

Switched M 161

Chapter 161: Lin Chuxia is His Principle and Bottom Line

Qin Yang was putting on his clothes when his previously indifferent expression suddenly shattered.

"I remember, Master, and I won't give you that opportunity."

The thought of letting his wife marry another man was unbearable.

After leaving Old Sir He's courtyard, Qin Yang continued to assure Lin Chuxia that he would never recklessly endanger himself again and would cherish his wellbeing.

Lin Chuxia did not expect the master's words to be so effective, and she quietly marveled at how the old man still favored her.

Seeing that Qin Yang no longer needed to keep his arm in a sling, but could casually let it hang by his side, she also asked him about how he felt.

Qin Yang lifted his arm and moved his fingers, his face brimming with a satisfied smile.

"After Master's acupuncture treatment, I feel a marked improvement in recovery. Previously, my finger movements were weak and unresponsive, but now they're nimble. It's just that after a long period of inactivity, I lack strength."

"Don't be anxious. Master also said that rehabilitation after an injury is crucial and requires a gradual recovery."

"Mhm, I know. My dear wife, I have to thank you. If you hadn't come to find me in the Northwest, I probably would still be there."

And he wouldn't have received Old Sir He's treatment.

The medical conditions in the Northwest were limited.

Master had said that the sooner the treatment, the better. If he had received Master's treatment immediately after the injury, he would have recovered even faster and better.

On the contrary, if he had delayed another month or two, his arm truly would have been ruined.

"I don't know if it's just psychological, but you know? Since the day I saw you, I've felt filled with hope, and my arm didn't feel as powerless as before. Even moving my fingers was a problem, but after coming back and receiving Master's treatment, it's been improving day by day."

Lin Chuxia smiled, her eyes curving with joy. She knew that the spiritual spring water had also played a significant role.

"So remember, whatever happens in the future, don't hide it from me. We'll face difficulties together and solve problems together."

"Mhm, you must do the same."

This was also what Qin Yang wanted to tell Lin Chuxia. Lin Chuxia's responsibilities were vast, and he didn't know how much strength a woman could have. Even if he couldn't be by her side all the time, he was willing to be her rock.

Lin Chuxia gently touched his hand, "Of course, we're husband and wife after all!"

Qin Yang grabbed her hand firmly, squeezed it in his palm, and quickly released it.

He glanced around; there were passersby in the distance, not sure if they had seen them, but his heart felt exceptionally content.

The two of them went to the department store; food and drinks would no longer be appropriate as wedding gifts for Li Jian.

But to be honest, although it had been several years since the economic reforms started, their Shanhe Province was an inland territory in the North, and most of the goods in department stores still mainly satisfied basic living needs. It was quite difficult to choose a decent wedding gift.

After much consideration, Lin Chuxia settled on a pair of watches, one for men and one for women, which seemed suitable for Li Jian given their price point.

After paying and receiving the goods, Lin Chuxia was in no hurry to leave and wandered over to the crockery section.

"Excuse me, comrade, please show me that set of coffee pots."

It was the only set of coffee pots in the entire department store.

The salesperson seemed surprised that someone was actually interested in buying it, and after sizing up Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia, thought they seemed well-dressed enough for such a purchase.

"These come from the South, look how pretty the patterns are."

Ordinarily, department store salespeople would never actively pitch products to customers.

But this salesperson also liked the coffee pot set, so he spoke a few more words.

Lin Chuxia examined it carefully and was also quite satisfied.

"Please write me up a bill."

The packaging of the coffee pot was exquisite, a wooden case even.

After paying and receiving the item, Qin Yang immediately offered to help her carry it, but Lin Chuxia slapped his hand away.

"With that one and a half arms of yours, better take a rest. Don't accidentally break my stuff."

Qin Yang wanted to say it wasn't necessary, that he could carry a box with one arm.

But seeing how careful she was, as if she really liked the item, he didn't argue and simply asked, "Do you like coffee?"

Coffee was not easy to come by; it was nearly inaccessible in their rural area.

"It's alright."

In her previous life, when she was busy with work, she heard that coffee could help with staying alert, so she had a friend buy her a can.

But after drinking coffee, she felt even sleepier.

She was skeptical and persisted until after drinking 5 cans of coffee, she eventually stopped feeling drowsy.

Gradually, coffee began to have a stimulating effect on her.

It wasn't until years later that she found out the effect of coffee to keep people alert doesn't work on everyone, and people like her, who feel sleepier after drinking coffee, are actually allergic to it.

Later on, the fact that coffee started to stimulate her proved that, with her persistent and relentless effort, she successfully managed to overcome the allergy.

Snapping back from her thoughts, Lin Chuxia explained to Qin Yang, "I'm planning to give this to Director Kang of the cotton mill. His wife will like it."

"His wife?" Qin Yang didn't understand even more.

He knew that Lin Chuxia's Bun Shop was renting a space from the cotton mill, so it was normal to give gifts during festivals.

But if she was giving something to Director Kang, shouldn't it be something that Director Kang liked?

Looking at Qin Yang's naive and foolish gaze, it was clear that this science and engineering guy wouldn't think so deeply.

With no one around, they walked back while she explained.

"I've inquired already, this Director Kang has no particular hobbies, just spoils his wife excessively. His wife is quite something, the daughter of a well-known capitalist family from the neighboring county, and she even studied abroad."

In the past years, they were suppressed and couldn't flaunt, but nowadays with policies more relaxed, some things naturally could be used.

She would definitely like this coffee pot set.

"When it comes to gifting, there's a certain finesse to it, to 'give what they cherish'. Director Kang himself doesn't have any particular interests; he just dotes on his wife, so I have no choice but to please his wife."

Now Qin Yang understood. If someone came to him asking for a favor, he might not necessarily oblige, but if someone made Lin Chuxia happy, he'd probably struggle to stand by his principles.

Lin Chuxia was his principle, his bottom line.

Seeing that he understood, Lin Chuxia smiled slightly.

These tactics could be seen as opportunistic or as ways of dealing with people.

When talking to retired leaders, you should mention their past more; with business partners, talk more about their achievements; with middle-aged parents, compliment their children more.

Qin Yang was an upright person, irreplaceable in his professional achievements, and she wasn't trying to make him delve into these matters, but understanding them a bit more wouldn't hurt.

In the blink of an eye, Li Jian's wedding day arrived, and Lin Chuxia attended the wedding with Qin Yang.

It was only these past few days that she discovered Li Jian's father was a member of the County Standing Committee; no wonder that in her past life, a mere vegetable depot manager like him could climb to such heights.

Since ancient times, there have been scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants.

The wealth of merchants requires generation after generation to accumulate, while the officialdom requires the support from one generation to the next, the so-called family heritage.

Li Jian's fiancée was also from the administrative department, a judge at the Ancheng County court.

Chapter 162: It's as if He and I Are from Two Different Worlds

The woman was two years older than him and had a bit of fame at Ancheng Court. She had resolved many complex cases with swift and decisive action, impartial and incorruptible, earning the love and admiration of the common people, who affectionately called her the Iron-faced Female Judge.

Because of this, she had faced difficulties in her love life. Still unmarried at the age of twenty-five or twenty-six, she was considered an old maid by the standards of the times.

Li Jian's father and the woman's father were colleagues, and Mr. Li had the inclination, but he was also worried that his son would not be satisfied.

After all, which man does not like a gentle woman with tender regard? Everyone wants to marry a gentle and virtuous wife.

Unexpectedly, when he mentioned it to his son, his son actually agreed. He had not anticipated his son's taste.

Mr. Li happily discussed it with his colleagues. Since they were the groom's family, they were naturally more proactive. Once the two families met, they immediately hit it off, and the marriage was quickly set in motion.

"Congratulations to the groom!"

Lin Chuxia sincerely congratulated Li Jian when she saw him and gave him his gift.

"Congratulations to us both."

Li Jian wore a brand-new Sun Yat-sen suit today, his chest adorned with a big red flower, his face beaming with joy, radiating the spirited look of someone enjoying a happy occasion.

Lin Chuxia also saw his wife, who indeed did not look gentle, but was very beautiful.

With an oval face and prominent features, which probably came from her job, she possessed a sense of righteousness and sharpness in her eyes, and wore her courtroom uniform with a spirited and heroic air.

Lin Chuxia really liked this type of woman.

At the same time, at the wedding, she also encountered some acquaintances.

For example, Vice Director Feng from the Market Supervision Bureau.

Li Jian had been transferred to the Market Supervision Bureau and Vice Director Feng had become his direct superior.

Whether it was due to connections from Mr. Li or relationships on Li Jian's own side, his attendance at the wedding was expected.

It was at the wedding today that Lin Chuxia learned that Vice Director Feng had been promoted: the former director had been transferred, and Vice Director Feng was set to replace him.

However, with the Spring Festival approaching, the announcement of the transfer would only be made official after the holiday.

When Li Jian mentioned this news, he did not hide that his transfer to the Market Supervision Bureau was orchestrated by Director Feng. He clearly didn't consider Lin Chuxia an outsider.

"When the Emperor changes, so does his courtiers." With his transfer, he would certainly become one of Director Feng's loyal followers.

Director Feng also had a good impression of Lin Chuxia, and during the meal, he made sure Lin Chuxia stayed at their table.

At the table, facing a group of officials from Ancheng County, Director Feng gave Lin Chuxia his affirmation.

"Work hard and set a benchmark for our private enterprises in An City—I have high hopes for you."

Xiyang Food Company was the first company in Ancheng County to be established in an individual's name.

Director Feng was deliberately promoting it, both as a way to enhance his own achievements and to pave the way for Lin Chuxia and her company.

The others present were all seasoned veterans of the government scene. News of the food factory competing with an individual vendor had spread long before, and now that they had met her in person, coupled with Director Feng's affirmation, they all looked at Lin Chuxia with new respect.

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The afternoons in winter always seemed exceptionally peaceful.

Today was a weekend, and Kang Yong was able to enjoy this rare leisure time.

With the end-of-year account settlements approaching, although the performance of the cotton mill was slightly better than the garment factory and some other factories, it was merely maintaining appearances.

If this trend continued, it could very well lead to a dead end.

Recently, between big and small meetings, he has been somewhat overwhelmed, and now that he is just over 50, he no longer possesses the energy of the young.

It is only at home that he can feel his whole being come alive.

Seeing his wife tinker with a set of equipment by the window, bathed in sunlight, looking like a picture of peaceful times, Kang Yong also walked over.

"Is this thing really that great? This cup can't hold more than a few sips of water, and it barely gets to my lips before it's time to pour again."

Qiao Lan glanced at him and chided, "What would you know, you brute? This is a coffee pot, it's for brewing coffee, here, this is a coffee cup."

She showed him piece by piece, pointing at the patterns, "Look how beautiful these patterns are, and the gold trim looks nice too. I had a set like this back at home, it was brought back by a friend from Hong Kong, but then they all got smashed."

As Qiao Lan spoke of the past, she seemed a bit disheartened but soon perked up again.

"Wait for me, I still have some coffee beans. I tell you, coffee has to be freshly ground to taste good, I'll let you taste my handiwork."

Kang Yong watched his mid-fifties wife, as excited as a young girl, and he became somewhat interested himself.

Waiting as she finely ground the coffee beans and eventually brewed a pot with the coffee maker, and then poured two cups.

Kang Yong grabbed a cup with his large hand, ready to gulp it down, only to be frowned upon by his wife again.

"How can you drink like that? You need to hold it like this, smell it, doesn't it smell nice?"

Qiao Lan held the delicate coffee cup and took a gentle sip, closing her eyes in enjoyment.

Kang Yong stood there staring at his wife.

Heaven knows, the first time he saw her, she had this same high-class miss attitude.

Delicate, reserved, beautiful!

She seemed to be from a different world than him.

That one glance had deeply imprinted itself in his mind.

In those years of constant upheaval and facing pressures from all sides, the proud princess began to bow her head and shed her beautiful feathers.

Especially when seeing him embroiled and considering taking her own life multiple times.

It had been too long since he had seen her like this.

He mimicked her, taking a small sip, and grimaced at the bitterness.

"How is this any different from herbal medicine soup?"

Qiao Lan burst into laughter immediately, "You brute, you wouldn't understand."

Qiao Lan liked to call Kang Yong a brute, and Kang Yong indeed felt he was quite a simpleton compared to Qiao Lan.

A brute can't appreciate coffee, so he just watched his wife sip by sip, tasting a bitterness of his own, yet seeing her features relax and enjoy immensely.

"No wonder Qin's shop does good business, Boss Lin is someone who sees through things and thinks big," Kang Yong looked up, "Just because she sent you a set of cups? I think she's just good at flattering and sweet-talking, always conniving," having sent him a set of coffee pots his wife liked, she had him completely figured out.

Qiao Lan didn't see it that way, "That's being smart and adaptive, that's the kind of person who's cut out for business. People like you, who are opinionated and adhere to old ways, will suffer headaches sooner or later."

Kang Yong quickly waved his hand, "Let's not talk about this anymore, I've heard enough of it at work, spare me at home."

Qiao Lan smiled faintly, "You, just don't worry so much. At our age, let the youngsters make their way. This Miss Lin, if you can take care of her, then offer more care. It's good to be friends with such people."

Kang Yong nodded, this time actually agreeing with his wife's perspective, "Alright, I'll listen to you."

Chapter 163 Not Officially Hired

In a blink of an eye, the end of the year approached, and by the 20th of the twelfth lunar month, the atmosphere of the New Year began to rise.

These years, people lived frugally, and the more so, the more they valued the Spring Festival.

After toiling for a year, regardless of family circumstances, everyone made an effort to ensure good food, drink, and clothing during these few days.

A happy and prosperous Spring Festival implied a year of good days ahead.

It's not an exaggeration to say that saving money for the New Year was a tradition for many families at the time, with some even borrowing money when unable to save, just to buy several pounds of meat.

Even state-owned enterprises and institutions had longer holidays for the New Year compared to later generations.

After the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month, Lin Chuxia's cooked food business began to pick up, and many customers were willing to spend more just to taste Qin's Cooked Food.

Of course, more people sought cheaper options at the food factory's stores, but you couldn't deny the sheer number of people buying cooked food at year's end.

In the northern winter, the outdoors was a natural giant freezer, and nearly every household would prepare in advance, ready to serve visiting friends and relatives at any time.

This time, Lin Chuxia didn't manage the Bun Shop or the affairs of the small courtyard, leaving them to Qin Han and Su Wensong, while she took advantage of the time before units went on holiday to make her rounds.

Now that their cooked food had proper packaging, Lin Chuxia had also customized a batch of gift boxes, which were perfect for gifting.

At this moment, Lin Chuxia once again missed the small cars of the later eras.

With a car trunk, you could fit as much as you wanted, easily accessible for deliveries to several places in a day.

Now, she could only sadly cycle, delivering one order at a time.

Fortunately, at this time of the year, the compounds and residential yards were close together, and the entire Ancity County was just a few kilometers in diameter.

When Lin Chuxia left Xu Changping's house, it was already getting dark.

The snow that had fallen earlier had partially melted in the middle of the road, but in some places, it was still icy and snowy.

It wasn't too bad when the sun was out in the afternoon, but come evening, the temperature dropped and the roads froze hard, making cycling dangerous, at risk of a fall.

Pushing her bike out of the machinery factory's residential compound, Lin Chuxia saw Su Wenmao walking out from the alley.

Already not very tall, he looked utterly dejected now, holding something in his hand, like a bereft dog.

Just now in Xu Changping's house, they had discussed him; at the year's end staff appraisal, those who should be promoted were promoted, the only one not becoming a permanent worker was Su Wenmao.

According to Xu Changping, his work capacity was mediocre and his conduct objectionable. Even if the machinery factory didn't dismiss him, they certainly wouldn't put him in a key position.

Lin Chuxia knew this was Xu Changping currying favor with her, after all, she had mentioned Su Wenmao to Xu Changping before.

In such state-owned factories, once you're hired, you usually have a secure job. No matter how poor the work performance, at worst, you just don't get promoted and remain a Level 1 worker for life.

Someone like Su Wenmao, who didn't even pass for a permanent position, certainly had Xu Changping's influence to blame.

Su Wenmao's presence in the machinery factory's residential yard at this time was likely an attempt to network and improve his situation, but the outcome seemed to be less than ideal.

Lin Chuxia felt secretly pleased and returned to the Bun Shop by the train station.

Just in time, she saw Su Wensong also returning from outside, and she passed this news on to him.

Su Wensong sneered coldly, viciously spitting out the word "deserved."

Su Wenmao's downfall was truly sweet vindication for him.

"Mr. Lin, you have no idea what they did to me, how they pressured me to admit that it was my voluntary choice to let Su Wenmao take over my job. When I refused to sign, they conspired with the local office to forge documents and forced Su Wenmao to replace me. Back then, I couldn't even protest or seek redress."

That period could be described as the darkest time for Su Wensong, even more tormenting than hard labor in the countryside.

Lin Chuxia patted his shoulder, "It's all in the past now. Luckily, you didn't go to work at the machinery factory, otherwise, I couldn't have found such a qualified employee. Back then, as an individual business owner, I couldn't compete with the iron rice bowl of the machinery factory."

With her words, Su Wensong also started to smile, "Meeting Mr. Lin is my good fortune, let Su Wenmao remain an apprentice in the machinery factory for life."

"Right, let him be an apprentice there for life, and see if he can endure it."

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Indeed, Su Wenmao couldn't endure anymore. There was no need for him to be an apprentice for life; the moment the evaluation results came out, he was the only apprentice worker not to be regularized. The peculiar gazes of his colleagues around him made him wish he could find a crack in the ground to hide in.

He knew that he was not proactive at work and his colleagues had reservations about him.

But what does that matter? As long as one gets into the machinery factory, one secures an iron rice bowl.

By then, he thought, mingling along with everyone else, I'll become a regular employee too, and they can be uncomfortable all they want.

He never expected that when the time came, his name was not on the list of those stipulated for regularization.

The mocking and derisive looks from his colleagues made him wish, even more, to find a crack in the ground to crawl into.

These past few days, he took leave and walked around trying to pull strings to achieve regularization, but he was met with obstacles everywhere.

He was baffled; not regularizing an apprentice worker was unprecedented in the machinery factory, and yet it had happened to him.

Back home, Mrs. Su was still waiting for good news, and hurried over when she saw him coming back.

"How did it go, did they agree to make you a regular employee?"

Su Wenmao pushed what he was holding directly into Mrs. Su's arms.

The gifts had not been delivered; was there even a need to ask about the results?

Su Dazhuang has also been distressed these days, chain-smoking in the house.

Mrs. Su still chased after him to ask, "What's the actual reason for not regularizing you? Not regularizing you must have a reason, right? You've been an intern for so long, who doesn't get regularized by the end of the year?"

Su Wenmao pursed his lips, "They said I haven't done well even as an apprentice, but how have I not done well? I do as others do. I think they're just targeting me."

Had there been no targeting before, Mrs. Su might have believed it, but now with the gifts rejected...

"Don't worry about this for now. Perhaps you just lack some weight; let your father go and visit them. We'll bring more stuff, it might just be that we didn't offer enough, our sincerity was lacking."

After saying this, she went to discuss with her husband.

Su Dazhuang also couldn't understand it. They took over the job originally meant for Su Wensong. Besides, Su Wensong was a sent-down youth; the job quota was supposed to be a nailed-on iron rice bowl.

But to say that his son lacked the capability to get regularized, he didn't believe it. There were so many slackers in all those factories, and his son was no worse than any of them.

Crushing the cigarette butt, he frowned and said, "Buy a couple more bottles of liquor tomorrow, I'll go and ask about it."

Listening to his father deciding to step in, Su Wenmao instantly perked up.

"Dad, you must talk to them properly, tell them to make me a Level 1 worker. Cuicui said, once I become a Level 1 worker, she'll ask her parents to agree to our marriage. Cuicui is still waiting for my reply."

Su Dazhuang's frown deepened, and his frustration was evident.

"Cuicui, Cuicui, you only care about Cuicui. If you cared that much, you should have been serious about your work from the beginning. The job was already in your hands, what more do you expect from me?"

He was no longer the Su Dazhuang of years past. As powerful as he was during the Revolutionary Committee era, he is now just as down and out.

Most of his well-connected friends had been settled after inquiring into their pasts, and it was only by staking his life that he managed to keep his current job.

In his workplace, not a word he says is heeded, and others don't even bother to look him in the eye.

Now nearly fifty, he really doesn't want to beg and see others kick him when he's down.

Chapter 164: A Man Remains a Youth Until His Dying Day

Su Wenmao was so frustrated from being yelled at all day that he decided to lash out. "How am I not doing my job well? It's clear they're targeting me. If you don't like it, too bad, I might as well quit. Not even grandpa would bother with that lousy team; getting despised all day long while acting like a grandson - whoever likes it can take my place."

"Not going to work? If you don't go to work, what are you going to do? Do you think your dad can still provide for two freeloaders?"

Su Dazhuang looked at his son, who's about the same age as Su Wensong and still behaving like a petulant child. Thinking about the current situation with Su Wensong, Su Dazhuang felt even more disappointed.

Su Wenmao pleaded, "Dad, think of something. Let's take over Su Wensong's shop. If we get that shop, not only will I have a job, but mom and Cuicui too. We wouldn't even have to go to that crappy job, we could open our own bun shop, Su's Dumpling Shop, and be our own bosses. Imagine how good life would be..."

His eyes were gleaming brightly with scheming anticipation for the future.

Just then, someone called out from outside the door.

"Is sister-in-law home?"

Su Wenmao's eyes sparkled even more upon seeing the visitor, "It's Cuicui's second aunt. Mom, it must be Cuicui who's come around, asking her aunt to come over to arrange our marriage. Mom, do I look okay? Should I change my clothes?"

The visitor was both the matchmaker for Su Wenmao and Cuicui, as well as Cuicui's distant second aunt.

Mrs. Su excitedly got up to welcome her, "Second Aunt, what brings you over at this hour? Come in, come in."

"I'd rather not come inside."

Cuicui's second aunt stood still at the entryway, glanced at Mrs. Su then at the grinning like a fool, Su Wenmao behind her, and instantly looked away.

"I came to tell you, let's forget about the previous arrangement. Since neither family is sincere, let's not waste each other's time."

Having said that, Cuicui's second aunt turned to leave.

Mrs. Su got anxious and quickly tried to stop her, "Second Aunt, what do you mean by that? Weren't the kids happy with each other before?"

Cuicui's second aunt scoffed, "Happy? Who was happy? Don't talk nonsense. Cuicui just met your Su Wen at my place by chance, nothing was set in stone. Now, Cuicui is seeing Xiao Liu from the brick factory, and his family even found her a job. They're going to work together at the brick factory..."

With a mocking look at the family, Cuicui's second aunt left swaying her plump hips.

"Why's she going for someone else? She's just another flashy, cheap woman..."

Mrs. Su cursed under her breath, then turned to see Su Wenmao sliding down the door frame looking completely dazed, gazing blankly at the courtyard gate as if he had lost his mind.

"Wenmao, Wenmao, what's wrong with you? Don't frighten mom..."

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On the 23rd is the candy hawthorn treats, the 24th is for house cleaning, the 25th is for grinding tofu, the 26th is to buy a piece of meat, the 27th is to slaughter the rooster, and the 28th is for kneading the dough...

On the 27th of the Twelfth Lunar Month, Mrs. Qin decided to slaughter the two roosters little Zhuangzhuang had been yearning for all year long.

Previously, Lin Chuxia had intended to get some chickens directly from the shop to bring home, but Mrs. Qin disapproved, believing that personally slaughtering chickens was necessary for the New Year atmosphere.

Having experienced the future, Lin Chuxia longed for the Spring Festival of this era.

Given what Mrs. Qin had said, Lin Chuxia didn't insist on bringing chickens, and not only did she not bring any, but she also didn't go to work that day, choosing instead to join the festivities at home.

Mrs. Qin boiled a large pot of hot water, while Lin Chuxia and little Zhuangzhuang worked together to catch the chickens.

Originally, the chickens were supposed to be locked up in the chicken cage overnight by Mrs. Qin, but little Zhuangzhuang, having been fixated on slaughtering the chickens, accidentally let them escape first thing in the morning.

Catching chickens during broad daylight is not an easy task.

"Zhuangzhuang, you block that side. If the chicken goes there, herd it towards your little aunt..."

While directing, she quietly approached the big rooster.

"Cluck cluck cluck..."

The big rooster flapped its wings, hopping and jumping, while Little Zhuangzhuang and Lin Chuxia chased after it, mouths full of feathers.

"Little Auntie, you're so clumsy, you had its wing, how could you let it escape?"

"Little Auntie didn't mean to, it was trying to peck me, I got scared..."

"Little Auntie, don't be scared, I'll protect you. You block over there and I'll catch it..."

Mrs. Qin, Mr. Qin, and Qin Yang, the three of them watched the young and the old chase chickens around the yard, laughing until they were nearly in tears.

She sneakily glanced at her younger son standing by her side, his eyes smiling and seemingly glued onto his wife.

Initially, she just felt that this daughter-in-law sat well with her son, but she didn't expect their relationship to be so good.

This put her at ease; the daughter-in-law's capable hands had brought good days to the entire family. If her son had maintained his usual icy demeanor with her, she would have felt extremely guilty.

"Yangyang, stop watching and go help your wife."

Qin Yang still wanted to watch a little longer, it was rare to see this side of his wife.

Meeting his mother's disapproving gaze, he had no choice but to join the chicken-catching fray.

"Qin Yang, no need to do anything, just block over there, I'm definitely catching it this time..."

Lin Chuxia locked onto her target and pounced with all her might.

Just as she was about to succeed, the rooster flapped its wings and flew away.

"Ah ah ah... you're flying now, that's not honorable!"

Lin Chuxia couldn't stop her momentum and was about to make intimate contact with the ground when an arm wrapped around her waist, saving her from the fall.

A voice filled with laughter whispered in her ear, "Had enough fun? Alright, go rest, I'll handle this."

Lin Chuxia still wanted to continue, but seeing Little Zhuangzhuang covering his mouth and snickering, she realized she was still in Qin Yang's arms.

Standing beside them were Mr. and Mrs. Qin, which made her suddenly feel embarrassed.

"Then it's all on you," she said as she stepped out of Qin Yang's embrace and straightened her clothes.

Qin Yang gave her an OK sign and beckoned to Little Zhuangzhuang, "Come, help your little uncle block."

Little Zhuangzhuang was instantly thrilled and dashed to herd the chicken.

The rooster ran towards Qin Yang, who suddenly struck, deftly grasping the chicken by the neck.

No matter how the rooster struggled, it couldn't escape his grasp.

"Little uncle is so amazing..."

Little Zhuangzhuang clapped his hands excitedly and yelled, while Qin Yang turned to look at Lin Chuxia, smiling and raising his eyebrows.

Lin Chuxia understood what he meant; truly, men never grow up.

Beneath his expectant gaze, she gave him a thumbs-up.

Killing the chicken was also Qin Yang's doing; after over ten days of recuperation and nourishment from the spiritual spring water, his injured arm was fully functional again, and his muscles were robust.

His actions were always swift. The knife rose and fell, eliciting gasps of amazement from Little Zhuangzhuang.

Plucking and gutting was done by Mr. and Mrs. Qin; Lin Chuxia wanted to help but couldn't find a way to get involved.

While the courtyard was bustling, Qin Yang's Third Aunt came over with a sifter covered with a clean white cloth.

As she entered the courtyard and saw everyone there, especially Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang, she greeted with a smile, "Everyone's home! Second Sister-in-law, I made some rice cakes. I've brought some over for you to try—pure glutinous rice flour, and I've added lots of jujubes too."

Chapter 165: Happy

Mrs. Qin hurriedly pointed to Qin Yang, "Go and greet your aunt."

Lin Chuxia went over to take the dustpan from Third Aunt, "Thank you, Third Aunt."

"Hey, we're all family, no need for thanks. If it weren't for Yangyang's wife, we wouldn't be able to enjoy these rice cakes this year. Little Wu gave me 100 yuan last winter to properly prepare for the New Year. Which household can spare 100 yuan for New Year shopping? It's all because the couple work at Yangyang's wife's place, and they have more money now, which benefits your uncle and me as well."

Third Aunt Qin was genuinely happy and genuinely praising.

Unlike other families with many children, she only has Xiao Wu, her one son, upon whom she relies for care in her old age.

She was always worried that she and her husband would become a burden to their son when they got older.

Now everything was fine, her son and daughter-in-law were working, she and her husband were still strong and could farm the land and raise pigs.

With money in hand, what is there to worry about?

Third Aunt looked at Lin Chuxia affectionately, "You guys eat these rice cakes first, if you like them tell Third Aunt, and I'll steam some more for you. Your mom knows I make the best rice cakes, not like your mom, she never gets the cakes fully cooked."

Mrs. Qin, who was playfully teased, couldn't help but laugh and scold, "Look at you, praising yourself is enough, why belittle others?"

"Am I wrong? Isn't it every time you make rice cakes you have to call me? Since Qin Han's wife came, you no longer need me supervising. The kids are busy this year; you should stop making the cakes and just tell me how much you need."

Mrs. Qin jokingly asked, "Can you handle supplying the sticky rice cakes? Don't let it strain you and spoil the New Year."

Third Aunt generously waved her hand, "No, no, aren't you underestimating me?"

Recently, Yangyang's wife has been providing plenty of cooked food for their family, what's a pot or two of rice cakes to fuss about? She even feels it's not enough.

Lin Chuxia lifted the white cloth and glanced at it, the sticky rice cakes were cut into strips, steamed from sticky rice flour and looked appetizingly white and shiny.

But she still asked Third Aunt, "Did you make sorghum flour cakes? I want some of those."

Nowadays, people's lives are tough, especially in the North. It is a luxury for Third Aunt to make sticky rice cakes as local New Year cakes are usually made from sorghum and millet.

Lin Chuxia still remembered the popular large-eared dwarf sorghum in recent years, with high yield and high viscosity, mixing corn flour with milled sorghum for steaming cakes made a yellowish sticky and tasty cake.

Later, when times got better, people only made cakes from millet and sticky rice flour, and even stopped growing that sorghum. She actually missed that taste quite a bit.

Third Aunt slapped her thigh, "You mentioned it, I still have a pot of sorghum flour cakes. If you want some, come with me later, they are freshly steamed."

Lin Chuxia readily agreed, "Alright, I'll come with you to get them after I clear this dustpan for you."

She glanced at Qin Yang, cheerfully went to clear the dustpan and then took her own basket to leave with Third Aunt.

Qin Yang also wanted to follow, but felt shy.

Couples in the village walked together and he didn't want to be laughed at.

He could only watch reluctantly as his wife left.

Mrs. Qin watched her youngest son with a secretive smile, "Go and change the basin of water."

Qin Yang then withdrew his gaze.

Third Aunt's house was not far from Qin Yang's house, originally Qin Yang's grandfather arranged the houses close by for Qin Yang's father and his two brothers.

Third Uncle, Third Aunt, and Xiao Wu's couple lived in the same yard.

The courtyard was tidied up very cleanly, and the glass windows were all wiped until they shone. Grandmother always said that Third Aunt is a neat person.

Third Aunt injured herself when she was pregnant with Xiao Wu, and after the difficult birth of this son, she never got pregnant again.

Although back then it was advocated that more people meant more power, when there really were a lot of people, whether the power was great or not set aside, messiness was real.

All things were in the kitchen, Third Aunt handed Lin Chuxia several slices of sorghum flour rice cakes and wanted to pull her into the house to chat.

Lin Chuxia didn't plan on staying long, as Grandmother needed her to stew the chicken after tidying up.

Third Aunt knew her sister-in-law's cooking skills weren't good, so she didn't insist on keeping her and walked her to the main gate.

And right then, they ran into Qin Wen's wife, Ma Suyun.

Ma Suyun glanced at the basket Lin Chuxia was holding, and still could faintly smell the fragrance, smilingly teased, "Fourth sister-in-law, what goodies did you get from Third Aunt's? Does Third Aunt have any for me?"

Third Aunt spoke with a smile, "Yes, I just steamed some rice cakes, take some from the house if you want."

"Rice cakes? No thanks, I don't like them," Ma Suyun retorted, "Talk to me when Third Aunt makes other delicious dishes, but even then, I can't promise to be as timely."

Third Aunt pretended not to get the hint and still replied cheerfully, "That's nothing, just swing by my house every day, see whatever you want to eat, feel free to take."

"Third aunt is really generous, having two people working in this house makes a difference."

Third Aunt also laughed openly, and they exchanged a few more bits of small talk.

Lin Chuxia and Ma Suyun weren't close, and didn't wish to get deeper acquainted, so after some polite exchanges, Lin Chuxia took her basket and headed home.

Only when she got home did she find out that during her absence, the eldest brother-in-law's wife Qian Chuncao had sent over a basket of red bean buns.

The buns made at her own home had a thin skin with a generous filling, sweet with every bite.

The two big roosters had already been cleaned up, and Lin Chuxia started making chicken stew with mushrooms.

Qin Yang helped by tending the fire, while she focused on stewing, and soon the fragrant chicken stew with mushrooms was stewing away, filling the yard with its scent.

For some reason, despite cooked dishes being made daily in the neighbor's yard heavy with the scent of meat, they inhaled, yet it still wasn't as aromatic as the one at home.

The 27th of the twelfth lunar month is the big market day, after starting the meat stew, Mrs. Qin watched the pot and urged Qin Yang to take Lin Chuxia and Little Zhuangzhuang to buy firecrackers.

As the new year approached, the production company there had already started selling firecrackers, but to really feel the New Year's spirit, they had to go to the big market's firecracker section.

Truckloads of firecrackers, and in order to attract business, the owners would even set off a few strings to prove the quality of their own firecrackers.

Crackling bullets, the whole firecracker market had intermittent sounds of explosions, extremely lively.

Qin Yang shielded Lin Chuxia and Little Zhuangzhuang behind him as they went from one vendor to another, buying a bunch of firecrackers and two stacks of double-thundercrackers, before contentedly leading them back home.

On the way back, Qin Yang looked at Lin Chuxia's sparkling eyes and asked, "Are you happy?"

"Happy," Lin Chuxia nodded without hesitation, "Qin Yang, do you know? I haven't felt this happy in a long while," and it had also been a long time since she had experienced such a warm and lively New Year.

Probably the span of two lifetimes.

Little Zhuangzhuang, clutching a string of small firecrackers, fearing he'd be left out, also jumped up and shouted, "Uncle, I'm also happy, when we get home, I'll set off my little red firecrackers, will you join me? Auntie, are you scared of setting off firecrackers? If you are, I'll protect you."

Qin Yang laughed and ruffled his small head, "We won't need you for that," you little rascal.

Chapter 166: Not a Good Feeling

On the 28th day of the twelfth lunar month, the shop only did business for half a day. After lunchtime, it closed for the New Year holiday.

Lin Chuxia gathered all the employees at the Bun Shop to distribute this month's wages, bonuses, and holiday benefits.

Everyone was informed beforehand and looked forward to it with joy and excitement.

Especially the new employees, it was their first time earning money by working.

Previously, helping their families grow and sell vegetables did earn money, but that was family money. Today, they truly made money under their own names.

"Is everyone here?"

Lin Chuxia came over with a stack of red envelopes, glanced over the attendees, saw that everyone was present, and cleared her throat.

"Thank you all for your hard work this year. I look forward to a better year ahead for Qin's Bun Shop and Xiyang Food. Let's start distributing the money now."

Hou Xiaobao was the first to excitedly clap his hands.

Lin Chuxia began calling out names amidst the laughter and applause.

First up were the new employees, "Sun Liangdong..."

"Here!"

Sun Liangdong straightened up and called out loudly, which caused another burst of laughter from the crowd.

Lin Chuxia also smiled, "No need to be so nervous. This month, you worked overtime preparing our ready-to-eat products, ensuring all our orders were completed. You played a crucial role. Here's twenty days' wages of 20, overtime pay of 18.5, a bonus of 10, and a holiday fee of 10, totaling 58.5. Count it."

Sun Liangdong hesitated at first, incredulous and overjoyed, looking around at everyone, before finally accepting the money at Lin Chuxia's gesture.

Not just him, the few others who came with him were equally disbelieving and surprised.

They had agreed upon an internship period of one month with a wage of 30, and upon official employment, it would be 40 with a potential bonus for good performance.

They did indeed work a lot during these days for the village chief's request, working overtime diligently.

They really did it for the village chief's words, to perform well and bring glory to their village.

They didn't expect to receive overtime pay, and that good performance would indeed result in a bonus.

Earning over fifty in less than a month, they could imagine the look their parents would give them when they brought the money home.

Lin Chuxia was happy for them too. With such large order volumes and these newcomers not complaining of fatigue, selected specifically by the village chief for their literacy, they became proficient with the machines quickly.

They deserved it.

"Qin Yufeng, wage of 20, overtime pay of 19.2, bonus 10, holiday fee 10, total 59.2."

"Qin Weidong, wage of 20, overtime pay of 17.8, bonus 10, holiday fee 10, total 57.8..."

...

After the new employees, it was the bun shop staff.

Cai Jun, Granny Sun, Zhou Hongmei, Zhang Guilan, Qin Lihua, Chen Chunhua - they all did the same work, earning a wage of 40, bonus of 10, and another 10 for a holiday fee, each receiving 60 in total, nearly equivalent to two months' salary of a regular factory worker.

Qin Lihua joyfully received her wage, "Thank you, Auntie Four," then ran over to Zhou Hongmei, giggling as she counted her money.

Zhou Hongmei teased her, calling her a little money-grubber, and Qin Lihua whispered, "My mom said to save my earned wages for my dowry; I've saved over a hundred now."

Chen Chunhua took her red envelope from Lin Chuxia and returned to her seat with a grin, whispering to Ma Yingzi sitting next to her.

"Our boss is really generous, with bonuses and holiday fees. Last month when I took money home, my husband treated me so well. This month I got 20 more than last. Let's see if he dares to puff up at me now."

Ma Yingzi nodded in agreement, "No matter when, we still have to stand up for ourselves, isn't there that saying? The economic base determines the superstructure."

"That's true, but your Lao Pang definitely wouldn't. You two do the same kind of work, and I see you even have overtime pay. You must have at least 20 more than me this month."

Ma Yingzi smiled and didn't respond.

It was soon Ma Yingzi, Pang Yongli, and Hou Xiaobao's turn.

"Brother Pang, this is yours, wage of 40, overtime pay of 23, bonus 30, holiday fee 10, check it out."

"Sister Ma, same for you, wage of 40, overtime pay 23, bonus 30, holiday fee 10."

Hou Xiaobao's wage and bonus were the same as theirs, but he also received a bonus for night watch.

During this period, the ready-to-eat orders were plenty, and the staff in the small courtyard worked overtime tirelessly.

Especially the couple, Ma Yingzi and Pang Yongli, they almost lived there.

The two joined their team when they started selling ready-to-eat products and now were considered veterans. Lin Chuxia had prepared large red envelopes for both of them.

Hou Xiaobao joined after finishing his rounds, and the raw material handling was almost all on him. He would get the goods before dawn, and he was also responsible for transporting the packaged goods.

Cold winter days spent running outside wasn't an easy job, yet Hou Xiaobao never complained of hardship or fatigue.

Even upon returning, he didn't rest, and worked along with the couple.

Most importantly, he really had a talent for handling equipment, operating the machines most smoothly.

As they heard the wage figures of these few, envious glances were cast, but everyone knew that the small courtyard had been very busy recently.

Finally, it was the shop managers and a few who handled business outside.

Qin Han and Sun Lanlan received 100 each, Qin Wu with his business commission received 113, Sun Bingnan received 108, Jia Liang received 124, and Su Wensong received the most, totaling 145.

Lastly, everyone also received three kilograms of ready-to-eat products as a holiday benefit.

After handing out the money, there was no rush to send everyone home. They prepared two tables with dishes at the Bun Shop for everyone to gather and enjoy.

Ma Yingzi saw a few who had already gone to the kitchen and called out to Chen Chunhua, who was still lost in thought, "Chunhua, let's go. Join us in picking vegetables. You're not planning to skip the gathering, are you?"

"Oh, okay..."

Chen Chunhua snapped out of it and went to the kitchen.

Watching Ma Yingzi ahead, she felt a bit uneasy.

She thought she earned only ten more than her, said twenty to make her happy, but didn't expect that Ma Yingzi actually earned over forty more than her.

Her husband's monthly wage wasn't even forty, so basically, Ma Yingzi's single wage equaled the combined income of both of them.

Lin Chuxia was also about to check things out when Hou Xiaobao approached her, hesitating to speak.

"What's wrong? Where are you planning to spend the Spring Festival?"

After Hou Xiaobao's family members learned he was working at the Bun Shop, they approached him once, seemingly because his elder brother's child needed school fees, asking him to lend money. Hou Xiaobao refused under the pretense of housing.

He was open to giving school fees, but they had to return his house to him.

Initially, Hou the Elder had kicked him out and taken over his house under the pretext that he was not studying well. Now that he had straightened out, if they still wanted to acknowledge him as a brother, they should rightfully return his house.

Hou the Elder seemingly didn't expect he'd ask for the house back, and left cursing.

They didn't get the money, and of course, they didn't intend to return the house.

Chapter 167: Lin Jiadong Comes Knocking

Hou Xiaobao pointed to Jia Liang, "Brother Liang even invited me to celebrate the holidays with them, but I thought the Bun Shop couldn't be left unattended during the break, so I decided to spend the holidays at the Bun Shop and have a reunion dinner at Brother Liang's place. Aunt Jia has been really good to us now; she'd be unhappy if I didn't go."

Lin Chuxia nodded, glad to hear he had plans.

Hou Xiaobao scratched his head, "Boss, I was the only one who came back empty-handed from running sales this time, are you disappointed in me? I've been thinking about it a lot since I got back. Maybe it's because of my image, I'm thinking of trying again after the New Year. I'll visit more clients and won't let you down, Boss."

So that was the issue.

Indeed, among those who went out, only Hou Xiaobao returned with nothing.

During those days, as everyone seemed downcast and the courtyard became busier, he had no time to dwell on these thoughts, but it seemed he was still concerned about it.

Lin Chuxia neither affirmed nor denied this, but instead asked, "Are you unsatisfied with your current salary?"

Hou Xiaobao immediately shook his head like a rattle drum, his voice growing louder, "Of course, I'm satisfied."

This month, he made a total of 118 yuan, which was the most after Su Wensong and Jia Liang.

That was the equivalent to what an ordinary worker would earn in over three months. What else was there to be dissatisfied with?

He had never even dreamed that he could earn so much clean money.

After speaking, realizing the intent behind Lin Chuxia's question, he said embarrassingly, "I just feel that I didn't do a good job with the task assigned by you, Boss, and that I failed your trust."

He was sent to run sales but ended up making no deals after going round in circles.

Lin Chuxia gave a slight smile, "How could you have not done a good job? Everyone has seen your effort during this time, and you've been outstanding. You're just not good at some things, that's all. In our company, it's impossible for everyone to be proficient at everything. Even I have weaknesses. Hou Xiaobao, you don't need to belittle yourself unnecessarily, nor do you need to dwell on your weaknesses. After the New Year, you just focus on what you're good at and do well at your own position, that's what makes an excellent employee."

"Boss... Do I really not need to go out on sales anymore?"

Hou Xiaobao's eyes lit up; truth be told, he was somewhat daunted by that task, but since everyone else was doing it, he felt like he would be letting the boss down if he didn't.

"No need, there will be adjustments after the New Year. We'll have just two dedicated people for sales."

Hou Xiaobao heaved a long sigh of relief, "I will definitely do what you've entrusted me with, Boss."

At this moment, Qin Lihua came over, "Fourth Aunt, someone is looking for you outside."

Lin Chuxia patted Hou Xiaobao on the shoulder, signaling him to get back to work, and then she stepped outside.

The Bun Shop had already put up a closed sign for the afternoon, so whoever was looking for her now must be someone she knew.

As she stepped out, she saw Lin Jiadong standing at the bottom of the steps.

Lin Jiadong, upon seeing Lin Chuxia, sized her up from head to toe twice, his tone carrying a hint of disbelief.

"Second Sister, have you really become a big boss? You look so good in those clothes. No wonder Big Sister got angry. You were prettier than her to begin with, and now you're a big boss and dressed so well, she must be furious seeing you."

Lin Chuxia felt differently about Lin Jiadong compared to the rest of the Lin Family. This brother was simple-minded and had been used by the Lin Family as a pawn in the past as well.

His ability to find his way here today could very well mean he had been given a mission.

"How did you come here?"

She beckoned him inside the Bun Shop; it was quite cold outside.

Lin Jiadong had been somewhat timid before, even though his mother and sister had said things, he didn't quite believe that his second sister had that kind of ability.

Even just now, when he came to Qin's Buns Shop to look for Lin Chuxia, he was nervous.

Now that he sees her, all his concerns fade away.

Smiling, he says, "Isn't it almost Chinese New Year? Mom said you opened a shop in the city and told me to come over to get some ready-made food for the New Year's feast. Second sister, I see this is a Bun Shop, do you sell ready-made food as well?"

Lin Chuxia looks at his presumptuous tone and realizes that he doesn't see anything wrong with their mom asking him to get things from her, prompting her to press her forehead helplessly.

She really wants to test his IQ.

Of course, maybe in the eyes of her dopey little brother, she has always been the one to give in their family.

And that has truly been the case for the past 20 years.

"Jiadong, I'm married now. If one day you get yourself a wife, and her family wants three hundred yuan for a dowry without even mentioning it, and then, seeing you have money, keeps coming back for more repeatedly, what would you think?"

Lin Jiadong thinks for a moment, his face getting stern, "Why would I marry a wife who squanders like that? Even if I did marry her, if she only cared about her parents' home and neglected her own, then there'd be no point in living that life..."

He suddenly understands the implications of Lin Chuxia's words and scratches his head awkwardly.

"But eldest sister said that since our parents gave birth to you and raised you, now that you are capable, it's only right to honor them."

"Is eldest sister still at home?"

Lin Jiadong nods, "Yes, she came back home this morning. She hadn't left when I came here."

That explains why Lin Jiadong suddenly came over.

"Then eldest sister must have brought a lot of things to honor our parents with, right? I heard her husband started a business, and they haven't earned little from selling vegetables."

"I didn't see her bring anything, just heard her tell mom to go get some pork. At lunch, I saw her picking out only the meat to eat, if I had not been quick, I would have gotten nothing."

Lin Jiadong shows a disapproving face.

"Didn't mom say anything?"

Lin Jiadong is their parents' treasured son; even if the eldest sister was favored, she couldn't compare to him.

"Mom said something, but eldest sister didn't listen. She said she's pregnant, so she needs to eat well."

Lin Chuxia nods, not asking any further, and leads him to get the ready-made food.

"Strictly speaking, I shouldn't be giving you anything. First, taking things from my marital home to my parents' home is frowned upon; second, if the eldest sister went home empty-handed, and I bring things home, wouldn't that make her look bad? But you're growing, so you need to eat well. I remember you like chicken most, so take this smoked chicken back to eat."

Lin Jiadong, smelling the meaty fragrance, swallows his saliva, "Second sister, I also like stuffed intestines and pork liver."

Lin Chuxia packs some pork liver and stuffed intestines for him, totaling over a pound.

Lin Jiadong's face breaks into a smile, "Second sister is the kindest to me. Eldest sister has always bullied me, only you protect me."

Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he looks around warily, "You're giving me these things, brother-in-law won't get angry, right?"

Lin Chuxia doesn't answer him, instead, she asks, "Are you hungry? I closed up the shop early today, and there are some unsold meat buns left. How about I get you a few to eat? Just wait over there."

Lin Jiadong, half a boy and half a man, is of the age where his appetite is big enough to eat his father out of house and home, capable of stuffing down two buns even right after a meal.

Not to mention that life isn't easy these days, and in the Lin family, white flour is a luxury only afforded during festivals.

Now that dinner time is approaching, mentioning meat buns just made him hungry.

Chapter 168: Her Face Turned Red Visibly

Chuxia handed him a plate of meat buns, and Jiadong sat down at the table to eat.

Three bites per meat bun, his mouth was completely stuffed.

"Slow down, don't choke."

Chuxia poured him a glass of water.

It took some effort for Jiadong to swallow the meat bun in his mouth, and he let out a sheepish chuckle, "Second sis, these meat buns are really tasty."

"If you like them, eat more, I'll get you more if it's not enough," Chuxia said.

Jiadong smiled again and lowered his head to continue eating the meat buns.

Just then, Qin Yang came in from outside.

Chuxia had greeted him before and invited him over for dinner that night.

Qin Yang had been accompanying her to various stores these days and was familiar with everyone.

Seeing Chuxia sitting by the window, he walked straight over.

Jiadong had just bitten into a large meat bun when he looked up and saw a tall and straight figure, which made him freeze.

He glanced at the pot of cooked food next to him and subconsciously stood up, making a loud clang with the chair due to the abrupt movement.

He hurriedly steadied the chair and stood up straight, "Bro... brother-in-law..."

He mumbled with a mouthful of bun and hurriedly swallowed it down, then continued, "I got these because I was craving them from second sis..."

Qin Yang nodded indifferently, "If your second sis gave them to you, then you keep them."

This was Chuxia's family, and even if the wife wasn't cherished in that household, if she couldn't let go of this kinship, he would respect her wishes.

But, if someone like Mother Lin came to bully his wife, he certainly wouldn't be polite.

Qin Yang also knew that Chuxia had a different attitude towards her brother.

They had met before when they returned to her parents' home, and this Jiadong seemed to be a bit simple-minded.

He wondered how such a smart wife could have such a silly brother.

Noticing that Jiadong was uncomfortable around him, Qin Yang told Chuxia that he was going to find Qin Wu.

After Qin Yang left, Jiadong quietly asked, "My brother-in-law isn't angry, is he?"

Chuxia handed him another bun, "Eat up, head back early once you're done. It'll be hard to navigate once it gets dark."

Jiadong didn't ask any further and quickly finished all the buns on the plate and let out a satisfied burp.

Before leaving, he still seemed worried and asked, "Second sis, I'm really taking these with me, are you sure it's okay?"

"Off you go, be careful on the road."

Jiadong chuckled and hopped on his bicycle, crouching low and pedaling furiously, disappearing into the dusk in no time.

In her previous life, the Lin Family had been demanding, but when Li Guangyuan betrayed her, it was only her simple-minded brother who stubbornly wanted to stand up for her, even though by that time she no longer cared.

It wasn't until Jiadong's figure was out of sight that Chuxia turned back and entered the bun shop.

Inside the room, the atmosphere was completely different.

Everyone pitched in, and dinner was almost ready, covering two large tables with food.

There was no separation of men and women, everyone casually took seats, but everyone wanted to sit at Chuxia's table.

In the end, the Qin Family and her good friend Sun Lanlan sat beside them, and Sun Bingnan, in an effort to foster a relationship between his sister and Cai Jun, pulled Cai Jun to sit at the Qin Family's table as well, with Su Wensong also joining them.

Chuxia, Qin Yang, and the Pang Yongli couple, Jia Liang, Hou Xiaobao, and Chen Chunhua sat at one table.

The five newcomers, three women sat at Chuxia's table and the two men went to sit with the Qin Family.

The dining atmosphere was even more lively, Chuxia made a simple opening speech, then encouraged everyone to eat and drink up.

With the joy of receiving salaries and the holidays, this meal lasted for a full two hours.

Everyone was toasting each other and exchanging blessings. Hou Xiaobao even brought up the karaoke down south and sang a song for everyone on the spot.

Lin Chuxia thought to herself, if there's a chance next year, she'd definitely set up a karaoke for them.

After dinner, everyone tidied up the shop again.

Sun Lanlan pulled Lin Chuxia aside and handed her a small pouch, "A New Year's gift for you."

It looked like a scarf, bright red, similar to the one she was wearing around her neck.

Lin Chuxia thanked her and reminded her, "Don't spend money on me next time. Use it on yourself, dress up nicely, so you can find your Mr. Right sooner."

Sun Lanlan pinched her playfully, her cheeks visibly reddening.

Lin Chuxia curiously watched her. They often joked about this, so why such a big reaction today?

Seeing that she glanced at Cai Jun in the distance, Lin Chuxia wondered if there was really something going on?

Before Lin Chuxia could ask more, Sun Lanlan waved her off, "I won't talk about it now, I'm leaving with Third Brother first, heading back to the village soon."

"Okay, take care on the road."

Sun Lanlan went to call Sun Bingnan. The two of them had already packed up their belongings. Just as they reached the door, someone called out to them from behind.

"Bingnan..."

Cai Jun, who was in the back kitchen, heard that Sun Lanlan and Sun Bingnan were about to leave and quickly ran out.

He rushed and with a bang, ran right into Qin Lihua, who was just about to enter the kitchen.

"Sorry, so sorry..." He apologized repeatedly.

Qin Lihua was only holding half a bottle of vinegar and wasn't hurt badly. She shook her head, "It's okay!"

Seeing she was really fine, Cai Jun chased after them again, "Bingnan, why didn't you tell me you were leaving?"

Sun Bingnan glanced at his sister and asked him amusedly, "Why do we need to inform you about going home?"

Cai Jun also looked at Sun Lanlan, but only glanced at her before looking away, "Well... after New Year's, I'll visit your Uncle and Aunt to send my greetings."

"Alright then, I'll be waiting for your visit," Sun Bingnan cheerfully agreed.

...

"Lihua, what are you doing standing here?"

Zhou Hongmei came out from the kitchen and saw Qin Lihua standing at the kitchen door, staring into space outside the Bun Shop.

"Put the vinegar bottle back, let's go home."

Qin Lihua snapped back to her senses, nodding repeatedly, "Oh, right away."

She stepped into the kitchen and then turned to look outside the door again.

"Hurry up, your fourth aunt and the others are still waiting."

Zhou Hongmei urged her again, then went to speak with Lin Chuxia and Zhang Guilan, who were waiting.

After a while, Qin Lihua came out, and they all headed home together.

The Qin Family of seven, plus five workers from Qin Family Village, twelve people marched mightily down the streets of Ancheng County.

It was cold at the end of the lunar month, and the entire street was quiet at this time, but no one felt the chill.

"Bang—"

Firecracker sounds erupted not far away. The New Year was coming!

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Elsewhere, Lin Jiadong returned home and it was already pitch dark, but his family had not yet rested.

The power was out again today. Oil lamps were lit in the house, casting dim, flickering shadows that did not affect Lin Jiadong's mood at all.

He took the cooked food from the handlebars of his bike, humming a tune as he walked into the house, calling out before even entering, "Mom, I'm back."

He didn't hear his mom, but his elder sister Lin Jiayi's voice came out, "Why are you so late? We've been waiting for you for so long."

Chapter 169: How Much Is Your Filial Piety Worth?

Li Jiadong entered the room and clearly saw the person inside, "Big sister, why haven't you left yet?"

"What else? I've been waiting for you," Lin Jiayi replied irritably, her eyes fixed on the bag in his hand.

She relaxed a bit when she smelled the faint scent of meat.

Li Jiadong looked around and asked, "Why are you waiting for me? Didn't all of you finish eating already?"

Lin Jiayi couldn't bother explaining and reached out to grab the bag in his hand.

"Alright, give me the stuff already. It's so late, don't you know I'm pregnant? It's not safe to walk late at night?"

Li Jiadong quickly lifted the bag out of her reach, puzzled, "How is my coming home late related to big sister? If you want to go home early, just go. I didn't hold you back, nor did I ask you to wait for me."

Lin Jiayi, failing to grab the item, glared at him, "You think I'm waiting for you? Give it to me. Such a small amount isn't even enough to fill the gaps between my teeth. Are you even useful? Why can't you ask for more?"

Only then did Li Jiadong understand what Lin Jiayi wanted and lifted the bag even higher.

"This is from second sister, all stuff that I like to eat. Big sister, why do you think you have the right to fight over it with me? You think it's not enough, but I think it's enough for two meals."

"Li Jiadong," Lin Jiayi shouted angrily when she couldn't get the items, "what do you mean by this? Don't forget that I was the one who asked you to get something from Lin Chuxia."

Li Jiadong nodded, "You told me to get it, and you said second sister ought to be filial to our parents, right? Being filial to our parents doesn't mean being filial to you, why should I give it to you?"

Unable to snatch the items, Lin Jiayi turned to Mother Lin with a look of grievance, "Mom, look at him."

It was difficult for Mother Lin as well, as she tried to mediate, "Jiadong, just give your big sister a bit, she's still carrying a child, you know."

"Not giving," Li Jiadong clutched the items tightly, "she's carrying a child for the Li family. If she wants good food, let her husband buy it for her. Why should she have mine? It's all from second sister."

Mother Lin also saw those items, and indeed, they were all her son's favorites.

Her son loved to eat pork liver, but it was expensive. She couldn't bear to buy any for her son all year round.

There were also smoked chicken and sausages, they smelled delicious, and it was no wonder her youngest son was holding onto them so tightly.

How long had it been since she had bought any of these for her youngest son?

"Jiayi, I don't think there's much there. Why don't you stay over for the night, and we can eat together tomorrow?"

Lin Jiayi refused, "Mom, everyone knows our family has this business. If I return empty-handed, that old lady and young sister-in-law at home will surely talk behind my back. Are you okay with your daughter being bullied by them?"

She came out today precisely because those two young sisters-in-law had provoked her.

Even after getting married, Li Hongmei could not settle down. Today, she came back to her maternal home and god knows what she said to the old lady, who made snide remarks about Lin Chuxia.

Half a year into marriage, and she's already pregnant. Yet, that old lady still mentioned the matter of changing brides.

Mother Lin also knew the nature of the old lady from the Li family and the two young sisters-in-law. She didn't want her daughter to be unhappy during the New Year, but she also couldn't bear to let her son suffer.

Palm or back of the hand, both are flesh, but the son's flesh was a bit more precious.

Lin Jiayi's face grew uglier as she watched her mother.

"It's all because of that little wretch Chuxia. She knew there was a big family, yet she only brought back so little. And you, couldn't you have asked for more? Is her filial piety only worth this much?"

Li Jiadong, hearing his big sister scold their second sister, frowned in displeasure, "Big sister, you never bring anything home to show filial piety to our parents. Why do you always pick on second sister? You're the eldest, so how much is your filial piety worth?"

"Lin Jiadong," Lin Jiayi immediately bristled with anger, "What favor did Lin Chuxia do for you to side with her like this? You can't have been bought by just a smoked chicken, can you? She has such a big bun shop, and she gave you just a smoked chicken, which isn't even enough to share. She's just trying to drive a wedge between us."

The thought of Lin Chuxia working in that bun shop, whether it was her own or belonged to the Qin Family, made Lin Jiayi green with envy.

What difference did it make if the business was the Qin Family's or her own? Was it not all just flaunting and showing off?

In the past life, she had reveled in glory for a lifetime, all thanks to Li Guangyuan.

Who would have thought that in this life, even that brute Qin Han would start doing business, allowing that wretched woman to get smug again.

Lin Jiadong shrank back from her shouting, retreating a step back due to the pressure that came from their blood ties.

However, he wasn't willing to concede, insisting, "How is it driving a wedge? What I see is you wanting my piece of flesh, which is damaging our sibling relationship. You could give me some meat to eat like our second sister does, then I'd remember your kindness too."

Give him meat to eat?

The Li family could barely scrape together two pounds of meat for the New Year, not to mention waiting until New Year's Eve to eat it.

Where would she get any meat to give him?

Knowing that her brother was straightforward to a fault, Lin Jiayi patiently explained to him.

"You don't understand. Her bun shop is massive, and Qin's Cooked Food is famous all over the county. What's this little bit of stuff? At her place, even beggars get more than this. She's treating you like a beggar."

"So, big sister, you also want to act like a beggar and fight with me over meat?" he retorted.

"You..." Lin Jiayi was so infuriated she raised her hand to strike him.

"Am I fighting with you? You've got a nephew now, and it's the nephew who wants to eat. If you wanted more, why didn't you just ask her for more? You are so gullible. Let me tell you, their cooked foods and their meat-filled buns are delicious. You went there only once and got so little, I bet you didn't even get

to smell the meat buns," she said, determined to show her naive brother Lin Chuxia's true colors. That little wretch wasn't as easy to talk to as she seemed, and she was intentionally stirring up trouble between them.

Upon hearing this, Lin Jiadong had something to say. He grinned, showing off his big white teeth, and even directed a breath at Lin Jiayi.

"What are you doing?" Lin Jiayi dismissed with a wave of her hand in distaste.

"Can you smell that? The scent of the meat buns," he said, taking a couple of breaths into his palm and inhaling deeply.

"Don't even mention it, big sister's meat buns are really delicious. She was worried I'd be hungry when I got back, so she gave me a huge plateful. Did I eat 10? 12?" Lin Jiadong cocked his head to think; he was counting at first, but then his brother-in-law came, and he lost track of the count.

"Ah, never mind, I ate a dozen or so until I was full," he said, pointing to his throat with a proud expression.

Upon hearing that he truly did eat the meat buns, and quite a few at that, Lin Jiayi's voice grew shriller.

"12 meat buns, have you no conscience? Mom and Dad haven't even had any, and you gobbled them all up. Didn't you think of taking some back for them to try?"

Lin Jiadong spoke matter-of-factly, "You told me to go get cooked food from second sister, you never said anything about getting meat buns."

Besides, that was all his brother-in-law's stuff - what if taking too much displeased him?

Big sister rarely took things home, saying she feared upsetting her husband. Not only did she avoid taking things from her family home, but she often took stuff from there to her marital home.

Chapter 170: I Am His Own Sister

"Second sister never took stuff from home to her in-laws' place."

"It's true, second sister cares for me the most, she has been good to me since I was little, while you, eldest sister, only know how to bully me. Anyway, since you're married now, better not to hang around home too much. Every time you come, you find fault with me. Look at second sister, she never asks me to do this or that. After all my hard work, you're still not satisfied..."

Lin Jiadong curled his lip and retreated to his room under the furious gaze of Lin Jiayi. Of course, to avoid his cooked food being taken away, he held tightly to the bag of food as he went back to his room.

Lin Jiayi was truly about to lose her mind with anger, tears streaming down her face, "Mom, why don't you discipline him? Listen to what he's saying. I am his biological sister, yet he's taking the side of that wretched girl."

"Keep your voice down!"

Mother Lin quickly spoke up, reminding her with caution, glancing suspiciously towards Lin Jiadong's room, then glared at her.

"What nonsense are you talking about, you and your second sister are both his biological sisters."

Lin Jiayi couldn't believe that even her mother was not on her side now. This had never happened before.

She was too shocked and aggrieved to care.

Her eyes red and swollen, she opened her mouth to say something but ended up closing it again, unable to utter a word.

Mother Lin felt a pain in her heart, but some things still needed to be said.

"Jiadong only has you two sisters, you both should help him when it's time. What he said isn't wrong, you're a married daughter, there's no way you should be taking things from your parental home to your in-law's, isn't that turning your elbow outwards?"

"When I found you such a good marriage prospect, you refused, saying Li Guangyuan would make something big of himself, but what about now? How's your life? I think it's not even as good as your second sister, what's it like to be living in widowhood? Doesn't she eat well every day? You have to come to your parents' house even for a bite of meat, is this the good life you were talking about? I can't see what great abilities Li Guangyuan has."

Lin Jiayi felt like she had been hit where it hurt, her eyes vicious and red as she lashed out, "Li Guangyuan is indeed capable. No matter how good Qin Yang is, he's a cold-blooded creature, not just cold-blooded, but also a hypocrite who's different behind your back. Mum, you just wait and see, in no time at all, Li Guangyuan will definitely surpass the Qin Family. And Qin Yang? He's been living outside for years, who knows if he's got someone there already. He and Lin Chuxia get along so well, why don't you see her pregnant? She's just waiting to raise his bastard child."

She didn't say it out loud, but she waited, eager for her mother to see what kind of cold-hearted creature Qin Yang was and how he treated Lin Chuxia.

Waiting for her mother to see Lin Chuxia's good days come crashing down.

She had never expected that her mother would also become so mercenary, seeing that wretched girl doing well and even...

Lin Jiayi wiped away her tears, as if to encourage herself, "Mum, just you wait, I will live better than Lin Chuxia. Once I have money, I won't be like her, so stingy about giving you a bit of meat. I've said it, I'll help Jiadong with the betrothal money, just you wait and see, by that time, I hope you won't regret it..."

After saying this, Lin Jiayi turned and walked out.

At this moment, Mother Lin was already regretful. Her eldest daughter had always been concerned about their family, unlike that ingrate who wouldn't even give a few hundred dollars when asked.

"Jiayi..."

She called out, but seeing Lin Jiayi not turning back, she hastily chased after her.

After a couple of steps, she thought of something, rushed into her son's room, and amidst her son's discontented complaints, took a length of sausage and chased after her.

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Lin Jiayi carrying a length of sausage, couldn't hide her disdain, yet couldn't help but place it near her nose to take in the aroma.

It was truly fragrant; she seemed to have smelled this scent before but couldn't remember where.

Perhaps that day at Qin's Buns Shop?

Even though they didn't buy any cooked food that day, Qin's Buns Shop sold cooked items, and the entire place was filled with the aroma of meat.

Just as she was thinking, she saw a blurry yet familiar figure in the distance and immediately put down the deli food.

"Jiayi, why are you coming back so late? I was just about to go over to my mother-in-law's to pick you up."

Li Guangyuan had already recognized Lin Jiayi. As he walked over, he said.

Noticing the items in her hand, he reached out to help, "What's this?"

Lin Jiayi handed it over nonchalantly, "Mom saw that I enjoyed dinner tonight and let me bring the leftovers home."

She glanced at him again, her voice proud, "If not for my mom who dotes on me, always making my favorite dishes when I visit because she knows I'm pregnant and it's hard on me."

Touched by the starlight, Li Guangyuan could roughly see what was inside, his face filled with emotion, "Yes, your mother dotes on you the most. When you have time, you should visit your parents more often. There's nothing much going on at home anyway, spend more time talking with your mother.."

Lin Jiayi: "..."

"Li Guangyuan, do you even have a conscience? The child I'm carrying is the Li Family's grandchild. Do you really think it's right for my mom to take care of me?"

Li Guangyuan looked innocent, "Isn't it you who said your mother dotes on you the most and that you're comfortable at your parents' home? I'm just thinking of your best interest."

"Thinking of my best interest? If that's true, you should talk to your mom and your two sisters. Your mom took 20 yuan from us for the New Year's preparation but didn't buy any goods. Now we have to do it ourselves. What did she need the money for? She probably gave it all to your sisters."

If it weren't for this, she wouldn't have needed to go back to her parental home.

"Mom did buy some New Year's goods, didn't she ask Dongmei to buy two jin of pork?"

"What's two jin of pork enough for? You gave her 20 yuan, remember?"

Seeing Li Guangyuan silent again, it had been like this lately; whenever they touched on issues, he would clam up as if avoiding the problem, acting as though not speaking would solve everything.

This Li Guangyuan, really doesn't resemble the awe-inspiring President Li from her past life at all. She even began to doubt if her previous life was a dream and there was no President Li.

"Guangyuan, I'm not just nagging about the money. It's just that we don't have much capital to begin with. How much can your mom even spend at her age? We gave quite a lot when Hongmei got married, and her dowry money is still held by your mom. She's not without money. If she wants 20 yuan for the New Year, she should be buying the goods."

Li Guangyuan remained silent. Lin Jiayi was so frustrated she could kick him.

In the end, she could only change the subject, "In the end, we're just poor. If we were like the Qin Family, running a shop and doing business, we wouldn't care about these 20 yuan. We could even give your mom 200 yuan. Guangyuan, it's the same old story; selling vegetables won't make us a lot of money. We have to think of another business to really get ahead."

She was desperate to get into business and earn big money so she could firmly trample Lin Chuxia under her feet.

Li Guangyuan agreed with her. Ever since he found out that Qin's Bun Shop belonged to his sister-in-law, he had also gone to see it.

Such a large bun shop, constantly bustling with people, must have a substantial daily income.

But opening a shop isn't as easy as just deciding to do it.

"I understand, Jiayi. I'll find a way."

Only upon hearing his promise did Lin Jiayi finally feel satisfied.

As the couple entered the house, Li Hongmei had just come out of the latrine.

She initially didn't want to pay any attention to them, but then her sharp eyes caught the item Li Guangyuan was holding.

"Brother, what's this? Did you bring it back for me?"

