Switched M 371

	Chapter	371:	Targeting	Xiyang	Food	Factory
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Lin Chuxia watched the old couple's performance with happiness in her heart.

A family should be just like that — not stingy with praise and admiration, giving timely affirmation.

She noticed that in many families, even though the spouse and children are one's closest people,

As soon as one makes a mistake, it is pointed out almost immediately, and even a small mistake can lead to endless nagging and fuss.

Meanwhile, the efforts and contributions of the other person are overlooked.

What a family needs, after all, is devoted care and more giving.

The sound of hurried footsteps came from outside, and Little Zhuangzhuang ran in with his backpack on.

Seeing the look of surprise on Lin Chuxia's face.

Then looking at Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin, he loudly asked, "Grandpa, Grandma, are you both wearing new clothes to visit relatives? Are you going to Auntie's house? I want to go too, I want to go too."

Last time when mom, dad, grandpa, and grandma went to Auntie's house without him, they left him to have lunch at Uncle's. He couldn't be left behind this time.

"No," Lin Chuxia replied smilingly while patting his little head, "Your grandpa and grandma are just trying on new clothes. There's also a new piece of clothing here for Zhuangzhuang, do you want to try it on now?"

"Yes."

Kids love new clothes and new toys the most.

Lin Chuxia helped Zhuangzhuang put on the new clothes and gave him some tasty treats, the little guy was now overjoyed, having completely forgotten the incident last time when the family left him behind to go to the city.

For lunch, they stewed pork ribs in an iron pot, adding vermicelli, potatoes, and green beans, even sticking a circle of white dough rolls on the edge of the pot – delicious enough to make one's tongue melt.

Little Zhuangzhuang gnawed his bones clean and still looked regretful, "Yuan Bao isn't home, what a waste of bones."

Mr. Qin snorted, "If you're worried about waste, chew on them. Children have strong teeth."

Zhuangzhuang glared with dissatisfaction, "Grandpa, I have human teeth, not dog teeth; don't trick me."

With a tone still tinged with a childlike lisp, the whole family was amused and laughed.

In the afternoon, Lin Chuxia went to Xiyang Food Factory.

Each month, the food factory and the bun shops would still report their finances to Lin Chuxia.

Looking at the accounts for the past two months, both the food factory and the bun shop are operating normally and even growing steadily.

Especially the food factory, where the order volume is expanding repeatedly, with a stable monthly turnover increase of about 20%.

When she arrived, the sales department was reporting to Su Wensong, and she waited by the side for a while. After the person left, Su Wensong repeated the situation to her.

"The several sales channels we just mentioned were originally from the old food factory. After we invested in the beef sauce production line, we have taken over quite a few of their sales channels. It's not that we intentionally took their business, but that's how the market is now; the people's tastes are the referees. Whichever products taste good and are cheaper, everyone has a clear scale in their hearts."

The implementation of policy liberalization, transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy, Su Wensong anticipated would be an opportunity for them, but he didn't expect the transition would go so smoothly.

Lin Chuxia had long seen through this, "That's why I say the market opening is an opportunity for individual enterprises like us. If it were before, the sales points would have all been allocated already, where would there be a share for us."

Su Wensong also laughed along, "Sometimes when I think about the past, it feels like a dream. In just a few years, the market rules that have been maintained for decades have been broken. I just fear that one day if another policy comes down, restoring the old system, if that really happens, us individual enterprises will be stuck in a tight spot for survival."

"That won't happen," Lin Chuxia was utterly certain of this, "Once the market economy has opened up and people have adapted to the market, it's impossible to go back to a planned economy – human nature simply won't allow it."

"Let's hope so. County Magistrate Bai calling you back this time is probably not for something simple. You should be mentally prepared."

The notice from the County Committee was issued to Xiyang Food Factory, and it was Su Wensong who had Hou Xiaobao inform Lin Chuxia.

"Is there any news?"

Su Wensong thought for a moment and said, "I suspect it's about the Old Food Factory. Ever since the last incident, the Old Food Factory changed directors. The new director, Ji Xingwei, was transferred in, and I've heard that he was specifically appointed by County Magistrate Bai. I don't know much about

this person, but the current operational state of the Old Food Factory can't be turned around just by changing directors. It's said that they haven't paid salaries for two months already. The last payment was made when Ji Xingwei took over, and he paid the workers the owed wages. But after that payment, no wages have been issued for the last two months, showing that the food factory really has no money. Workers rely on their wages to eat, and continuing this way is certainly not sustainable."

The employees of the Old Food Factory are not like those at Xiyang Food Factory; they are non-agricultural iron rice bowls, living solely on that salary.

"What would you do if you were in their shoes?" Lin Chuxia didn't dwell on the current predicament of the Old Food Factory but instead asked Su Wensong.

Su Wensong frowned and pondered for a moment, "Laying off staff is one solution."

Given the current order volumes at the Old Food Factory, they simply don't need so many people, nor can they sustain so many.

But inevitably, this would lead to dissatisfaction among the workers.

The term 'layoffs' was something Lin Chuxia had spoken of; if it were before, Su Wensong wouldn't even dare to think about it.

These workers with iron rice bowls don't have land, and once laid off and jobless, even their basic livelihood could not be guaranteed.

Living a life, being warm and well-fed is the most important matter for survival.

"Or maybe they have their sights set on Xiyang Food Factory."

After considering this, Su Wensong looked towards Lin Chuxia.

County Magistrate Bai specially requested Lin Chuxia to attend the meeting—could it really be...

Lin Chuxia knew what he was worried about and waved her hand, "If I'm not wrong, you've only got half of it right. Anyway, let's go see tomorrow. You'll come with me."
"Alright!"
On the day of the meeting, Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong arrived at the venue early.
This meeting was primarily the annual review of all state-owned enterprises in Ancheng County.
In addition to the leaders of various enterprises, leaders from the County Committee and the Federation of Industry and Commerce attended.
In the past, such a grand meeting was invariably bustling, with the government and businesses joining hands to lead the people of the county to prosperity.
In the last two years, as the market has opened up, the state-owned enterprises have found it increasingly difficult to maintain their 'iron rice bowls', and the annual summary meeting has turned into an opportunity for these enterprises to vent their grievances.
Competing over who had it worse had become almost like daily chatter for these bosses, hoping that the county committee leaders would provide more support, considering their plight.
Upon entering the meeting hall, Lin Chuxia saw Li Jian sitting in his seat.
Of course, people like them had no right to sit on the stage, not even qualified for the first few rows.
Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong consciously moved towards the back rows, exchanging a look with Li Jian as they passed him.

Li Jian got the hint without a word and moved back two rows to sit next to Lin Chuxia.

"Why are you here today? Shouldn't you be enjoying your little life in the city?"

"County Magistrate Bai called me in. I'm still in the dark myself. Brother Li, do you have any news?"

Li Jian was indeed surprised to see Lin Chuxia at the meeting, but he quickly thought of something.

"If County Magistrate Bai called you back, this return trip of yours is likely not simple," he looked around and lowered his voice, "I've heard that there may be some changes with the Old Food Factory, but the details are not clear yet. Be mentally prepared; I feel like it may be related to this."

Chapter 372: The More Low-Key People Are, the More Likely They Are Holding Back a Big Move

"Brother Li, I guessed it might have something to do with the Old Food Factory as well. We'll just have to adapt as things come."

At this moment, there was nothing else they could do but take it one step at a time.

Li Jian nodded. Since he was mentally prepared, there was no need for further discussion.

He had great confidence in Lin Chuxia.

As people gradually took their seats, the meeting promptly started at the scheduled time.

First, the County Committee leaders gave speeches on stage, affirming the efforts and contributions of various enterprises over the past year. Next, representatives from various enterprises gave their speeches, with Xu Changping, the director of the Mechanical Factory, being the first to speak.

Among many enterprises, the Mechanical Factory has always devoted itself to innovation and development, being one of the few factories in Ancheng County that have created significant benefits.

Several other representative figures took the stage to speak, all in very formal, official language.

To Lin Chuxia, these speeches held no practical significance.

Li Jian nudged her and pointed at a person not far away, saying, "That is Ji Xingwei, the current directions of the current direction of the current directi

Li Jian nudged her and pointed at a person not far away, saying, "That is Ji Xingwei, the current director of Ancheng Food Factory. Since his transfer, he has kept a low profile, probably also knowing the Old Food Factory is beyond saving."

Lin Chuxia looked at the man without expressing any opinion.

The more low-key the person, the bigger the move they might be holding back.

As expected, after the conference, Lin Chuxia was called to the office by the county mayor's secretary.

Another person was already in the office - it was Ji Xingwei, the director of Ancheng Food Factory.

Looking at him directly, he seemed to be just over 40, with a well-proportionate face, slightly pale skin, neatly groomed hair, and dressed in a crisp Zhongshan suit.

From head to toe, he had the air of someone steeped in bureaucracy.

County Magistrate Bai was as enthusiastic as ever upon seeing Lin Chuxia.

After some pleasantries, County Magistrate Bai pointed at Ji Xingwei and said, "Lin, let me introduce you, this is Comrade Ji Xingwei, the new director of Ancheng Food Factory."

"Brother Ji, this is Lin."

Ji Xingwei had already stood up, not putting on any airs, and smiled warmly.

"It really is true that seeing someone in person is better than hearing of them a hundred times. I've long heard that Comrade Lin Chuxia is the iron rose of our An City."

He reached out his hand first, and Lin Chuxia politely shook it, saying, "Director Ji praises me too highly."

After introducing Lin Chuxia, Su Wensong, who was following her, was also introduced to Director Ji.

Ji Xingwei couldn't stop praising Su Wensong, while Lin Chuxia silently twisted her fingers, sensing that today's meeting was something Ji Xingwei was determined to have.

Once everyone was seated, County Magistrate Bai began by discussing the current market development, affirming the contributions of individual enterprises.

Especially Qin's Bun Shop and Xiyang Food Factory under Lin Chuxia's management, which he referred to as exemplary.

Then, shifting the topic, he talked about the current market difficulties.

"Lin, as you've seen, the newly appointed Ji Xingwei of the Old Food Factory is an excellent comrade. Since taking office, he has been dedicated to the innovation and development of the Old Food Factory. However, I must admit, as times change, sometimes our private enterprises have more vitality. Currently, An City has two major food factories, Xiyang and Ancheng, which indeed puts pressure on the market."

Lin Chuxia listened quietly to County Magistrate Bai's talk, understanding that all of this was just a prelude.

If it really came down to corporate reformulation, she would see how they planned to change.

Whether they wanted to pull her into the game or push her out, they would need sufficient leverage.

Of course, being so openly and brazenly invited here, the former seemed more likely.

True enough, after the pleasantries, County Magistrate Bai continued, "The decision has been made, after consultations with County Committee leadership, to use Ancheng Food Factory as a pilot project for state-owned enterprise reform. Following the reform model from Capital City and Sea City in the past years, we will adopt a shareholding system. Lin, you've been successful in this field and might have heard about it. I think the shareholding reform system is quite good; it maintains the factory's development while introducing new energy, boosting production, and enhancing worker motivation, don't you think?"

Lin Chuxia smiled slightly, agreeing, "County Magistrate Bai is right, I also think the shareholding system is essential for the development of state-owned enterprises."

County Magistrate Bai laughed heartily, looking at Ji Xingwei, "See, I told you. The young ones have a different vision and ideas, and they see things more clearly than us."

Ji Xingwei nodded in agreement, "The market is ever-changing, no matter how it changes, we always need leaders. Our Ancheng County's stable development is all thanks to County Magistrate Bai's strong support and leadership decisions, which we wholeheartedly support."

Lin Chuxia silently watched Ji Xingwei and said nothing.

County Magistrate Bai nodded, affirming Ji Xingwei's remarks, then spoke in a negotiating tone to Lin Chuxia.

"Since you're also aware of these issues, I'm sure you can guess what I'm about to say. Ancheng Food Factory will undergo shareholding reform, and we'd very much like Xiyang to participate, whether under the name of Xiyang or under your personal name. The county leadership values your personal capability. Here is the asset evaluation report of Ancheng Food Factory and the post-reform shareholding plan."

Lin Chuxia didn't rush to respond but took the materials and quickly glanced through Ancheng Food Factory's asset evaluation, then flipped to the back to check the share distribution.

The current stocks are semi-publicly issued, mainly for internal digestion.

In plain terms, it means implementing a managerial contract system in state-owned enterprises, a form of corporate innovation at this time that somewhat promoted the separation of ownership and management rights in state-owned enterprises, thereby incentivizing the enterprises and individuals.

However, this contract system did not extend to the fundamental property rights of the enterprise.

As indicated in the materials, the largest share was held as state-owned stocks by Ancheng Food Factory's original assets, which amounted to 50.97%, bank stocks accounted for 25.89%, employee personal stocks accounted for 3.46%, and the remaining 19.68% were Lin Chuxia's corporate shares.

County Magistrate Bai sipped his tea leisurely, and slowly said, "These are the results of share distribution in line with county leadership and recent years of corporate reform. Xiyang Food Factory, being just over a year old, has received a very generous offer."

In other words, for the assets Xiyang Food Factory brought to the table, these shares were already quite generous.

Lin Chuxia inwardly cursed, 'Old fox.'

This share distribution, though seemingly fair on the surface and indeed a big advantage for her, carried an implied suggestion in County Magistrate Bai's earlier remarks: Lin Chuxia or Xiyang's involvement was essential in the management of the reformed Ancheng Food Factory.

If calculated, County Magistrate Bai intended them to revive the almost bankrupt Ancheng Food Factory with no more than 20% of the shares.

This deal, for County Magistrate Bai and Factory Director Ji, was incredibly advantageous.

Chapter 373: Is She Trying to Snatch Someone Away?

Lin Chuxia also knew that as a county leader, County Magistrate Bai's actions were justifiable.

The Xiyang Food Factory, no matter how well it performs, is a private enterprise after all. Currently, the status of private enterprises compared to state-owned enterprises is like that of adopted children vs. biological children.

Even if the adopted child is talented, there's still a distinction.

Compared to the disappointing biological child, no matter how impatient one becomes, one still has to support and hope for his success.

However, Lin Chuxia wasn't in a hurry. With the market's development, in a few years, they would see the reality.

"I'm aware of County Magistrate Bai's good intentions, but there might be some things that County Magistrate Bai is not aware of. I'm no longer in An City; my husband has been transferred to the city. We are now living in the city, so I'm afraid I cannot accept your proposal."

County Magistrate Bai and Ji Xingwei exchanged glances. Both could hear the refusal in each other's words.

They didn't expect Lin Chuxia to decline such an offer.

Although the proposition was slightly unfair, for Lin Chuxia, someone from a peasant background and a private entrepreneur, such an opportunity was indeed rare.

County Magistrate Bai did not want to easily let go of this opportunity, which was a decision made after much discussion, even the share distribution plan had been carefully weighed.

Ancheng Food Factory urgently needed this reform.

"That can be arranged. If you can't leave your family behind, the County Committee could consider transferring your husband to An City as well. I heard that your husband is originally from Ancheng, and it'd be great for him to contribute to his hometown. An City needs talents."

Lin Chuxia smiled slightly, "My husband's job may not be easily transferred. He loves his profession. County Magistrate Bai, I won't say much else, but as for the reform of Ancheng Food Factory, although I cannot take part in it, I can still offer some advice."

County Magistrate Bai and Ji Xingwei turned to listen, and Lin Chuxia directly gave them two words, "Transformation."

She paused for a moment before continuing, "The reason Ancheng Food Factory is losing market share is due to its products not being competitive enough," which means not being able to compete against Xiyang Food Factory.

Without her saying it outright, everyone present understood this.

"Ancheng Food Factory could scale back its current industry and expand into other productions, like the existing packaging production line, which could be used to produce other types of food packaging."

County Magistrate Bai frowned slightly, "You say that so lightly, but how can we be sure that the transformed industry will be welcomed by the market?"

A new industry, wouldn't it be even harder to gain market share?

County Magistrate Bai felt that Lin Chuxia was deliberately making excuses.

"Factory Director Su is here today too; I've said that it's fine for either you or Xiyang to participate."

Was he trying to poach her people?

Despite County Magistrate Bai's relentless pressure, Lin Chuxia remained calm and composed, not giving in.

"I've always believed in the principle that there can't be two tigers on one mountain, and this applies to business management as well. Even with a shareholding system where everyone owns a part of the

enterprise and has a say, the real leadership decisions must be held by one person. I can let Xiyang and Factory Director Su participate, but what about the follow-up work?"

Ji Xingwei was still sitting nearby; hence, the decision-maker of Ancheng Food Factory could not possibly be Lin Chuxia or Su Wensong.

Ultimately, they were after the recipe and technology of Xiyang Food. If she really agreed, it would be like selling Xiyang Food Factory to Ancheng Food Factory for less than 20% of the shares.

Both factories produced similar products, and in time, the market share of Xiyang could be gradually eroded by Ancheng Food Factory, even to the point where the entire factory could be assimilated.

The principle of "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers" also applied to Xiyang Food Factory and Ancheng Food Factory.

This deal was far too disadvantageous.

County Magistrate Bai looked at Lin Chuxia and sighed inwardly.

This woman, indeed sharp-minded, turned the tables with her strategic retreat, leaving him helpless.

"We must consider the hundreds and thousands of employees at Ancheng Food Factory. They've worked for generations contributing to the construction and development of An City; we cannot abandon them at this time. So many people entering society would also be harmful."

Not able to persuade with facts, he turns to moral coercion now?

"I understand the leadership's dilemma, but as of now, there's nothing I can do, thank you for your high regard."

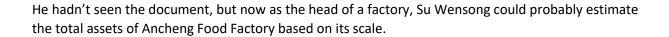
After Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong left, County Magistrate Bai and Ji Xingwei both had heavy expressions.

They really did not expect the negotiation to fail.
"This woman's appetite is indeed too big," Ji Xingwei said, shaking his head helplessly.
County Magistrate Bai felt the same, regretful, "It's not bad for the young to be ambitious, it's just that our plan might fall through now."
Ji Xingwei looked over the materials again, "In fact, personally speaking, this allocation does put Lin at a disadvantage."
If the other party was concerned about the prestige of Bai County as well as state-owned enterprises, or if they had a pliable character, this matter might still go through.
But of course, she was a 'defiant rose,' not intimidated, very clear-headed, and unwilling to suffer any loss.
Such a woman, intelligent, decisive, and resourceful, Ji Xingwei couldn't bring himself to hate her.
Neither could County Magistrate Bai.
"Otherwise, let's try following her suggestion"
"No way."
Ji Xingwei hadn't finished speaking when County Magistrate Bai objected.
"Right now, we are all crossing the river by feeling the stones. It's already bold for Ancheng Food Factory to go down the path of shareholding reform. Even the enterprises in the capital and Sea City are

uncertain whether they can pave a prosperous road through this pathway. Putting our decisions at the mercy of a private enterprise, if any issues arise, how will we answer to the thousands of workers at

Ancheng Food Factory?"

Re	eforms aren't done overnight, and certainly not based on a fleeting fascination with any given entity.
Co	ounty Magistrate Bai admitted he was getting old and didn't possess the young's fervor.
Αt	t their positions, considerations tend to be broader.
	Xingwei shared this concern and nodded, "Then let's find another way. It's imperative that Ancheng bod Factory's reform measures are carried out. We have to walk this path no matter what."
	therwise, facing the competitive pressure from Xiyang Food Factory, they'd have absolutely no power resist.
0	n the way back to Xiyang Food Factory, Lin Chuxia and Su Wensong were also discussing the matter.
"\	Vould County Magistrate Bai hold a grudge against Xiyang?"
	u Wensong had no objections to Lin Chuxia's refusal of County Magistrate Bai but was worried about fending the leadership, which might lead to petty repercussions.
"۱	No, if he doesn't even have that much grace, then he wouldn't be in his position."
	n Chuxia had dealt with County Magistrate Bai a few times and knew his character, as well as his ersonal motives.
"l [.]	f they really gave us a say, Mr. Lin, would you have accepted Bai County's offer?"
Α	20% stake in Ancheng Food Factory, that's quite a temptation.



"No," Lin Chuxia answered decisively.

Chapter 374: An Official a Rank Higher Crushes the Opposition

Seeing Su Wensong's puzzled gaze, she explained.

"Never challenge human nature at any time. Now Ancheng Food Factory is facing closure, and no matter what conditions I offer, for the sake of thousands of workers' stability, or even for their official hats, they would compromise at this moment. But what about later? A factory's development is not an overnight endeavor. County leaders will only be in office for a few years, what do I do if their successors don't acknowledge me? Who would I cry to then?"

She wasn't confident that she could always go against the officials.

Power at a higher level can crush people, let alone the fact she's just an ordinary citizen.

If in the end she ends up making clothes for someone else to wed in, she would be utterly disgusted.

She had heard of such things in her past life; she refused to fall into this pit.

But speaking of Ancheng Food Factory...

Lin Chuxia looked at Xiyang Food Factory in front of her, her voice casual.

"There's no rush on this matter, let Ancheng Food Factory struggle on its own for now. When they've had enough, we can make our move all the same."

Su Wensong's eyes lit up at her words. Was Mr. Lin implying... to take over Ancheng Food Factory?

Lin Chuxia did indeed have this in mind. From the moment Liu Guoyi abused his power to try to get their food formula and snubbed her, Lin Chuxia wanted to take over Ancheng Food Factory.
Isn't there a saying? "A gentleman's revenge is not too late even after ten years."
Her revenge wouldn't take ten years.
Now that she had kicked Liu Guoyi out of Ancheng Food Factory, the next step was to take over the whole factory.
"My grand ambitions here still depend on Factory Director Su," Lin Chuxia joked.
Su Wensong immediately rallied his spirits, his mind even beginning to calculate the stark contrast between the two factories.
What Mr. Lin wanted, he would strive to his utmost to achieve.
•••
Originally, she thought she wouldn't see her master upon her return this time, but it turned out that her master came back these days too.
Hearing the news, Lin Chuxia rushed to her master's house and saw the little old man crouching down, clearing the weeds at the entrance of the courtyard.
"Goodness, what kind of wind blew you back here, Old Man? Must have been a tornado! Master, you still know the way home? I thought you were enjoying yourself somewhere and didn't plan to come back at all."

Old Man He tossed the weeds in his hand at her without turning back, "No manners, no understanding of rules. When this old man isn't home, you don't even think to clean up the yard for me. You keep

saying you'll take care of me in old age—is this how you do it?"

"Of course, I'll take care—definitely. Isn't that why I'm here to help?"

Lin Chuxia picked up a shovel nearby and started uprooting the grass with clanking sounds.

Old Sir He straightened his back, massaging his lower back, then sat down in the courtyard chair, lifting a nearby teapot to take a sip of tea.

Then, turning back, he didn't manage to swallow the tea, which all sprayed out.

"You wretch, I asked you to pull out weeds, and you're about to dig the wall down. Put the shovel down and pull them with your hands."

Old Sir He's courtyard wall was made of piled-up earth; the top was fine, but the base was covered in grass.

Lin Chuxia looked innocently at her handiwork, "I didn't want to, but how many years has this earth wall been covered in grass? Of course, I have to clean it properly..."

Before she could finish her sentence, with a loud rumble, the shaky earthen wall collapsed.

Lin Chuxia swiftly jumped aside, patting her chest, visibly shaken.

She gave Old Sir He a reproachful look, "Master, have you got a curse on your mouth? You just said the top of the wall was about to be dug away, and now it really is gone."

Old Sir He glared, "It's not a cursed mouth, maybe it's a blessed mouth, right?"

Lin Chuxia's eyes brightened, and she immediately put down the shovel, scampering over.



It wasn't until he received the clothes that Lin Chuxia had sent him that Old Sir He felt different from them.

He had a disciple that constantly thought of him, insisting on providing for his old age.

At that moment he thought it was time to come back. No matter how hospitable people were outside, nothing compared to his own little courtyard.

Here, he had a chatty and annoying little disciple.

Old Sir He leaned back in the chair, the warmth of the early winter sun lulling him towards sleep.

After an unknown length of time, another noisy tumult awakened him.

He saw that his annoying little disciple had returned, carrying a big bag, followed by several other people.

Standing at the doorway, she spoke to the people behind her, "This is the place. Thank you, masters, for working extra hours. It would be great if the wall could be finished today. My master gets more timid as he ages, and he won't feel secure without a wall. If you do a good job, I'll pay extra for the work."

The group instantly broke into smiles—it was an urgent job, and they were already being paid extra for it.

"Don't worry, we will finish this wall today even if it means skipping meals and working into the night."

Behind the workers was a hand tractor loaded with red bricks.

Once done with instructions, Lin Chuxia, carrying her things, entered the courtyard.

Old Sir He grunted without looking at her.

Lin Chuxia found the old man's petulant demeanor particularly endearing.

"How is it, Master? Is your disciple filial or what? In a moment, I'll have the wall built up for you. We could even make the door solid if you don't want any..."

"You're speaking as if your master is dead, you unfilial thing," Old Sir He's beard nearly bristled with annoyance.

Lin Chuxia laughed heartily, shaking the thing in her hand, "Don't be mad, Master. I bought lamb spines. Today, just the two of us will enjoy a lamb spine hotpot and a couple shots of liquor. How delightful."

The annoyance on Old Sir He's face instantly dissipated, and he leaned back relaxed into his chair, "You've got some conscience, at least. Otherwise, I'd have to consider cleaning house."

"Don't say that, your house is clean enough already. Let's not do any cleaning."

Lin Chuxia purchased quite a lot of lamb spines, opting to use the iron pot in the yard.

This iron pot hadn't been used for a while, with rust forming on the bottom and the stove being battered by the autumn rain.

Lin Chuxia moved some bricks from the hand tractor and built a temporary stove.

She scrubbed the iron pot thoroughly and set it on the stove.

After washing the lamb spines clean, she tossed all of them into the pot.

Then came the green onions, ginger, star anise, cinnamon, and her secret sauce.

Old Sir He and she both loved spicy food, so she went with a hot and spicy sauce.

Lamb spine hotpot without any spiciness is like a soulless dish.

Cold water, cold pot, cold meat, light the fire and start stewing...

Chapter 375: Preparing Ahead

The wrist-thick firewood crackled as it burned, and before long, the pot was boiling, bubbling, and wafting out bursts of aroma.

Old Sir He initially sat on the side with a cold eye, but as the fragrance grew richer, he became restless.

Lin Chuxia saw Old Sir He constantly glancing over and teasingly asked, "Master, do we still need to 'clean house'?"

Old Sir He haughtily hummed, ignoring her and pretended to watch the workers stacking the courtyard walls.

And indeed, the workers were quite efficient. In just a short while, the collapsed mud wall was cleared, and half of the foundation was dug, with workers unloading the bricks outside.

But the fragrance was only getting stronger, making him, who hadn't eaten much breakfast, start to feel his stomach grumble.

After waiting a bit longer, Old Sir He couldn't stand it anymore, "Girl, is the meat ready yet? Get two pieces for this old man first."

Lin Chuxia looked at the pot; the meat was definitely cooked, just maybe not very tender.

She picked two pieces with more meat to fill a bowl, while her mouth spoke disapproving words, her face showed no sign of disdain.

"The older you get, the more you're like a child, eat two pieces to curb the craving, lamb spine needs a longer stew time to be flavorful, oh my, careful, don't burn yourself"
Old Sir He took a couple of bites and couldn't stop praising, "This is flavorful too, delicious."
Lin Chuxia continued to tend the fire while keeping Old Sir He company.
After Old Sir He finished eating, she handed him a towel.
Old Sir He stared at the towel and suddenly fell silent.
Lin Chuxia lifted it again, "Wipe your hands, they're oily."
Old Sir He then took the towel to wipe his hands, looking at Lin Chuxia's back as she went to tend the fire, his eyes slightly warm.
By the time she turned back, Old Sir He had already hidden the emotions in his eyes well.
Like always, he sighed, "Home is indeed best. This trip, my old friends wanted me to stay longer. It was novel at first, but after a while, nowhere feels as good as one's own nest."
"Then don't go out if you don't feel like it, when I get a car later, wherever you want to go, I'll drive you. We can leave and return whenever you wish."
"That sounds great, I'll hold you to that. Make sure you keep your word and don't find me a burden when you get a car."
"That would never happen, who are we if not family?"

Lin Chuxia saw that the meat was nearly ready, she then prepared a cold dish and made some noodles.

The two of them set up a charcoal brazier in the room, placed a pot on top, sipped on some liquor, and ate the hot lamb spine.

After they were full from liquor and food, they topped it off with noodles, which were incredibly aromatic.

Old Sir He didn't skimp on meat or drink, and after eating, he called Lin Chuxia into the room, rummaged through his unpacked luggage, and finally pulled out a small cloth wrap without even looking and handed it directly to Lin Chuxia.

"What's this? A gift you brought me from your trip?"

Old Sir He didn't respond, just waved his hand at her, signaling her to look for herself.

Lin Chuxia opened the cloth wrap, and her eyes instantly widened.

A banknote worth 50,000 yuan.

It wasn't that Lin Chuxia had never seen so much money, but in this era, having this much was quite extraordinary.

You see, the slogan for becoming a millionaire had just started being promoted.

"Wow, master, going out once and you became a millionaire, do you want me to help you cash the banknote and save it?"

"Take it," Old Sir He said impatiently, "do whatever you want with it, stop bothering me. You wanted to buy a car, right? This should be enough."

Man, Lin Chuxia never expected that by acknowledging a master, she also acknowledged a rich man.

"I don't want it, you know I have shops and factories under my management, why would I need to mooch off others? I will save this money for you."

"Why save it, to take it with you in your coffin?" Old Sir He glared, "Don't bother me with such trivial matters, I'm tired and want to sleep, you can go now."

Lin Chuxia: "..."

Alright, no need to say anything else.

Lin Chuxia carefully closed the door for him, instructed the workers, and went to the bank to cash the banknote and opened an account to deposit the money.

She knew Old Sir He's temper; insisting further might really upset the old man, so she just saved it for him.

But Lin Chuxia still pondered, what kind of person would invite a master to treat illnesses? And even pay so much in consultation fees?

After leaving the bank and seeing it was still early, Lin Chuxia found a secluded place to tidy up in her space, then took the items she had prepared earlier and went to the textile factory's residential complex.

This time she brought a set of imported cosmetics, which she had seen and bought immediately when she and Little Ningning were browsing the department store.

Though the country had opened up, imported goods were still rare to see in their inland, small city.

Other people might not recognize such items, but the wife of Director Kang from the textile factory surely would.

Earlier, she had heard that there might be some changes to the textile factory's assets, likely around the end or the beginning of the year.

During this time, she also had her brother gather information, but he was busy with the Bun Shop and it wasn't always possible to get the information they desired.

A few days ago, she casually mentioned it to Li Jian in a meeting, and Li Jian gave her a firm reply, although it was still unclear how the assets would be handled.

Lin Chuxia always liked to be well-prepared in advance.

Once things are set in stone, they are not easy to change.

Director Kang's wife was at home, in the early winter weather, Qiao Lan was boiling tea by the window under the clay stove, fussing with a pot of camellia flowers, looking quite content.

Lin Chuxia came in and was warmly invited to join for tea.

Lin Chuxia took a light sip of the tea cup, "Hmm, this is black tea, right?"

Qiao Lan's eyes sparkled upon hearing this, encouraging her to continue tasting, "Then tell me, what kind of tea is this?"

Lin Chuxia tasted another sip, as if savoring it, and then ventured a guess, "Is this True Mountain Small Tea?"

Qiao Lan smiled knowingly, "It's rare to meet someone who understands tea; that's right, it is True Mountain Small Tea," as she poured another cup for Lin Chuxia.

Lin Chuxia tapped her fingers lightly on the table, performing a tea ceremony gesture.

Though she tasted the pine smoke flavor in the tea and identified it as True Mountain Small Tea, she went along with Qiao Lan's prompt, "I'm really fortunate today, it's hard to find good tea, and even harder to find someone who can brew it well. You don't know, I'm rather crude, usually too busy, and I gulp it down. People from our place prefer floral tea, always saying it's more fragrant than black or green tea, but honestly, the aftertaste of black tea is superior."

Qiao Lan, impressed by her articulate explanation, her expression becoming even more joyful.

"That's exactly right, if you have time today, you must properly savor tea with me."

She poured another cup for her.

"You don't know, despite my efforts, it's hard to find someone who shares this interest. Others laugh at my supposedly petty-bourgeois taste, even my own husband, doesn't say it out loud, but he despises it too. Every time I ask him to sit down for tea, he just gulps it down to quench his thirst."

Chapter 376: Scheming for Benefit

"Director Kang is an honest man, so it's normal for him not to come."

Director Kang was a soldier in his youth and has been on the battlefield, his nature is that of a great warrior.

The two of them chatted while drinking tea, with most of the conversation being led by Qiao Lan, Lin Chuxia chiming in and occasionally expressing her own views.

Inadvertently, more than an hour had passed.

Lin Chuxia figured it was about time for the cotton mill to finish work and stood up to take her leave.

"With good tea, time flies. I should head back now, I'll visit you again for tea next time."

Qiao Lan	of course welcor	med this and	reluctantly 6	escorted her	out, only	y turning	back after	watching her
walk awa	. As she turned	around, she	saw her hus	band returni	ng from	work.		

"You're quite punctual getting off work today."

Qiao Lan took his briefcase from his hands, and they walked home together.

Kang Yong glanced at her, puzzled, "Why are you out in such cold weather? You're not here to welcome me off work, are you?"

Qiao Lan hated the cold and would hole up at home at the slightest drop of temperature.

"Not really," Qiao Lan smiled wryly, "Lin just came over, and we spent quite a while drinking tea together, she just left. That girl Lin is really talented, even her knowledge on tea is profound."

"It's rare for you to find someone you can talk to," Kang Yong replied with a smile, then suddenly, his smile froze, "Why did she come? It wasn't to fish for information about the factory, was it?"

"What are you talking about?" Qiao Lan glared at him disapprovingly, "Don't think so poorly of people. Lin didn't even bring up anything about your factory. These days, she's living in the city, and just recently when the department store got imported cosmetics, she thought of me."

Seeing the gift box of cosmetics on the table, Kang Yong snorted coldly: "If it didn't benefit her, why would Lin Chuxia give you, Qiao Lan, cosmetics for no reason?"

"Alright, alright, you make sense."

Qiao Lan couldn't win against him, and she knew Lin Chuxia kept in touch with her for the sake of her husband.

"But on another note, if the assets of the cotton mill need to be dealt with, isn't the storefront in the night market also going to be sold? I think Lin plans to buy that set of storefronts, it's not a big deal, just sell it to her."

Whoever it's sold to doesn't matter since the cotton mill can't be saved anyway.

Kang Yong unbuttoned his coat, his tone indifferent, "You don't need to worry about this. Since she didn't mention it to you, just act unaware. Besides, even if you knew, what could you do? Your husband isn't the factory manager, and can't make decisions on his behalf."

Qiao Lan sensed the hidden meaning in his words and looked at him, "What do you mean? Are you planning to sell that storefront to someone else?"

"It's the factory manager's brother-in-law who likes that storefront, thinking of buying it and opening a Bun Shop for a small business."

Hearing this, Qiao Lan scornfully curled her lips, "Is he really trying to run a small business? He's merely eyeing Qin's Buns Shop because it's doing well, wanting to pick up an easy success. I remember there was a contract before, and you mentioned Lin is shrewd; it's already clearly written in the contract that if the property is sold, they have the first right to buy."

Back then, Kang Yong didn't take this suggestion seriously, thinking it impossible to sell state property.

Unexpectedly, it didn't even take two years to reach this point.

It seems that woman had a clearer vision than him.

"The factory manager is aware of this and is planning to compensate her with some money."

What was the penalty mentioned in the contract again? Kang Yong couldn't quite recall.

But Qiao Lan didn't take it lightly, "You better advise the factory manager, don't forget what happened to the Old Food Factory. I don't think Lin is someone who would suffer a loss. Liu Guoyi not only lost his position but is still held up in that mess."

Kang Yong looked at her and suddenly smiled, "Look, you said Lin didn't come for the property matter, and here you are speaking up for her. It seems Comrade Qiao Lan's resolve isn't strong enough—a coffee pot, a set of cosmetics, and you're already corrupted."

"I'm just speaking to the facts here."

Seeing Kang Yong's skeptical look, Qiao Lan decisively gave up any pretense.

"Fine, just pretend it's for the coffee pot and cosmetics. Lin knows exactly what to send that strikes a chord, so you have to help say a word for me."

"Alright, I know, madam."

Kang Yong sat in the chair, drinking directly from the teapot mouth to mouth, his eyes catching sight of the letter beside him, covered in English letters.

"Did you get another letter from there?"

In the past, when communications were cut off, there were no letters exchanged, but these two years, it's become more frequent.

"Yes, my cousin hasn't been well recently, which makes her miss home even more. She's thinking about coming back for a visit if there's a chance. Now that the situation is better, it would be good for her to come and look around."

Kang Yong nodded, "I heard that it takes over ten hours for a flight from her place to return home, including layovers. Can her health handle all that travel?"

"I worry about that too and have been advising her. I'm just afraid she's thinking of returning to her roots."
Lin Chuxia planned to visit the Bun Shop and also talk about the house with Qin Han, spotting a familiar figure from a distance.
Her lips curved into a smile instantly, "How come you're back too?"
Seeing his wife, Qin Yang couldn't help but smile too, "I have the weekend off tomorrow, just came to see my parents."
Lin Chuxia looked at him, clearly not believing.
Caught under her gaze, Qin Yang felt embarrassed and gently turned her head in another direction with his hand.
Of course, seeing his parents was one of the reasons for coming back, but primarily, it was to see his wife.
Back in the Northwest, when they lived apart, he got used to the solitude.
Even when Lin Chuxia occasionally visited him in the Northwest, and they lived together for a couple of days, it never felt quite like this.
The first night after his wife left, he felt the entire home was cold and lifeless, even Yuan Bao looked listless.
The next day, missing his wife intensely, he couldn't even enjoy the food in the cafeteria.

Finally, the weekend came, and he left work early to ride his motorcycle back.

He didn't see his wife at home, knowing she'd either be at the factory or the Bun Shop, he sat with his parents for a while, then left again.

But it seemed a bit shameful to admit all these, better not to let his wife know.

Even without Qin Yang's words, Lin Chuxia guessed it, her smile never fading, feeling a sweetness in her heart.

Being constantly on someone's mind, whom you like, is such a blissful thing.

"Let's not go to the Bun Shop, let's go to the grocery store and buy some meat, I'll cook braised pork for you at home."

The matter at the Bun Shop can wait till Qin Han gets back.

"Okay," as long as he was with his wife, anywhere would do.

The couple walked to the grocery store, not riding bikes; besides meat, they also bought canned goods and luncheon meat.

At this time in winter, vegetables were sparse; mostly cabbages, potatoes, and radishes for sale. Seeing that the grocery store had celery and garlic shoots, rare fresh vegetables these days, Lin Chuxia also bought some.

Chapter 377: How Could It Be Like This? Why Is It Like This?

After buying groceries, Qin Yang and she walked home side by side, chatting casually along the way.

This trip to Ancheng, Chuxia faced many issues, and Qin Yang was very concerned.

He heard that Ancheng Food Factory was planning to reform its shareholding system and wanted to involve Lin Chuxia, but he was not optimistic about it.

In his view, his wife's abilities and skills were more than enough to handle things on her own.

With the current favorable market policies and conditions, his wife already owned Xiyang Food Factory and the Bun Shop. Following her own plans and pace would be perfectly fine, there was no need for her to get involved in this messy situation.

Although becoming a shareholder of Ancheng Food Factory might enhance their status and reputation, both he and his wife didn't care about such things.

Both of them were practical and purpose-driven, not chasing after hollow fame.

While they were talking, they suddenly saw a crowd gathered ahead, and could hear cursing coming from the crowd.

Life was quite dull these days, and people enjoyed watching the excitement of fights.

This was an unavoidable path for them, Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang planned to bypass the crowd from behind, but then they heard the hysterical voice of a woman from within the crowd.

"Li Guangyuan, I take care of the elderly and raise your son at home, and this is how you treat me? You said you had nothing to do with her anymore, what's happening now? I trusted you so much, each time you said you were coming to the city to find work, I never doubted you, this month you didn't earn money, and I even felt sorry for you, but you were not here to find work at all, you were here to be with this vixen."

"You ungrateful creature, have you forgotten who gave you the money to start your business? How can you do this to me and still have a conscience..."

Through the crowd, Lin Chuxia saw Lin Jiayi and Li Guangyuan standing opposite her.

Behind Li Guangyuan stood a woman in her thirties, looking indifferent as she watched Lin Jiayi crying and holding the child.

The child was already frightened, his face covered with tears and snot, his cheeks red from the cold wind.

"Have you made enough fuss? I've already told you, I have nothing to do with her. Look at you now, go back home at once, stop making a fool of yourself here."

Li Guangyuan, surrounded by the pointing crowd, looked dishonored.

Lin Jiayi didn't care, she had always been in the village, but he had to set up a stall and do business in the city.

There were quite a few familiar faces in the crowd.

"Making a fool of myself?" Lin Jiayi incredulously pointed at herself, "You did something shameless and you say I'm making a fool of myself? Let everyone judge, I stay home to raise our child while you mess around with her outside, and in the end, it turns out I'm the shameless one, how is this fair?"

Tian Cuixia spoke disdainfully, "Sister, you can eat whatever you want, but you shouldn't talk nonsense. What do you mean by messing around? Which of your eyes saw me messing around with him?"

Lin Jiayi was infuriated by her words.

Did she need to see with her own eyes?

She had secretly followed Li Guangyuan here today and saw the two of them embracing each other. Given a little more time, who knows what they would have done, and yet she had the audacity to deny it.

"You wretched woman, seducing someone else's husband, I will tear you apart..."

Lin Jiayi screamed and rushed forward, reaching out to grab Tian Cuixia.

There was no need for Tian Cuixia to dodge, Li Guangyuan held her back forcefully and flung her aside, "Have you made enough fuss? Get lost! Mind your own business."

Lin Jiayi staggered several steps from being thrown, just about to retort when she caught a glance of a familiar figure in the corner of her eye, instinctively looked again, and saw Lin Chuxia in a woolen coat.

She could hardly remember how long it had been since she last saw Lin Chuxia. Every time she saw her, she seemed different.

Dressed in a wool coat rare for that era, paired with a high-necked cashmere sweater inside, wide-legged trousers, and shiny leather shoes.

Her skin was even more delicate and luminous than before her marriage, her long black hair tied in a ponytail, she did not look like a married woman, more like a vibrant university student.

This version of Lin Chuxia is just like the one from her memory, a decade or two later.

So unattainable, so dazzling.

Then she looked at herself – still wearing the same old cotton-padded jacket from when she got married, stained beyond recognition with her child's milk, saliva, and snot.

Her pants too were old cotton pants from before; after having the child, she gained weight around the waist and altered them herself. Unable to find fabric of the same color, the patched area was even just a piece of rough cotton cloth.

Not to mention her hair and skin.

They owed the deli so much money over the years that, even when she just had a baby, her mother-inlaw hurried her to work in the fields before her confinement period was over.

Wind and sun dried and cracked her skin, her hair frayed and yellowed at the ends.

She was barely two years older than Lin Chuxia, yet she looked like she was more than a decade older.

Lin Jiayi looked at Lin Chuxia standing before her and even forgot about Li Guangyuan behind her, her teeth itching with hatred.

Why is it like this? How could this happen?

She had already married Li Guangyuan, stolen her life, so why was she still like this, even worse off than her previous life married into the Qin Family?

The Qin Family, though cold-hearted and merciless, with that stepson being a thankless wretch, at least they did not shortchange her life.

Lin Jiayi felt an urge to rush up and bite her, "Lin Chuxia, I didn't expect you to come enjoy the spectacle. Wait, that's not like you. You just came to revel in my misery, didn't you? Are you happy to see me like this?"

Lin Chuxia: "..."

What a misunderstanding. She had merely wanted to pass by quietly; who would have guessed that Lin Jiayi would suddenly be pushed out by Li Guangyuan.

However, seeing her like this did give her a bit of schadenfreude.

Li Guangyuan was never a good sort, slick and sly, womanizing was in his nature.

But before Lin Chuxia could say anything, Qin Yang pulled her behind him, his brows furrowing as he coldly said, "Who are you that we must constantly remember? The road is right here; you're the ones blocking it."
With that, he took Lin Chuxia's hand and they left.
The Lin Family, every one of them is like a mad dog; you never know when they'll come biting at you in some way or another, better to quickly take his wife and leave.
Lin Jiayi, seeing Qin Yang suddenly appear, stared in disbelief.
How has he come back again?
And with Lin Chuxia?
And carrying groceries?
Recalling that Qin Yang was now transferred to the city, and Lin Chuxia had also moved there to live with him, their returning together to visit their parents seemed entirely natural.
Yet even such a reasonable situation felt absurd to Lin Jiayi.
Who is Qin Yang? A cold-hearted animal who only knew work, when did he ever have family in his eyes?
Thinking about how this man treated her in the past life and seeing the two of them now so close, Lin Jiayi suddenly yelled out.
"Impossible, absolutely impossible, it shouldn't be like this, Lin Chuxia, it shouldn't be like this"
Sobbing uncontrollably, she squatted down, clutching her crying child in her arms.

Qin Yang was always on guard against her; hearing her shriek Lin Chuxia's name, he frowned, looked back and said, "What does she mean?"

Chapter 378: Only Like You Alone

Lin Chuxia also glanced at him, her eyes calm, and said indifferently, "It seems like a husband's infidelity got to him."

Qin Yang nodded. He had also heard it just now; his brother was involved with a widow, truly...

Recently, his older sister got divorced because her husband cheated. Now it seems his brother-in-law cheated as well.

Why is it that all the men around him are like this? Will it affect his image in his wife's eyes?

His grip tightened unconsciously. Lin Chuxia looked over, Qin Yang let go, touched his nose and coughed lightly before saying, "Wife, don't worry, I will absolutely not do such a thing. I only like you."

Lin Chuxia smiled, "I know."

Lin Jiayi's breakdown not only shocked Qin Yang but also frightened Li Guangyuan and Tian Cuixia.

Both watched her intently, fearing she might suddenly jump up and do something surprising.

After who knows how long, Lin Jiayi stood up, holding her child who had cried himself to sleep, didn't even glance at Li Guangyuan, and walked away step by step.

She looked like a soulless person.

Tian Cuixia wondered, "What is she doing?"

Li Guangyuan didn't know either. "Could it be that she's thinking of death?" Tian Cuixia pushed Li Guangyuan, "You should still check on her," she didn't want to bear the burden of a life. Li Guangyuan was startled, wanted to refuse, but worried that Lin Jiayi might seek death with her son, he finally said, "I'll go have a look." Lin Chuxia didn't think about Lin Jiayi anymore and went straight back to the Qin Family with Qin Yang. The youngest son and his daughter-in-law were back, Mother Lin was already preparing delicious food. Lin Chuxia brought more vegetables and meat, and soon a large table of meals was arranged. When passing by the bun shop, Lin Chuxia had already greeted Qin Han and his wife, asking them to come back early. Right when Qin Han and his wife arrived, it was time to eat. Nowadays, it's rare for the whole family to sit at one table for a meal, wine was essential.

Zhang Guilan was beginning to show her pregnancy, Lin Chuxia told her she could stay home to nurture her baby safely until the child was a bit older before going back to work. However, Zhang Guilan couldn't stay idle.

Mr. Qin's health had visibly improved over the years, and he occasionally enjoyed a couple of drinks

when happy.

Wu's wife was already working at months into her pregnancy, and Zhang Guilan insisted she had to do the same.

Qin Han also laughed and said it was no problem, as long as his wife was under his watch, everything she did was safe.

Both were insistent, and Lin Chuxia had no complaints. In this day and age, it's common not to stop working until the day of delivery.

"Today your elder brother and I ran into something," Zhang Guilan suddenly spoke, everyone looked at her curiously.

"Today at noon, a young couple came into the shop, the woman was alright, but the man, after entering, did not rush to order food or drink, wandered around for quite a while, and finally picked a table to sit. When ordering, he was shouting and carrying on as if he owned millions."

Qin Han didn't pay much heed, and gave Zhang Guilan a piece of meat, "Who knows, maybe some rich kid, relying on his father's power, doesn't know the enormity of the world. We've been running the shop for so long, what haven't we seen? What's there to be surprised about?"

"These two were different," Zhang Guilan glanced at Lin Chuxia, "I've been at the shop for so long, I've learned to read people. Those with real abilities tend not to show off. It's usually the worthless braggarts who act like this. I was worried they came to make trouble and kept an eye on them. I heard that man say that the bun shop will be his soon and it will be called Feng's Dumpling Shop."

"Did he really say that?" This unsettled Qin Han, "Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"Aren't I telling you now?" Zhang Guilan was visibly upset, "What does he mean by that? Our bun shop is just fine. How did it become Feng's Dumpling Shop? Could it be that he has connections with the Old Food Factory and is thinking about taking over our bun shop?"

Lin Chuxia's return this time was not a secret; Qin Han and his wife both knew.

Zhang Guilan worried that Lin Chuxia refused the offer from the Old Food Factory, assuming this was their new tactic.

Lin Chuxia shook her head, "It's not the Old Food Factory, if I'm not mistaken, there seems to be a problem with the Cotton Mill." "Is the Cotton Mill going to sell the house to someone else? Don't we have a contract when we rented it?" Qin Han nowadays also gets right to the point with issues. "If they really sell the house to someone else, what about our Bun Shop?" Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin also looked over worriedly. "No worries," Lin Chuxia said calmly, "It won't be so easy for them to undermine me." She insisted on signing the contract from the beginning just to guard against this situation. Her established reputation is definitely not something to simply hand over to others. "Big brother, if someone from the Cotton Mill gives you trouble, don't be afraid. Let them act according to the contract. If they really want to abide by the contract, then just hand over the house to them." "Hand it over to them?" Zhang Guilan widened her eyes, "Sister-in-law, they just want to take advantage of our Bun Shop's fame, how can we just hand it over to them?" Qin Han understands Lin Chuxia, "Don't worry, since sister-in-law said so, she must be confident." Qin Yang slightly raised his eyebrows, looking at the little lady.

He found that his wife's ability to strategize everything charmingly was most alluring.

Lin Chuxia smiled, "They can't simply take the house without our agreement. The penalty for breaking the contract is something they can't afford; worst comes to worst, we'll go to court."

The contract clearly stated that breaking it would cost them ten times the annual income of their property.

Their Bun Shop currently earns about thirty thousand a year, ten times that is three hundred thousand, and these two facade rooms on the market are not even worth ten thousand.

Perhaps initially, the Cotton Mill had never thought about selling off assets, or perhaps they didn't take Lin Chuxia's shop seriously.

This contract was also smoothly signed initially, I just don't know if the leaders of the Cotton Mill now regret it.

With Lin Chuxia's assurance, Qin Han gained confidence, "Alright, I understand now."

Two years ago, merely mentioning 'court' would probably have made Qin Han's legs go weak.

Now, he has weathered storms, whether dealing with Huang Family Nutritional Chicken Farm or Old Food Factory, or even his younger sister's divorce recently, he had gone through court.

The court is where ordinary people like them can seek justice. Their voices are weak and can't overrule those big leaders, but the court can advocate for them.

The meal was lively, lasting over an hour, ending only when Little Zhuangzhuang started dozing off.

The women jointly cleaned up the dishes while the three men continued chatting in the house.

After Lin Chuxia finished tidying up, Qin Yang called out to her from afar, "You head back to the room to rest, I'll talk with dad and them for a while longer."

Qin Yang hadn't been back in a while, it was normal for the men to have plenty to talk about, so Lin Chuxia went back to her room first.

After she finished washing up, Qin Yang and Qin Han had just come out from their mother's room.

He casually put one hand in his pocket and pointed outside, "I'm going out with big brother to take a walk and sober up."

Qin Han, with a big hand around Qin Yang's shoulder, laughed heartily, "It's been so many years since we've walked together like this. It reminds me of our childhood."

"If big brother likes it, I'll accompany you more often in the future."

Lin Chuxia: "..."

This unyielding bond of brotherhood was something she couldn't comprehend.

Watching the two brothers walk out arm-in-arm, Lin Chuxia rubbed her arms, feeling like the temperature was dropping.

And the two brothers, going out to sober up, were no sooner out the courtyard gate than Qin Han was disparagingly pushed away by Qin Yang...

Chapter 379: Turning Hostile Quickly

Qin Han clicked his tongue, "Quick to turn a face."

Qin Yang discontentedly said, "You don't know how short you are, it's suffocating me."

"..."

This is a real brotherhood.
"Did you find out what you needed to know?"
Qin Han patted his chest, "I figured it out a long time ago. If I wasn't waiting for you, I would have already taken action."
Qin Yang nodded, "Then let's go, make it quick and come back soon," she still wants to cuddle with her wife in bed.
···
In the quiet alley late at night, Zhang Wenbin pulled his clothes closer and walked home shivering.
Suddenly, rapid footsteps came from behind. Before he could turn around, a sack covered his head, and then a flurry of punches and kicks rained down on him.
Enduring the pain, Zhang Wenbin shouted, "Who are you? I have no quarrels and grievances with you, did you mistake me for someone else?"
He had only returned recently, the relatives here didn't even know he was back, how could he have made enemies?
However, no matter how much Zhang Wenbin shouted, the other party showed no signs of stopping.
From the initial resistance and shouting, to later only curling up and moaning while incessantly begging for mercy.
It was not until he thought he would be beaten to death that they finally stopped.

Hearing the footsteps gradually fading away, he struggled to remove the sack from his head, but there was no trace of those people anymore.

Zhang Wenbin, in pain, convulsed all over and lay on the ground for a long time before he silently got up and slowly shuffled home.

Mrs. Zhang was washing clothes in the courtyard while cursing, "All lazybones with black hearts, the clothes have been soaking for three days and almost stinking, yet still not washed. Does she really think she's a princess? She should look in the mirror, does she even have the fate of a princess..."

Before Mrs. Zhang could finish, the door of the adjacent room banged open.

Li Wenhong stood at the door with her arms crossed, "You still won't let people sleep at night? You think you are fit to be a mother-in-law if I am not fit to be a princess? Washing your own clothes and still expecting others to wash them, how shameless."

Mrs. Zhang didn't expect her to talk back. This daughter-in-law had been home for a few days now, not cooking or washing clothes, and not tidying up the room.

Now she couldn't play cards and had to cook and wash clothes for the family.

Now she had to be scolded by her daughter-in-law, and Mrs. Zhang was immediately infuriated.

"What kind of daughter-in-law are you, not getting up in the morning, not cooking, and the clothes in this basin are all Wenbin's. Is this how you take care of your family?"

Li Wenhong snorted, "I live my own life, why should I look at others? If you think other daughters-in-law are better, why don't you go be a mother-in-law in their house? I married Zhang Wenbin to live a life, not to be your nanny. Why should I exclusively do all the washing and cooking? If I hadn't come to your house, wouldn't you still have eaten?"

Mrs. Zhang was at a loss for words, "But aren't all daughters-in-law supposed to do these things?"

"Exactly, daughters-in-law are supposed to do these things, and you are also a daughter-in-law, why complain?" After saying this, Li Wenhong slammed the room door shut. Mrs. Zhang was so angry she trembled and almost fainted. Just then, Zhang Wenbin limped in from outside. Seeing her son looking like her mainstay, Mrs. Zhang started crying and complaining. "Wenbin, you're finally back. Your mom is almost bullied to death by that bitch. Is it easy for me to do the laundry and cook for you every day? That bitch even scolds me. If you don't take control, I'm going to be bullied to death." Zhang Wenbin was in pain all over from being beaten and just wanted to go back to his room to rest, but he couldn't shake off his mom, who kept dragging him while he spoke impatiently. "Isn't it just doing laundry and cooking? What's the big deal? If she doesn't want to do it, you should just do it. Also, next time you cook, add more oil and make the dishes more delicate. Wenhong hasn't lived a hard life before; even if our family is tight on money and can't eat meat often, you still need to make the meals finer." Qin Juan's cooking skills were excellent before, but Zhang Wenbin didn't mention that. Thinking about it, his mom had enjoyed Qin Juan's cooking for so many years; she should understand what he meant. Mrs. Zhang stared in disbelief. What did he mean by saying laundry and cooking were no big deal? Three meals a day, and she's supposed to make different dishes each time?

Not to mention the clothes, it's so cold, and all the clothes are thick, her hands have cracked from washing these days.

Her son doesn't cherish her, and he even complains about her cooking?

"You ungrateful wretch, am I still your mom? Really, you got a wife and forgot your mom; for that bitch, you actually treat me like this?"

Mrs. Zhang cried out and called Old Master Zhang to come and decide.

Old Master Zhang heard them quarreling from inside the room, and was already annoyed hearing what Li Wenhong said; he didn't want to come out, but now he had to, his face full of impatience.

"This home is chaotic enough, can you keep quiet for a bit?"

If it wasn't for this old woman making trouble out of nothing every day, would his daughter-in-law have divorced his son? If they hadn't divorced, would he have lost his job?

"Just washing some clothes and cooking some meals, and you make such a fuss about it, acting as if you've done a great deed. That's enough, my son is tired as well."

When Qin Juan was around, although not every meal had meat, there were always vegetables and soup, and the meals were delicious.

The old woman's cooking is nothing but careless, even making a fuss about preparing a single dish every day; even if his son didn't say it, he would have.

Mrs. Zhang was dumbfounded now, her son didn't understand her, and neither did her husband.

Mrs. Zhang was so angry that she sat in the courtyard crying and swearing.

Zhang Wenbin didn't bother with his mom and limped into the house.

Li Wenhong knew Zhang Wenbin had come back, and seeing him enter, she looked disdainful, "What, you're here to scold me on your mom's behalf? Zhang Wenbin, you know how I used to live alone before, now that I'm with you, there's no way I should be living worse than when I was alone."

"Look at you, I haven't even said anything yet," Zhang Wenbin took off his muddy coat.

Only then did Li Wenhong see how he looked. "What happened to you, did you fall?"

Zhang Wenbin didn't speak; on his way back, he had figured things out.

He didn't offend anyone during his time back in An City, but Qin Juan's relatives still live there.

Before, he didn't understand the Qin family; in fact, he'd never seriously considered the Qin family people.

A family of vegetable farmers, what could they achieve? Qin Juan was lucky to marry him.

But after the divorce, he realized the Qin brothers weren't as easy to provoke as he had imagined, especially Second Qin.

Seeing that he didn't speak, Li Wenhong took it as him admitting he fell.

"I told you to carry a flashlight, and you didn't. You're an adult and still falling over, really ridiculous."

Looking at his clothes, apart from being dirty, they were not torn. She threw them back at him, "Your mom is just washing clothes, let her wash these too."

Zhang Wenbin looked at her but couldn't help saying, "My mom is also getting older, she never used to do these things at home..."

Chapter 380: Don't Sell to Him

Before Zhang Wenbin could finish speaking, Li Wenhong sneered, "Zhang Wenbin, you're not about to suggest that I should help your mother with laundry, are you? She never did it, so should I be the one doing that all day at home? Did you not hear what I just said? Do I need to repeat myself?"

"I didn't mean that," Zhang Wenbin quickly explained, "I just think that since we are together, respecting our parents should be our duty, too. I'm not saying you should do everything, just help out my mom a bit."

"Help? With the way your mom is, if I don't help, she would still dump everything on me. If I do help, she'll walk all over me. I'm not like your ex-wife, selflessly sacrificing herself to light up others' lives. I'm not that noble."

During that time, Li Wenhong only knew that Qin Juan and Zhang Wenbin were getting a divorce, but she didn't know the specifics.

It was only after her affair with Zhang Wenbin became public that she learned how the Zhang Family treated Qin Juan.

Although she was not righteous for being the third party with a married man like Zhang Wenbin, she still looked down on the Zhang Family's ways.

"Why bring her up?"

Zhang Wenbin frowned displeasedly, his last desire was to hear about Qin Juan at the moment.

If it wasn't for that woman, he would not have ended up in such a state.

Not wanting to discuss these domestic issues anymore, he changed the subject, "When should we go get our marriage certificate? Although I'm back in An City, you can rest assured that I won't let you down. After we get the certificate, we'll arrange a few tables, let friends and relatives get to know you."

Most importantly, now that he's back in An City and divorced, who knows how many people are watching him for amusement?

Another wedding and a couple of tables would shut those people up, letting them see that Zhang Wenbin, even without a job and after divorce, can still quickly find another one.

Li Wenhong, not caring, was combing her hair, "What's the rush? Aren't we doing quite well now? I don't want others to misunderstand, thinking that it's because of me that you got divorced."

Zhang Wenbin still wanted to persuade her, but Li Wenhong pulled him away, "Alright, alright, let's rest early. The most important thing for us now is to find jobs. Did you get any good news today after running around?"

Zhang Wenbin sighed, "How easy is it to find a job nowadays? With the economic performance of companies being poor, it's good enough that they're not laying off people. I'll go look again tomorrow."

"Don't worry, it's their loss if they don't make use of someone as capable as you," Li Wenhong consoled, "By the way, I don't want to eat the food your mom makes tomorrow. All she does is make pancakes. Why should we live so frugally? Buy me some meat buns tomorrow, okay? It's been a while since I had one, and I heard the meat buns in An City are particularly famous. Can you buy some for me? After tagging along with you for so long, I shouldn't be missing out on a meat bun, right?"

Zhang Wenbin could only swallow the refusal he had in mind, "Okay, I'll buy them for you tomorrow. Go to sleep, don't wait up for me."

In the end, Zhang Wenbin didn't have the heart to leave his dirty clothes for his mother to wash, so he squatted by the water tap and began to scrub his clothes by the moonlight.

He forgot when he last washed clothes; it seemed like it was before he got married. Back then, when his family underwent changes, his parents had to do tiring work every day—and so did he. They wouldn't wash their clothes often as there wasn't time, and frequent washing would wear the clothes out.

Only in the summer, when clothes were really dirty, would he wash them by the river.

He didn't expect the water to be so cold in winter, and thick winter clothes so difficult to wash... No wonder his mom was unwilling to do the laundry...

On a cold winter morning, with the skies barely brightening, the street-side breakfast stands were already bustling into action.

The busy crowd, the warm steam mingling with the dim light bulbs, the occasional sound of a bicycle bell piercing through...

It created a warm and comforting scene.

Qin's Bun Shop had also opened its doors early, and the elders who accustomed to waking up at dawn were already sitting inside.

A few steamed buns, served with a bowl of hot, sticky millet porridge, and a few sticks of pickled vegetables.

With such a breakfast, there's one word to describe it—delicious!

From time to time, they would sigh in appreciation, praising how great the social system is.

Now that they can enjoy the good life with white flour food every day, they have to thank the leaders for their generosity.

Zhang Wenbin hunched his shoulders as he walked on the street, observing the people around him of all shapes and colors.

These days he had indeed been looking for a job. Zhang Wenbin believed he had made some friends at his previous workplace and hoped to leverage these connections to secure a job. Reality, however, had slapped him hard in the face.

Not only had those people evaded him with words, but there were also two who sported a superior demeanor, nothing like how they were when they sought his help.

This made Zhang Wenbin experience the chilly nature of the world firsthand.

There were also those who suggested he seize the chances now that the market was open. With small businesses popping up like bamboo shoots after rain, why not start his own trade? He could be his own boss and wouldn't have to kowtow to others.

But Zhang Wenbin could not swallow his pride—after all, he used to be an office worker. To go out and hustle for business in the public eye was unthinkable to him, he'd rather die.

Besides, away from an institutional environment, he didn't know what else he could do.

"Sir, here are the buns you ordered, please take care."

The friendly voice pulled Zhang Wenbin back to reality, and he saw a queue forming in front of the bun shop.

A young girl in her twenties was selling buns, with dimples on her cheeks when she smiled.

Zhang Wenbin pursed his lips; he enjoyed receiving such service, but to become one of these people...

Humph, impossible.

The server was deft in her movements and quickly reached him.

"What filling would you like? We have pork with green onion, chive with egg, cabbage with vermicelli fillings, and the prices are listed on the board."

Zhang Wenbin glanced at the menu board tha	t was hanging behin	d the server, clear	with the offered
items and their prices.			

"Give me 10 pork with green onion buns."

Li Wenhong wanted to eat meat-filled buns, and his parents hadn't tasted meat for a long time. Today could be a day for living it up a bit.

"Alright, just a moment, please!"

The waitress quickly took the buns from the steamer, and then a voice came through, "Xiao Zhang, don't do business with this guy. We won't sell our meat buns to him."

Xiao Zhang uttered an "Ah," then quickly understood, "Got it, next please, what filling would you like?"

The serving window was small, and Zhang Wenbin couldn't see who had come but felt the voice sounded familiar.

In his moment of distraction, an elderly man behind him nudged him, "If you're not buying, then move aside. You're in the way."

Zhang Wenbin staggered from the push and, regaining his composure, felt disgraced. He returned to the window to demand, "Why won't you sell me buns?"

It was one thing for others to look down on him, but even a bun seller was being snobbish?

"Because you are Zhang Wenbin and I don't like your face."

The voice came again, and Zhang Wenbin could finally see who was speaking. He widened his eyes in shock, "Zhang Guilan?"

It was Qin Han's wife.