

Switched M 171

Chapter 171: Perhaps Shouldn't Have Switched Brides Initially

Lin Jiayi sarcastically spoke, "What could your brother possibly bring back for you so late at night? These are things from my parental home, sister-in-law, are you even eyeing what my family has given me?"

Li Hongmei also saw what was inside, realizing that her brother indeed wouldn't go buy cooked food late at night.

Seeing Li Hongmei's reaction, Lin Jiayi finally let out a sigh of relief.

During the day, this sister-in-law of hers was always full of sarcasm and mockery, as she, a married granddaughter, returned to her parental home and they didn't even prepare decent meals to welcome her.

During the New Year, her brother and sister-in-law didn't prepare festive goods either, making the whole family endure hardship.

Of course, she knew what her sister-in-law meant by visiting her parental home—it was merely to take advantage of them.

She didn't want her sister-in-law to benefit or to have the last word, so she thought of going to Qin's cooked food shop.

She wanted to bring something back from her parental home specifically to slap Li Hongmei in the face.

It wasn't because her brother and sister-in-law made them live poor lives, but because the Li Family was inherently poor.

If it weren't for her, Lin Jiayi, god knows what kind of life they would still be leading.

But who would have thought Lin Jiadong was so useless, going there once and only bringing back such a little amount, and even getting bought off by Lin Chuxia.

However, this little amount was enough to annoy her sister-in-law.

But then Li Hongmei just paused for a moment and snorted, "What's so great about bringing some things? If you're capable, open a bun shop yourself. Maybe if you hadn't swapped the marriage, it would have been Li's Bun Shop instead. Why are you so proud here now?"

Although Li Hongmei didn't know exactly what happened originally, it didn't stop her from provoking.

Sure enough, Lin Jiayi was deeply stung, and she shouted sharply, "Li Guangyuan, aren't you going to control her?"

Li Guangyuan also felt that these past matters had been over for so long now, and it wasn't appropriate for his sister to bring up marriage swapping.

Moreover, it was initially the second son of the Lin Family who wanted to swap marriages. If Lin Jiayi hadn't agreed to the swap or had simply called off the marriage, perhaps he would still be single.

"Hongmei, what nonsense are you talking?"

But Li Hongmei didn't want to let her off. Her life was not going well now, all thanks to this sister-in-law.

Everyone said that she wanted to marry someone from the city, and it was them who said that the other party was a self-employed person with many pigs, promising carefree food and drinks without in-laws to serve.

But after marrying, it turned out not to be the case at all. Except for her husband being really honest, they were so poor that they nearly couldn't make ends meet.

The money from pig farming never reached their hands, and the income from farming the land was too little for the effort.

Her current situation was all caused by Lin Jiayi; how could she let her have an easy time?

"Am I talking nonsense? Brother, have a think, Daqing Mountain Village is right next to our village. Whether Lin Family favors their eldest or the second child, just inquire around. They say Lin Chuxia wanted to marry Qin Yang which is why they swapped, I think it's because Qin's Family looked down on her. When Lin Chuxia was in school, she was a well-praised student by teachers. If she had married you, maybe we would have been living well by now. Instead, fearing she couldn't marry off, she swapped with Lin Chu for someone others didn't want..."

"Shut up!"

Even though Li Guangyuan was usually good-tempered and conciliatory, he lost his temper this time.

Lin Jiayi's face turned even more ashen.

"Li Guangyuan, if you don't give me an explanation today, this isn't over. Do you really think your Li Family is so desirable? Don't you have any self-awareness? If not for me, you wouldn't even be able to sell vegetables, and you'd still be suffering from famine, right?"

"Is this ever going to end?"

Old Mrs. Li came out of her room, with a stern expression on her face.

"What are you howling about in the middle of the night? Isn't that shameful? Everyone go back to your rooms."

She gave Lin Jiayi a deep look, her voice indifferent, "Don't blame your sister-in-law for those words, blame yourself for not being capable. You are real sisters, everyone already knows what your sister is like now. If you don't want to be gossiped about, then live your life properly. When you start doing better than them, naturally no one will criticize you anymore."

"Our Li family may be poor, but Guang Yuan knows how to live. He loves and protects his sister, unlike those who are black-hearted and rot-lunged, marrying your sister-in-law off far away; what good does

that do for you? It would be better for you, as her brother and sister-in-law, to live well and support your mother-in-law. With such a malicious mindset, it's no wonder the Qin family didn't want you..."

Lin Jiayi was so angry that smoke seemed to come out of her seven orifices, wanting to argue back, but Old Mrs. Li had already pulled her daughter into the room.

Her eyes ablaze with anger, she looked at Li Guangyuan, "Do you think so too?"

Li Guangyuan grabbed her arm, "It's cold outside, let's go back to the room."

"Li Guangyuan, I'm carrying your son right now, and you let them bully me like this? Are you even a man? I already made it clear to you about the swap arrangement in the beginning. What kind of person Lin Chuxia is, she doesn't even regard you highly, you've seen what Qin Yang is like. How do you compare to Qin Yang in any aspect?"

She spitefully spewed hurtful words, seemingly to cover the panic in her heart.

For a moment, Lin Jiayi almost believed it, that all of Li Guangyuan's achievements in his previous life came from Lin Chuxia.

But that thought was quickly dismissed.

Lin Chuxia and she grew up together, Lin Chuxia wouldn't dare to challenge her words. Even if she was good in studies, what use was it? She found excuses not to let her mother pay for Lin Chuxia's middle school fees.

What can a person who is always doing chores at home achieve?

Lin Chuxia, she knew her all too well.

Li Guangyuan pulled her towards the room without saying a word during the whole process, but Lin Jiayi felt suffocated.

"You don't really believe what your mother and sister said, do you? They did it on purpose. Li Hongmei's life isn't going well because she's incompetent, purposefully stirring up discord between us, what good does it do for her? You wouldn't really let them come between us, would you?"

Finally, Li Guangyuan spoke, "No, Jiayi, we really misjudged the Ma family. Don't take to heart whatever Hongmei says, my mother is just worried about her daughter..."

In the dim light of the room's oil lamp, Li Guangyuan clearly saw Lin Jiayi's face, but for some reason, that face overlaid with another.

He averted his gaze, "I'll go talk to them."

He left the room without waiting for Lin Jiayi to reply.

Yet after leaving, he didn't go to where his mother and sister were, but looked towards the night sky, his mind in turmoil.

He never mentioned it, but these days, driven by Lin Jiayi to look for business, he went to the county twice, and each time he passed by Qin's Bun Shop, he couldn't help but linger for a while.

He had also secretly inquired, Qin's Bun Shop was said to belong to the Qin family, but in reality, the person running it was surnamed Lin.

Li Guangyuan pulled out a small pouch from his waist, took out cigarette paper and tobacco, and rolled a cigarette.

He knew he was poor, lacking the capabilities of the Qin family, the more he thought about it, the more he couldn't understand why his wife, leaving the Qin family, chose to marry him instead.

Initially, he believed it was because her younger aunt wanted to marry into the Qin family as an arranged swap.

Now, seeing how the Yue family treated their daughters and how the sisters got along, it was clear his wife was actually the favored one.

He couldn't figure out why his wife insisted on marrying him; maybe she truly liked him, but he also thought, if he had married the younger aunt, would the outcome have been different?

After Li Guangyuan left the room, Lin Jiayi leaned against the window sill and looked out through the glass. She didn't see Li Guangyuan going to his mother's room, but instead saw a flicker of light in the yard dimming and brightening.

Her fingers involuntarily clenched into a fist...

Chapter 172: Celebrating Spring Festival

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On the twenty-ninth, steam the buns; the whole night of the thirtieth, stew; on the first and second days, wander the streets...

The Bun Shop is closed for holidays, and Lin Chuxia has returned to the Qin Family to properly celebrate the Spring Festival.

This year, Qin Yang returned early, and the Qin Family had a new business, although the business belonged to Lin Chuxia, in this period, Qin Han and Zhang Guilan made more money at the Bun Shop than they did from selling vegetables all year.

It can be said that this is a reunion year, and also a year of harvest.

There's no need to mention the New Year goods at home, they were prepared early and abundantly.

Although they ate meat every day at the Bun Shop, for the New Year's celebration, especially during the northern Spring Festival, you have to fully stock up to feel like it's truly New Year's.

An entire pig's leg, half a rack of pork ribs, and in the village where they slaughter sheep, Mr. Qin even bought half a sheep.

Mrs. Qin had already filled the large tank in the courtyard with water early on, letting it freeze over, effectively creating a natural big freezer.

Things stored inside won't spoil and also won't be gnawed by rats.

On the thirtieth, according to local custom, they eat scooped dry rice in the morning.

At that time, there were no rice cookers, they partially cooked the rice in a large iron pot, and then scooped the rice out from the rice water, placing it in a steamer to continue steaming, called scooped dry rice.

In the rural areas of Shanhe Province, they rarely grow rice, and rice is relatively more expensive and hard to buy.

Especially during the planned economy era, they couldn't buy rice in the countryside as there were no quotas.

Even as markets opened up in recent years, rice remained scarce, and with people having little money, buying rice was done by the pound, mostly to make weak rice porridge at home.

Perhaps it's for this reason that eating a meal of white rice on New Year's Eve adds a ceremonial sense to the Spring Festival, indicating that the coming year will bring good days.

Lin Chuxia, in her past life, no longer followed these customs, but after rebirth, upon entering the kitchen in the morning and seeing her sister-in-law cooking rice, the whole house filled with the fragrance of rice, she felt somewhat bewildered.

She remembered that at her parental home, on the morning of the thirtieth when scooping dry rice, she could never eat a full bowl of it.

Her elder sister and younger brother, however, would always eat to their fill.

Later, after marrying into the Li Family, she continued to drink rice porridge.

By the time she started making money from the business and could eat rice freely, she no longer wanted to follow these customs during the festival.

Zhang Guilan, seeing Lin Chuxia enter the room, pointed to the side and said, "I'll prepare stewed pork with vermicelli later, I've already cut everything, sister-in-law, if you're idle chop some cabbage filling, after breakfast they are going to the cemetery, we usually prepare some dumplings to bring along every year."

"Alright," Lin Chuxia washed her hands to make dumplings.

Little Zhuangzhuang entered the kitchen at this moment, his eyes still sleepy, forcing them open, he asked Zhang Guilan, "Mom, Grandma said today I need to wash my face in every direction, but I usually wash my face twice and it's enough, Grandma said I need to go around, how many times do I have to wash?"

Seeing Lin Chuxia there, he also asked, "Little auntie, do you wash your face by turning around in circles? Why turn in circles?"

Lin Chuxia: "..."

She really hadn't, having long forgotten these customs.

Zhang Guilan smilingly replied to him, "Wash however your grandma told you to wash, it won't hurt to wash a couple more times, will it?"

"But don't people say to wash your butt three times and your face twice?"



Lin Chuxia looked at his sincerely troubled little expression, finding him utterly adorable.

Pinching his little cheek, "Then you wash four times, four directions, still an even number."

Zhuangzhuang thought for a bit and nodded, "That's the only way then, sigh, New Year's is just troublesome, Grandma also said not to touch scissors and needles, she won't even let me touch the window paper, little auntie, if I touch them, will I really get a sty?"

Lin Chuxia: "..."

Could she say it wouldn't happen?

"Do as you're told, you, normally you don't ever touch scissors or needles anyway, just listen to whatever your grandma says."

Zhang Guilan was getting ready to stew the dishes, feeling he was in the way, she sent him out.

After chopping the cabbage filling, Lin Chuxia began making the dumplings, not needing too many, just sixteen in total.

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Qin Yang came in while it was being prepared, "Need any help?"

"No need, it'll be ready soon," Lin Chuxia casually replied.

Thinking of something, she turned her head to look at him, noticing some damp hair on his forehead, probably just washed his face.

"How did you wash your face?"

Qin Yang's handsome face stiffened, his eyes uncomfortably shifted elsewhere before he calmly responded, "Just washed it like that, any problem?"

"Pfft..."

Zhang Guilan couldn't help but laugh out loud.

Without any mercy, she burst his bubble, "Sister-in-law, don't listen to him. Your elder brother at his age still rotates his face while washing every early morning of his thirties, and mom always reminds them in advance," she said it's a reminder, but it actually means watching over.

Her mother-in-law was a bit superstitious, she adhered to anything that had a good omen.

Lin Chuxia also laughed, feeling it was quite fitting; celebrating New Year like this was fun.

After breakfast, the men of the house went to offer sacrifices at the ancestors' graves, not even Little Zhuangzhuang was left behind.

Zhang Guilan cooked dumplings, served in four small plates, Mrs. Qin prepared four apples and four oranges, and Qin Han also took a bottle of wine.

After the men left, Mrs. Qin, Zhang Guilan, and Lin Chuxia began preparing for the New Year's Eve dinner.

This was the most elaborate meal of the year, with almost every household bringing out their best for this one table.

These days, life was tough, having a chicken or a pot of vegetables made for a decent New Year's Eve dinner.

This year, the Qin Family was well-prepared with their New Year goods, arranging hearty dishes like chicken, fish, pork knuckles, and ribs.

There were also fried bean puffs, fried meatballs, fried spare ribs... and previously fried goods were all laid out.

Nowadays, without vegetable greenhouses, radishes and cabbages were staples in the northern winter; Mrs. Qin planted some young garlic sprouts in the house, adding a bit of freshness.

Lastly, a big carp was to be stewed whole, symbolizing abundance throughout the year.

When the men returned from the grave offerings, the yard was filled with the aroma of food.

Little Zhuangzhuang drooled profusely, his eyes sparkling as he rushed towards the kitchen.

"Mom, what delicious food have you made? It smells so good."

It's often said that children are the happiest during New Year, with new clothes, new hats, and good food.

Mrs. Qin served him a small bowl of freshly fried meatballs as a snack, making the little guy blissfully happy.

At that moment, outside Qin Han called him, "Zhuangzhuang, come paste the Spring Festival couplets..."

"Okay, coming..."

Little chubby hands grabbed a meatball in each, stuffing another into his mouth, and hurriedly ran outside.

Mrs. Qin cautioned him to be careful while asking Lin Chuxia to go outside and have a look too.

Most of the meal was ready, and this being the daughter-in-law's first New Year with their family, they wanted her to spend more time with her son.

In the yard, seeing Qin Yang eagerly waiting, Lin Chuxia notified Mrs. Qin and Zhang Guilan, then washed her hands and joined him in the yard.

The Spring Festival couplets were personally written by Qin Yang, with dynamic strokes and flowing lines, all carrying auspicious messages.

"You watch, I'll do the pasting."

Each door frame needed a couplet pasted, a task for Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang, while the remaining small "Fu" character decals were handled by Qin Han and Zhuangzhuang.

The granary decorated with the character "Abundance," the water tank and cupboards with "Fortune," happiness upon looking up, and good fortune as you step out...

"Zhuangzhuang, this character will be pasted on your quilt tonight."

Qin Han, holding a red paper with writing, said to Little Zhuangzhuang.

### Chapter 173: Unique Anticipation

Little Zhuangzhuang, having finished pasting the Fu character in his hand, excitedly ran over, "Daddy, little uncle even wrote characters for me? What do these characters read? Does it mean I'm cute and smart?"

Lin Chuxia handed Qin Yang a horizontal scroll and glanced over there while she had the chance, her lips involuntarily twitching.

Fat pigs fill the pen!

Big brother really has a unique expectation.

After the lively and bustling New Year's Eve dinner, brothers Qin Han and Qin Yang took the whole family out into the courtyard to set off firecrackers.

At this time, there weren't that many types of fireworks, and in such small places like theirs, they had never even seen fireworks, but that didn't affect people's enthusiasm for the New Year.

The crackling sound of firecrackers, accompanied by the adults' laughter and the children's shouting, intertwined into the most wonderful notes of the human world...

Dumplings are made on the first day of the Lunar New Year.

The Qin Family prepared two types of fillings: one with cabbage and pork and the other with lamb and large green onions, both with more meat than vegetables.

As Mrs. Qin wrapped dumplings, she lamented, "Life really gets better year after year. If we turn back time five years, we wouldn't dare to eat as much as we want even with plain-flour dumplings on the first day, but now we can eat dumplings with meat fillings."

Zhang Guilan, while rolling out the dough, laughed and asked, "Mom, isn't it said that the filling for the dumplings on the first day shouldn't change? It's also said that eating meat would lead to having a troublemaker in the family. Aren't you afraid anymore?"

The mother-in-law truly believes in these things, and this year, she took the initiative to eat dumplings with meat filling, which surprised Zhang Guilan.

"What troublemaker or not, those were excuses people found when they couldn't afford to eat meat in the hard times. Our family won't have a troublemaker."

Mrs. Qin affirmed, then added.

"It's said that adding or losing family members can change, and this year, our Xiaxia came. We added a person; a little change won't hurt."

Zhang Guilan looked at Lin Chuxia, she had overestimated the mother-in-law; apparently, there were such considerations.

After eating the warm dumplings, couples Qin Han and Zhang Guilan, along with Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia, went out to pay New Year's visits.

This was a local tradition, and for Lin Chuxia, it was her first year going to pay New Year's visits as part of the Qin Family, Qin Yang's face was full of pride.

The Qin Family was a large clan, and in previous years, they would first rush to Uncle Qin's house to gather.

On the way, Lin Chuxia asked about Qin Yang's relationship with his brothers, especially with the couple Qin Wen and Ma Suyun.

Qin Yang furrowed his brows and thought about it; it seemed he got along well with his brothers, and he hadn't had much contact with Qin Wen's wife.

"What's up? Did she do something?"

The daughter-in-law isn't someone who makes a fuss about things. If Lin Chuxia brings up Ma Suyun now, it must mean the other side did something.

Seeing him like this, Lin Chuxia knew Qin Yang's temperament and shook her head, "It's nothing."

She just felt like Ma Suyun seemed to be targeting her.

If Ma Suyun's trip to the Bun Shop last time could be seen as a coincidence, then the words she said when they met again a few days ago in front of the third aunt's house definitely seemed targeted.

Since Qin Yang didn't know, Lin Chuxia also didn't want to worry him with these words.

Lin Chuxia's nature had always been to meet soldiers with generals and to cover water with earth, meaning if nobody stirred up trouble with her, all would be well; but if her bottom line was truly crossed, she definitely wouldn't be kind-hearted and lenient.

Zhang Guilan, overhearing their conversation, interjected.

"How would these men understand such matters?"

She walked over to Lin Chuxia's side and spoke in a lower voice.

"If you ask me, that couple is just jealous of the two of you. Qin Wen is about the same age as our second son, and they went to school the same year. Our second son was exceptional, skipped several grades, and later got into college. Although Qin Wen is not as good as our second son, after graduating from high school, he also managed to get a job at a hardware company. And since the second son rarely comes home due to work, whenever relatives and friends gather..."

She gave Lin Chuxia a knowing look, but did not explain.

Lin Chuxia understood as well. With Qin Yang not at home, everyone would naturally praise Qin Wen, who was present and seemed to have a promising future.

"Our second son has never compared himself with him, but I always feel that couple has always been in a rivalry with us. Before, when the second son was not married, every time we all sat together, you could hear them saying ambiguous and snide remarks. Now that the second son is married, and you are so capable, I bet that couple is green with envy."

As they arrived at Uncle Qin's door, Qin Han warned, "It's the New Year, why talk about all this?"

Zhang Guilan reassured Lin Chuxia with a pat on the arm, "You don't need to worry, even if they are envious, they can't do much about it."

Lin Chuxia nodded her head.

Uncle Qin lived in the same yard as Qin Liang, the eldest son of the Qin Family. The group went straight into Uncle Qin's house and first offered their New Year's greetings to Uncle Qin and his wife.

Here, there was no need to kneel for New Year's greetings; just saying a few auspicious phrases was enough.

Uncle Qin's wife took out some peanuts and melon seeds to welcome everyone to sit down.

Aside from Uncle Qin and his wife, Qin Liang's family was already in the house, as well as Qin Wen and his wife Qin Wu, with Qin Jiang's couple yet to arrive.

Everyone was not in a hurry, chatting and waiting at the same time.

After all, celebrating New Year's is just about sitting together, talking, and having a lively time, no matter where it is.

When Qin Jianjun saw Qin Yang come in, he crowded around his uncle, asking him all sorts of questions.

He has always admired his uncle. Last month, when their unit was featured in the newspaper, Qin Jianjun had seen it.

When he brought it up, the others in the room looked over as well.

Qin Yang casually nodded, "Yes, it was our project team."

"Uncle, as far as I remember, you are the leader of your project team. Doesn't that mean what was designed was by you?"



Qin Jianjun clenched his fist in excitement.

Qin Yang nodded again.

"Yeah, I just knew it, uncle, you're really awesome."

Qin Liang's focus was different though; he looked at his arm. "That's how you got injured, wasn't it? How's the recovery now?"

His injury was known to all his brothers, who had also visited him at the Qin Family home.

Qin Yang immediately moved his arm a little and smiled, "It's completely healed."

Qin Liang's wife, Qian Chuncao, also sighed, "Oh my, you should take good care of yourself from now on. That arm of yours is not like anyone else's. All the knowledge from a university education depends on that arm for writing and drawing."

"Thank you, sister-in-law, I got it."

As a rural native, Qian Chuncao felt a little embarrassed about Qin Yang's formally polite thanks.

She immediately waved her hand, "What are you thanking me for? If anyone should be saying thanks, it should be me thanking your wife. Lihua has been working at your wife's place, earning a salary without having to be exposed to wind and sun. She's even gotten fairer. Last year, the matchmakers were so diligent, eager to find Lihua a match."

In the countryside, marriage is a big affair. Lihua was just 19 that year, the right age for matchmakers to get busy.

Zhou Hongmei immediately inquired, "Is there a suitable one?"

Suyun didn't hide anything, as it was all family. "I've heard there are one or two good prospects. I'm thinking of arranging a meeting for the kids after the New Year. Lihua isn't very willing, though; the candidates are farmers too. We are farmers ourselves, so what's wrong with

#### Chapter 174: Not Interested

"Big sister-in-law, what you said is not quite right," Ma Suyun took over the conversation, "Our Lihua is now working and earning a salary, how can she go and find someone who's just a farmer?"

"But..."

Qian Chuncao wanted to say that selling buns can't last forever, it's not a secure job.

Right now, Qin Lihua is at home as a bachelorette, she can still earn a salary selling buns at the Bun Shop, but once she's married, pregnant, and having kids, will her in-laws let her go to work?

Moreover, someone who sells buns for a private business, would urban folks even consider that respectable?

Who among them has the luck of Qin Juan?

Zhang Guilan, on the other hand, thought of a candidate, a member of their own circle, and immediately suggested him.

"Why don't I play matchmaker for you? I think our Bun Shop's Su Wensong is quite a good match; although he's a bit older, he's spirited and doesn't look his age, and most importantly, he's capable..."

"Don't even go there, second sister-in-law, are you sure you're not just pushing Lihua into a fire pit? The man you mentioned, isn't he older than elder brother by no small margin? Lihua is your own niece."

Zhang Guilan hadn't finished speaking when she was interrupted by Ma Suyun.

Her face showed a hint of discomfort with this interjection.

It was true that Su Wensong was not young, but she genuinely felt him to be a decent person, one who seemed capable of taking care of others.

He was outstanding in his abilities, highly valued by his brother and sister-in-law, and his future development was sure to be promising.

He had just Granny Su at home, and Granny Su was a very nice person.

If Lihua were to marry him, she'd surely be going to a life of comfort.

Qian Chuncao wasn't familiar with the people from the Bun Shop, at first she was quite interested when she heard Zhang Guilan talking about introducing a colleague to her daughter.

But now, hearing Ma Suyun's words, she didn't know who was right and involuntarily looked towards Lin Chuxia.

Lin Chuxia felt that Qin Lihua didn't match up to Su Wensong, but who can be sure in matters of affection—a mutual singlehood, if Zhang Guilan truly wanted to make a match, she had no objections.

But now with Ma Suyun's comments, she herself was a bit upset.

She merely said, "Lihua knows Su Wensong, do you have any opinions on this?"

Everyone's gaze turned towards Qin Lihua again.

Qin Lihua didn't know what to say at the moment, thinking of Su Wensong's forthright and serious disposition, she slightly furrowed her brows, "I... I'm not sure, I've always seen Manager Su as an uncle."

Well, that meant she wasn't interested.

Zhang Guilan gave an embarrassed smile, and just then, Qin Jiang and his wife Xu Yun came over with their son Qin Jianye, moving past that topic.

Upon entering, Qin Jiang took a seat next to Qin Yang.

After Qin Jiang got married, he moved out to live independently—his yard was the farthest from the old Qin Family house, and also far from Qin Yang's place.

This visit was just the second time the brothers had met.

Seeing that Qin Yang's arm was no longer in a sling, he showed concern for his injury and, finding out it was nothing serious, let his son compete in arm-wrestling with Qin Yang.

Of course, Qin Yang won without any suspense.

Little Zhuangzhuang, seeing his cousin arm-wrestling with his uncle, also clamored to challenge Qin Yang.

With Niuniu cheering on the side, the atmosphere in the room quickly became lively.

Qin Wen watched as everyone rallied around Qin Yang, even though he himself also worked away from home and rarely interacted with these brothers, he now couldn't get a word in.

Earlier, before Qin Yang had arrived, Qin Wu was also pulling at him to chat about all sorts of things.

His fourth brother, as always, loved to be the center of attention.

Noticing Qin Han on the side, Qin Wen raised his voice a notch.

"Second brother, I've heard that your Bun Shop is doing great business; working at the Hardware Company counter, I often hear my colleagues wanting to go there for buns. It's gotten me curious to try them out too."

Qin Han replied with a chuckle, "It's not really my Bun Shop; it belongs to your fourth sister-in-law. But if you want to try, feel free to come over anytime, I'm there every day."

Qin Wen immediately said, "Look how you talk, second brother. You and fourth brother are blood brothers, his wife's shop is practically yours, no need to make such a clear distinction. I heard the fourth sister-in-law is so busy she can barely keep up with her several shops."

This time, Qin Han just smiled without further explanation.

Brothers should clear accounts, and Qin Wen's words clearly intended to stir discord between them.

He's not articulate, knowing any response to Qin Wen would provoke further comments, he simply chose not to speak.

He knows very well what kind of person his brother's wife is, so he doesn't worry about her overthinking anything.

Seeing Qin Han fall silent, Qin Wen turned his gaze to Qin Wu.

He grinned, showing off his white teeth, looking carefree, "Wu, you and your wife are working at Fourth Sister-in-law's shop, you definitely don't earn as much as Second Brother and his wife, right?"

Qin Wu calmly said, "I don't earn as much as Second Brother, he's the manager, in charge of the entire shop. My job is a lot less demanding than his."

"What's the matter, Fourth Sister-in-law doesn't trust you to manage things? Doesn't she have two shops? I think it would be nice if each brother managed one shop, isn't that good?"

A flicker of displeasure passed through Qin Wu's eyes, but since it was the New Year, nobody showed it.

He still spoke with a smile, "I don't have Second Brother's abilities. If Fourth Sister-in-law let me manage things, that would be putting a square peg in a round hole. I'm doing fine as it is, standing by the window and selling things, much like your job."

"You're comparing yourself to me? My work is at the Hardware Company..."

"Don't you also stand behind a counter selling things?" Qin Wu's wife, Zhou Hongmei, had long been unable to stand Qin Wen's words.

Her husband considered the fraternal bonds and couldn't fall out with him.

But she, as his sister-in-law, speaking a few words isn't a problem.

As soon as she spoke, Ma Suyun didn't like hearing it.

"Selling things is not the same as selling things. My family's Qin Wen just got a raise, now he makes 40 yuan a month. How much can you make selling buns?"

"Coincidentally, I also make 40 a month. Fourth Sister-in-law says I do well and even gives me bonuses. There are holiday allowances, and Qin Wu got commissions for getting business before New Year..."

It's not nice to say such things, but when she belittle the Bun Shop, Zhou Hongmei disliked it.

"Bragging. What sort of business trips would a bun shop need," Ma Suyun didn't believe at all.

But whether she believed it or not, no one was going to explain it to her, and Zhou Hongmei couldn't be bothered with her.

Anyway, those working for the Fourth Sister-in-law at the Bun Shop knew the situation.

Except for Qin Wen and his spouse, only Qin Jiang and his spouse at the gathering didn't work for Fourth Sister-in-law. Their position was different from the others.

After more conversation and once everyone arrived, they began to visit houses in the village for New Year's greetings.

In Qin Family Village, the Qin Family was a major household; wherever there was an elder in the family, they would pay a visit.

This tour lasted half the day, and after lunch at home, they visited a few more distant families in the afternoon.

Since their relation was somewhat distant, the daughters-in-law from Uncle's family didn't go in the afternoon, but Lin Chuxia, who was in her first year of marriage, went to all of them.

Zhang Guilan and Zhou Hongmei were there to accompany the new sister-in-law and also made the rounds.

Without outsiders, Zhou Hongmei was still thinking about the morning's events.

"I used to think Qin Wen's wife was just a bit arrogant, but now she's getting even more...", she struggled to describe, "Thankfully, we are only related as uncle's wives," no need for too much interaction and no financial ties.

Zhang Guilan also nodded, "Knowing she is like that, as long as we get by on the surface is fine."

Lin Chuxia understood that this was a reminder for her. Mainly, Ma Suyun and Qin Wen were targeting her and Qin Yang, so she smiled to show she understood.

Meanwhile, Ma Suyun was still in Qin Liang's courtyard; with Qian Chuncao tidying up the house, she pulled Qin Lihua aside.

"Auntie, what do you need to talk to me about?" Qin Lihua, seeing her act so mysteriously, followed her gaze around.

Ma Suyun lowered her voice, "Tell me the truth Auntie, how much does your Second Uncle and Fifth Uncle make in a month at the Bun Shop?"

She had been pondering this all day, assuming they were just volunteering for Lin Chuxia.

They were all relatives after all, how could they possibly be strict about wages?

But seeing Zhou Hongmei's smug demeanor again made her uneasy.

Qin Lihua, not overthinking, replied, as Ma Suyun is a close aunt to her, a relation even closer than that with Second or Fifth Uncle, and she didn't think salary was a secret.

"We all make a base salary of 40 working in the shop, Second Uncle is the manager, so he probably makes 20 more..."

"Base salary of 40? Is there more?" Ma Suyun's voice rose nearly to a shriek.

Thinking how her own husband's salary also just recently hit 40 yuan, she had been looking forward to bragging about it during the holiday, and now this little girl, Qin Lihua, is making 40 yuan a month?

"It wasn't this much when we started, it increased last month. If you do well, there are bonuses. I got a 10 yuan bonus this month, Fourth Aunt is very good to the employees."

This was something Qin Lihua and the shop staff were very satisfied with, and nobody spoke ill of Lin Chuxia.

Chapter 175: She Goes to Ask Lin Chuxia for Help?



Seeing Ma Suyun's complexion turning uglier, Qin Lihua couldn't help but ask, "Auntie Liu, what's wrong with you? Do you also want to work at Auntie Si's shop? You should talk to Auntie Si, she will agree, Auntie Si is a very nice person."

Ma Suyun forced a smile.

Her going to ask Lin Chuxia for a job?

Not to mention she didn't want to, if her family's Qin Wen found out about this, wouldn't he divorce her?

No one understood better than her what kind of existence Qin Yang was in Qin Wen's heart.

And she would definitely not bow her head to that couple.

She would rather draw circles at home and curse them, wishing their business would bottom out.

Looking up and seeing Qin Lihua still looking at her with a puzzled face, she smiled again, "Just now, your mom and them were talking about helping you find a match, I see you seem to have someone in mind?"

"Auntie Liu... What are you talking about?"

Qin Lihua playfully rebuked, yet her small face turned red.

Seeing this, Ma Suyun guessed she was right and continued, "Hey, don't be shy with Auntie Liu. Tell me, Auntie Liu will give you some advice. Don't worry, Auntie Liu is not like your Auntie Er, who only introduces you to old men. I think she's up to no good. After all, I consider you like my own daughter."

"Actually, Manager Su is indeed different from the typical old men."

Although she really didn't fancy Su Wensong, it had to be said that Su Wensong's conditions were not bad, and everyone working at the Bun Shop thought he was impressive, second only to Auntie Si.

"Alright, Auntie Liu knows you're clever, but just because you're clever doesn't mean you can let people treat you like a fool. Marriage is a lifetime matter, we can't be controlled by them," Ma Suyun pursed her lips and curiously asked, "Tell Auntie Liu, who have you taken a fancy to? If you really have someone, tell Auntie Liu, I'll help you."

A figure suddenly flashed before Qin Lihua's eyes, but admitting it...

"Auntie Liu, it's not... I just..."

Seeing her hesitating, Ma Suyun said, "What's the use of hiding it from me? Are you still counting on your mother to find you someone from the village who farms the land?"

As far as she knew, besides the old man Su Wensong at Lin Chuxia's shop, there were also a couple of riff-raffs.

She didn't understand what the fourth son's wife was thinking, hiring such people to work in the shop, not afraid of bringing bad luck.

If Lihua really fancied such a person...

Ma Suyun thought of her sister-in-law, who looked easy to talk to, but was not a pushover.

If she led her daughter astray, wouldn't she have torn into the fourth son's wife?

She patted Qin Lihua's hand, "Don't you trust Auntie Liu? Don't worry, Auntie Liu will definitely help you."

Qin Lihua lowered her head, her small face blushing, and her voice barely audible, "It's just... I think Cai Jun from Auntie Si's shop is quite nice, but I just think he's... good..."

"Cai Jun? The one who always delivers cooked food to your shop?"

Ma Suyun often ran into town for nothing and was close to Qin Lihua, frequently inquiring about the Bun Shop, so she knew quite a bit about its affairs.

The one who delivered cooked food was one of the riff-raffs Lin Chuxia used.

Qin Lihua hurriedly shook her head, "Not him, Cai Jun isn't in our shop nor from the cooked food side, he is in the main branch, ah Auntie Liu... stop asking, I just find him... and he's quite familiar with Manager Sun..."

"You don't have to say, Auntie Liu has been through it all, I understand," Ma Suyun acted like she knew everything and was only thinking of Qin Lihua's best interest, "He's familiar with Manager Sun, does that mean they are in a relationship?"

Qin Lihua shook her head, "I haven't heard anything like that."

"Then it's settled? Working in the same shop, everyone is familiar with everyone, don't worry about those things. Since you like him, you should pursue him. Isn't freedom in love the trend now?"

"But... I am a woman..."

"What does being a woman have to do with anything? As the old saying goes, 'for a man pursuing a woman, mountains stand in the way; for a woman pursuing a man, only a layer of gauze stands in the way.' Our Lihua is so beautiful, as long as you're willing, what kind of man can you not pursue?"

Seeing Qin Lihua still hesitant, Ma Suyun whispered, "Don't worry, Auntie Liu is here. She will definitely help you."

The small courtyard was tranquil and peaceful, decorated with remnants of firecrackers, adding a festive atmosphere of the New Year.

Granny Su was making dough by the window and smiled even more when she saw her grandson enter in new clothes.

Her grandson had returned to the city a year ago, and for most of this past year, he had been working with Lin Chuxia, spared from weathering the sun and wind. His skin, previously tanned and rough from the countryside sun, had recovered. He was starting to resemble his father more and more—in his composure, a touch of scholarly elegance.

Clothes make the man just as a saddle makes the horse. With money in hand, he took care of his appearance. Such a grandson stood out even more among the crowd.

"Granny, what are you smiling about? Why aren't you wearing the new clothes I bought for you?"

To celebrate the New Year, one should wear new clothes and hats.

This year, Su Wensong had made some money and bought a complete new set for Granny Su.

Granny Su chuckled, "At my age, it doesn't matter what I wear. You better save your money; there's no need to spend it on me. Wait until you get married and have children, and then buy them new clothes."

"Granny, I have the money, even enough to buy more new clothes and hats. Just wear them with ease."

Granny Su gave him a look, "You know that's not what I'm talking about. I saw a box on the table in your room, quite a nice one. Were you planning to give it to someone? Didn't get a chance to give it away?"

She observed her grandson's expression as she spoke and, seeing his ears redden, knew her guess was right.

Some frustration, feeling like she couldn't make steel out of iron, "You are colleagues, and she has helped Granny so much. It's only proper to give her a gift for the festival—to thank her on behalf of Granny."

Ah, what a tongue-tied boy, driving this old lady mad.

"You said her and Xiao Cai, but I don't see anything between them. Are you overthinking it?"

"It was her elder brother who told me. Don't mention it anymore, Granny, I know what's in my heart."

Hearing this, Granny Su felt a tinge of disappointment, frustrated that her grandson wasn't showing initiative.

"You see, Xiao Cai hasn't been here long, but you've known each other for a while. Now look what happened; a good girl has been snatched up by someone else. What will you do? Let me tell you, this year you must bring me a bride. Granny's health is failing, and if you drag your feet, I may never live to see my great-grandchildren."

"Granny, why bring this up during the New Year celebrations? I will listen to you, and I will definitely bring you a bride this year."

Hearing this promise, Granny Su finally showed a smile again.

"That's right. You're almost 30, and you have a job. It's time to think about settling down for good. Right, later on go visit Uncle Qi's family. Aunt Qi loves matchmaking. Visit their house more often, and I'll talk to Aunt Qi myself—I guarantee she'll find you a beautiful bride."

"Okay, I got it."

Su Wensong nodded in agreement and helped Granny Su make dumplings.

Suddenly Granny Su remembered something, "During this New Year, you didn't visit your uncle's house, did you?"

"No."

Su Wensong lowered his head, a glint of coldness in his eyes as he mentioned Su Dazhuang.

"Granny, don't mention it. Even if I were left without a single relative, I wouldn't acknowledge Su Dazhuang as an uncle."

Granny Su agreed, "Such a relative is not worth acknowledging. I heard that Su Wenmao worked in the machinery factory for most of the year without being made permanent. The relationship he talked about before fell through. Su Wenmao got a shock from that, lost all drive, and now loafes around at home, eating and drinking—serves him right."

#### Chapter 176: Teasing the Wife

Su Wensong unexpectedly glanced at Granny Su.

Granny Su had always been kind and gentle to everyone, it was the first time he heard her say such extreme words.

He said with a teasing smile, "Granny, what about your upbringing?"

Granny Su snorted coldly, "You can't have manners when dealing with that kind of person."

She looked at her grandson with eyes full of affection.

"Wensong, remember, you don't have to be high-minded all the time, whether you should act superior depends on who you're facing. If it's just a fly, you don't have to tolerate its filth; if it's a rat, you don't have to be lenient with its thieving nature. Tolerance is the practice of self-cultivation, but occasionally quibbling tells others that you're not a fool. The former shows your magnanimity, the latter sets the rules. I have manners that don't harm others, but that's not a reason for you to harm me. I can smile and reason with you, but I can also turn my face and set the rules with you."

"Granny, I understand."

...

When he returned home in the evening, Mrs. Qin brought up that their eldest daughter, Qin Juan, should be coming back.

Qin Juan was Qin Han's sister, and Lin Chuxia had met her when she got married.

Qin Juan married a year after Qin Han to a genuine city resident who worked in a government agency.

In the past few years, her husband was transferred to the city for work, and they took Qin Juan and their child with them.

When it came to Qin Juan, there was no one among the Qin family's relatives and friends who wasn't envious.

"It's all about fate. Your elder sister's marriage was arranged by Yangyang's granny when she was still alive. She and Wenbin's granny came from the same village and clan. At that time, given the Zhang family's circumstances, no matchmaker approached them. Wenbin's granny had to ask Yangyang's granny for help, and seeing that Wenbin was a decent young man, Yangyang's granny accepted this marriage proposal. At the time, many people were pessimistic, thinking that your granny had pushed your sister into a pit of fire. But who knew that within a year of their marriage, a policy came out and the Zhang family benefited from the policy, making it seem like our family was reaching above our station."

Mrs. Qin spoke of her daughter with a smiling face, obviously missing her as she hadn't been home for half a year.

"Mom, listen to yourself, what's all this talk about reaching above our station? Juanzi is considered the beauty of our ten-mile radius. I think it's Wenbin who didn't match up to her," Zhang Guilan disagreed.

Lin Chuxia also nodded; although she didn't interact much with her sister-in-law, she could tell that the latter was beautiful and gentle, a truly good person.

Mrs. Qin cheerfully agreed.

If there ever was a thought that her daughter was marrying above her station, it was because the Zhang family all had good grain rations and decent jobs, and she worried that her daughter would suffer there.

Nowadays, the Qin family was doing well too, with both Qin brothers' lives getting better and better.

No matter what, having brothers in her maternal family always gave a woman confidence in her marital home.

The next morning, Mrs. Qin and Zhang Guilan got up early to prepare for the arrival of relatives.

Lin Chuxia, upon hearing the commotion outside, was about to get up when an arm pulled her back, enveloping her in a warm embrace.

Qin Yang's voice was muffled, "Stay with me a little longer."

"But your sister and the others are coming back soon," Lin Chuxia really didn't want to lie in.

This guy had enough energy to 'hunt tigers in the mountains' at night, but was acting like a caterpillar in the morning.

That's not right, even caterpillars would have woken up by now, which gave her a slight sense of crisis.

Qin Yang still didn't let go, "I will have to return to the unit in a few days."

Lin Chuxia turned in his arms to face him, ready to reason with him, "You use that line at least three times every night, Mr. Qin. As an engineer, can't you have the most basic professional integrity? Be precise. Do you also go about your engineering work this carelessly?"

Qin Yang immediately opened his eyes, looked at Lin Chuxia, smiled, and then pulled her under him and kissed her.



"My professional integrity has gone to the dogs when it comes to you, Lin Chuxia. What should I do if I can't bear to leave you to go to work?"

Can't bear to leave, yet unable to take her with him, he could only make the most of the limited time for happier things.

The two of them fooled around for a while longer before getting up, by which time Mrs. Qin had already prepared breakfast.

During the Spring Festival, they would eat together.

After breakfast, Mrs. Qin took Zhuangzhuang out, saying she was going for a stroll.

Qin Yang squatted next to Lin Chuxia and whispered complaints while they washed clothes together.

"My mom is probably going to wait for my sister at the village entrance. She said before that she didn't want to marry her daughter off too far, and it ended up not being far, but who knew my brother-in-law's job would relocate. My elder sister can't ride a bike, and taking the bus is inconvenient, so she can hardly make it home a few times a year, not much better than me."

After finishing, he told Lin Chuxia, "Work might be a bit better this year, and I'll come to see you if I have time."

"Mm, work is important, and if you're busy there, I can visit you..."

"Then you must come."

Before Lin Chuxia could even finish talking, Qin Yang said eagerly.

Getting an eye roll from Lin Chuxia, he smiled and picked more clothes out of the basin to wash.

He seemed about to lift a black piece of underwear.

With a "slap," Lin Chuxia smacked the back of his hand.

She hissed, "Put that down, I don't need your help."

And glanced around guiltily.

Qin Yang laughed even harder, "We're a married couple, what's wrong with helping you wash some undergarments, even if it's..."

"Get lost!"

Seeing his cheeky grin, Lin Chuxia found it hard to connect him with the cold and aloof man he used to be.

She didn't even need to guess what he was about to say.

Seeing her getting annoyed, Qin Yang regretfully withdrew his hand.

But the thing that made him happiest now that he was home was teasing his wife.

His young wife, who was so strict and rule-abiding in front of the Bun Shop staff.

She still often acted like a know-it-all when facing him.

Only when she was provoked did she show a bit of a young woman's coquettishness.

After washing the clothes, they hung the large pieces outside and the small ones in their room.

Then, voices came from outside; Qin Juan had returned.

When Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang got married, it was only Qin Juan and her child who came; this time, the family of three were all here.

Qin Yang, Qin Han, Lin Chuxia, and Zhang Guilan all came out to greet them, even Mr. Qin showed up.

Lin Chuxia saw her legendary brother-in-law Zhang Wenbin for the first time.

He wasn't tall, barely over one meter seventy, with fairer skin compared to Qin Han and the others who worked in the fields all day, a side-parted hairstyle, and wearing glasses.

His looks were not particularly outstanding, and he had a slightly portly figure, but he smiled like a good-natured fellow.

He wore a proper Zhongshan suit with a black cotton overcoat on top.

Compared to him, Qin Juan looked rather thin.

Her slim figure was clad in a maroon cold-resistant jacket.

The jacket was a bit large for her, making it seem loose and making her look even more fragile.

Chapter 177: Eldest Sister Qin Juan

"Chuxia, this is your brother-in-law."

"Wenbin, this is Yangyang's wife, Chuxia."

This was their first meeting, with Mrs. Qin formally introducing Zhang Wenbin and Lin Chuxia.

Lin Chuxia smiled graciously, "Brother-in-law, you must be tired from the journey, it's cold outside, please come inside and have a seat."

Zhang Wenbin caught a glimpse of astonishment in Lin Chuxia's eyes and chuckled, "No wonder Qin Yang hasn't been in a hurry to find a wife for so many years, his standards are quite high! Chuxia, with your looks, we couldn't find many like you in Ancheng County."

"Brother-in-law, you flatter me too much. Speaking of beauty, isn't there one right by your side? My eldest sister is famously beautiful in Qin Family Village."

Lin Chuxia wasn't exaggerating; members of the Qin Family were all quite attractive, Qin Juan with her oval face, big eyes, double eyelids, and striking features. Even the traces of age couldn't diminish her beauty.

Zhang Wenbin gave a dry laugh and glanced at Qin Juan beside him, "Yes, yes..."

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Mrs. Qin invited everyone into the house.

Lin Chuxia noticed the slender little girl standing beside Qin Juan.

The child had inherited Qin Juan's good looks and was very pretty, though a bit frail, perhaps taking after her mother as well.

At that moment, her big eyes were curiously looking all around.

When her gaze met Lin Chuxia's, Lin Chuxia gave her a big smile and waved at her.

The little girl instinctively hid behind Qin Juan, tightly grasping her mother's clothes.

Qin Juan noticed her actions and brought her to the front, pointing to Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia, "Ningning, this is your little uncle and aunt. You've met them before when we last visited grandma's house. They were the bride and groom then; don't you remember? Come on, say hello."

Zhang Ningning didn't speak, just kept hiding behind Qin Juan.

Qin Juan pulled her back, insisting she greet them.

Seeing the child was really shy, Lin Chuxia said, "Eldest sister, no need to rush her. Ningning will naturally call out to us once she's more familiar."

Qin Juan pursed her lips, appearing a bit embarrassed.

Zhang Wenbin turned around and said in a mild tone, "I think it's just because you spoil her too much. Such a big child, yet she can't even greet people."

As soon as he finished speaking, Zhang Ningning burst into tears, tightly pulling on Qin Juan's clothes and sobbing loudly.

Mrs. Qin felt terribly distressed and hugged her precious grandchild, also expressing her displeasure.

"You only come back a few times a year; it's no wonder Ningning is shy around you. She's so young, what can she remember? Even if she remembers now, she'll forget again if you don't visit for another year or so."

This time, Zhang Wenbin responded amicably, "Mother-in-law is right. I'll ask Juanzi to bring the child to see you more often."

Inside, Mr. Qin invited Zhang Wenbin to sit while Zhang Guilan served tea to everyone.

Zhang Wenbin turned to Qin Yang and began talking about his work unit, mentioning the achievements he had read about in the newspaper and asking if it involved Qin Yang's projects.

Qin Yang didn't hide anything, answering any question Zhang Wenbin asked.

These are all things reported in the newspapers, nothing confidential or unspeakable.

Men are talking while women head to the kitchen to prepare lunch, also sharing some private chats.

With no outsiders around, Mrs. Qin looks at her daughter with a heart full of concern.

"Why do you look thinner? Are you sick, or are the Zhang family treating you poorly?"

"Mom, no, I'm doing well at the Zhang family. I just caught a cold during the winter, lost my appetite for a few days, but I'm better now. With the New Year here, I'll eat well and regain my strength quickly," Qin Juan said with a smile to her mother.

Mrs. Qin still worried, "You said the same last time. Six months have passed, and instead of getting better, you've gotten thinner. I'm worried about your health. I was thinking, Ningning is growing up, and you're still young; you and Wenbin could have another child. I know your mother-in-law wants a grandson. It's not just to shut her up, having two kids means they'll have each other's company. But with your health like this, how can you think of having children?"

Mrs. Qin and her peers still hold old beliefs, raising children to secure their old age. Not necessarily favoring boys over girls, but they do feel having a son means having security.

Qin Juan was briefly taken aback, then smiled again, "Mom, why think of more children? Have you forgotten what Wenbin does? Now they promote family planning, and people like him need to be role models. Having a second child could get him fired."

Mrs. Qin sighed heavily upon hearing this, "Oh, you should have gotten on with it when Ningning was one or two years old."

Qin Juan didn't respond, and Lin Chuxia couldn't tell if it was her impression, but Qin Juan's smile seemed bitter.

Little Zhuangzhuang ran into the kitchen, wanting to take Ningning out to play.

Ningning stayed close to Qin Juan, even with Little Zhuangzhuang's enthusiastic invitation, she hesitated and didn't want to go out.

Mrs. Qin shook her head again, "Ningning is really too timid. You city kids are always confined at home and end up losing your courage. Isn't Ningning already five? Even Niuniu from the Xiaowus, who's two years younger, is so daring. Don't confine her too much; it's good for boys and girls alike to be braver."

"Yes, Mom, I understand."

During lunch, everyone gathered around a big table, the men drinking alcohol and the women not rushing to eat their main food.

Lin Chuxia bought some mini champagne and sodas.

Mini champagne is a kind of sparkling wine, with alcohol content similar to wine, which Lin Chuxia and Zhang Guilan both could enjoy.

When offered to Qin Juan, she declined, "I really can't drink this; it makes me dizzy."

"What's wrong with a bit of dizziness? I get dizzy too. At worst, we can sleep it off after eating. Don't rush off this time, stay at home for a few days."

Zhang Guilan warmly invited her, hearing which Mrs. Qin also looked over.

"Stay at home for a few days this time, Yangyang is also here, and we could have a good talk."

Mrs. Qin now had a lot to talk to her daughter about—how the family was doing well, and although her daughter had married and moved out, she remained a part of the family.

She hadn't discussed with her daughter about the second daughter-in-law's business or the eldest son and his wife's jobs.

And as a mother, she naturally had her biases; the family was doing well now and bought a lot of goods for the Lunar New Year. She wanted her daughter to spend some good time at home to 'replenish' her.

Life at the in-laws' could never compare to the freedom at her mother's home. Seeing her daughter getting thinner and thinner, how could a mother not be heartbroken?

Qin Juan narrowed her eyes slightly, her smile still gentle, "Let's talk about that later. There are also matters at home to attend to, and if I don't go back, Wenbin would have to come here. He needs to visit during the New Year, too."

"That's easy to solve. You don't need Wenbin to come, let your elder brother take you back," Zhang Guilan suggested.

Qin Juan smiled again, picked up some cooked food with her chopsticks, and changed the subject, "Sister-in-law, try this; I had a piece earlier, it tastes really good."

#### Chapter 178: Greasy

Mentioning Zhang Guilan, her spirits lifted, "If you like the taste, eat more. This was made by my sister-in-law, and we often eat it at home."

"Made by sister-in-law?" Qin Juan looked towards Lin Chuxia.

Zhang Guilan's voice was quite loud, and Zhang Wenbin also looked over.

"Our sister-in-law also has such skills. No wonder Qin Yang, you lucky guy, I was wondering which deli made this tasty food, not realizing it was made at home."



Seeing Lin Chuxia sipping champagne, Zhang Wenbin raised his glass, "Here, I'll drink one with sister-in-law. Brother-in-law has already downed his, feel free."

Beside them, Qin Yang frowned slightly, and Lin Chuxia also paused for a moment.

For Zhang Wenbin, who was meeting Lin Chuxia for the first time as a brother-in-law, this gesture was somewhat inappropriate.

Yet, holding his glass, he seemed unaware of the impropriety, and it would be rude for Lin Chuxia to not give him face.

After a moment, she still raised her glass, "Meeting brother-in-law for the first time, and it's the start of the New Year, let's drink together."

With this stepping stone, everyone picked up their glasses and took a sip.

Zhang Wenbin actually drained his glass in one go, showed the empty glass to Lin Chuxia, and slightly raised an eyebrow with a smug expression.

Lin Chuxia acted as if she did not see it.

Zhang Guilan was already picking up a soda to refill for Qin Juan, while Lin Chuxia also picked up the champagne bottle, topping up for Zhang Guilan and then herself.

Then, Zhang Wenbin spoke again, "I see sister-in-law can hold her liquor, why not have a shot of white liquor..."

"Wenbin," Qin Juan interrupted him, "You're drunk, stop talking nonsense. How can she drink hard liquor?"

"Who's drunk? I can judge better than you, she..."

"Brother-in-law, Chuxia doesn't drink," Qin Yang sternly interrupted him.

Zhang Wenbin glanced at Qin Yang, then chuckled, "I was just joking with sister-in-law, didn't mean to scare you guys."

Lin Chuxia finally understood her initial feeling when she first saw Zhang Wenbin; although he was dressed decently, something about him was not quite appealing.

Now she understood; despite Zhang Wenbin's outward refined appearance, he actually seemed somewhat sleazy.

Fortunately, the episode passed quickly, and the meal went smoothly.

Under the attentive care of Mrs. Qin, Qin Juan and Little Ningning ate quite a lot.

After dinner, everyone chatted for a while, and Zhang Wenbin suggested going home.

They had come by public bus; the bus from the city to Ancheng County only ran twice a day, and they would miss it if they were late.

Mrs. Qin still wanted to keep Qin Juan and Ningning at home for a few days.

Ningning, now familiar with the Qin Family, looked at Qin Juan eagerly when grandma suggested they stay for a few more days.

Qin Juan pursed her lips and before saying anything, Zhang Wenbin quickly said, "They won't bother you here, mother-in-law. Besides, I wouldn't feel at ease if they went back by themselves."

"Staying at one's own house is hardly bothering anyone," Qin Han disagreed, "Let them stay. When they've had enough, I'll take them back."

"No need to trouble my big brother," Zhang Wenbin said, turning to look at Qin Juan, "Right, wife? With spring coming, they should be starting to plant vegetable seedlings, right? They're all busy people; we shouldn't interrupt their lives."

Qin Han wanted to say more, but Qin Juan spoke, "Mom, big brother, I won't stay. There are many relatives at home for the Spring Festival; it's better if we go back. I'll visit you after a while."

With that said, it was hard for Mrs. Qin to insist, "Then come after a while, and bring Ningning with you."

"I will, Mom."

"I'll take them to the bus station."

They had a handcart at home, and Qin Han went to push the cart.

It was only after the group walked far away that Mrs. Qin let out a slow sigh.

"Your eldest sister rarely stays at her mother's house after getting married; now that they have moved to the city, we hardly see them twice a year."

Zhang Guilan comforted, "Mom, Juanzi is enjoying her life with her husband in the city. Look around our village, who has her luck? She married a city man and even moved to the city for work. I've heard the city is much bigger than our county town."

"What good does being big do, when they are so far from family? If she is mistreated, we wouldn't even know."

"We'll write to them more often from now on. Besides, the marriage was solicited by Old Mrs. Zhang, they wouldn't dare to mistreat Juanzi... Qin Han and his brothers wouldn't let Zhang Wenbin off the hook..."

Zhang Guilan supported Mrs. Qin as they walked back, continuing to comfort her.

Just as Lin Chuxia was about to head back, she spotted a familiar figure in the distance.

Lin Jiadong saw his second sister and began pushing his bicycle toward her.

"Second Sister, Brother-in-law!"

"Why did you come here?"

"Mom asked me to check why you hadn't visited home. Turns out, you had guests over."

He had arrived just as the Qin Family was seeing Qin Juan and her family out.

"Mom really, what's the rush; making me come here in such cold weather."

Most importantly, to visit during the New Year empty-handed, even if it was his second sister's home, Lin Jiadong felt embarrassed.

Having delivered the message, Lin Jiadong turned and left, "I'll head back first then, think about coming home tomorrow, mom is waiting for you."

Lin Chuxia didn't say a word; the other person had already bent down and cycled a few hundred meters away.

Qin Yang placed his hand on her shoulder, "I'll come with you tomorrow."

He had also noticed, his wife was not keen on visiting her maternal home.

Considering the so-called relatives at Lin's house, if not for the sake of his wife's reputation...

In this era, reputation is crucial for someone, especially for the actions of a wife.

Merchants value credibility, and a person indifferent even to family ties is hard to gain trust from partners.

If you can't even maintain close familial ties, how can others trust you?

As for whose fault it is, others would hardly delve into it; at most, they'd say, managing family relations poorly just shows one's limited capabilities.

He understood his wife's situation but also didn't want her to be mistreated.

Lin Chuxia could feel Qin Yang's stance and nodded her head.

.....

The next day, Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia went back to Daqing Mountain Village.

As soon as they entered the house, Mr. Lin and Mother Lin came out to greet them.

Especially Mother Lin, who showed an enthusiasm Lin Chuxia hadn't seen in her two lifetimes; she thought she had entered the wrong house.

"Why only today? Your elder sister came yesterday. We just wanted you sisters to spend a good day together. Knowing you would come today, she didn't leave and has been waiting for you in the room."

Mother Lin held Lin Chuxia's hand, the warm touch made her uncomfortable, causing her to instinctively pull away.

Mother Lin glanced at her hand with a flash of displeasure in her eyes, which even if fleeting, did not escape Lin Chuxia's notice.

Her heart sneered, indeed, this was her real mother.

Knowing that Lin Jiayi was here, these actions of her mother were not surprising.

"Really, don't you understand the courtesy of visiting your maternal home during Spring Festival? Your brother-in-law is also here; you didn't think to bring him along, and waited for your brother to come looking for you, that's very thoughtless and even made your brother-in-law witness this embarrassment."

Mr. Lin also spoke, his tone significantly less pretentious than Mother Lin's.

#### Chapter 179: Seducing Brother-in-law

Lin Chuxia smiled and glanced at Mother Lin, "Dad, didn't mom tell me not to visit home too often if it's not necessary? Have you forgotten what she said during Mid-Autumn Festival? I'm just following what mom said."

Mr. Lin stiffened and also recalled the words Mother Lin had spoken during Mid-Autumn Festival; he gave her a dark glare.

Mother Lin instinctively wanted to chastise this disobedient daughter but remembered the instructions from her elder daughter, so she suppressed her temperament and said,

"Look at you, child. Do you take every word mom says to heart? This is your home, and you can come back whenever you want; who could really stop you?"

Lin Chuxia said no more; if they wanted to wear masks, then let them—she'd be at peace.

She hoped they would keep their masks on for a bit longer, better not to take them off.

Inside the house, Lin Jiayi sat on a chair with both hands resting on her lower abdomen.

Even though she wasn't showing yet, she protruded her belly exaggeratedly, looking every bit pregnant.

Seeing Qin Yang beside Lin Chuxia, Lin Jiayi was taken aback for a moment, her gaze falling on his right arm.

She recalled her mother mentioning that Qin Yang had been home with an injured arm and was likely disabled, which is why his workplace advised him to go home.

But now, his arms hung normally by his sides.

He seemed to have been the one pushing the bicycle when they entered the gate.

Was his arm healed?

If it was healed and yet he wasn't at work, he must have been dismissed from his job.

Without giving it much thought, she smiled and greeted, "Second sister, you finally came. I've been waiting for you all day."

Mother Lin pushed Lin Chuxia forward, "Your elder sister has been talking about you continuously. You two sisters sit together and have a good chat."

Lin Chuxia didn't miss Lin Jiayi's scrutinizing gaze. After scanning the room and seeing only Lin Jiayi, she smiled faintly, "Is your husband not here today?"

Seeing her enter the room without speaking to herself and directly asking about Li Guangyuan, Lin Jiayi's eyes flashed a hint of wariness.

Maybe she was overthinking, but although these two were never husband and wife in this lifetime, Lin Jiayi always felt that Li Guangyuan treated Lin Chuxia differently.

What a vile woman, having her own man yet still thinking about seducing her brother-in-law.

"Guang Yuan was here yesterday; he came with me to my parent's home."

"That's unfortunate, but no matter, Jiadong, go to Xiaoqingshan Village and call your elder brother-in-law over for lunch," Lin Chuxia directly called out.

"No need," Lin Jiayi stood up abruptly, then thinking she was overreacting, smiled again, "Your elder brother-in-law was here yesterday, no need to call him again."

Qin Yang didn't know why Lin Chuxia wanted to call Li Guangyuan, but this didn't stop him from speaking up,

"I haven't seen the elder brother-in-law in a long time, just wanted to talk. Elder sister, are you unwilling?"

Confronting Qin Yang's dark, cold eyes, Lin Jiayi felt inexplicably terrified.

She had seen these eyes her whole life, feared them her whole life.

Especially during those years when she cuckolded this man, every time he looked at her with those eyes, it felt like those eyes saw right through to her bones, and no murky deed could be hidden from his sight.

"No...not at all."

Mother Lin also thought it proper to call Li Guangyuan, as it wouldn't hurt for Li Guangyuan to interact more with the Qin Family who were quite influential.

Pointing at Lin Jiadong who was still dazed, "What are you dazing for? Go call your brother-in-law over, tell him your second brother-in-law is here."



Lin Jiadong acknowledged and hurried out.

Mother Lin smiled and asked Qin Yang and Mr. Lin to have a chat and drink water inside, while she went with Lin Jiayi and Sister Chuxia to prepare the meal.

In the kitchen, Mother Lin first asked Lin Chuxia why Qin Yang didn't go to work.

According to her eldest daughter, Qin Yang's workplace was very busy, even during the Spring Festival he would only stay at home for a day or two at most.

Lin Jiayi also looked over, her eyes filled with a faint expectation.

Lin Chuxia spoke indifferently, "He will go in a few days."

"Didn't mom say he injured his arm? He has been home for such a long time, does his workplace still need him?" Lin Jiayi couldn't help but ask.

Lin Chuxia glanced at her, "Big sister, what are you saying? Qin Yang was injured while working, the workplace would reward him rather than not wanting him. His rest at home was also approved by the workplace, now that his injury is healed, naturally, he needs to return to work."

He's not left disabled and fired by the workplace?

Just resting at home, and there's a reward?

Seeing Lin Jiayi's face turning ugly, Mother Lin quickly intervened, "Your big sister cares about you, if you guys are doing well, she's happy too. Similarly, if they're doing well, you'll be happy too, right?"

"Of course, I hope my big sister and her husband have a harmonious marriage and a blissful life."

"This shows you really have grown up and become sensible," Mother Lin said, visibly relieved, "Now that your big sister is pregnant, she's become picky with food. She even told me yesterday she likes the cooked food from your Bun Shop."

"That's easy to say."

As soon as Lin Chuxia spoke, both mother and daughter looked at her joyfully.

She then continued with the latter half of her sentence, "Since big sister likes it, let my brother-in-law buy more. I heard he has made quite a lot of money in business, he surely won't mind the little extra for my big sister. After all, she is carrying their Li Family's grandchild."

Lin Jiayi felt like she was choking, getting more uncomfortable.

She didn't know when Lin Chuxia had become so sharp-tongued.

And she didn't know if it was intentional, but every word seemed to stab right where it hurt.

Hearing this, Mother Lin also became unhappy, "Child, we're all family here, should your big sister have to spend money to eat something you have? And don't say that Bun Shop belongs to the Qin Family, you are now part of the Qin Family too. I don't believe you can't manage this matter, and it's not like you have to take things to the maternal home. Later you can teach your big sister how to cook the seasoned food, once she learns, does she still need to go to the county to buy it?"

"Sure, making seasoned food is easy," Lin Chuxia responded generously.

Lin Jiayi, however, was more cautious, "I heard that the seasoned food from the Bun Shop has a secret recipe, would you be willing to share that secret recipe?"

Lin Chuxia looked surprised, "Big sister, don't you just want to eat the seasoned food? Why do you need a secret recipe? I don't even know the Qin Family's secret recipe for seasoned food."

Hearing this, Mother Lin knew she had been tricked by this cunning girl again, and didn't go round in circles anymore.

"I'll tell you the truth, your big sister also wants to start a business selling seasoned food, don't worry, they will only do it in this village and definitely won't compete with your sales in the county. You're now a daughter-in-law of the Qin Family, and you manage matters in the shop, it shouldn't be hard to get the secret recipe."

Looking at Mother Lin's angry face and Lin Jiayi's jealous expression, this was the family Lin Chuxia knew.

All these roundabout talks and acting just to get the secret recipe for seasoned food.

But the acting was still subpar.

"If big sister wants the recipe for seasoned food, considering we are relatives, I can mention it to brother, but before the New Year a food factory wanted the Qin Family's recipe for seasoned food and offered three permanent job positions in exchange, even then, brother didn't agree, I wonder what big sister has to offer in exchange?"

#### Chapter 180: Bring Out the Secret Recipe

Mother Lin couldn't help but look at her eldest daughter upon hearing this.

But Lin Jiayi did not believe that the secret recipe belonged to Qin Han. If he really had the secret recipe, would he have needed to farm his whole previous life?

"You stop trying to fool me, Lin Chuxia. Do you think you've grown wings since you married into the Qin Family and can now disregard your mother's words? Threatening us with three permanent job positions? Who are you trying to scare? If you don't hand over the recipe today, it's unfilial."

Mother Lin also realized the absurdity of the idea of three permanent job positions.

After all, they were permanent jobs. If there really were three such positions, wouldn't they jump at the chance?

"You ungrateful girl, how dare you lie to me! Listen to your sister and hand over the secret recipe, or once the reputation of being unfilial spreads, let's see how you'll stand your ground in the Qin Family. I can even ruin your bun shop's business."

"You're welcome to try. I believe the neighbors have seen everything during my years at home. We can bring them and the village chief to judge who's being unfilial: me or if Mother is causing trouble without reason. Or perhaps we can talk about how exactly I married into the Qin Family?"

A sneer appeared on Lin Chuxia's lips as she looked out the window.

Following her gaze, Mother Lin and her daughter saw Li Guangyuan walking in with Lin Jiadong.

"I wonder if the Li Family will regret knowing how capable I am..."

"Lin Chuxia," Lin Jiayi said in a lowered voice, grinding her teeth, "Even if you don't want to give the secret recipe, why bring up the matter of switching brides? Now that I'm carrying Li Guangyuan's child, what more do you want? Let me tell you, Li Guangyuan is my husband. Put away any inappropriate thoughts you might have."

Despite her words, panic was evident in her eyes.

She had always known that Lin Chuxia was prettier than her, had a better temperament, and now, she was also capable.

Should Li Guangyuan learn the truth behind the bride switching...

Lin Jiayi didn't dare to continue the thought.

She had felt Old Mrs. Li's dissatisfaction growing, and even Li Guangyuan was no longer the same as before.

All because of the Qin Family's Bun Shop.

If Lin Chuxia handed over the cooked food secret recipe, fine. But if she didn't, this matter must not be blown out of proportion.

She even felt that she couldn't let on that the idea of the cooked food secret recipe belonging to Lin Chuxia. The Bun Shop and its secret recipe could only be the Qin Family's.

Mother Lin also realized how difficult her elder daughter's situation could get at the Li Family and looked at Lin Chuxia with a displeased face.

"I really raised a thankless wolf. You heartless creature, you just can't stand to see your elder sister doing well, can you?"

"Mom, you've got it the other way around. It seems to me that you and elder sister can't stand to see me doing well. When you asked the Qin Family for a 300 yuan dowry, did you think about my situation? Then, after finding out about the Qin Family opening a bun shop, you demanded 300 yuan from me again and falsely accused me of stealing from home. Now you want me to betray the Qin Family and give the secret recipe to elder sister. Have you considered my situation at the Qin Family after all this?"

Lin Chuxia threw the vegetables she was holding on the ground and dusted off her hands.

"I guess what Mom said during the Mid-Autumn Festival was heartfelt; you genuinely don't want me to return to this home. Since that is the case, I also don't want to be an eyesore for you here."

With that said, she went straight to the main room and called for Qin Yang.

Finding her expression troubled, Qin Yang put down his cup and came over, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, let's go home."

With just these four words, Qin Yang didn't ask any more questions; he took Lin Chuxia's hand and started walking out.

They ran into Li Guangyuan, Lin Jiadong, Mother Lin, and Lin Jiayi who were just about to enter the house.

Seeing Lin Chuxia truly leaving, Mother Lin couldn't help but sneer, "Go ahead, leave, and never come back. If the Qin Family ever mistreats you, your parents' house will absolutely not support you. I will just consider having raised a thankless wolf."

Before Lin Chuxia could say anything, Qin Yang spoke up first, "Mother-in-law need not worry; the Qin Family will not let Xiaxia suffer any grievances. But as for your family..."

His gaze swept coldly over each member of the Lin Family present, and each one of them involuntarily lowered their heads, not daring to meet his eye.

With a cold snort, he continued, "I see that my wife has indeed suffered plenty of grievances here. However, I advise my father-in-law and mother-in-law to weigh their actions carefully. Xiaxia is not only your daughter, but she is also my wife. Although I work away from home, I absolutely won't let my wife be wronged. Should there come a day, no matter who it is, I won't let them off easily. If you don't believe me, just wait and see."

As the words were spoken, Mother Lin couldn't help but shudder.

Li Guangyuan and Lin Jiadong both looked bewildered.

Especially Li Guangyuan, who had called him over with a sense of pride upon hearing that his brother-in-law was coming.

His brother-in-law was different from them, an educated engineer who would show him such respect.

He had groomed himself well for the occasion, pondering all the way how to converse with his brother-in-law to appear cultured.

Now, observing the situation, he stood aside, awkwardly unsure of what to say.

Lin Jiadong instantly added, "Second sister, brother-in-law, where are you going?"

Seeing Qin Yang standing up for Lin Chuxia, especially their interlocked fingers, Lin Jiayi's eyes reddened with jealousy.

In her previous life, she had fulfilled filial duties on his behalf and cared for his illegitimate child without ever being treated this way by him.

If he hadn't been so indifferent towards her, how would that bastard have dared to treat her like that?

It could be said that all of her misfortunes in her previous life stemmed from Qin Yang's indifference.

The reason she usurped Lin Chuxia's marriage in this life and pushed her towards Qin Yang was to let Lin Chuxia taste the bitterness of being neglected, alone in an empty room, unloved and uncared for.

Why had Qin Yang suddenly changed?

All because of Lin Chuxia's face that could seduce men?

She reached out abruptly towards Qin Yang's arm, "Qin Yang, do you realize that perhaps your arm didn't need to be amputated at all?"

Qin Yang shook off Lin Jiayi's hand with disgust, "What do you mean?"

Lin Jiayi sneered venomously, "What I mean is maybe someone schemed against you, leading to your arm being disabled and almost getting fired from your job."

She even cast a suggestive glance at Lin Chuxia after saying that.

In her previous life, she was all too aware that Qin Yang had never been injured.

The injury in this life was mostly due to some chain reaction brought about by Lin Chuxia marrying him.

Qin Yang's disgust was undisguised, "If there's something wrong with your brain, better get it treated sooner rather than later."

With that, Qin Yang left without looking back.

Lin Jiayi watched the man's proud silhouette, deeply wounded by that look in his eyes.

That was the look he always gave her throughout their life together.

As if she were some piece of trash, or a mental patient.

She kept an empty bed for him, raised his illegitimate child, and was still looked down upon by him.

"Jiayi, what exactly is going on?"

Seeing that the man had left, Li Guangyuan finally asked.

Mother Lin hopped mad with anger, pointing at the front gate and shouting, "This damn girl has really grown wings. I should never have let her marry into the Qin Family. Look at her now, does she even see me as her mother?"

Li Guangyuan suddenly turned his head.

For some reason, upon hearing Mother Lin's words, a surge of heat welled up in his chest.



He looked towards that slender and upright figure in the distance, so resilient.

If he had a wife like that...