

Switched M 381

Chapter 381: So What If I'm Bullying You?

Thinking of something, his eyes narrowed, "You say you won't sell to me just because you say so? Who do you think you are? Call your boss out here and let him see what kind of employees he's hired."

"Even if the boss comes out, he definitely won't sell buns to scum like you. Get lost if you know what's good for you, and don't hinder our business here."

Zhang Wenbin had never been pointed at and cursed at in public like this, and found Zhang Guilan even more unreasonable and aggressive.

He turned to a young server and said, "Go call your boss, I don't believe your boss would miss out on business just to let her point fingers here."

The young server did not want to pay him any attention, but Zhang Wenbin repeated his demand.

An old man from behind couldn't stand it anymore and patted his arm, "They don't sell you buns, so just leave already. Instead of arguing, you should think about why they won't sell to you. Qin Family's business is known for being fair; you probably offended them."

"That's right, we come here to buy buns every day and we've never heard of them refusing to sell to anyone. You don't look like a good person; just go away quickly and don't block the way."

While they were speaking, Zhang Wenbin was pushed to the side again. This time, the crowd formed a ring around him, not leaving even a small gap for him to squeeze through.

Everyone looked at him with eyes that seemed to see him as trash.

Zhang Wenbin became infuriated with embarrassment. Since they wouldn't sell to him at the window, he would go straight to the main hall.

If the young server wouldn't call the boss for him, he would find the boss himself.

The Qin Family had cost him his job, hadn't they? An eye for an eye - he would make sure Zhang Guilan lost her job too.

As soon as he entered the main hall, he saw Qin Han emerge from behind the counter, looking fierce and intimidating.

"Zhang Wenbin, how dare you show your face here?"

Seeing Qin Han's demeanor, the pain that Zhang Wenbin had been trying to ignore flared up once again.

Not bothering to seek trouble with Zhang Guilan, he asked coldly, "Qin Han, let's be clear about this. Did you hit me last night? It's a society ruled by law nowadays, and it's illegal for you to assault someone for no reason."

Qin Han looked at him and sneered, "Zhang Wenbin, you actually got something right..."

Hearing him admit it, a gleam flashed in Zhang Wenbin's eyes.

They had gotten rid of his job, yet their family still wants to live a good life with no consequences? Not happening.

Not only would he get their job positions terminated today, but he would also file a report at the police station against them, making them pay compensation, even see them imprisoned.

But the very next second, he heard Qin Han continue, "I am indeed someone who doesn't do shady things. If I were to hit you, I would do it out in the open. There's no need to put a sack over your head in the middle of the night. Unlike some people who are all bark but no bite—they can only beat their wives behind closed doors. It's no wonder you got beat up in the wee hours; against scum like you, everyone would want to kick you twice."

"You're defying the law. Where is your boss? Call your boss out here."

With such an employee, he couldn't believe the boss would keep them on.

"Are you blind?" Qin Han sneered, "I am the owner of the Bun Shop. What business do you have with me?"

"You're the boss?" Zhang Wenbin blurted out subconsciously, then remembered that while lining up, everyone had said that Qin Family's business practices were fair, and he also recalled the signboard of Qin's Buns Shop.

"Impossible," Zhang Wenbin took a step back, unable to believe this fact.

How could a brute like Qin Han be the boss?

Seeing his reaction, Qin Han almost wished he could kick him, "Get lost while I'm still not angry, and don't ever say that Qin's Buns Shop refused to sell you buns. If I catch you loitering around our doorstep again, watch how I won't be polite to you."

Zhang Wenbin's face flushed with humiliation, "Qin Han, you're going too far..."

Not selling him buns was one thing, but also not allowing him to pass by Qin's Buns Shop's doorstep?

It was simply too domineering.

"I'm bullying you, what can you do about it?"

Qin Han said and then addressed the customers buying buns, "This is the guy who not only beats his own wife but also messes around with other women. He was even caught in bed..."

Nowadays, others might not comment on a couple fighting, but having illicit relationships with others, that will definitely earn contempt.

Most of those who get up early to queue for buns are elderly men and women, and they seem ready to spit on Zhang Wenbin.

"No wonder they refuse to sell you buns. You have a wife but still mess around outside. You were caught in the act; how can you have the face to show up in public?"

"I knew the Qin Family wouldn't refuse to sell buns to you for no reason. If I were doing business, I wouldn't sell to someone like you either."

"Now scram, people like you deserve to be denounced by everyone."

.....

Zhang Wenbin couldn't take it anymore and turned away in embarrassment.

The Bun Shop quickly returned to order, and Zhang Guilan sneaked a glance at her husband.

Her husband said he would go out for a stroll with his younger brother last night, and she wondered what was there to stroll about in such cold weather late at night. It turns out he went out to beat someone up.

Qin Han felt uneasy under his wife's gaze and explained with a smile, "Last night..."

"Good beating," Zhang Guilan interrupted Qin Han with gritted teeth, "People like him deserve to be beaten up not just once; it's not satisfying. You and your brother are useless. Look at him, jumping around as if nothing happened."

Qin Han, who was just about to make up a story: "..."

Elsewhere, Zhang Wenbin's steps quickened.

Utter humiliation, this is absolute humiliation.

He felt no less humiliated than the day Qin Yang and his people caught him in Li Wenhong's bed.

He never imagined that Qin's Buns Shop was actually owned by Qin Han.

No wonder the Qin Family people act so arrogantly, no wonder they pushed Qin Juan to divorce him.

This is why poor people shouldn't become rich.

These bumpkins should just spend their whole lives growing crops in the fields. When they come out to do business, this is the outcome.

Having earned a bit of dirty money, they forget their roots, forget where they came from, and at the end of the day, they forget their origins.

"Wenbin, you're finally back. Your wife hasn't even gotten up yet. I've slaved over cooking all morning, and she won't eat. We're not raising a princess to this extent, are we? You need to have a serious talk with her. What kind of daughter-in-law is like her? Even if she doesn't care for your father and me, she should take care of her husband, right? I know your father and I have a hard life and can't count on you guys anymore, but you're my son. I've pampered you since you were little, never letting you suffer. When have you ever worried about family matters in your over 30 years? A man should do great things outside. With a wife like that, how can you focus on expanding your career?"

Mrs. Zhang thought hard last night and knew that her old tactics on Qin Juan wouldn't work anymore, so she immediately changed her strategy.

Indeed, Zhang Wenbin was somewhat touched, but only for a few seconds, "Mom, Wenhong is different from before," he now even disliked mentioning that name, "Wenhong is educated and capable, even if she's lost her job now, she'll find a new one later. She's a new-age woman who refuses to stay home just to look after kids and handle chores; please be more understanding."

Mrs. Zhang: "..."

She understands her, but who understands her?

Zhang Wenbin continued, "Mom, you've already ruined the previous family I had. If you drive Wenhong away, do you think your son will ever be able to find another wife?"

He definitely didn't want to live a life without a wife.

It was embarrassing enough that Qin Juan divorced him. At least with Li Wenhong, he could regain some face.

Mrs. Zhang: "..."

Chapter 382: Qin's Restaurant

Lin Chuxia had finished her business here, and Qin Yang happened to come over on his motorcycle, so the two planned to return to the city together.

Before returning, Lin Chuxia visited Old Sir He again, as she still hoped her master would join her in living in the city.

Old Sir He was all alone at home, utterly lonely.

However, once again, Old Sir He refused her, and in the end, Lin Chuxia had no choice but to return to the city with Qin Yang.

Life continued uneventfully; the weather was turning colder, and Lin Chuxia rarely went out, only occasionally visiting the Bun Shop.

It can't be called the Bun Shop anymore; after the renovation of the second floor, it was officially renamed Qin's Restaurant, a fairly common name during this era.

With added service, the business at Qin Ji Restaurant was doing very well, not to say that it was packed every day, but there were still a few tables, especially the private rooms on the second floor, which were very popular.

Master Sun often exclaimed that he was busier than when he was at the State-Owned Restaurant.

The daily business was so good that sometimes Master Sun and Master Kong in the kitchen couldn't keep up; Jia Liang asked Lu Dafa to help in the kitchen.

Lu Dafa had some skills himself, having previously helped with catering, though he wasn't as professional as Master Sun and the others.

When Qin's planned to expand its business, Lu Dafa was very eager to work in the kitchen, fulfilling his own wishes.

Master Sun saw that he was indeed fit for this line of work and was willing to give him some guidance, more than enough to handle side dishes.

When Lin Chuxia saw the lively fish just bought at the restaurant, she couldn't help but crave it and asked Master Sun to make her a Squirrel Fish.

Qin Yang did not like sweets much, so he ordered a Spicy Chicken instead.

She called Gao Lele at the front desk, "How much for these two dishes? Issue me a bill."

The accounts in the store were handled through billing.

Issuing bills was something Gao Lele was skilled at; she would issue hundreds of bills a day at the front desk, but this was the first time she was issuing a bill for the boss.

She looked towards Jia Liang who was not far away.

Jia Liang said directly, "Why are you looking at me? Listen to Mr. Lin."

"Alright," Gao Lele cheerily complied and issued the bill to Lin Chuxia, with payment collected.

Lin Chuxia quite liked Gao Lele, this young girl; she was smart and agile, and also beautiful, perfectly becoming the face of their restaurant.

She heard that Gao Lele had just graduated from high school this year and initially planned to take exams to become a factory worker, only to find that these two years, factories were not doing well, hiring fewer and fewer people, with many positions being internally filled.

She could have taken over her parents' position, but since her parents were only in their mid-40s, taking their jobs would mean her parents would be out of work, which her older brother and sister-in-law would not be happy about.

So, Gao Lele simply found a job on her own, even if it meant working for a private entity, she was willing.

Unexpectedly, she found such a satisfying job.

Now at the Bun Shop, her salary was not at all less than what she would make as a factory worker, and she had more clout at home.

While waiting for the dishes, Lin Chuxia called over Qin Jianjun.

The shop wasn't busy at this moment, and she needed to check in on her nephew's life and studies.

Speaking of studying, Qin Jianjun's eyes lit up.

"Auntie Six, I've realized that studying law really broadens one's horizons. Many things I thought we had to endure silently can actually be addressed with legal measures. Like the issue with Huang Family Village's chicken farm, we have a contract that is legally protected, and their attempts to provide

inferior goods or even cut off our food factory's supply outright is illegal. And the disturbance at the Old Food Factory at our Xiyang Food Factory; they violated the law by causing such a commotion, and we were indeed very lenient by letting it continue for so many days."

"It's not about being merciful," Chuxia explained to him, "The law you're learning now is just the national law and regulations. Since the establishment of our country, the law has been continuously perfected and supplemented. Regarding the issue of the Old Food Factory, according to strict legal regulations, they indeed violated the law. However, in the enforcement process, human feelings also have to be considered, plus, those people at the entrance of Xiyang Food Factory didn't cause any personal injury or direct losses to Xiyang Food Factory. Actual enforcement might not have the effect you anticipate."

Today's society is still situated within a traditional social system.

When applying the law, multiple factors are taken into consideration.

Nature's law must not be violated, human feelings should not be defied, striving to consider all three aspects, has become an important characteristic and distinctive feature of the legal system in a traditional society.

This is shaped by the traditional economic production patterns, the integrated legal social governance structure, collective legal consciousness, and the long cultural accumulation, carrying a legal cultural inertia.

You may argue that such laws are not fair enough, but you have to admit, they also possess more humaneness.

And for Qin Jianjun and others studying law, what they need to do is to provide fairness while being humane.

"Laws are ultimately about human feelings."

This phrase is often uttered by those who rely on connections and seek to dodge responsibilities, thinking that law can accommodate personal biases; however, that's not the case.

Here, "human feelings" doesn't refer to personal biases, but points to the common moral sentiments shared by humanity.

"Laws are ultimately about human feelings," means that the formation and enforcement of laws cannot be separated from the common moral sentiments of mankind.

And the common moral sentiments of mankind are what is referred to as 'natural justice'.

Therefore, human feelings, national laws, and natural justice are mutually unified, interdependent, and seamlessly aligned.

The two discussed this issue extensively, and Qin Jianjun heard many different opinions from Chuxia, and many previously puzzling issues suddenly became clear.

When both dishes were ready, Qin Jianjun still had more questions.

Chuxia smiled and invited him, "Come on, come back home with me. Your Uncle has not seen you for a long time."

Qin Jianjun scratched his head, "It will be busy in the shop shortly; I better not go. Uncle probably doesn't miss me."

Every time his uncle and aunt were together, he felt like a third wheel, it made him anxious.

The once cold and domineering uncle was no longer there.

Oh, towards him, he was still cold and domineering. Maybe it's better to focus on earning money for his aunt.

After Chuxia left, Gao Lele said admiringly with a face full of amazement, "Mr. Lin is really impressive; she knows so much."

Qin Jianjun very much agreed with this, "My aunt is very capable in everything she does; working with her is assured. No matter the difficulties, she seems like nothing can stump her."

Even if there were unsolvable issues, his aunt would actively confront them.

He was always learning this mentality from his aunt.

Lele nodded and then looked at Qin Jianjun again, "You are very impressive too, working at the Bun Shop during the day and studying at night, you know so much."

Qin Jianjun felt embarrassed being praised, "I still have a long way to go, by the way, I have some errands to run."

Lele called him back as he turned to leave and stuffed two pieces of candy into his hands, "These are from my mom's work unit, give them a try."

It was milk candy.

Qin Jianjun smiled, "Thanks."

Taking the candy to the kitchen, he saw Qin Juan and directly handed the candy to her, "Aunt, take this back for Ningning to eat."

Chapter 383: Frozen Pork

Qin Juan laughed, "Where did you get candy? Keep it for yourself, Ningning isn't lacking any food or drink now."

Before moving, the bun shop had issued a paycheck, and although she hadn't worked there for long, there was an income.

After the divorce, her parents and siblings had also helped her out, and with payday approaching at the end of the month, Qin Juan had quite a comfortable life.

With Ningning by her side, and this job, food and drink were not a concern; life was much better than before.

But Qin Jianjun insisted on giving her the candy, "I'm already grown up, what does a grown man need candy for? Aunt, you have it."

Without dwelling on the candy any longer, he changed the subject, "Aunt, what did you want to see me for?"

Qin Juan's smile faded slightly, she put the candy in her pocket, glanced around, and pulled Qin Jianjun to a secluded spot.

"You've been at the shop for a long time, do you think this pork looks normal? I just discovered it while preparing to make the filling; today's pork seems a bit different from before."

She saw that no one else seemed to react and wondered if it was because she didn't understand the business, as she hadn't worked at the bun shop for long.

Qin Jianjun examined the pork and frowned slightly, "This seems like frozen pork."

The meat for their bun shop was always fresh pork slaughtered that same day.

"Could it be that it got frozen on the way here because it's too cold outside?"

Qin Jianjun wasn't sure, but since it was his aunt's bun shop, any issue had to be reported promptly.

Just as he was about to go find Jia Liang, Feng Zhong came over, "Xiao Qin, big sister, what are you doing here? Is something wrong?"

Qin Juan glanced at Qin Jianjun, as the procurement work for the bun shop had always been Feng Zhong's responsibility.

After thinking for a bit, she went straight to the point, "I was about to make meat filling just now, and it seems like our meat today is frozen. I remember the manager saying that our bun shop's meat filling is always made with fresh pork slaughtered the same day."

"Today's pork is freshly slaughtered," Feng Zhong said with a chuckle, "Big sister, you've got to spare me. Do you know how cold these mornings have been? I got up in the middle of the night to go to the slaughterhouse for the meat. It's so cold that not just the pork, I'm almost frozen stiff too. This is normal; just smell the meat and you'll know it's fresh."

Qin Juan, who couldn't afford meat more than a few times a month at the Zhang Family, always saved it for others to eat,

and she even ate less of the vegetables in the meat dishes.

After this explanation, she laughed somewhat awkwardly, "Is that so? I guess I'm just ignorant."

Qin Jianjun rarely entered the kitchen and knew even less about the difference between fresh and frozen pork.

Thinking about back home, during Chinese New Year they would also buy a big piece of meat to keep frozen and eat gradually.

Hearing what Feng Zhong said, he understood.

Although the issue seemed resolved for today, Qin Juan still remained cautious.

The next day, she checked the procured pork first thing in the morning.

She found that the pork, though somewhat stiff, was still different from yesterday's.

Feng Zhong came over this time, "Big sister, how's the meat today, no issues, right?"

Qin Juan smiled, "No issues."

"That's right. You mentioned yesterday that the meat was badly frozen, so today I made sure to cover it with a blanket. It was warmer than my own clothes on the journey."

"Really? You're considerate," Qin Juan finally felt at ease.

"Of course, we must be diligent and conscientious when working for the boss, to be worthy of the salary we receive. Big sister, don't you worry. If there's anything, just tell me directly. Me and Brother Liang, we're brothers who've gone through thick and thin, there's nothing we need to be courteous about."

Qin Juan nodded, smiled, and didn't speak any further.

She was aware of the relationship between Feng Zhong and Jia Liang, which is why she had spoken to Jianjun about it first.

However, it seemed she was indeed inexperienced in this matter.

Qin Juan helped out in the kitchen for a while before heading upstairs.

Now her main work is on the second floor, but every morning when there's nothing to do there, she likes to join everyone in wrapping buns.

.....

Returning to our story, Lin Chuxia brought home two kinds of vegetables, planning to stir-fry some sweet and sour cabbage.

These days, there are no off-season vegetables, so they eat cabbage in various ways every day.

Luckily, Lin Chuxia's home has heating, so it's warm inside. She has several large flowerpots in which she grows baby bok choy.

Now, half of Qin Yang's study has turned into a vegetable garden.

There's no choice; if you don't want to shortchange your taste buds, you have to get creative.

Even so, they couldn't just eat without restraint.

Right after the meal was cooked, Qin Yang came home from work.

Seeing the dishes on the table, Qin Yang smiled and said, "Did you go to the store again? If you don't feel like cooking, just wait for me to come back, or tell me in advance; the food in our company cafeteria is quite good, I can just bring some home from there."

Lin Chuxia handed him a pair of chopsticks, "I just saw that the fish was fresh in the store today and wanted to have sweet and sour mandarin fish. You should try it, Master Zhang is really good at making this dish. I thought he was boasting before, but the taste is indeed excellent."

Master Zhang has worked in a State-Owned Restaurant, and people who work for the government carry a sense of superiority.

They are outgoing, speak and act with confidence and generosity, and even tend to exaggerate a bit.

So every time Lin Chuxia listens to him talk, she takes it with a grain of salt.

Qin Yang took a bite and couldn't stop praising it, but he still preferred spicy chicken.

"By the way, there's news about the house. It's not far from our residential compound, near the slaughterhouse, could be considered part of the slaughterhouse's residential compound."

Old Sir He is reluctant to come to the city, and a big part of that is because he doesn't want to live with them.

Lin Chuxia decided to simply buy a yard, and when Old Sir He is ready, they can bring him over to live on his own.

However, it's not easy to buy a yard these days.

The ownership of housing in government units and residential compounds lies with the units, and individuals don't have the right to buy, sell, or rent them.

Even the houses belonging to various enterprise units are owned by the units, and only in the past two years, as some units face economic downturns, have they started to consider selling housing.

And once individuals buy a house, they rarely let go of it. The larger the city, the more tense the housing issue is.

There's no real estate market for buying and selling houses either; it's all about inquiring and word of mouth.

Lin Chuxia also got the chance to buy the yard Qin Juan lives in only through a fortuitous opportunity.

"Okay, then let's go take a look together tomorrow."

It just so happens to be the weekend tomorrow.

Qin Yang had the same plan.

After dinner, Lin Chuxia went to tend to her baby bok choy.

These vegetables grow quickly and are easy to take care of.

Qin Yang went to the study to find books and laughed at her cautious manner, "You fuss over those two pots of vegetables more than Brother spends on his two acres of land."

"Oh, you don't understand, rarity makes things precious. If I were to sell these vegetables in the market, I could earn more than Brother does with his two acres of land."

Qin Yang didn't refute this point. His wife's homegrown vegetables indeed couldn't be found on the market at the moment.

In the entire residential compound, only a few households have heating, and the workers at their unit generally have higher incomes, so they can afford to heat their homes.

Chapter 384: Meaningful Things

Most families managing to use a coal stove is already quite good. In the countryside, there are still some who use earthen beds or charcoal basins for heating.

That kind of temperature, even if you try to grow vegetables indoors, it won't go well.

Qin Yang simply stopped looking for books and joined her in tending the vegetable garden.

And really, watching these few pots of vegetables from planting to sprouting and gradually growing, it's quite fulfilling.

"Next year, I plan on planting off-season vegetables on a large scale," Lin Chuxia suddenly said.

"Off-season vegetables?" Qin Yang was somewhat unfamiliar with this term.

Lin Chuxia nodded. This idea came to them when the restaurant was short on vegetables, but given the current technology and material conditions, it wasn't easy to implement.

But she had one major advantage—the villagers in Qin Family Village all came from vegetable farming backgrounds.

Even though Qin Family Village now has a chicken farm, a pig farm, and Xiyang Food Factory as its three main industries, only a small portion worked in these factories.

With farming ingrained in their bones, regardless of other pursuits, the land must not lay fallow and most people still diligently cultivated their own fields.

"This is just my initial thought. I need to find some technical support and see what the village chief thinks. Here's what I plan..."

Lin Chuxia detailed her ideas to Qin Yang, and the more she spoke, the more feasible she felt they were.

"By then, Qin Family Village will not only have the chicken farm, pig farm, and Xiyang Food Factory, but if the whole village's greenhouse vegetables take off, everyone could be a millionaire, pushing the whole village towards prosperity. What do you think? Isn't it feasible?"

Qin Yang gazed into her sparkling eyes, full of hope and vision.

He didn't know how one person could have so many ideas.

Leading the entire village towards prosperity!

"Xiaxia, you are really great, and I am not as good as you."

She led her family to open a Bun Shop, leading them on a path to wealth.

Later, she set up a factory in the village, supporting the pig farm, and provided job opportunities to the villagers of Qin Family Village.

Now, she aims to guide the whole village on the path towards prosperity.

Lin Chuxia laughed, "Why make it sound so melodramatic? This is just a preliminary idea, implementing it poses many problems."

"An idea is already great; I support you. Is there anything you need my help with?"

Lin Chuxia saw his excitement and held his face, "Compared to what you all are doing, this is just a trivial matter. Qin Yang, don't see me as so grand. I am just a businessman, and what you are doing is really meaningful for the country's development in the upcoming decades."

It was also because of Qin Yang's actions that influenced Lin Chuxia to do meaningful things on top of making money as a businessman.

And the villagers of Qin Family Village helped Xiyang Food Factory time and again, their genuine efforts touched her.

Qin Yang felt he was just doing his job well, while Lin Chuxia's awareness was higher.

"Okay, let's stop flattering each other. Your face is dirty, don't move..."

Her hands, just done with touching the vegetables, had dirtied his face, and she rubbed it off with the back of her hand.

"Ah, you better go wash up; it's getting dirtier the more you rub."

Qin Yang, unconcerned, continued with the vegetables, "No rush, keep talking, what other ideas do you have?"

Perhaps he could help his wife in some way.

"My thought is..." Lin Chuxia deliberately drew out her voice, "to earn lots and lots of money so that you, Mr. Qin, can live worry-free and dedicate yourself completely to the country's infrastructure projects."

"What an honor!"

.....

After discussing with Qin Yang, Lin Chuxia became even more confident about the idea of planting vegetables in greenhouses.

In the afternoon, Qin Yang went to work, and Lin Chuxia went to Xinhua Bookstore, hoping to find some books on planting vegetables in greenhouses.

She walked around Xinhua Bookstore and was somewhat disappointed.

There were indeed some books on off-season vegetable planting and greenhouse temperature control, but none that were comprehensive.

Actually, since the mid-'60s, there had been examples of using plastic film as a transparent material for cultivation.

Perhaps it was because her city was too small and lacked comprehensive materials.

Lin Chuxia casually picked a few books on vegetable cultivation, planning to read them first when she got back.

Over the weekend, Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang had breakfast and then went to look at houses.

This area was part of the slaughterhouse family courtyard, and the other party had just acquired the property rights two months ago. They had other properties and disliked the term 'slaughterhouse', hoping to make a quick profit by selling it.

The courtyard had three rooms, not very new, with windows in the front and back, a typical old-style family courtyard layout.

There was only the main house without side rooms; however, the courtyard was not small, measuring about 200 square meters.

The price was indeed not low; the three rooms cost 5000 yuan, whereas the small courtyard Lin Chuxia bought from Qin Juan, though it had two rooms, cost only 2500 yuan.

Yet, Lin Chuxia did not hesitate too much. Although the price seemed expensive now, as someone who had lived a lifetime, she still found it cheap.

This was, after all, the city center, the slaughterhouse would not last many years, and Lin Chuxia remembered the rapid development in this area. The value of this small courtyard would increase multiple times by then.

And currently, this courtyard was located at the innermost part of the alley.

Her master liked tranquility, this location was just perfect.

And it was not far from where she lived, so she could take care of anything that came up.

In the end, they purchased it for 4800 yuan, and the paperwork was straightforward, just a matter of registering at the housing authority and changing the name.

After getting the keys to the courtyard, Lin Chuxia planned to seal the back windows later and build two side rooms so her master could come and live anytime.

"Should we wait for a suitable courtyard to bring our parents over?" Lin Chuxia discussed with Qin Yang.

"No need," Qin Yang almost did not consider it, "Mom and Dad are used to living in the village, they have their familiar people and familiar things there, bringing them here would be too restrictive and would actually be a hardship for them."

When the two arrived home, they saw Qin Juan and Ningning standing at the door.

"Big sister, when did you come? Have you been waiting for a long time?"

"Auntie, Yuan Bao wants to come out, Yuan Bao is so pitiful."

Ningning saw Lin Chuxia and pointed at the courtyard shouting.

Turns out Yuan Bao heard the noise outside, knew his good friend had arrived, and was excitedly humming in the courtyard.

Through the gap in the door, one could see a round, black little nose stuck in the middle of the gap.

"Yuan Bao knows Ningning has come, he's welcoming Ningning."

Lin Chuxia said this while taking out the keys to open the courtyard door.

Qin Juan then responded to her, "We just got here, haven't waited too long."

She also handed over the things she was carrying.

Lin Chuxia glanced at them, "Such big apples."

Qin Juan smiled, "Got my salary yesterday, saw these nice apples at the supply and marketing cooperative, bought some for you to try."

"Ah, big sister is lucky, I've been several times to the supply and marketing cooperative and the apples were only the size of fists."

"Those are our local apples, I heard from the sales clerk at the cooperative that these were brought from outside."

Lin Chuxia naturally knew this, at this time, transportation was not developed, and their locality did not produce apples, so having some was already pretty good.

As they talked, the group entered the house, and Ningning finally got to see Yuan Bao, giggling and playing with Yuan Bao in the courtyard.

"Ningning, how is your new school?"

Lin Chuxia asked Little Ningning, watching her.

It hadn't been long since their last meeting, but she felt that Little Ningning had become much more cheerful.

Qin Juan also had a face full of relief, the changes Lin Chuxia could see, how could she as a mother not notice?

"Pretty good, the first two days of adjusting to the new school made her a bit shy, but with the teacher's guidance, she quickly made new friends, and these days she is very eager to go to school every day, saying she likes playing with her classmates."

"That's good."

Lin Chuxia further asked about her living situation, knowing everything was well made her relieved.

Actually, there was no need to ask, just seeing Qin Juan's current state, it was much better than before.

Without the family troubles, not having to serve such a big family, living daily with her daughter, working with young people and peers, her whole mentality had become younger.

Isn't it said that any marriage that lowers one's quality of life is not worth clinging to?

Chapter 385: Pulled Out from the Abyss

They planned to eat pork and cabbage dumplings for lunch.

Qin Yang was playing with Ningning and Yuan Bao in the yard, while Lin Chuxia and Qin Juan were making dumplings in the kitchen.

Their casual conversation inevitably led to the topic of the Bun Shop.

Qin Juan asked about Feng Zhong. She had heard that he had been with the Bun Shop from the early days alongside Jia Liang, and she thought he was dispatched from An City together with Lin Chuxia.

"That's not the case."

Lin Chuxia knew Qin Juan's temperament—she was a woman of few words and did not pry into others' business.

However, since the question had been raised, Lin Chuxia was willing to share a bit more.

She explained Feng Zhong's relationship with Jia Liang to Qin Juan, as well as the matter concerning Tian Jinzhu.

Qin Juan looked at Lin Chuxia in shock, "You mean Jia Liang and his group initially..."

Lin Chuxia smiled, "Yes, Houzi from An City Xiyang Food Factory was one of them too. Back then, that monkey robbed me twice."

Recalling the circumstances when they first met, Lin Chuxia found it quite amusing.

"Now they have turned over a new leaf. Houzi is doing well over in An City, and Jia Liang is decent in his dealings. That's why I'm at ease handing over the Bun Shop to him."

Qin Juan nodded, "With better prospects ahead, who would want to engage in stealing and thievery?"

It's no wonder Jia Liang was so loyal to his younger siblings; the kids were the ones who pulled them out from the abyss.

Qin Juan glanced at Lin Chuxia and silently added, 'And who pulled me out from the abyss as well.'

"That's not entirely true," said Lin Chuxia with a light snort, "Tian Jinzhu is an example. When Jia Liang and his group decided to follow me, they wanted to bring Tian Jinzhu along, but he wasn't appreciative. Now when he comes asking for help, he ends up betraying Jia Liang. Some people are just rotten to the core."

Qin Juan nodded in agreement and then remembered Feng Zhong. After pondering, she decided to tell Lin Chuxia about discovering the frozen pork that day.

"It was just that once, afterwards everything was fine. I don't know if it's because I'm unaware."

Lin Chuxia thought to herself that it wasn't necessarily Qin Juan's lack of awareness; most likely, Feng Zhong realized he had been exposed and only stopped because he feared things would escalate.

"Next time something like this happens, just speak to Jia Liang. Don't mind their relationship. Although he values brotherhood, when it comes to business, Jia Liang is serious and meticulous."

Since she had entrusted the store to Jia Liang's management, as long as no principled issues were involved, Lin Chuxia would not interfere arbitrarily.

"Alright," Qin Juan acknowledged.

.....

As per the tradition of Qin's Buns Shop, on Laba festival, the shop would offer Laba Porridge at a fair price.

They had advertised the day before, so on the day, the shop was packed with guests; every seat in the hall was taken.

Even the entrance was bustling with people coming and going, and those without seats stood in corners to eat.

The wait staff in the shop were also incredibly busy.

Qin Juan came early to the shop to make steamed buns and, when the customers were plenty, she joined Gao Lele in handling the money and calculating the bills.

Fortunately, the rush only lasted a few hours, and by 9 o'clock, the crowd had started to dwindle.

Qin Juan counted the cash and tickets in hand and handed them to Gao Lele, "Lele, check the count."

Gao Lele took it and said, "No need Sister Juan, I trust you."

"Lele, it's not about trust, we both are handling the shop's money, we can't be careless. Please count it."

Qin Juan said this, and Lele didn't insist anymore, first counting the change and then checking the bills.

"Exactly right, Sister Juan."

"Okay then, you get busy, I'm going to check the back."

"Sure!"

Gao Lele watched Qin Juan leave, carefully putting away the tickets and money.

Feng Zhong, finding a moment's rest amid his busyness, leaned on the counter and slightly lifted his chin, "Our little Lele seems so happy today, and the Bun Shop is so busy. The money must have stuffed it full, right?"

Gao Lele, blessed with a cheerful appearance and dimples on both cheeks, always had a sweet look even without a smile, which made everyone in the shop like talking to her.

Hearing the tease, Gao Lele replied without lifting her head, "When am I not happy?"

"True, no wonder our manager knows how to pick people, Lele, you're truly the face of our shop."

"If you're envious, go talk to the manager someday, let him make you the live mascot of our shop too."

"Don't joke, if I became the mascot, I'd probably smash the shop's sign."

Gao Lele laughed heartily at the banter. Just then someone called Feng Zhong, he responded with a laugh, and threw out another couple of teasing remarks to Gao Lele as he walked away.

Jia Liang was drawing up lists in the kitchen and saw Feng Zhong with a frown and warned, "Don't always joke with the young lady when you're free. You're old enough to be her father, don't bring those old habits into the shop."

Feng Zhong was not happy, "Brother Liang, I'm only a few months older than you, how could I be old enough to be her father?"

He looked around and leaned in to speak in a lower voice, "I've heard that Xiao Liu is about the same age as Gao Lele, and that young girl is quite attentive to you. So, it's fine for you to receive her attentions, but I can't banter with other young ladies?"

"Shut your mouth," Jia Liang hissed softly, "I have nothing to do with Xiao Liu, and I don't want to hear such talk again. A young girl's reputation is very important. If there's a next time, don't say I didn't warn you."

"Alright, alright, my bad," Feng Zhong knew Jia Liang's temper and quickly apologized.

Jia Liang didn't dwell on the topic, handing over the list he wrote, "We're running short on meat today, go get some more, and load up on scallions, too. The price is rising continuously, and it will be even more expensive after the holidays."

"Okay, I'll go now."

It was another busy noon period, and in the afternoon, the whole shop gradually quieted down.

These days, people lived healthily, rarely going out to eat at night.

After tidying up the affairs on the 2nd floor, Qin Juan saw it was almost time, 5:00 Ningning would finish school, and she had to pick her up.

After picking up Ningning, she would be able to finish work and go home, which was also a backdoor favor from her younger siblings.

Downstairs, she saw Gao Lele counting the money at the counter, her abacus clacking methodically, her brows knit tightly.

Scanning around and not seeing Jia Liang, she planned to give the money and accounts to Gao Lele first, who would hand them over to Jia Liang - a common practice when Jia Liang was occasionally not in the shop.

But before she spoke up, Jia Liang came out of the kitchen, a bag in his hand.

Seeing Qin Juan, he walked straight up to her, "Just in time, take home some of this Laba Porridge left from this morning for the kids."

Qin Juan glanced at the lunchbox in the bag and shook her head, "Thank you, Manager, but that's against the rules. I've already bought rice, I'll just cook it at home."

She handed the accounts she was holding to Jia Liang.

After she left, Feng Zhong approached, reaching for Jia Liang's lunchbox, "Brother Liang, I happen to have no dinner for tonight, give me the porridge."

Jia Liang dodged him, "You want to eat, go cook it yourself."

Feng Zhong was dumbfounded, "It's just leftovers from the shop, what's the big deal giving it to me?"

"How thick is your face? Even the boss pays for his food in the shop. Did you see any porridge left over this morning? I bought this."

Chapter 386: The Accounts Don't Match

The rule in their store was that even if there were leftover dishes or buns, they had to be handled by the manager's arrangement.

Most of the time they were eaten as employee meals, but private handling was absolutely forbidden.

In an era where the majority of people had just solved the problem of food and clothing, leftovers from a restaurant were still good stuff.

Feng Zhong muttered something to Jia Liang's back in dissatisfaction, when a little head popped up beside him, "Brother Feng, what did you say to the manager?"

Feng Zhong looked at Liu Na's curious big eyes and chuckled, "Nana, are you free after work? Brother Feng will treat you to a movie."

"Sure, I'd like to see 'The Little Soldier Zhang Ga'."

"Alright, let's go watch 'The Little Soldier Zhang Ga'. I'll wait for you after work."

Liu Na, happy, twirled a finger around her braid and walked briskly to find Gao Lele, "How come you haven't finished counting the money? Even if it was busy today, it shouldn't take this half a day, right?"

Gao Lele was so anxious she was almost in tears, and handed the tickets to Liu Na all at once, "Can you help me recalculate this, how much is all this together?"

Liu Na had also graduated from high school and had no problem doing the math.

In a short while, she finished abacus counting and looked at the beads, "It's a total of 265 yuan and 80 cents."

"It's all over, my money doesn't tally today."

Gao Lele sat on the chair, anxiously pulling at her hair.

"How much is missing?"

Gao Lele showed a mournful face, "I'm short exactly 10 yuan."

"Then... should I count it again for you? Maybe I got it wrong," Liu Na said, and she too became unsure.

"No need, I've counted it three times myself, it's all the same number."

Now Liu Na also furrowed her brow; they only earn 40 yuan a month, and as Gao Lele was the front desk accountant, she made 10 yuan more than the others, only 50 yuan.

The lost money had to be covered out of her own pocket.

"Think about it, is there some place where there might be a mistake? Right, didn't Sister Juan help you with the checkout this morning? Could it be..."

"It's not," Gao Lele knew what she was going to say and interrupted before she could finish, "Sister Juan's accounts were all cross-checked before we switched."

"Forget it, let it be for now; Nana, don't tell the manager."

The manager trusted her so much with the accounts; if he knew she got it wrong, it would be too embarrassing.

Liu Na already knew that Gao Lele planned to pay out of her own pocket to balance the accounts, while feeling sorry for her money she nodded, "Alright, I won't say anything, but next time be careful, it's not a small amount of money, you can't always be putting in."

"I know, it must have been this morning when it was too busy, and I miscounted."

.....

Qin Juan picked Ningning up from school and saw a tractor parked in the alley before even reaching the entrance to their home, its cart filled with honeycomb coal.

Next door, Aunt Jia was moving the honeycomb coal into the yard with a dustpan.

There were four stacks in the metal dustpan, four pieces in each stack.

Speaking of which, Aunt Jia was about the same age as her mother, and her mother hadn't done this kind of work in several years.

When her father was in poor health, it was her brothers and sister-in-law who did it; now that her father was better, they wouldn't let her mother do such heavy labor.

Qin Juan knew that Jia Liang had lost his father at a young age, and Aunt Jia, raising Jia Liang alone, had endured all kinds of hardship. She couldn't help but feel a sense of empathy.

"Aunt Jia, why didn't you wait for Jia Liang to be home to buy coal?"

Qin Juan didn't like to pry into other people's affairs and felt that Aunt Jia was kind-hearted; she did not let her daughter-in-law help, but she should be able to ask her son, right?

When Aunt Jia saw it was Qin Juan, she greeted her with a smile, "Alas, when does Liangzi have the time for this, waiting for him to be at home, I would have to freeze."

Qin Juan thought about it, Jia Liang was indeed busy; the Bun Shop was in good hands with him.

"Then let me help you move it."

Qin Juan couldn't stand it anymore and left the vegetables she had bought on the way at her own doorstep. She told Ningning and rolled up her sleeves to help.

"Ah, no need, no need, I can manage slowly."

Old Mrs. Jia was not short and quite sturdy, yet she had small feet.

With her sturdy figure, she was shaky enough walking without carrying anything, let alone carrying a few pieces of coal—she dared not walk fast.

She wasn't in a hurry, but the coal seller was. He urged Old Mrs. Jia to move faster, or else he wouldn't be able to sell all his coal.

Qin Juan didn't say anything else and got straight to work.

The coal was all put under the eaves, and with Qin Juan's help, it was quickly moved into place.

Old Mrs. Jia tugged at Qin Juan to come inside and wash her hands, but Qin Juan laughed and declined.

Qin Juan used to live in a family where mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relations were sensitive. She didn't know what it was like in the Jia family, but seeing Old Mrs. Jia move coal by herself suggested that there might be issues between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law there too.

She didn't want to meddle in other people's affairs. Besides, being single herself, she needed to avoid giving the wrong impression.

Old Mrs. Jia, however, was insistent and wouldn't take no for an answer, urging her to come in for a drink, "It's just me and Liangzi at home, he's not in and I've been lonely all day. You could at least walk around inside and liven up the place."

Qin Juan was still thinking about avoiding suspicion and paused at the words, "Is your daughter-in-law not around here?"

Could it be that Jia Liang left his daughter-in-law in An City?

Thinking back, Jia Liang always talked about his dear mother just like Zhang Wenbin did.

Bringing the old mother along but leaving the daughter-in-law in An City didn't seem out of character for him.

Zhang Wenbin had thought about doing the same when he was transferring to the city.

However, being concerned about public image since he lived in the family housing provided by his employer, he finally brought both her and Ningning with him.

Back at the Bun Shop, Jia Liang sneezed violently: Who was talking bad about him behind his back?

Old Mrs. Jia with a hint of disdain in her voice chimed, "What daughter-in-law? I haven't even caught a glimpse of a daughter-in-law yet."

On this topic, Old Mrs. Jia grabbed Qin Juan's hand as if she had found someone to confide in.

"How can Liangzi be like this? He's in his thirties and still isn't looking for a wife. I've nagged him and it just annoys him. Here I am, old already, wouldn't I want to hold a grandchild before I leave this world? It used to be difficult for him to find someone and I wouldn't urge him, but now he's got a proper job with a monthly salary. Why doesn't he think about starting a family? I see there's no shortage of young women at your Bun Shop. How come he doesn't get it?"

Knowing that Qin Juan had been through similar things before, Old Mrs. Jia suddenly whispered, "Girl, you work at the Bun Shop with Liangzi, have you ever seen him care particularly for any young man? The young men at your Bun Shop all seem pretty charming."

Qin Juan: "..."

PS:

When writing about Old Mrs. Jia's character, the author inexplicably thought of her own grandmother.

Grandmother was born in the 1920s, a typical well-bred young lady, attended private schools, read books, and even had a poetic name and a courtesy name to boot.

Though she was about one meter sixty, she had a pair of small feet.

I remember when I was young it was hard for my mother to buy shoes for Grandma. At that time, the village market even sold shoes for old ladies with bound feet, but there were none too small; I remember Grandma had size 21 feet.

Her size 21 feet were different from a child's size 21. I can still recall the look of her tiny feet—toes all curled under except for the big toe.

They didn't rest flat and comfortable in the shoe like a child's small feet; Grandma's entire foot was almost round, somewhat disconcerting to see.

The instability of the old ladies with small feet wasn't just due to their tiny size but also because the deformed feet folded under in the middle developed calluses and corns, making walking quite painful.

Therefore, Grandma would often soak her feet in hot water and try to remove the softened calluses, but they couldn't be removed cleanly; doing so would expose raw and bleeding flesh.

Yet, those size 21 feet were considered large by Grandma herself back then.

Grandma was the youngest of three sisters. During the foot-binding, she couldn't tolerate the pain well, so her mother, feeling sorry for her youngest daughter, would secretly loosen the bindings whenever Grandma cried in pain—hence, they did not end up perfectly small.

Her two sisters' feet were around size 18.

My grandmother wore traditional clothes with large jacket clasps she made herself even up to the early 2000s. She disliked clothes with buttons or zippers down the front.

Grandma felt that front-opening garments were insecure and feared exposing herself.

Chapter 387: The Elderly Know How to Be Considerate

As the Spring Festival approached, Lin Chuxia discussed employee benefits and salary increases with Jia Liang.

Their wage standard was based on the standard in Ancheng County, but since they were actually in the city, the wage level should be a bit higher than that of the county.

At this moment, there were no customers in the shop, so the two sat in a corner by the window in the lobby.

Jia Liang had also brought out the accounts for the year for Lin Chuxia to check.

Lin Chuxia would check the Bun Shop's main account every month, so she had an idea of the numbers.

In these two months, the daily turnover of Qin's Restaurant was four to five hundred yuan, with a monthly net profit reaching 5,000 yuan, a number that completely exceeded her expectations.

Such income was entirely dependent on Jia Liang's business management.

But since he had brought it up, she flipped through it again, especially the part about the restaurant on the second floor.

In just two months, the daily turnover of the second floor was in no way inferior to the first floor.

Lin Chuxia glanced over it and then pushed the accounts back, "Let's do as we just discussed. The people under you are all good, they deserve it. Also, give yourself a raise—add 30 more."

Jia Liang did not expect Mr. Lin to raise his salary. With an extra 30, his salary would be 110 a month, the same as a grade 8 worker in a factory.

And how many grade 8 workers can there be in a factory? Most are below grade 5.

"Mr. Lin, there's no need to increase my salary. I'm already very content with what I have," Jia Liang said, unsure of how to handle such a raise.

Lin Chuxia gave him a reassuring look, "You manage the shop well, this wage is just right."

It was already 1987. The country was rapidly developing, the standard of living was continually improving, and people's wage standard was starting to gradually increase.

She was just taking a step ahead.

Jia Liang was still somewhat at a loss, and Lin Chuxia looked on with interest at a scene in the distance.

Feng Zhong was talking to a young waitress, their coquettish looks making the waitress bow her head in embarrassment.

Seeing that Lin Chuxia remained silent for a long time, Jia Liang followed her gaze and slightly frowned.

Lin Chuxia then spoke, "Is your brother interested in that young waitress?"

Jia Liang's face darkened a bit, "Don't worry, Mr. Lin, I'll remind him later."

Lin Chuxia waved her hand, "The country advocates for freedom of love, I'm not really trying to interfere with their romantic affairs, but still, it's important to be mindful of the impact."

She stopped there, after all, she was an absentee owner and had no right to meddle in her employees' private affairs.

But seeing Feng Zhong's greasy behavior, she felt like the young waitress was a fresh flower stuck in cow dung.

Of course, such matters rely on mutual consent, and no one can say for sure.

It wasn't just Lin Chuxia who noticed them.

In these past few days, Gao Lele had seen their flirty behaviors not just once. As soon as the manager and Mr. Lin went out and there were fewer people in the shop, she finally found the opportunity to speak up.

"Nana, what's the deal between you and Brother Feng?"

It wasn't that Gao Lele was nosy, she just felt Feng Zhong wasn't a good match for Liu Na.

She had the closest relationship with Liu Na in the shop and truly had her best interests at heart.

Liu Na, still immersed in happiness, unabashedly admitted, "I'm dating Brother Feng."

"Dating? I heard Brother Feng is even older than the manager. Do you know what kind of person he is? Have you figured out his family background?"

There's always a reason why someone his age isn't married, right?

It's not that Gao Lele judged people by their appearance, but she always felt Feng Zhong had a certain slyness to him, not appearing to be a good person.

"Ah, I haven't been with him for long. It's not appropriate to inquire about his family matters."

Liu Na's face turned red as she spoke.

She remembered what Feng Zhong said to her after watching the movie.

Although he didn't spell it out, she got the hint—he was planning to marry her.

She did want to ask about his family, but before she could say anything, Feng Zhong had kissed her.

She didn't expect him to be so bold. Just as she began to struggle, he let her go and whispered promises in her ear—no matter his family's situation, in his heart, his wife would be the most important. Once married, he would do all the work and give her control of the money.

Gao Lele worried for her, "Does your family know? Have your parents met Brother Feng?"

Liu Na stamped her foot, "Oh, don't ask anymore. Brother Feng said that during the New Year, he will accompany me to meet my parents. Besides, what could my parents possibly have against it? Brother Feng earns 10 yuan more than me, making 50 yuan a month, which is more than what my parents earn. And as for his age, my mother always says older men will be more caring."

And her mother was absolutely right. They had only started dating, and Brother Feng had already promised to give her his future earnings and she wouldn't need to do any household chores. Isn't that what caring for someone looks like?

Gao Lele wanted to say more, but Feng Zhong approached with big strides, "What's the buzz about? Seems lively."

Liu Na's eyes curled into a smile at the sight of Feng Zhong, "Nothing, just some idle chat with Lele."

"Chatting idly during work hours, be careful or the boss might dock your pay," Feng Zhong joked, "There's 'Shaolin Temple' at the movie theater today. Haven't you wanted to see that film for a while?"

"Sure, let's go after work," Liu Na agreed happily.

Feng Zhong seized the moment to stealthily pat her backside, "Then you better get to work quick, or the manager might not let you go if you don't finish your tasks."

Liu Na's face flushed red, and she scampered off, embarrassed.

Feng Zhong, not quite satisfied, twisted his fingers where he stood, a gesture that Gao Lele, who was right beside them, saw clearly and found utterly revolting.

When Feng Zhong turned around and saw Gao Lele, he smiled nonchalantly, "Little Lele, want to join us tonight? My treat."

Gao Lele's face turned stern, not sparing him a glance as she fiddled with an abacus, "My mom wants me to come straight home after work and not to spend late nights out with other men."

Feng Zhong left, having had no luck, and chuckled twice, not taking the young girl's attitude to heart.

After Jia Liang saw Lin Chuxia out, he walked into the shop and immediately saw Feng Zhong circling around Gao Lele, his face darkening as he called him into the office.

Not mincing words, he said, "What's the matter with you, falling back into old habits? Can't walk straight when you see a young girl? How many times have I told you, if you want to work in my shop, you need to behave, or don't blame me for kicking you out."

Feng Zhong laughed along nonchalantly, "Brother Liang, what are you talking about? When have I been unable to walk straight after seeing a young girl? I'm just engaging in normal conversations with them."

"And what's this with you and Liu Na? Don't act like I'm blind."

Mentioning Liu Na, Feng Zhong stroked his chin and plopped down on the corner of the office desk.

"So you're not interested in that girl? Brother Liang, if you're not interested, it's time I got a wife, so I took my shot. I also solved a problem for you, saving you the trouble of being stuck between Qin Juan and Liu Na in the future."

Chapter 388: I'll Take You to the Manager

"What are you rambling about again? How did you bring up Qin Juan again?"

Jia Liang, like stepping on his tail, suddenly shouted coldly.

Feng Zhong looked at him meaningfully, "If you're not interested in Qin Juan, why would you buy porridge for her?"

Jia Liang also felt that his reaction was too exaggerated just now and adjusted his emotions to explain, "I just see that it's not easy for a woman to raise a child alone. You should mind your words, don't talk nonsense all the time. Also, if you like the girl, go through a matchmaker to propose marriage properly, and court her decently instead of acting like a hooligan."

"Brother Liang, see what you're saying, I am courting her properly. There will be a matchmaker, but I need to build up the feelings first, right? I'll propose after the new year."

Jia Liang then nodded, "As long as you are aware of it, that's fine. She's a young girl, and you're not that young, don't do anything inappropriate."

"I got it, Brother Liang. Do I look like that kind of person to you?"

.....

In the lobby, Gao Lele fiddled with the abacus, truly about to cry.

Qin Jianjun passed by the front desk and couldn't help but ask, "What's wrong, Lele?"

When Gao Lele looked up and saw it was Qin Jianjun, tears fell.

Qin Jianjun saw there was something wrong and went over to comfort her, "Don't cry, tell me what's the matter slowly."

"Today... my accounts don't match again, off by more than 20 yuan. I was very careful, I remember every entry clearly, and I kept the money properly, I don't know why it doesn't match..."

She wiped her tears, continuing to slide the abacus beads around.

Qin Jianjun took her abacus, "Let me help you calculate, read them to me."

Gao Lele took a couple of deep breaths, stabled her emotions, and read each item to him.

After finishing, they counted the cash again, and it was off by 24 yuan and 60 cents.

Gao Lele saw this number, and her tears came again.

"It's the same as what I calculated before, what should I do? I was off by 10 yuan a few days ago, and more than 20 yuan today, my monthly salary is hardly enough to cover this, I still have to give my mom 30 yuan each month, and I wanted to buy new clothes for the New Year too..."

Gao Lele became more and more saddened.

Hearing that the money was off before, Qin Jianjun also found this suspicious.

Since Qin's Bun Shop opened, it was Gao Lele who managed the accounts at the front desk, and there had never been a mistake.

And since there was a discrepancy a few days ago, Gao Lele would have been even more careful; it didn't make sense for the discrepancy to be bigger.

"Did you tell the manager about the discrepancy from the other day?"

"I didn't dare to; I was afraid the manager would scold me. I paid 10 yuan from my own pocket to cover it."

She could cover 10 yuan, but she really didn't have the money to cover more than 20 yuan.

"Just fearing being scolded isn't enough; you need to tell the manager about this."

Most importantly, it might not just be Gao Lele making accounting errors.

"I'll take you to the manager."

Qin Jianjun helped her organize everything, locked it in the drawer, and took her to the office.

Feng Zhong just happened to come out of the office and jokingly said to the two, "What's wrong, little Lele, why are you crying? Did Jianjun bully you? Do you need Brother Feng to teach him a lesson?"

Gao Lele quickly shook her head, "No, we have something to discuss with the manager."

Seeing the office door close again, the smile on Feng Zhong's face faded.

In the office, Gao Lele explained the mismatch in the accounts on two occasions in great detail to Jia Liang, and then, frightened, she shed tears.

"Manager, I really was careful, I clearly remember each transaction clearly, I don't know how so much money was missing."

Qin Jianjun also added, "Just now, Gao Lele and I counted everything together, even searched in the corners of the counter drawers, indeed more than 20 yuan is missing."

Jia Liang's eyes narrowed slightly, "These two times that money went missing, did you notice anything unusual, also, during these two occasions, do you remember anyone approaching your area?"

Lin Chuxia finally received good news from Ancheng County.

Qin Han personally came to the city to discuss with him about the facade building of the cotton mill.

They had anticipated that the cotton mill would not readily fulfill the agreement to give them priority for the transfer rights of the facade building.

Unsurprisingly, the young man and woman they saw at the bun shop that day were indeed the small uncle of the cotton mill manager.

It was they, seeing Qin's Buns Shop doing well, who harbored ill intentions.

They wanted to buy the facade building of the cotton mill at an extremely low internal price, then make slight renovations to turn it into their own bun shop.

The cotton mill manager, naturally aware of the agreement signed initially, despite Kang Yong's persuasion, wanted to give this benefit to his own small uncle.

Thinking that even if they breach the contract, it would only tarnish their reputation.

With the cotton mill like this now, struggling to pay staff wages, what good is a reputation anymore?

Moreover, to a private entrepreneur, even if they made a fuss, it wouldn't stir up any significant trouble.

The cotton mill manager did not take these people seriously.

However, they found out that the opposition was not only citing the contract but also demanding compensation for the substantial penalty specified on it.

If they dared to deny it, they would take them to court.

The cotton mill manager truly didn't expect a small private entrepreneur to be so tough; upon further inquiring, this wasn't just a simple small business.

People in their position, if they wanted to inquire, could clearly understand the past year's grievances and disputes between Xiyang Food Factory and the Old Food Factory, including County Magistrate Bai wanting Lin Chuxia to invest in the shares of the Old Food Factory's reform.

Facing County Magistrate Bai, they could refuse outright, so suing their cotton mill was definitely not just an empty threat.

For a peaceful future, the cotton mill manager had to compromise.

However, he was not willing to swallow the loss; the facade building he originally planned to sell to his small uncle for a few thousand yuan, he started demanding fifteen thousand yuan instead.

His calculation was clear; the agreement only mentioned that Lin Chuxia and the others had the priority purchase right.

If they thought the price was high and did not want to pay the extra, then he would naturally have a legitimate reason to sell to others.

Qin Han came over to discuss this matter with Lin Chuxia.

"I see these government officials are shameless enough, the market price is right here, where is there a house that costs ten thousand yuan, they ask for fifteen thousand straightaway, they are betting on us not affording it, wanting to resell to his small uncle."

Lin Chuxia smiled slightly, "Who says we can't afford it? Big brother, when you go back, finalize the transfer with the cotton mill's housing management bureau, we will take this house."

Qin Han was stunned for a moment, "Are we taking it just like that? They are exploiting the situation, should we really swallow this injustice?"

He thought that given his sister's temperament, there should be a huge uproar.

He was prepared to follow wherever his sister wanted him to fight.

"The house belongs to the cotton mill, they have the right to decide how to dispose of it and at what price, they now want to scare us off. Since we know their intention, why bother further, just buy it."

She left out one thing, right now it might seem like the cotton mill was exploiting the situation, and they suffered a loss silently, but in a few years, it would be clear how valuable this house was to them.

By then, only the cotton mill would have regrets.

Chapter 389: Buying a Car

"When the time comes, you don't have to interact with the cotton mill factory manager. Since the price has already been set, you can go directly to Director Kang of the cotton mill to handle it. First, check how much there is in Qin's Buns Shop's public account, and if it's not enough, go to Xiyang Food Factory to find Su Wensong."

"The Bun Shop's account should have enough money, I'm going back now."

Seeing Lin Chuxia's eagerness for the shop, Qin Han didn't delay any longer, stood up, and was ready to leave.

Then he thought of something and turned back to ask, "It's only about ten days until New Year, when does the second brother have holiday? When you go back, bring your elder sister and Ningning along. Mom and Dad are already starting to buy New Year's goods, wanting the family to have a good celebration."

"Understood, big brother. I'll tell Mom and Dad that we'll go back together."

With a definite response, Qin Han did not hesitate this time.

Lin Chuxia walked him to the door and saw him board the 121 bus. The car started, and off it sped in a flash, leaving her feeling envious once again.

She couldn't sit still once she was back inside and waited for Qin Yang to finish work; then she urged him to go car shopping.

As early as this year when the policy allowing private ownership of cars had been implemented, Lin Chuxia had been thinking about buying a car.

Before, if she wanted a private car, she could only buy a second-hand one under someone else's business account, but now she could outright buy a new one.

Of course, Lin Chuxia had the means to do so.

Although advertisements now boasted, "Owning a Santana, travel the world without fear," for most people, a private car was still an alien and unattainable thing.

They were just too expensive.

Santana, as one of the first joint-venture private car models, was priced at over a hundred thousand.

In an era where a worker's wage was just tens of yuan and the promotion of becoming a millionaire was just starting, a price of over a hundred thousand was absolutely astronomical.

Lin Chuxia never thought about buying a Santana; it was too expensive and ugly.

Such high-end cars aren't even available in this small place.

The only two cars for sale here are the Fiat 126p, which is quite popular at the moment.

And then there's the Jeep 212.

These two are still increasing in number as private cars, brought here at the year's end.

Of course, no one paid attention to them after they arrived.

The arrival of Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang really pleased the staff, who energetically introduced the two models.

Lin Chuxia had already decided on buying the 212; no matter when, the Jeep always looked the coolest.

Today was quite late; by the time they finished the car buying procedures, it was already time to close. Other matters would have to wait till tomorrow.

Qin Yang drove while Lin Chuxia sat in the passenger seat. While passing by the entrance of the second primary school, it was just time for school dismissal, and she spotted Qin Juan and Little Ningning among the crowd.

"Stop the car, stop the car."

Qin Yang pulled over, and Lin Chuxia got out to call Qin Juan.

Qin Juan, hearing her voice and surprised to see Lin Chuxia, changed her expression when she saw the brand new car behind her.

She knew her sister-in-law was capable, but this was... too impressive.

Back then, Zhang Wenbin could only ride in cars if they were designated for their unit leaders.

"Did you guys just come back with a new car?"

"Smart, elder sister. Get in the car."

Lin Chuxia opened the rear car door, and Little Ningning gazed at her mom with wide excited eyes, as if asking if she could sit inside.

Lin Chuxia lifted the little one, "Let's go sit in the car."

Qin Juan also smiled, "I was actually planning to come and find you."

"That's perfect, we can have hotpot tonight," Lin Chuxia said as she got in the car too.

Qin Yang restarted the car, Little Ningning excitedly pressed her face against the car window looking outside. Some children recognized her and pointed at her, saying to the adults beside them, "Mommy, look, there's a big car, Qin Jiating is riding in a big car. I want to ride in a big car too..."

Hearing the envious voice of the children, Little Ningning's face was filled with a happy smile.

Lin Chuxia also knew that in an era where most people still rode bicycles, owning a private car was really impressive.

As soon as they entered the family compound, their new car caused a bit of a sensation. Although no one said anything to her face, from the looks people gave her, Lin Chuxia could guess what they would say behind her back.

Lin Chuxia had never intended to compromise her lifestyle to conform to others' perceptions, nor had she planned to feign modesty.

Qin Yang, whether in work or life, never cared about these things, and she cared even less.

The car parked right in front of their own house, drawing curious children to come over and look.

Lin Chuxia opened the door and directly allowed Qin Juan and her daughter to enter the yard.

The second elementary school wasn't far from here. Little Ningning hadn't had enough of riding, and with a smile, Lin Chuxia said, "When winter break comes, let your little uncle drive you to grandma's house."

Ningning was immediately pleased and looked up at her mom, "Really? Are we going back to grandma's house? Are we going to stay over at grandma's house for New Year? Can we stay at grandma's house for two days?"

She loved being at grandma's house, everyone liked her there, and Zhuangzhuang was willing to play with her.

But her mom never let her stay at grandma's house, and she knew it was because of that person who didn't allow her mom to stay at grandma's.

Now that they no longer lived with that person, could they do it?

Qin Juan seemed to hesitate, and Lin Chu directly said, "Of course, Ningning can stay as long as she wants. Let's stay to our hearts' content."

Then she said to Qin Juan, "Today big brother came to the city and he told me that our parents are already preparing for the New Year goods, just waiting for us to go home for New Year. Big sister, you can't say you want to stay in the city with Ningning over New Year, that would really not consider us family."

As far as the divorce was concerned, the Qin Family did not mention it, so outsiders wouldn't know either.

Qin Juan basically lived in the city, and going back to her parents' house for New Year was common.

It wasn't that the Qin Family felt ashamed of Qin Juan's divorce, but the perceptions of people in that era were something they couldn't change, much less silence others' gossip.

They could only protect Qin Juan from getting hurt by those rumors and slander.

Qin Juan hesitated only briefly, then realizing that her parents and brothers wouldn't allow her to spend New Year alone with Ningning, which would hurt them and make them worry, she said, "Alright, we'll all go back together."

"When is Ningning off for vacation? Did the school notify you?"

"She just has half a day of classes tomorrow before the break. I've already spoken with the store manager, Ningning will be with me in the store during her vacation days."

Ningning was understanding and well-behaved, she wouldn't affect anyone else's work even at the store.

"If Ningning gets bored at the store, let mom bring you to your little aunt, she will take you out to play."

Lin Chuxia patted Ningning's small head.

Ningning crisply spoke up, "I like going to the Bun Shop with mom, all the big brothers and sisters, uncles, and aunties there are nice people."

"Alright."

Lin Chuxia these days had been reading books related to vegetable management.

She planned to handle the car's paperwork and then make a trip to the Xinhua Bookstore in the capital, to buy some more books on the topic.

Chapter 390: Expel Feng Zhong

Eating hot pot in the evening, Qin Yang was burning charcoal with Little Ningning in the yard, while Lin Chuxia and Qin Juan were preparing ingredients in the kitchen.

The slices of mutton were all pre-cut by the butcher, and the tripe was cleaned and sliced into shreds.

In the past, a winter hot pot would mainly consist of Chinese cabbage, white radishes, plain tofu, and at most, frozen tofu and duck blood.

But Lin Chuxia's little vegetable garden had several kinds of small green vegetables, which were perfect for the hot pot.

As Qin Juan picked the vegetables, she laughed and said, "I've discovered that some people are born with a taste for food. You running a food business is definitely no mistake."

Of course, who could compare with Lin Chuxia when it comes to eating?

Take the hot pot condiments, for instance. In those days, there were no ready-made condiments; everything had to be mixed by oneself.

Ground pure sesame made into sesame paste of the right consistency, with two bright red fermented bean curds added for flavor and scent, plus two spoonfuls of chive blossoms, brought out that special zing.

Those who liked cilantro could add a handful of freshly cut cilantro, along with some freshly fried chili oil, topped with another spoonful.

The mutton and tripe scalded in the charcoal heated copper pot, swirled in the sauce, and then eaten with a clove of sugar garlic.

Truly, you'd have one bite and be utterly speechless.

Even Little Ningning, while puffing, continued to eat the mutton, her little lips all red.

"Mommy, the sliced mutton is so delicious."

This was her first time eating sliced mutton. In her previous home, let alone sliced mutton, she hardly even had dumplings filled with mutton.

Lin Chuxia then gave her some more vegetables and tofu.

Children have delicate digestive systems; eating too much mutton late at night isn't easy to digest.

Qin Juan was also worried she would eat too much and kept telling her to slow down.

Outside, the north wind was howling, and at some point, small snowflakes began to float down.

Inside the house, it was as warm as spring. Sitting around the steaming hot pot, watching her daughter eat with a satisfied face, Qin Juan felt like she was living in a dream.

"Today the store manager fired Feng Zhong," Qin Juan picked some noodles for her daughter and casually chatted.

"Some time ago, Gao Lele at the front desk on the first floor always had discrepancies in her accounts. The first time, 10 yuan was missing; too scared to tell the manager, she covered it with her own money. Then, a few days ago, money was missing again, this time, it was over 20 yuan. Gao Lele's salary is only 50 yuan a month, so that's more than 30 yuan gone, she was so upset she cried. It just so happened that Jianjun came across her and took her to see the manager..."

At the beginning of this incident, none of them thought someone was being dishonest. They just figured that because of the busy end-of-year business, there were more transactions through Gao Lele or for some other reason, Gao Lele had made a mistake in accounting.

Who would have thought that after speaking to the manager, he started investigating in a different direction.

And this investigation led straight to Feng Zhong.

"At first, Feng Zhong denied everything. I don't know what method the manager used, but in the end, Feng Zhong admitted to it. He returned the more than 30 yuan missing from the front desk, and the manager settled this month's wages with him and let him go."

Qin Juan didn't know what method Jia Liang used, but Lin Chuxia had a rough idea.

What did Jia Liang do in the past? It's not something others might think of right away, but as someone who knew Feng Zhong best, as long as it was confirmed that he had been in contact with the front desk, the case was almost certainly solved.

"What happened after that?"

Lin Chuxia didn't care about Jia Liang firing an employee. The right to hire and fire staff in the restaurant was in Jia Liang's hands, naturally including the authority to dismiss them.

Since Qin Juan had mentioned it, there must be more to the story.

At this moment, she heard Qin Juan sigh faintly and glanced at Little Ningning, who had finished her meal and was hugging her water cup.

"Eat up and go play with Yuan Bao."

The little girl loved playing with Yuan Bao the most; she put down her cup and scampered away.

Only then did Qin Juan withdraw her gaze and continue, "I only heard about it in the last two days, Feng Zhong was dating Liu Na from the shop, their relationship was quite intimate before. Now that Feng Zhong is gone, that girl Liu Na seems to have lost her soul. I've seen her wiping away tears in secret a few times, and I worried whether her emotions might affect her work."

Lin Chuxia remembered the girl she saw flirting with Feng Zhong in the shop that day.

"Jia Liang should know about this, too. With so many employees in our shop, it's impossible to look after everyone's emotions, let alone their personal affairs."

Qin Juan nodded; she understood.

Since it was someone else's private matter, only they or their family had the real right to inquire.

Liu Na and the Bun Shop were only in an employment relationship. As long as there were no issues at work, that was all that mattered; should problems arise, matters would be dealt with professionally.

It was she who had thought too much, seeing the young girl in tears, and having dealt with Feng Zhong, a surge of sympathy overwhelmed her.

With only three people under her sister-in-law at the Bun Shop, plus the food factory and the chicken farm, if they were to meddle in everyone's private matters, when would it ever end?

Lin Chuxia could understand Qin Juan's feelings, after all, in this day and age, for workers who had secured a permanent job, it meant their marriage and family life were taken care of as well.

Roll back a few years to the heyday of these factories, the companies would organize social events to resolve the issues of single young men and women, provide housing upon marriage, and even operate their own daycares for those with children.

Not to mention the system where securing a permanent job would benefit an employee's children who could follow in their footsteps.

...

Early in the morning, the snow had already stopped, leaving only a thin layer. Households were sweeping the snow in front of their doors with brooms.

When Lin Chuxia woke up, Qin Yang had already gotten out of bed and was clearing the snow in the yard.

She put on her clothes, made the bed, and opened the door, only to be greeted by a gust of chilly wind that made her shrink her neck.

Qin Yang, hearing the movement behind him and seeing her shiver, smirked and said, "It's cold today, the weather forecast said the temperature has dropped to minus ten degrees, wear more clothes before going out."

Lin Chuxia was especially susceptible to the cold, just like a little kitten.

She remembered last year when he was injured and Lin Chuxia went to the Northwest to see him, coinciding with a heavy snowfall and several days of plummeting temperatures there.

The poor girl was so cold she nearly cried.

Thinking back, it has already been a year since then, and a tender light warmed Qin Yang's eyes.

It was also at that time he began to look forward to the days when they could spend their mornings and evenings together, and now, his wish had come true.

Lin Chuxia was dressed warmly, as she had come prepared, "I'm wearing a lot, not cold at all. What would you like to eat? How about some nice warm noodles?"

After speaking, she breathed on her hands for warmth.

Qin Yang urged her, "Alright, alright, you decide. Go back inside quickly; don't go anywhere today, just stay at home, alright?"

They had agreed yesterday that today they would handle the car paperwork, but it could wait until he had time.

"It's okay, I'm really not cold," Lin Chuxia replied stubbornly, then darted inside the house like a rabbit.

After breakfast, Qin Yang still felt uneasy and reminded her again. Lin Chuxia didn't take it to heart, sent him away with assurances and, gathering the things she needed, headed out the door.