, he won't mess up the work."

Lin Chuxia already guessed something, "Big brother isn't still hung up on that dinner party, is he?"

She could see that Qin Han genuinely wanted to help her and lacked confidence in himself, which is why he had Su Wensong accompany her.

"It's all his petty mind, always competing with Xiao Su, always thinking he should be the first to rush to help in any matter. But honestly, Xiao Su is well-educated and experienced. Your big brother, over all these past twenty years, except for growing vegetables, really needs to learn more about other things..."

Lin Chuxia smiled, understanding Qin Han's feelings.

"Is everything alright in the store now? If it's okay, I would like big brother to accompany me to the market. I want to buy a three-wheeled motorbike for the store. I know big brother is quite knowledgeable about vehicles, and I want him to help check it out."

Just yesterday, she did payroll and checked the accounts.

Her two stores together make over three hundred yuan a day, adding up to over five thousand yuan a month in profit.

Of course, this is after competing with the cooked food from the food factory. She predicts it won't be long before the food factory takes action that might impact their store to some degree.

However, any scenario is within her anticipated range, and this income allows her to add more equipment for the store; the three-wheeled motorbike is one such addition.

With the three-wheeled motorbike, increasing delivery volume, like to the chicken farm where Hou Xiaobao currently has to make two trips daily, could be done in one trip, also reducing travel time.

Hearing this, Zhang Guilan's eyes lit up, "You know, aside from anything else, your big brother does have a passion for vehicles. He could drive the tractor in the team since he was a teenager, and he drove more steadily than most. Whenever he went to the agricultural machinery station and saw the vehicles there, he always chatted with the owners, and if he couldn't drive them, he'd at least touch them to get his fix."

"I know about that, I heard that sister-in-law fell for big brother initially because he looked handsome and cool driving the tractor."

Zhang Guilan blushed at her sister-in-law's teasing, "Hey, why bring that up," then turned her head to call Qin Han.

Qin Han was immediately energized when he heard that the store wanted to buy a motor tricycle and asked him to go with them to look at it.

The two of them did not delay and set off after packing up.

At the beginning of this year, the state issued the "Certain Regulations Concerning the Purchase of Motorized Vessels and Tractors by Individual Farmers or Joint Households for Transport Business", a small document that clarified the legality of private motor purchases.

However, currently, people's living standards are limited, and many are still struggling just to feed themselves; even buying a bicycle requires tightening one's belt, not to mention a motor vehicle.

In the entire Ancheng County Agricultural Machinery Company, only a few tractors were allocated, so they would need to go to the city to buy the motor tricycle.

Upon arriving at the city's Agricultural Machinery Company and seeing the Changjiang 750 motor tricycle displayed, Qin Han's eyes lit up.

Before the staff could introduce it, he was explaining it all to Lin Chuxia, knowledgeably walking around the motor tricycle, making even the staff nearby couldn't help but ask if he was an employee of the local agricultural machinery company.

Finally, the two selected a more perfectly performing vehicle.

For 1000 yuan, a Changjiang 750 regular tricycle, pay on the spot, get the invoice on the spot, and pick up the vehicle on the spot.

In this era with few vehicles on the road, as long as one can operate it, one could drive on the road almost without anyone checking for a driving license.

On the way here, Lin Chuxia was wondering how she would explain to Qin Han that she knew how to ride a motor tricycle.

Moreover, in her past life, she had only ridden motorcycles and driven cars; she wasn't even sure if she could drive a tricycle.

Qin Han, holding the keys, called Lin Chuxia to get on and sit down. He then started the motor tricycle and smoothly took to the road.

Seeing his excitement, Lin Chuxia didn't have the heart to tell him that this motor tricycle was primarily for Hou Xiaobao to transport goods.

After buying the vehicle, it was already noon, and the two didn't rush back, choosing to eat lunch at a nearby state-owned restaurant.

While waiting for their food after ordering, Qin Han stepped out again and came back with a stack of newspapers, somewhat embarrassed as he explained to Lin Chuxia.

"Back then, my family was poor, and I wasn't meant for studying; I couldn't continue after the fifth grade, unlike my younger brother, who's been meant for studying since childhood. No matter what, he could remember anything after reading it once. After first grade, he went straight to fourth grade because he had read my books."

Lin Chuxia was interested; this was the first time she heard about Qin Yang's childhood.

"And then?"

"And then?" Qin Han scratched his head, "Then he consistently topped his class every year and won awards, went to junior high school in the town, then to high school in the county. When it was time for college, he was one of the few in the whole county who got accepted. That's why they say one should study more," he sighed, "It's no use regretting now. My sister-in-law says reading more books and newspapers broadens one's horizons. So here I am, buying more newspapers to read slowly."

Lin Chuxia knew Qin Han was still feeling guilty about the incident a few days ago and encouraged him, "Sister-in-law is right, older brother, you are smart. Just now, when we were buying the tricycle, you really surprised me. I didn't expect you knew so much. It was right to bring you along."

Flattered by his younger sister-in-law's praise, Qin Han was even more embarrassed and took a newspaper to pretend reading shyly.

Lin Chuxia found his manner funny, sometimes Qin Han and Qin Yang, these two brothers, really looked alike.

Suddenly, Qin Han holding a newspaper showed it to Lin Chuxia, "Younger sister-in-law, look, isn't this my younger brother's unit mentioned here? I remember this is their unit's name, and the location is the same too."