

Switched M 561

Chapter 561: Offending Others

Someone nearby leaned in and whispered, "Why bother with her? Look at her, showing off as if her husband's little bit of authority makes her tail wag to the sky. Every day she's criticizing this and that, always talking down about rural folks. I really can't tell if she steams herself or looks down on herself."

The person said, "We're all living on the same floor. My husband told me to try not to offend anyone."

"Ah, you just got here and don't know her kind. Whether you offend her or not, it makes no difference."

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Sister-in-law Feng tossed the vegetables onto the floor when she got home, feeling sullen.

But thinking of Sister-in-law Gong's husband's position, she started to feel a bit uneasy.

Just as she was losing herself, Feng Dajun returned home from work.

Seeing her sitting dazed on a chair with two cabbages at her feet and no sign of dinner being made, Feng Dajun frowned slightly, "What's wrong?"

His voice startled Sister-in-law Feng.

Seeing it was Feng Dajun, she quickly stood up, "Da Jun, after Sister-in-law Gong fell, you said you'd go to Minister Wei's house to apologize. How did they react back then? Did they give you a hard time? Lately at work, has Minister Wei been making things difficult for you?"

"Why are you dwelling on such nonsense again? Didn't this matter pass a long time ago? Some time ago you went to see Sister-in-law Gong, didn't you? Don't you know their attitude?"

Speaking of this, Sister-in-law Feng felt even less assured.

"How could they possibly have an attitude towards me? You know, I'm just a rural girl; I hardly ever talk with them. That day, I kindly brought eggs to see her, and her tone was indifferent, as if my warm face met a cold backside. If not for your career, I wouldn't put up with that."

"Why is it always about my career?" Feng Dajun didn't like hearing this, "No matter what, we have some responsibility for Sister-in-law Gong's fall. Asking you to bring some gifts is only right, isn't it?"

"How is it my responsibility? I already told you, she fell because of Lin Chuxia."

Feng Dajun didn't want to hear more and hung his coat on the rack, changing the subject, "Hurry up and make dinner. I'm starving. I told you before, we can buy more cabbage. If you can't handle it, we can go together on the weekend, so you don't have to make one trip for one cabbage."

"Cabbage is expensive now. Wouldn't it be a waste to let it spoil at home if I buy a lot? Besides, prices might drop soon, and buying in bulk isn't cost-effective."

Even after saying this, Sister-in-law Feng still felt uneasy.

"In the Northwest, you and Mr. Qin were equals. Now, though your position is slightly higher, I always felt Minister Wei seems to like Mr. Qin more."

"Qin Yang was transferred here at his request. It's only natural Minister Wei sees something in him," Feng Dajun didn't think much of it.

Sister-in-law Feng sneered, "To me, it seems that couple knows how to curry favor. I didn't tell you before to avoid making you overthink, but today, the more I thought, the more something felt off. The day I visited Sister-in-law Gong, she was cold and rushed me out. Guess what happened as I was leaving?"

Feng Dajun glanced over, "What?"

"I saw Minister Wei and Qin Yang's family coming in together, laughing and chatting as if Qin Yang was Minister Wei's own son..."

Feng Dajun frowned and scolded, "Don't talk nonsense; how could they be that close? I've told you countless times, living in the residential area, you need to mind your words."

"I'm just talking to you at home. They were so warm with each other; clearly, they're on great terms. I even saw Mr. Qin carrying expensive items. I saw Lin Chuxia with Sister-in-law Gong out laughing and chatting today. Usually, Lin Chuxia barely steps out, but today she went out and returned with Sister-in-law Gong. What's that phrase? True epitome of 'dying for the company of a gentleman.' I've been thinking, if they're constantly currying favor with Minister Wei and his wife, when anything good happens at work, others wouldn't get a chance, would they? You should be more mindful, perhaps give Minister Wei some gifts yourself..."

"Minister Wei isn't that kind of person," Feng Dajun instinctively denied, then glanced sideways at Sister-in-law Feng.

"Saying these things to me alone is one thing, but what others are like is their business. Minister Wei isn't like that; I don't need to cater to him. If he was that kind of person, why bother currying favor after offending him?"

Upon hearing this, Sister-in-law Feng blew up, "How did I offend anyone?"

With the conversation reaching this point, Feng Dajun set the tone.

"Don't you know how you've offended people? Do you think I wouldn't know what you do just because I'm not home? Look around at all the tenants here. Who acts like you? We've been in Yan City for so long, and how many friends have you made?"

Look at how Lin Chuxia and Sister-in-law Gong laugh and get along, yet you haven't reflected on yourself.

Sister-in-law Feng felt immediately wronged, her eyes reddening as she began to cry and wipe her tears.

"What have I done? I also want to make friends with them, but they look down on me for coming from the countryside. What can I do? If I had Mrs. Qin's background, driving around in a nice car, they'd flock to me, wouldn't they? Didn't you say before that we villagers are different from them? How quickly you've forgotten you're just a bumpkin too? Even if you can't compete with Qin Yang, how is that my fault? It's just that Minister Wei and the others look down on your background..."

"What nonsense are you saying now? What does this have to do with anything?"

Feng Dajun was tired of Sister-in-law Feng's unreasonable arguments.

Sister-in-law Feng was relentless, "Can you say they respect you? Since we came to the compound, have they ever invited you for a drink or party? I heard Li Wei's family was invited by Mr. Qin for dinner; we were all transferred from the Northwest, the same people. Why didn't they invite you? Because they look down on you."

"You..."

"What about me? I always remember who I am and my status, unlike you—just days in the city, and you've forgotten you're an old farmer too? Even if you forget your status, others won't. As long as they remember, you'll always be a step below them..."

As Sister-in-law Feng's shouting grew louder, Feng Dajun angrily pushed her away, "Truly unreasonable."

Chapter 562: Director Bai

Sister-in-law Feng wasn't paying attention and fell on her backside.

But Feng Dajun didn't even glance at her, took his coat from the rack, threw it on, and left home.

Sister-in-law Feng sat on the ground, wailing, and only when she thought he was far away did she start to quiet down.

At that moment, a pair of small hands grabbed her arm, trying their best to help her up.

Sister-in-law Feng turned her head fiercely, only to see Feng Jingjing shrinking back in fear.

"Mom...Mom..."

"Don't call me Mom! You're just like your dad. Let me tell you, no matter how much you miss your dad, you'll never become non-agricultural. Your household registration will always follow mine as agricultural. You're destined to be a farmer your whole life..."

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At the end of the year, various departments held their summary meetings one after another.

Lin Chuxia originally didn't think these matters had anything to do with her, but Wang Tianxue called, asking her to participate in a city meeting.

Previously, while in Ancheng County, she could understand the county leaders' attention on her as an individual business. Her achievements were indeed impressive in such a small county.

If county leaders wanted to set up a model example, she was confident she could stand at the forefront of certain industries.

But in Yan City, Lin Chuxia didn't really think her achievements were enough to impress those high-ups.

Even Qin's Restaurant had only been in Yan City for just over a year. From what she knew, Yan City had plenty of individual businesses.

"Do you know what's going on from above? Why did they notify us about Huamei Mall?"

It's not that Lin Chuxia was being cautious; she had already learned her lesson from the Old Food Factory in Ancheng.

No matter how dazzling their achievements were, individual businesses always had to take a back seat in front of state-owned enterprises.

One reason was their shallow roots, and another was the lack of identity background.

They say a big tree offers shade, but they don't even have one tree, so how could they claim to be cooler than others?

Wang Tianxue indeed got the inside scoop, "It's an exchange summary meeting, and the government is encouraging individual enterprises. Huamei Mall is considered among the best of Yan City's individual enterprises, which is why they notified us."

Lin Chuxia was still somewhat skeptical, and Wang Tianxue suddenly chuckled.

"My dear, don't you know how capable you are? Huamei Mall has not only found its footing this past half year, but it's also reached a triadic rivalry with Department Store and People's Mall, the two largest malls in Yan City. Because of procedural matters, I had contact with the deputy mayor before, and he was indeed very complimentary of us. I think neither Manager Zhao nor any city leader has the capability to deal with us, not only Huamei Mall, but I heard the above knows Qin's Restaurant is also your business, so they're eager to meet you."

Lin Chuxia did know that many departments had accounts with their restaurant. One could say they were more familiar with Qin's Restaurant than Huamei Mall.

Given the circumstances, Lin Chuxia understood the situation, inquired about the meeting time, and on that day, she and Wang Tianxue went to the city government early.

Lotsa people came that day, almost all major enterprises in Yan City sent representatives.

While report summaries were one aspect, the main goal was for city leaders to secure ties with these enterprises and provide more opportunities for exchange.

Lin Chuxia and Wang Tianxue, as newcomers, only needed to sit quietly and listen to the leaders' reports.

After the meeting ended, they would grab a meal together, completing their task.

They underestimated the simplicity; after the meeting, they were surprisingly called aside by the staff.

Their host was the deputy mayor in charge, someone Wang Tianxue had met before.

This time, the deputy mayor's attitude towards them, especially Lin Chuxia, was very friendly. He said many encouraging words and indicated that if they needed support, the government would back them strongly.

In short, the pair left the office bewildered, finding it hard to believe how forthcoming the city leaders were.

Their rivalry with Department Store had reached a fever pitch; this year Department Store's performance had plummeted, all thanks to Huamei Mall.

Department Store was a state enterprise, logically speaking, the government officials should favor them more, just like in Ancheng County; even when County leaders dealt with Food Factory Director Liu Guoyi, they'd still protect Food Factory's interests.

After all, if a state-run enterprise ran into problems, the government would still be responsible for its hundreds or thousands of employees.

But this deputy mayor seemed to lack such concerns, even wanting to present Huamei Mall as a benchmark and participate in the provincial meeting as Yan City's individual enterprises, an enormous honor.

Moreover, the deputy mayor specifically emphasized that Lin Chuxia must attend the provincial meeting.

Initially, Lin Chuxia had decided that the provincial meeting would be Wang Tianxue's full responsibility, but she had no choice but to attend now.

Wang Tianxue also found it odd, not that she was trying to steal the limelight, but rather because Lin Chuxia was pregnant and it was inconvenient to go anywhere in the freezing weather.

Besides, the mall's operations had always been handled by her, and she could answer any questions directly.

So the two went with full hearts of suspicion to attend the provincial meeting.

Fortunately, Yan City was the provincial capital, so Lin Chuxia didn't have to travel far; she just went directly to the designated venue on the meeting day.

While she was waiting for the meeting to start, a staff member approached her to say a leader wanted to see her.

This made Lin Chuxia even more confused; while it made sense for city leaders to pay attention, her achievements didn't warrant much attention from provincial leaders, right?

But when the office door opened, Lin Chuxia saw a person she never expected.

County Magistrate Bai Qifeng sat cheerfully behind the desk, smiling at her.

Lin Chuxia couldn't help but step back, then glanced at the office door sign: Deputy Director of the National Development and Reform Commission's office.

What was unclear now?

Lin Chuxia didn't know what to say, smiled, and spoke, "Director Bai, you're really... giving me such a surprise."

The last few words carried a hint of gritted teeth.

She felt duped when he approached her, asking to settle over a thousand staff from the Old Food Factory, acting all melancholic and worried when he was about to leave Ancheng County. She thought he'd been transferred to another county or forced to leave for some reason.

In reality, he'd been promoted!

And to such an influential role!

Bai Qifeng, aware of his wrongs, personally poured her a glass of water, "I did what had to be done back then. If I hadn't played the pity card, would you have accepted over a thousand employees from the Old Food Factory?"

In truth, Lin Chuxia didn't initially plan to take on that burden.

"But I didn't misjudge you in the end. They've informed me that now all machines at the Old Food Factory are running, profits have improved in recent months, and those employees you took in can have a good New Year this year."

Chapter 563: A Well-Connected Person

Lin Chuxia also knows the situation at Xiyang Food Factory; every major development, Su Wensong reports to her.

These days, Su Wensong is quite busy. On one hand, he's arranging matters related to the factory's festival and employee benefits. On the other hand, he's been frequently going to the county government.

She is now in Yan City, and the entire Xiyang Food Factory, including Qin's Buns Shop, is managed by Su Wensong.

The mess at the old Food Factory is somewhat troublesome, but since this is their line of work, they've managed to handle it smoothly.

In just over a month, not only have the existing machines been restarted, but even the previously idle workshops are operating one by one.

However, no new staff has been hired.

The old Food Factory previously lacked enough business volume to support so many employees, and they do not want to repeat the same mistake.

"I heard that Qin Family Village has been rated as advanced again this year. The vegetable greenhouses in Qin Family Village are not only famous in Ancheng County but even have business connections in the province and the capital. To be honest, I've traveled to many places, but An City is the one I miss the most."

"Does Director Bai want to consider returning to Ancheng County? If Director Bai returns to Ancheng County, I'll also return and ensure to achieve something big, adding a brick to Director Bai's achievements."

Lin Chuxia asked with a smile, teasing Bai Qifeng into hearty laughter.

"You little girl, always relentless when in the right. However, returning to Ancheng County is not possible. You can achieve just as much in Yan City, and I still have confidence in you."

"So does that mean I'm someone with backing now?"

With the conversation at this point, Lin Chuxia couldn't help but try to build a connection; it wouldn't be fair not to, after Bai Qifeng met her alone.

Bai Qifeng still smiled pleasantly, "The market has been open for so many years, encouraging fair competition among individual businesses. Even without my backing, you can still do well. Just go for it—I admire the drive you young people have."

"Yes, I guarantee to follow the leader's command."

Lin Chuxia almost saluted him.

Bai Qifeng waved with a smile, "Alright, it's about time for the meeting."

Wang Tianxue was still waiting for her outside; by now, she had found out which leader had come to see Lin Chuxia.

Having heard it was the head of the Development and Reform Commission, she wondered which procedure in their mall wasn't completed properly or if they would be trouble from the Department Store's perspective.

In her nervous anticipation, she saw Lin Chuxia walk over with a smile.

"Chuxia, which leader? What exactly did they want? Did you tell them that Huamei Mall is now my responsibility? What's the point of making things difficult for a pregnant woman?"

Lin Chuxia patted her arm, telling her not to worry, "Nothing about work. I ran into an old acquaintance."

Lin Chuxia briefly explained Bai Qifeng's connection and past events in Ancheng County to Wang Tianxue.

Upon hearing this, Wang Tianxue's eyes lit up, "Does this mean that if we want to develop other industries in the future, we can get the green light?"

"As long as we don't violate rules and regulations, in principle, we can," Lin Chuxia whispered, suddenly realizing her words carried meanings, "Don't tell me you already have plans?"

Wang Tianxue smiled and said, "Let's go to the meeting first. We can discuss other matters later; they are not things that can be done overnight."

Upon hearing this, it seemed like it was going to be a big deal.

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Lin Chuxia didn't get to hear about Wang Tianxue's big plans but instead first heard about Hou Xiaobao and Liu Na's wedding.

The day before their wedding, it snowed again in Yan City.

The snow was heavy, with a thick layer covering the ground.

Fortunately, the snow stopped on their wedding day, and the sun came out brilliantly.

However, Lin Chuxia was wrapped up like a zongzi, personally escorted by Qin Yang to attend their wedding, and was instructed to stay quietly as a guest indoors, not allowed to wander around.

Hou Xiaobao rented a small courtyard with three rooms and two side rooms, decorated festively and warmly.

In this area, Hou Xiaobao only knew colleagues from the mall and friends like Jia Liang.

The mall was still open, so his colleagues naturally couldn't attend his wedding. Hou Xiaobao and Liu Na decided to invite their good colleagues for a later dinner celebration at a restaurant after work.

So on this day, besides Lin Chuxia and Aunt Jia, following local customs, only a table of new relatives from the bride's side attended.

The closest people to Hou Xiaobao and the closest people from the bride's side witnessed their wedding.

The two tables were arranged indoors, and the meal was based on Qin's Restaurant's standards, which were quite sumptuous, leaving the bride's family very satisfied.

Lin Chuxia was also very pleased.

To be honest, Houzi usually seemed a bit unserious, but today, as a groom in a well-fitting suit with a red tie, he looked different.

His hair was specially styled, he wore leather shoes, and had a big red flower on his chest.

Truly looking sharp and respectable.

Working under Lin Chuxia, he grew significantly, shedding his previous timid appearance.

Liu Na, on the other hand, wasn't typically categorized as very beautiful but was very pleasant to look at.

In a red bridal outfit, with her hair styled upwards and a few curled strands left on her forehead, she wore a string of red flowers on her head, representing the most fashionable bridal look.

Standing with Hou Xiaobao, they truly looked like a perfect match.

Over the past half-year, Liu Na has grown more confident working at Huamei Mall.

You know the saying? A confident woman is the most beautiful.

Lin Chuxia watched as the couple toasted the guests. Liu Na approached her first with a wine glass.

"Mr. Lin, I know you can't drink today, but I still want to toast you with the first glass. You can drink whatever you wish."

Lin Chuxia came back to her senses and laughed, "In this setting, you should first toast your parents and relatives."

Liu Na stubbornly shook her head, "I feel that the first toast should go to Mr. Lin. Without you, there wouldn't be the Liu Na of today, nor would I have met Hou Xiaobao."

As soon as she finished speaking, Hou Xiaobao also came over with a glass, "What Nana said is exactly what I want to say as well. Mr. Lin, our first toast should certainly be to you. Without Mr. Liu, there wouldn't be the Hou Xiaobao of today."

With both of them insisting, Lin Chuxia did not refuse further, picked up her glass of water, and clinked glasses with them.

Hou Xiaobao and Liu Na downed their drinks in one gulp, especially Liu Na, whose beautiful eyes glistened with tears of happiness.

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In the blink of an eye, it was approaching the end of the year. Qin Yang's workplace had an early holiday, officially starting on the 23rd day of the twelfth lunar month.

The couple didn't have much else going on here this year, and with Lin Chuxia pregnant, they decided to return to their hometown early.

Knowing about their early departure, Jiang Hong brought them a jar of pickled plums.

Chapter 564: The Feeling of Turning the Tables

Lin Chuxia casually asked about her situation. Even though Huamei Mall is extremely busy during the year-end period, if Jiang Hong wanted to request leave to go back to her hometown, Wang Tianxue would still approve it for her.

After all, last year, Jiang Hong didn't return home for the New Year because she was heavily pregnant.

Jiang Hong already had plans. "I'm definitely not going back home for the New Year. You have no idea; Manager Wang mentioned earlier that anyone who stays to work at the mall during those days will get an extra bonus. Even without this bonus, our Huamei Mall earns commissions from selling clothes. You have no idea; so many people have been coming in to buy clothes lately as if our clothes are free. Thanks to our large stock from before, but even so, many styles are sold out. I've calculated that the salary I can earn this month is double that of any other month. No way I'm going to waste such a good opportunity to make money. I told my Li Wei if he wants to go home for the New Year, he can go alone and also take his mom and son with him. I'm staying here to make money."

As she spoke, she scooted closer to Lin Chuxia. "I previously mentioned working at your place, but he just thought I was bored and didn't take my earning potential seriously. Guess what happened when last month's salary was issued?"

Lin Chuxia blinked with curiosity, and Jiang Hong smiled triumphantly.

"Last month, I earned 82 yuan, and Li Wei's salary was only 80 yuan, two less than mine. You should have seen Li Wei's face, as if I was lying to him. He refused to believe I earned that 82 yuan and accused me of borrowing money from my colleagues to deceive him. I threw the payslip in his face, and after looking at it twice, he finally believed that I can not only earn money but earn more than him. Oh, after so many years, I finally got to relish in a bit of pride. And not just that, ever since then, if I get off work late, he would come to the mall to pick me up. He even started helping with reheating meals at home. Chuxia, you have no idea—to have him set foot in the kitchen is a miracle. Even when I was pregnant and couldn't stand the smell of cooking oil, he would still only bring food back from the cafeteria. I never thought one day he'd actually cook for me. Oh, the feeling of turning the tables..."

Lin Chuxia was also amused by her demeanor.

"I've come to understand that the economic foundation really determines the superstructure. So, I'm not going home for the New Year; I'll just stay in Yan City and earn a lot of money, buy whatever I want, and never rely on those stinky men again."

"You have ambition," Lin Chuxia gave her a thumbs-up. "In the end, did Li Wei actually take your mother-in-law and son back home?"

Jiang Hong chuckled again in satisfaction. "No way, let me tell you something you might laugh at," she looked around before lowering her voice to Lin Chuxia's ear, "he's worried that if he leaves me here alone, I'll be snatched away by another man. Lately, he's been acting weird, not even letting me wear new clothes to work. When he sees me in new clothes with lipstick, he gives me the glare, as if I'm out there cheating on him. He should really think it over; look at me—with a kid and everything—what man would be interested?"

Lin Chuxia just smiled without saying anything. Naturally friendly, Jiang Hong quickly got along with her colleagues in the mall.

The salesgirls in the mall are mostly young and fashionable, so she's changed quite a bit with them.

And since she deals with clothes all day, her fashion sense has definitely improved from before.

Just look at her outfit today—she stands out wherever she is.

With a wife like her and also a wife who can make money, it's only natural for Li Wei to feel a sense of crisis.

That's why they say women should always be self-reliant and independent, not just clinging to someone like a morning glory, so the other side will always be on edge.

Lin Chuxia, carrying the preserved plums Jiang Hong brought, grabbed her luggage and headed straight to Qin's Restaurant to pick up Little Ningning.

Ningning was already on winter break and usually spent most of her time at Old Mrs. Jia's. When she heard they were going back to Qin Family Village early, the little girl was overjoyed, quickly packing her bag and clothes, waiting at the restaurant for Lin Chuxia to pick her up.

Before Lin Chuxia's jeep even parked at the restaurant entrance, the little girl had already run out.

Qin Juan and Jia Liang followed behind, constantly reminding her to slow down, but she didn't decrease her speed at all.

The restaurant wasn't busy at the moment, so Lin Chuxia, feeling lazy, just lay against the car window speaking to the people outside.

"Big Sis, rest assured as I take Ningning. In a few days when the restaurant officially closes for vacation, I'll have Qin Yang come pick you up, along with Jianjun and Master. They'll return together too."

Qin Jianjun still had to wait until the end of the year for his market job to let him off, and Sister-in-law Gong still had two acupuncture sessions before the New Year, plus Old Sir He couldn't manage without him.

Luckily, Qin Jianjun was staying with Old Sir He, so Lin Chuxia didn't have too much to worry about.

Qin Juan smiled and agreed, while Jia Liang stood beside, itching to speak.

Lin Chuxia gave him an out, "Is there a problem? Do you think the restaurant's vacation is too early, or is it just hard to manage staff scheduling?"

Jia Liang: "..."

This wasn't quite the out he was hoping for.

Sometimes, Jia Liang thinks Mr. Lin can be quite bad, being so smart and knowing exactly what he wanted to say.

Purposefully diverting the topic, evaporating all the courage he had mustered.

Seeing Lin Chuxia's smiling eyes, Jia Liang took a deep breath, deciding to be straightforward. "I'll go back together with Master then, Mr. Lin, would you mind informing Uncle and Aunt for me?"

Upon his words, Qin Juan quickly turned her head, her face immediately turning red.

Lin Chuxia blinked, "Why do you want to return together with Master? Haven't you already sold your house in An City? What about Aunt Jia if you go back? And why are you asking me to inform your uncle and aunt—they're not even people I know."

Jia Liang's face turned bright red as well. Qin Juan couldn't stand it any longer and went back to the restaurant without even a word to her daughter, her head hung low.

Jia Liang, face flushed with a helpless smile, said, "Mr. Lin, please... please don't tease me. Juanzi finally agreed to it."

Qin Yang couldn't bear his silliness anymore and started the engine, "Let's go."

As the jeep gradually pulled away from the restaurant, Lin Chuxia could still see Jia Liang's bewildered look in the rearview mirror and chuckled softly.

"So simple, I really don't know what my big sis sees in him," Qin Yang quipped from the side.

Before Lin Chuxia could reply, Little Ningning from the back chimed in.

"Uncle Jia is not silly at all; Uncle Jia is very nice. He buys toys and treats for me, and he picks me up and drops me off from school. Many of my classmates think he's my dad and don't dare to bully me. Even Chun Cao asked me if she could borrow Uncle Jia for a few days. She wants a dad who seems really strong and cool too."

"And how did Ningning respond?"

Chapter 565: Is It Really This Exciting?

Lin Chuxia was also intrigued. She knew that Jia Liang usually took good care of Qin Juan and her daughter, but she didn't expect him to have such a good relationship with Ningning.

Ningning lifted her little chin proudly, "I won't give Uncle Jia away to her. I've told him, a dad can only be mine alone..."

"Ningning, that's Uncle Jia, not your dad," Qin Yang couldn't help but remind her.

Ningning waved her small hand nonchalantly, "There's no rush. Very soon, Uncle Jia will be my dad. Grandma Jia said as long as my mom agrees and I agree, then Uncle Jia will be my dad. I really want it, my mom agrees too. I even saw my mom knitting a new scarf for Uncle Jia, and Uncle Jia was so happy that he hugged her."

Lin Chuxia: "..."

Is it that exciting?

Qin Yang: "..."

If you're not careful, someone will take the whole pot, and even pluck a little flower next to it.

Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia came back for the holidays, and the happiest ones are Mrs. Qin and Zhuangzhuang.

Ever since Lin Chuxia got pregnant, Mrs. Qin always wanted to be by her side to take care of her, and now she finally had the chance.

Zhuangzhuang found a new playmate. As soon as he saw Ningning get out of the car, he couldn't wait to pull her along to share his little sister with her.

There were endless stories about his little sister, and there was still a group of little friends in the village who would always take Ningning wherever they went.

Lin Chuxia also enjoyed the festive atmosphere at home, just in time for Mrs. Qin and Zhang Guilan to prepare for New Year.

Today, we butcher chickens and stew meat, tomorrow fry tofu and fry balls, and the day after tomorrow we'll steam a few pots of flower buns...

Mrs. Qin and Zhang Guilan wouldn't let Lin Chuxia lift a finger, so she just sat by and chatted with them, accepting the constant feeding from Zhang Guilan and Mrs. Qin.

In just a few days, Lin Chuxia felt like she had gained a few pounds.

Qin Yang couldn't lend a hand or have a say at home, so he became very interested in Qin Han's greenhouse during these days.

The strawberries in the greenhouse were already in their last season, and whenever he had the time, Qin Yang would go to the greenhouse with Qin Han, under the pretense of helping out, and on the way back, he'd pick a basket of big red strawberries for his wife.

When the village chief heard that Lin Chuxia was back, he cheerfully came over.

As per usual, the village wanted to organize a year-end dinner and wanted to invite Lin Chuxia to join.

He remembered clearly that last year, Lin Chuxia's businesses held a dinner but didn't invite them.

This year, he made a special effort to inquire, and since Xiyang hadn't organized a dinner yet, he seized the opportunity first.

Moreover, even if the Qin Family Village Vegetable Market accounted for half of the village's share, the manager of the market was Lin Chuxia.

In addition, there were pig farms and chicken farms, all of which were connected to Xiyang in some way.

Inviting Lin Chuxia to the dinner made perfect sense.

Besides Lin Chuxia, he also invited Wang Cheng and Su Wensong, and with Qin Han, the lineup was quite complete.

Lin Chuxia didn't refuse the village chief, but just as he was leaving, Qin Yang also got ready and went out with him.

Lin Chuxia thought he was worried about her going out alone, and comforted, "Don't worry, it's just a few steps. The snow in the middle of the road has almost melted, and besides, isn't big brother here too?"

Qin Yang didn't even glance at Qin Han, "I'm going with you; he's not reliable."

Qin Han, who was just about to say something: "..."

Alright, alright. When picking strawberries, I never saw him looking down on me so much.

The village chief didn't mind Qin Yang's presence at all.

Knowing that the couple had a good relationship, in previous years when Lin Chuxia attended their village gatherings, Qin Yang would come if he had the time.

Besides, Qin Yang was the first college student in the village, which made them proud for a while; he was the pride of the village.

The gathering was set at the vegetable wholesale market, as the office there was big and spacious.

As the three of them walked over, they ran into Qin Jiang, who had just returned from inspecting the chicken farm.

Qin Jiang hadn't seen Lin Chuxia and Qin Yang for a while, so he first greeted Qin Yang and then started chatting with Lin Chuxia.

After merging with the Old Food Factory, Xiyang Food's production scale expanded in just a few months.

As one of the suppliers, the Qin Family Village chicken farm expanded its scale as soon as they received the news.

Qin Jiang had now officially become the director of the Qin Family Village chicken farm, and he was fully responsible for all matters.

Over the past few years, he had gained considerable experience in chicken farming. Not long ago, he contacted his brother-in-law to partner up and start a chicken farm, and they planned to raise the first batch of chicks when spring came and the weather warmed up next year.

To be honest, he brought this up with Lin Chuxia because he wanted to connect with Xiyang Food Factory, even if he and Qin Yang were cousins, he felt it was necessary to discuss it with his sister-in-law face to face since Xiyang Food Factory belonged to Lin Chuxia.

Upon hearing this, Lin Chuxia gave him a thumbs up, "Third brother, your idea is very good. I support you, and I'll have a word with Wensong."

Right now is a good time for self-employed to make money. Raising chickens for the village doesn't require responsibility, but in the end, the money you earn is far less than raising your own.

Lin Chuxia understood the difference, which is why when Daqing Mountain Village set up the chicken farm, Lin Chuxia proposed a commission system from the start.

Later, as the chicken farm expanded, they directly set aside part of the profits for the Sun Brothers.

Efforts must always be proportional to rewards.

As far as she knew, Qin Jiang was initially chosen as the deputy director of the Qin Family Village chicken farm because he was a member of the Qin Family. The village chief hoped to connect with a sales channel through Xiyang Food after the chickens were sold.

Now that he was made the official director, it was due to recognizing his abilities.

Whether as deputy or director, Qin Jiang only received a salary from the village. Even though the chicken farm generated tens of thousands in revenue for the village, his monthly salary was only increased by a few dozen yuan.

Qin Jiang didn't wash his hands of it, but instead used his brother-in-law's name to start a separate chicken farm, which already gave the village face.

The industries in Qin Family Village need support, and the family's businesses also require care.

Lin Chuxia didn't feel that Qin Jiang's actions were unfaithful. Even if one day Qin Jiang leaves the Qin Family Village chicken farm, she would think it perfectly normal.

Qin Jiang didn't expect Lin Chuxia to agree so readily, which left him a bit surprised, but he soon broke into a smile, "Then I'll thank my sister-in-law in advance."

Qin Han laughed heartily on the side, "Why are we being so polite? You're starting a chicken farm with your brother-in-law; what about the land? If you really don't have time to plant it, you can let me do it, even if it's just a small plot. I think your land is just right for a greenhouse. When I plant strawberries, you can eat them as much as you like."

Qin Jiang shook his head helplessly. Although he called Qin Han "brother," the two of them were only a year apart, not even a full year when you counted the months.

"If I plant the whole greenhouse for you, what about the public grain?"

Chapter 566: Squandering Wealth

Eating and drinking is not a problem; as long as you have money on hand, you can buy white flour from the flour mill and rice from the grain and oil shop.

Paying the public grain, however, is a big deal.

Qin Han waved his hand largely, "That's easy, I'll cover your share of the public grain. I'll pay for it. After all, I can't let you farm your land for nothing."

Qin Jiang's wife is non-agricultural, so she doesn't have land and doesn't have to pay public grain.

According to the current policy, children follow the mother's household registration.

His son Qin Jianye follows his mother's household registration and is also non-agricultural.

In the end, of the three members of their family, only Qin Jiang needed to pay public grain.

"Alright, let's do it like this then."

The few people chatted as they walked, occasionally greeting villagers from Qin Family Village.

Their cheerful demeanor would surely earn them compliments on their brotherly bond and promising future from anyone who saw them.

For people in the village, isn't life all about these two things? Harmonious brothers and a prosperous life.

In the eyes of the villagers, the Qin Family truly lived these two to the fullest.

Of course, there was an exception.

Ma Suyun emerged from behind a big tree with a basket, still watching the figures in the distance.

"Suyun, heading to your mother-in-law's again," someone saw Ma Suyun and greeted her.

Seeing her carrying a basket, they jokingly asked, "What good stuff have you got this time? Your mother-in-law really dotes on you, you know. When you give her a chubby grandson, she might even give you all her savings from her coffin fund."

Mentioning a chubby boy, Ma Suyun straightened her yet-to-show belly, trying to look pregnant, slightly lifting her chin.

"Sister-in-law, what are you saying? It's not even New Year yet. My mom is worried I can't manage with the pregnancy, so she fried me some snacks. It's nothing valuable. Besides, my Da Wen is the youngest and most filial among the brothers, so it's only right to take care of him a bit."

"Oh, who wouldn't agree? Your Da Wen used to be a government worker, and even now in the village, he stands out. He'll surely have a promising future one day, especially now that you're expecting a child. Anyone would take care of you."

The words made the smile on Ma Suyun's face even more genuine, "I don't expect my Da Wen to become a big success. Just living a steady life with him is good. Da Wen is smart, and if we teach our child well, he will surely be well-educated. I'm hoping my son can get into college and bring me happiness."

"Yes, yes, with Da Wen's ability, he can surely raise a college student."

Hearing this, the fire stifling Ma Suyun's chest suddenly dissipated completely.

She gave a glance of appreciation, for having a keen eye, lifted her basket proudly, and walked away.

But she didn't notice that after she turned around, the other person's expression also changed, from a smile to disdain, almost spitting on the ground.

Muttering quietly, "What's with that, really thinking she's something special? Anyone can have kids; I've had two already and haven't been fussing about it, yet she's constantly talking about having a son. I think she's obsessed with having a son. Even if they have a son, with your Qin Wen, he'd probably turn out to be a scoundrel, pfft."

Ma Suyun naturally couldn't hear these words and went home happily, but the sight of Qin Wen lying on the kang sobered her mood instantly.

Other men were all rising up; even Qin Jiang, whom she once looked down on, had become the director of the chicken farm. Only her Qin Wen had lost a good job because of those people.

"Don't sleep anymore. Didn't you say we'd set up some greenhouses to grow strawberries? I just asked mom; Qin Han earned a lot selling those two strawberry greenhouses. I heard last year's strawberries fetched two yuan per catty."

Qin Jiang sat up in a flash upon hearing this, "Two yuan per catty? Did mom hear it wrong?"

"How could she hear wrong? I asked specially. Earlier, the strawberries were one yuan fifty per catty, and as the New Year approached, the price increased. I heard a single picking could earn hundreds. When transported, they were wrapped in quilts, just like wrapping a golden nugget. My goodness, two yuan per catty, more expensive than meat. I don't know what kind of people could afford such pricey strawberries. It's really extravagant."

Recollecting the recent scene, Ma Suyun continued, "When I was coming back, I saw the second family along with Lin Chuxia merrily heading east with your second brother. I heard the village cadres are over at the wholesale market today. That bunch is quite popular in the village. Your second brother too, probably can't even tell who his real brothers are. He seems closer to those two than to you. This is exactly it; when you have money, even those who aren't related stick around, while the penniless ones are ignored by their real brothers. We need to hurry and set up our greenhouse. Once we harvest strawberries, we'll have money in hand. Let's see who dares to look down on us then."

Qin Wen scratched his head in frustration, "Easy for you to say. Where do we have money now? You asked how much Qin Han sold the strawberries for, but didn't inquire about the cost of a greenhouse. All the money I earned over these years was spent on your medication. Where am I supposed to get money for the greenhouse?"

These words weren't pleasant for Ma Suyun, "It's not like the medicine was just for me alone. The doctor said the problem mostly lies with you. If you had agreed to see the doctor earlier, we wouldn't have wasted so much money."

"What nonsense are you spouting?" Qin Wen's temper flared, "Who said the problem is with me? Clearly, you're the useless one. I took the medication just to soothe you. If I weren't sympathetic, I could have divorced you and married someone else; maybe she would have had kids right away. Mind your foul mouth. Don't spout this nonsense outside."

Huddled by Qin Wen's shout, Ma Suyun recoiled slightly. This had been Qin Wen's attitude since the doctor suggested he get checked.

Despite the facts, he remains like this.

But Ma Suyun knows this man has a strong ego. Now that there's a child on the way, she doesn't want to agitate him over this issue.

So she changed the topic, "Why don't you borrow some money from elder brother? I heard from mom that elder brother's watermelon sales were good. His son Jianjun works in the city and probably has saved a lot of money."

Qin Wen thought for a moment and nodded, "Hmm, I'll talk to elder brother about it during the New Year."

.....

When Lin Chuxia and the others arrived at the office of the vegetable wholesale market on the east side of the village, most people were already there.

From afar, the room was filled with lively chatter.

For today's gathering, the village chief invited a well-known chef from the village to cook, and the village chief's wife, along with the security director's wife and the accountant's wife, came to assist.

Steaming buns, stewing meat, the whole courtyard was filled with a fragrant aroma.

The room was also heated warmly. As soon as you walked in, you felt the warmth, both from the heat and the lively atmosphere, which made people feel cozy.

Chapter 567: Secrets

Honestly, considering her current achievements, she's met quite a few big shots.

Just the other day, she attended city and provincial meetings, interacted with the deputy mayor, Director Bai, and dined at the same table with them.

But what she loves most is this lively scene in front of her.

The people here and their genuine smiles.

These are the ones who followed and supported her from the very beginning.

Today they not only had a banquet but also handed out red envelopes.

Holiday bonuses and prizes from the Qinjiang Chicken Farm, Wangcheng Vegetable Wholesale Market, and the village cadres were all distributed today.

Each thick envelope in hand brought joy to everyone.

And the biggest red envelope was with Lin Chuxia, as she has shares in the pig farm and the vegetable wholesale market.

The village chief had the accountant issue her a receipt, and seeing the string of numbers on it, Lin Chuxia was very satisfied.

Once business was done, it was time to eat and drink.

The village chief originally thought that since Qin Family Village had a bountiful harvest this year, and Lin Chuxia was the rightful contributor, they must ensure she eats well today.

But just as the wine was poured, it was taken away by Qin Yang, who was nearby.

Only then did they realize Lin Chuxia was pregnant.

This was great news; even though the table was full of big men, they knew Qin Yang and his wife had been married for several years.

In those years, Lin Chuxia focused only on her career and finally had time to have a child.

With a child, she certainly couldn't drink, but she should eat well.

So they began a new round of offering dishes.

In short, the lively atmosphere continued until the afternoon, with the dishes being reheated twice.

Until the men were tipsy and at risk of sleeping here if they didn't go home, then the banquet dispersed.

Lin Chuxia didn't drink, and although Qin Yang was made to drink a few glasses, he wasn't drunk.

If anyone drank the most, it was Qin Han.

Qin Han, being the most familiar with these village cadres and having a straightforward nature and good relations, could drink a couple of glasses with anyone.

Thus, he ended up getting quite tipsy.

Qin Jiang, on the other hand, remained calm throughout; his reserved nature perfectly avoided him being forced to drink.

As the banquet ended, Qin Han was swaying left and right, walking in a zigzag path. Lin Chuxia wanted Qin Yang to support him, but Qin Yang was not pleased.

He cared more about his wife's well-being than his elder brother's safety.

It was Qin Jiang who stepped up, putting Qin Han's arm over his shoulder and helping him back home.

Qin Yang and Lin Chuxia followed behind them, occasionally holding hands.

Until a low giggle came from behind, and they saw Liangliang and Ningning, the two little rascals, trailing behind them at some point.

Along with Qin Jianye from Qinjiang's family and Niuniu from Qin Wu's family.

Zhuangzhuang was the cheekiest, pretending to cover his face with his little hands but peeking through his fingers with big eyes.

"Uncle and Auntie, I didn't see anything, Third Brother told me to watch you two."

Qin Jianye raised his hand and flicked his forehead, "I told you to watch your dad. Second Uncle is certainly drunk, Second Auntie will scold him when they get home. When my dad drinks too much, my mom will scold him. Who told you to watch Fourth Uncle and Fourth Auntie?"

Zhuangzhuang rubbed his head, stubbornly retorting, "You're lying. You clearly told me to watch Uncle and Auntie. You even said they were holding hands, and that's something only couples do."

Little Ningning raised her hand, "I know this, Uncle Jia and my mum held hands too. But they did it secretly, thinking I didn't know, but I already saw it secretly..."

Then she suddenly covered her mouth, her big eyes rolling, "This is a secret; you're not allowed to tell anyone."

Zhuangzhuang patted his chest, "Don't worry, I'm the best at keeping secrets."

Qin Jianye wasn't willing to be left out, "This is our little secret, rest assured, I won't tell outsiders."

Niuniu also raised her chubby little hand, "Me too."

The little kids were chattering away, making Lin Chuxia laugh heartily.

"Alright, you can save your secrets for later. Auntie bought you candy and cookies, come on, let's go back, and I'll get them for you."

Kids love treats the most, and at Lin Chuxia's words, they whooped and ran home, quickly overtaking Qin Jiang and Qin Han.

Lin Chuxia watched the kids with a smile, imagining that in a few years, her and Qin Yang's child would be among them too.

But with the children's reminder, Lin Chuxia remembered that her eldest sister would be returning tomorrow.

Jia Liang would also come over to propose.

"When you go to Yan City to pick them up tomorrow, bring Jia Liang along too; the buses during the New Year are hard to catch."

Qin Yang snorted coldly at the distant roof, "What's so hard about it? It's just a little crowded, is he afraid of being stolen by someone?"

Lin Chuxia tickled his palm, "Look at you being all jealous. Well, whatever, just remember to pick up Master, Jianye, and eldest sister, you don't need to worry about Jia Liang. He can come back however he wants, after all, he's the one seeking to marry our eldest sister. The more difficult it is, the more sincere he seems."

Qin Yang tightened his grip on her playful fingers, giving a faint "hmm," without saying more.

Lin Chuxia knew that this man was just being stubborn.

.....

The weather at the end of the lunar month is the coldest time of the year.

The snow hasn't melted yet, and with the little northern wind blowing, it chills to the bone.

Luckily, Lin Chuxia was well wrapped up, and the house had heating installed this year. Once inside, the warmth hit, making her feel completely at ease.

"It's all thanks to Big Brother for installing the heating this year. Living in a house with heating in the city, it would've been hard to get used to it here without it."

Lin Chuxia sighed as she took off her coat.

How could she get used to it?

In her past life, she spent decades living in luxury; whether it was an apartment or a villa, the heating was always well set up.

Honestly, the first two winters back without heating were quite a struggle for her.

Thankfully, the Spiritual Spring water nourished her, keeping her healthy this time around.

The kids heard the commotion and ran over from Zhang Guilan's house.

Once inside, Zhuangzhuang started telling Lin Chuxia, "Auntie, Auntie, my dad got scolded. My mom scolds people fiercely. If baby sister wasn't sleeping, she would have yelled even louder. I also saw my mom pinching my dad, and he didn't dare to move."

Qin Jianye, beside him, said earnestly to Zhuangzhuang, "Second Auntie is already very kind. She still let your dad on the kang, took off his shoes, covered him with blankets, and even poured him a glass of water. If my dad gets drunk, he has to share the bed with me, and I have to take off his shoes, cover him with blankets, and pour him water. My mom won't scold or hit him; she'll just lock their door and not let him in."

Chapter 568: Shamelessness Is a Must to Get a Wife

Zhuangzhuang widened his eyes, "Wow, will Auntie Three make Uncle Three stand in punishment? Like if Uncle Three does something wrong, will she make him stand against the wall? I saw Auntie Three punish her students like that at school. My classmates said she's got a good temper, never hits anyone, just makes them stand as punishment. Other teachers in other classes hit students instead. I got 82 in math this time, and the teacher hit my palm 17 times. The teacher said, if you don't score 100, every point less means a hit on the hand. Just look at my hand, it's still swollen."

Qin Jianye grabbed his little hand and examined it carefully, "Looks okay to me, your two hands don't look any different. Your hands are naturally chubby."

"Really?" Zhuangzhuang seemed unconvinced, examining his hand closely, "I still feel the pain, it hurts when I touch it."

Ningning timidly spoke up, "If it's one hit for every point less, why did you get hit 17 times? $82+17=99$, there should be one more hit missing."

Zhuangzhuang lifted his head abruptly, eyes wide in disbelief, "The teacher miscalculated, right, it should've been 18 times. But I clearly remember she hit me 17 times. Teachers can make mistakes too. What should I do? Should I remind the teacher when school starts?"

Ningning nodded seriously, "You should remind her, a teacher shouldn't miscalculate. What if she teaches all the students that $82+17=99$?"

Qin Jianye thought for a moment and said, "Maybe don't tell her. If you really tell the teacher, won't she just hit you one more time? Do you really want to make it 100?"

Zhuangzhuang shook his head vigorously, his little head shaking like a rattle, "I don't want any more hits, but I also don't want the teacher to teach the students wrong. What should I do?"

The little guy was so anxious that he scratched his head, which made Lin Chuxia laugh out loud.

These little kids are really amusing when they're together.

Niuniu couldn't understand what they were talking about, so she stood by, blinking her big eyes. She nodded after each spoke, as if agreeing with everyone, though she hadn't said a word, she still seemed part of the conversation.

She was so sweet that Lin Chuxia's heart melted.

She quickly took out her little snacks: calcium milk biscuits, White Rabbit candies, chocolate cookies, peach shortbread, cakes, and invited the kids over to eat, specially giving Niuniu a handful of White Rabbit candies.

Niuniu's cheeks were stuffed with biscuits, yet she didn't forget to mumble, "Thank you, Auntie!"

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The next morning, after breakfast, Qin Yang drove the jeep to the city.

He returned before noon.

Qin Jianye was the first to get off, having dressed up specially for the New Year's visit to the village.

He wore a navy long cotton coat, black pants, and shiny leather boots.

Standing at almost six feet tall, slim and lanky, he cut quite a striking figure.

He greeted Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin, and then turned to help Old Sir He out of the car.

At the same time, the passenger seat door opened.

Jia Liang, wearing a black cotton hat, long black cotton coat, black trousers, and black shoes, with only a gray scarf breaking the all-black, stepped out.

Lin Chuxia pursed her lips; add a pair of black sunglasses to him, and people might avoid him on the street.

She glanced at Mrs. Qin, who indeed appeared a bit uncomfortable, while Mr. Qin seemed cheerfully unfazed.

Qin Juan and Qin Yang also got out of the car.

Jia Liang waited for Qin Juan a step behind, carrying big bags and small, approached respectfully, nearly bowing ninety degrees.

"Dad, Mom, Happy New Year!"

His booming voice startled not only Lin Chuxia but also Zhang Guilan nearby.

Mr. and Mrs. Qin were left speechless.

Though they knew he was here to propose, they hadn't agreed yet, so how could he already call them mom and dad?

Qin Juan blushed bright red, wishing she could find a hole to crawl into.

Qin Han kicked Jia Liang instantly, "You punk, how long have you been hiding this intent? This 'mom and dad' of yours is smoother than my 30-plus years of saying it."

Jia Liang finally realized he had blurted out his heart's desires accidentally.

No wonder the two elders looked shocked, and everyone else seemed scared.

His face flushed red, stammering, "No, I didn't mean that, Uncle, Aunt, let me explain..."

Qin Han put an arm around his shoulder, "Explain what? Regretting calling them mom and dad? If you really do regret it, you don't need to explain. The door is behind you, feel free to leave."

Despite his age, Jia Liang had thick skin, and Old Mrs. Jia often nagged him about marrying, telling him to be shameless in pursuit of a wife.

After his brief panic, he collected himself and smiled sheepishly, "No way, I've been wanting to call them that, just worried they won't respond."

Turning around, he solemnly addressed Mr. and Mrs. Qin, "Uncle, Aunt, I'm here today to propose. I know I'm not much, not worthy of Juanzi. I'm not good with words either, can't speak pretty words, but from the moment I saw her, there's been a feeling taking root and sprouting in my heart. I want to protect her, care for her, and support each other through life. When she's cold, I'll build a wall for her; when she's hungry, I'll bring her a bowl of porridge. When she's happy, I want to watch her smile, and when she's sad, I'll quietly stay by her side. I...I want to make a home with her. Uncle, Aunt, please grant us this!"

After finishing, he bowed deeply once more.

Qin Juan had already teared up by now.

Zhang Guilan and Lin Chuxia also looked on with pleased faces.

Qin Han patted his shoulder, "And you say you're not good with words? You've been learning these fancy lines in the city, sounding like your lips are coated in honey."

Mr. Qin stepped forward to help him up, eyeing the young man in front of him with satisfaction, "It's cold outside, let's go talk inside. I heard you have an elderly mother at home. You came alone, what about her? Next time, bring her along. It's much livelier with everyone together."

Jia Liang understood immediately.

He nodded firmly, "Got it, Dad."

Qin Han already took over the gifts he held. Jia Liang followed the couple inside, attentively helping Mrs. Qin on the steps, "Ma, watch your step, I'll help you."

Mrs. Qin felt a bit out of place.

Zhang Guilan and Lin Chuxia kept exchanging knowing looks at Qin Juan, making her blush deeply.

"Oh, I just got back from the market, from a distance, I saw your jeep and guessed everyone was back. Juanzi, it's been half a year, and you seem to have gained a little weight. Look at this fresh face of yours, not at all like a mom's, more like a young girl."

Chapter 569: That's Just Too Much Bullying

Before they reached the house, Qian Chuncao's loud voice was heard.

She knew her eldest son would come back today and had been on the lookout; sure enough, she chased after the jeep as soon as she saw it.

After greeting everyone, her eyes landed on her son.

Since he went to the city, her son had been busy with work and studies, and rarely came back home.

In the blink of an eye, it had been more than half a year since she last saw her son.

Looking at him now, he seemed to have grown taller, and most importantly, he had the demeanor of an adult.

Previously, on the phone, she heard he was working at a mall and had even gone on a business trip to the south.

Compared to her who had never left the county, he seemed to have experienced a lot.

The clothes he wore were also nice; tall and slender, how did her son grow up to be so handsome?

Qian Chuncao couldn't take her eyes off him; no matter how much she looked, it wasn't enough. She didn't even hear the people next to her talking.

Only when Qin Jianjun helplessly reminded her did she come back to her senses.

Lin Chuxia smiled and said, "Jianjun, quickly go home with your mom. Sister-in-law misses her son; it's hard to get a few days off during the Spring Festival. Spend more time at home with your mom."

"Alright, Aunt Lin."

Qin Jianjun always listened to Lin Chuxia.

Only then did Qian Chuncao notice an unfamiliar man in the crowd.

She looked at his position, at the things Qin Han was holding, and finally at Qin Juan.

Smiling, she said, "Sister-in-law knows me well. Alright, you all keep busy, I'll take Jianjun back now."

Qin Jianjun had also bought a lot of things when he came back, all sitting in the car.

He left some things for Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin, and the rest Qian Chuncao helped him carry as they walked home side by side.

No sooner had they left when more people arrived at the house.

It was a cousin's wife, bringing over a big bowl of meatballs they had fried at home for the New Year.

In the past two years, the Qin Family had done a lot in the village.

Whether it was the Xiyang Food Factory, the vegetable greenhouses in the village, Qin Han's agricultural supply store, or the vegetable wholesale market...

The villagers of Qin Family Village personally felt the benefits brought by the Qin Family.

The villagers were sincere and grateful, and many remembered the goodness of the Qin Family. Without the Qin Family, their current good days wouldn't exist, so they always thought of the Qin Family whenever they had something good.

Zhang Guilan went outside to greet this sister-in-law.

After a while, another aunt stopped by to visit. Seeing the house had guests, she didn't stay long and left.

By noon, Mrs. Qin, Zhang Guilan, and Qin Juan were in the kitchen preparing lunch.

Zhang Guilan repeatedly said Mrs. Qin didn't need to help, but Mrs. Qin just wanted to stay longer with her daughter there.

Qian Chuncao was right, her daughter had gained some weight, her complexion had improved, and she looked radiant.

Thinking back to when she hadn't yet divorced Zhang Wenbin, her daughter was as thin as a bag of bones, and Zhang Wenbin would always say Qin Juan was ungrateful and never gained weight no matter how much she ate.

In truth, it was their Zhang Family who was the most ungrateful.

How could someone not gain weight if they ate well?

Now Qin Juan was working at a restaurant, managing people, going out early and coming back late every day, working hard, but you could visibly see her gaining weight.

In the end, her daughter never lived a decent life with the Zhang Family.

Seeing her mother always looking at her, Qin Juan candidly talked about her and Jia Liang.

She knew her mother wouldn't be at ease unless she heard everything clearly.

Lin Chuxia didn't go to the kitchen, she was responsible for watching Little Yaoyao.

Little Yaoyao was now over five months old, raised plump and fair by Zhang Guilan.

Her big eyes were like black grapes, rolling around, full of spirit.

Dressed in layers for the winter, the little one had just learned to turn over. She would lie on the kang, huffing and puffing, kicking her legs for a long time without moving at all.

Lin Chuxia turned her over, but within two minutes she flipped back again, continuing to kick her legs and pant, exhausted to the point her drool was dripping.

Lin Chuxia placed a toy in front of her, using her hands to guide her little feet to crawl for it.

But after all her efforts, it was still in vain.

"You can't do it; watch me."

Qin Yang came over, holding a peeled orange. He broke open a segment, put it to the baby's mouth for a taste, then placed it in front of her.

The little one's big eyes stared at the orange segment, kicking her little legs vigorously, her face turning red from the effort.

Qin Yang placed his hand behind her little feet, and the little one suddenly lunged forward, right to the orange, bowing her head to start nibbling.

Lin Chuxia:

"You're so mean,"

She said, taking the orange piece from the little one's mouth to prevent choking.

The little one cried immediately after the orange she finally got was taken away.

Qin Yang shrugged, "I didn't make her cry."

Lin Chuxia was speechless, holding Little Yaoyao in her arms to comfort her, "What brings you here? Aren't you supposed to be with the new brother-in-law?"

Qin Yang smirked, "What's the point if he's already with Mom and Dad? I'd just be in the way of him winning over his in-laws."

Lin Chuxia looked over to see that Jia Liang was chatting animatedly with Mr. Qin, along with Qin Han.

They looked like a long-lost father and son or brothers.

With that lively scene, Qin Jianjun and Qian Chuncao had also gone back home.

They met many villagers along the way, who were both envious and complimentary of the greatly changed Qin Jianjun.

The happiest of all was Qian Chuncao; mothers most hope for their sons to succeed, and she was happier hearing others praise her son than being praised herself.

When they got home, Qin Liang and Qin Jianshe had just returned from the fields.

Seeing his brother's appearance, Qin Jianshe was full of envy.

"Brother, I don't want to go to school anymore. Does Aunt Lin need help? Talk to Mom and Dad for me; I'll work with you instead."

Seeing that his brother could both make money and afford new clothes, he also wanted to wear nice clothes.

Qin Jianjun didn't pay attention to what he said, but directly handed him a bag, "Try this on for fit."

Qin Jianshe opened the bag, his eyes lighting up, "New winter coat, new shoes, and military boots. Brother, how did you know I've been wanting a pair of military boots? You know, this year Mom didn't have time to buy me new clothes for the New Year, and I was worried about having nothing new to wear."

"Alright, now you have new clothes, so don't bother your brother anymore. Let him rest a bit. Have some watermelon, son, after your long journey back home."

Qin Liang brought out a stored watermelon, cutting it for his son.

Qin Jianjun glanced to the east side, "Dad, I'll eat the watermelon later. I want to see Grandpa and Grandma first."

His grandparents had always doted on him since he was a child; it had been several months since he last saw them. Calls were usually answered by his parents.

Qin Liang nodded with a gratified smile, "Go ahead, they've long been wishing to see you."

With gifts bought for the old couple, Qin Jianjun entered Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin's quarters, only to be startled by the people inside.

Chapter 570: Like She's Suffering from Some Serious Illness

"Auntie, how did you change so much? I almost didn't recognize you."

Inside the room, besides Mr. Qin and Mrs. Qin, there was another woman.

Qin Jianjun didn't recognize her at first and was about to greet her out of politeness. On closer inspection, he realized it was his aunt, Ma Suyun.

He hadn't been back for more than half a year, and in that time, his family hadn't changed much. Even his grandparents looked the same as before, except for this aunt.

At a glance, she looked like a gravely ill patient, with more wrinkles than his mother, a sallow and dull complexion, and so thin she barely looked human.

Ma Suyun didn't mind Qin Jianjun's stare; instead, she seemed a bit proud.

"Oh, it's just that your younger brother is too active, making it hard for me to eat and sleep well. This little one hasn't been well-behaved since he was in the womb. You can tell he's a lively one, but don't worry, that's how it is during pregnancy."

Qin Jianjun couldn't help but twitch his lips.

Who was worried? He was just shocked to see someone so thin as if left with only skin and bones, looking like they were seriously ill.

He hadn't expected she was pregnant.

But is pregnancy really like this? His fourth aunt is also pregnant and seems even a bit fatter than before, definitely not like this.

Though doubtful, Qin Jianjun didn't pay much more attention to it.

Placing the box of pastries in front of the two elders, he opened it up while saying, "Grandpa, Grandma, these are pastries I bought from the city. There are many kinds: crispy ones, soft ones, some with fillings, and what they call roll cakes with cream..."

Mrs. Qin's toothless gums were all exposed as she smiled, "Oh dear, you're working hard and earning money outside, save the money to find a wife. Your grandpa and I have plenty to eat at home, no need to worry about us."

From the moment Qin Jianjun entered, Ma Suyun had been eyeing the things he brought.

Now that the box of pastries was open, the aroma wafted over, and seeing those exquisitely made pastries, she instinctively swallowed, "Mother, what are you saying? It's Jianjun's thoughtfulness. He's grown up and knows to buy delicious food to honor his elders."

Qin Jianjun knew his grandmother had bad teeth, so he picked a soft one and brought it to the old lady's mouth, "Grandma, try this. The cream inside is really good."

Mrs. Qin took a bite from his hand, and the soft cake practically melted in her mouth, with egg and cream flavors she had never experienced before.

"Grandma, is it good?"

"It's delicious. I've never had such a tasty cake in my life."

Mrs. Qin was so moved she nearly cried.

All these years of doting on her oldest grandson hadn't been in vain; he made money and knew to buy her new clothes and such delicious pastries.

"A couple of bites are enough for me; let your grandpa have some," she said, planning to savor what was left. Come Spring Festival, she wanted to show these to her old friends, boasting a luck no one else had.

Qin Jianjun insisted on putting the cake into the old lady's hand, "There's more. Grandpa likes ones with filling. Here, Grandpa, this one's got date paste filling."

"With date paste filling?" Mr. Qin eagerly took a bite, "Delicious, truly delicious, aromatic, soft, and sweet. The filled pastries I had before had sugar and candied green silk; this is so much better. Truly worthy of city pastries."

"If you like it, eat more. I'll bring more next time I visit."

Mr. Qin was also so delighted his eyes squinted into slits, eating happily, and just as he finished one piece, another was stuffed into his hands by Qin Jianjun, which made Ma Suyun a bit restless.

She began to speak with a smile, "Jianjun is indeed filial. These pastries look so good; we can't buy anything like them here. You can smell how fragrant they are. When your elder uncle worked at the Hardware Company, he bought pastries for your grandparents too. He tried to get the best available, but in our small county, it was just peach pastries and sponge cakes."

She craned her neck to look inside the pastry box, "I've never even seen those cream rolls before, let alone tasted them. I don't know what cream tastes like."

Qin Jianjun had been focused on his grandparents, but hearing the clear implication in his aunt's words, he glanced at the pastries in the box, contemplating whether to let her have some.

Truth be told, he didn't like this aunt much after she bad-mouthed his fourth aunt.

If she wasn't his actual aunt, he wouldn't even bother to say a word to her.

But in front of his grandparents, this aunt kept praising him.

There's a saying that you don't hit someone who's smiling.

As he was pondering, his mother's voice came from outside.

"What's cream taste like? Just like milk, right? Like the milk from Old Chen's big cow at the west end of the village. I remember you couldn't stand these gamey smells when pregnant. Jianjun, quickly take the pastry box away. It can't stay here with your grandma. Your aunt is pregnant and can't handle these smells, or else she'll be nauseous again. Quickly take them to your room. If your grandpa and grandma want some, they can always get it from you. You don't know how hard your aunt's pregnancy has been, and we should be understanding. She often visits your grandpa and grandma; we can't let her suffer even more."

Qin Jianjun wanted to tell his mom that though cream has a milk flavor, it's neither fishy nor gamey.

But he saw his mom constantly winking at him.

Though confused, Qin Jianjun obediently covered up the pastry box, "Alright, Grandpa, Grandma, I'll put the pastry box in my room. If you want some, you can come and get it from me, or I can bring it to you."

Seeing Qin Jianjun was seriously about to take the pastry box away, Ma Suyun grew anxious.

"Jianjun, what are you saying? Your grandparents are so old, and they have to go to your room just to eat some pastries? Aren't you just making them go through trouble? Since you bought them for your grandparents, doesn't it make sense to leave them here so they can eat them whenever they want? Why the fuss? As if you're afraid your grandparents might eat them or something."

Before Qin Jianjun could speak, Qian Chuncao intervened.

"Our Jianjun isn't that kind of child. Since he bought them for the old folks, he wants them to eat them. Leaving them in their room, who knows whose hands they might end up in."

"Sister-in-law, what do you mean by that?" Ma Suyun retorted angrily, "Break it down for me. What do you mean by whose hands they might end up in? If it's for Mom and Dad, then it's theirs. They can eat them however they want or give them to whoever they please. You're saying you're honoring Mom and Dad while not letting them eat. What kind of heart do you have? I know you've always disliked me. If you're afraid I'll eat it, just say it. I never wanted to take from Mom and Dad. Besides, this is their last grandchild in my belly. Don't they deserve to dote on him?"

Qian Chuncao sneered without even sparing Ma Suyun a glance...