

The 80s 561

Chapter 561: New Joy

Having returned to Qing City, night had completely fallen. Qi Taiguo put down his things and rushed to report to the military unit, while Cheng Su massaged her waist, took a short rest, simply made herself some noodles, and only after she had eaten did she start to put away the things she brought back.

Of the families living in the same building, only Chunhua, who was heavily pregnant and nearing childbirth, was still around; all the others had gone back to their hometowns for the New Year, so the building was very quiet.

However, there were no lights on in Chunhua's home. Could they have gone to bed this early?

Cheng Su glanced at the time—it was only eight o'clock. She figured it wouldn't matter to wait a little longer to visit, so she decided to pay them a New Year's visit tomorrow instead.

After putting everything away and taking a bath, Cheng Su leaned on her bed, quietly digesting the events of the past few days during the New Year celebration.

Throughout the New Year, she had observed the attitudes of various families. Exceptional eccentricities were everywhere, but there were also good people. In just this one New Year, she had come to accept it all.

If she could get along with someone, she would; if not, then it was best to minimize contact. After all, the person she was living her life with was Qi Taiguo; as for anyone else, she would just do what felt right in her heart and leave it at that.

It was actually her father-in-law whose attitude had genuinely surprised her; within the whole family, she hadn't expected that it would be Old Liang who stood by her side the most.

As for the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, well, best leave that unsaid.

This ancient and complex relationship was one she couldn't resolve, so she might as well treat it with the same deference she would give to a boss.

Then, thinking of her own parents, although they were not her biological ones, their protective attitude also moved her. They truly were her immediate family, after all.

As her thoughts drifted, sleepiness overtook her. Cheng Su pulled the lamp cord and drifted off to sleep.

A night without dreams.

The company and the restaurant were still closed, giving her rare days of leisure. Cheng Su enjoyed a natural awakening, got up to wash up, made herself a cup of coffee, and, smelling its aroma, felt refreshed and clear-headed.

Having been away from home for the New Year, she hadn't stocked up on any food, but luckily, both her own parents and her in-laws had given her quite a bit of food. Cheng Su planned to boil a couple of corn cobs and fry a couple of eggs for a simple breakfast.

As she left her apartment, she heard a clanging noise from the kitchen.

Approaching, she saw Liang Shurong busily working, a pot falling from his hands with a clattering noise.

"Old Liang, happy New Year! What are you doing up so early?" Cheng Su greeted him with a smile.

Liang Shurong hadn't expected her to be back and smiled, "Sister-in-law, happy New Year." He then added, "I'm getting ready to make some food!"

"Why are you cooking? Where's Chunhua?" Cheng Su asked curiously.

Liang Shurong grinned sheepishly, "She's in the hospital. Oh, she said her stomach hurt yesterday, so we went to the hospital, and the baby was born last night."

Cheng Su was delighted, "Born? Are mother and child doing well? Did she have a boy or a girl?"

"She had a girl, and both mother and daughter are doing well. I came back to make her some egg soup and such," replied Liang Shurong.

"Oh, congratulations on the birth of a precious daughter, and I'm glad they're both healthy. But now that you're back here, who's with her at the hospital? You should hurry over. I can make the soup and bring it to her," Cheng Su joyfully offered.

Touched and somewhat embarrassed upon hearing this, Liang Shurong, who wasn't used to cooking as his wife usually handled it, truly did not know what to do, and with his mother not yet arrived, he was indeed worried about leaving his wife and daughter alone in the hospital. It was a situation without much choice.

Now that Cheng Su had volunteered to help, he was of course grateful. He hesitated for a moment and then said, "Well, if you wouldn't mind, I'll take some things that might be useful as well."

"Sure, go on," urged Cheng Su with a wave of her hand.

Neighbors helping each other was the natural thing to do, and since Chunhua and her family had helped when she herself was sick, it was only right to visit and lend a hand now that Chunhua had given birth.

Chapter 562: Unfortunately, It's Not The Boy

Cheng Su had made the soup and got dressed, ready to leave, when Qi Taiguo just returned and asked, "It's so early in the morning, and there's no need to open the store, where are you going?"

"Chunhua gave birth last night to a girl. This morning, Liang Shurong came back to make soup. No one from their family has come over yet, so I told him to stay at the hospital. I made some soup and am just about to take it there!" Cheng Su explained with a smile.

"She gave birth? Then I'll go and have a look too," Qi Taiguo said.

"No, you don't have to. You just finished the night shift and should rest. They've just had a baby, and you're all full of 'killing energy'. I can go by myself. Wait until they're discharged from the hospital to see them; it won't be too late," Cheng Su stopped him.

Qi Taiguo thought it over and reluctantly gave up on the idea.

"There's still food in the pot; you can eat it yourself. I'm leaving now!" Cheng Su said.

"Be careful riding your bike."

"Mhm!"

She pedaled to the hospital and, following Liang Shurong's earlier instructions, found Chunhua's ward—a three-person room that was quite cramped.

Chunhua was lying with her eyes closed on the bed closest to the door, with neither Liang Shurong nor the baby in sight. Cheng Su walked over quietly and placed the thermos she was carrying on the table.

Hearing the noise, Chunhua opened her eyes: "Who's there? Oh, it's sister-in-law, happy new year!"

Cheng Su replied with a smile, "Happy New Year, you've worked hard," and added, "Are you hungry? I made some egg soup. I hear you can't have too nutritious soups now; just egg. I added lots of ginger to dispel the wind."

Chunhua's face was pale, but she laughed in response: "Thank you."

As she tried to sit up with some effort, Cheng Su quickly helped her and propped her pillow behind her, saying, "Take it slow."

Once she was comfortably seated, Cheng Su poured some soup into a bowl and handed it to her: "Be careful; it's hot. You've just given birth, so I didn't add too much salt."

Chunhua thanked her again, eating and talking with Cheng Su.

"...I started feeling pain in my belly yesterday evening, but it wasn't too bad. I gave birth at ten, six pounds three ounces," Chunhua said, then sighed, "It's just a pity that I had a girl, not a boy."

"Having a girl is good too. Girls are like tender little coats keeping your heart warm, and they'll have plenty of time to be filial to you in the future. What matters now is the child's health and filial piety. Just raise her well—that's all!" Cheng Su consoled her.

"That's true. But in the countryside, having a girl is a bit disappointing, you know. We are military families, and now there's even more emphasis on having just one child. For us in the military, it's even more important. To have a second one would mean giving up military life," Chunhua said, "My mother-in-law hasn't even come over yet. She won't be happy to hear that it's a girl, and whether she will come to take care of me or not, I don't know!"

"Don't talk nonsense; she's her granddaughter, how could she not come over," Cheng Su chided her, "Don't think too much right now; the main thing is to recuperate. We can discuss the rest later. Even if your mother-in-law doesn't like it, so what? I think Old Liang seemed pretty pleased."

Upon hearing this, Chunhua showed a smile: "He always says having a daughter is good, saying that when she marries, her husband will be like a half-son to us. He does seem genuinely happy."

"There you go, it's settled then. Just wait and see; once you raise this little girl, she will bring endless blessings to both of you," Cheng Su said cheerfully.

Her words were comforting, and Chunhua felt reassured, replying, "Then I'm counting on your good fortune."

No sooner had she finished speaking when the nurses came in carrying the baby who had just been bathed, followed closely by Liang Shurong. Seeing Cheng Su, he greeted her with a smile.

Once the baby was placed in the cot, Cheng Su leaned over to look. The little one's face was all wrinkled, but her skin was quite fair, and Cheng Su couldn't help but be charmed.

Chapter 563: What you said makes sense.

After visiting Chunhua at the hospital and seeing her tired appearance, Cheng Su didn't stay long. She also asked about when Liang Shurong's parents were coming. Learning that they probably wouldn't arrive until tomorrow, she took the initiative to say she would bring soup over in the evening.

Leaving the hospital, Cheng Su went to the city to buy gifts and headed to the Ying family's home.

She had already planned to visit the Ying family today to celebrate the New Year. The timing was just right; she could make the visit and then go home to cook soup for Chunhua.

When she arrived at the Ying family's home, Ying Jian wasn't there, but Director Ying and Xiao Ya both were. Seeing Cheng Su, they jumped up happily.

"Perfect timing, it's cold today. I was thinking of going out to buy some ingredients so we ladies can enjoy a hotpot together," Director Ying said with a smile.

"Auntie, just frying a couple of small dishes is fine, don't go to all that trouble. I still need to rush back after lunch," Cheng Su said with a laugh, stopping her.

"Your restaurant isn't open yet, and neither is the company. Why the rush to get back?" Director Ying asked, puzzled.

"My neighbor next door gave birth last night. Her mother-in-law hasn't managed to come over yet, and her husband can't cook, so I was thinking of helping out, neighbors and all. That's why I have to go back and cook something for her," Cheng Su explained with a smile.

"She had the baby, huh? Did you go see? Is the baby cute? How does it look?" Xiao Ya asked curiously, leaning in.

Cheng Su thought for a moment and said, "Like a little monkey, face all wrinkled up."

Xiao Ya let out a "Yi" and made a disgusted face.

"Why 'Yi'? Weren't you just like a little monkey when you were born? With your forehead all wrinkled like a bitter melon. That's how babies look when they're born. They're lovely once they fill out and grow a bit, so precious," Director Ying chided.

"I thought the same thing," Cheng Su said with a light laugh.

Xiao Ya then said, "I don't think so. When Susu has kids, they will definitely be beautiful."

"Look at you, sweet-talker. Are you angling for a red envelope?" Cheng Su teased as she pulled a red envelope from her bag and handed it over: "Here, happy New Year."

"Thank you," Xiao Ya said, all smiles as she thanked her.

"Not at all embarrassed, such a grown woman still taking red envelopes. And Susu is even younger than you," Director Ying scolded her again.

"I'm still not married, still young," Xiao Ya said unabashedly.

Director Ying couldn't stay mad, and after looking at the time, she told Cheng Su to sit tight and went out with her basket to shop for groceries.

As soon as she left, Xiao Ya began asking Cheng Su how her trip home for the New Year was and why she returned so soon.

Cheng Su didn't have many close friends in the city; Xiao Ya was like a best friend to her, and naturally, one shares troubling matters with close friends.

So, Cheng Su spilled the beans about the bizarre and outrageous incidents she encountered during her New Year's visit back home to Xiao Ya.

Xiao Ya listened, wide-eyed, and said, "That sounds like someone hiding behind a mask of morality to criticize others, even using 'female virtue.' Are you sure she's just a woman in her fifties or sixties, and not some two-hundred-year-old witch? What era is this?"

Cheng Su laughed, "That's exactly what I thought, probably her true form is an old-fashioned witch."

Xiao Ya giggled: "You're bad too."

The two burst out laughing together.

"Forget it, just this one encounter, right? If you can't face her, can't you just avoid her? You live here, and she has nothing to do with you, no need to keep it in your heart and upset yourself," Xiao Ya advised after a while, still smiling.

Cheng Su felt much better after speaking her heart out and nodded, "You're absolutely right."

Chapter 564: Someone Else's Mother-in-Law

After a lively lunch at the Ying family's, Cheng Su hurried back home, first stopping by the farmers' market to buy fresh meat and vegetables. She made a point of asking an older aunt what new mothers could eat, and brought a loaded bag back home.

Qi Taiguo had just woken up when he saw her return and asked a few questions.

"Like a little monkey, his skin is still all wrinkly. It doesn't look too good, but Aunt Ying also said that newborns are all like this, and that he'll fill out in a few days. I think so too; his skin is very white, quite precious. I saw that Old Liang was very happy, Chunhua is truly blessed," Cheng Su sincerely felt happy for Chunhua.

"How come?" Qi Taiguo raised an eyebrow at her.

"These men who favor sons over daughters, you think there are few of them? Her husband doesn't despise her for giving birth to a girl, loves her dearly, if that's not fortune, then what is?" Cheng Su shot him a look and said.

Qi Taiguo's forehead twitched, and he squinted his eyes, "Why do I feel like you're insinuating something about me?"

Cheng Su let out a dry laugh.

"I don't favor sons over daughters. Having a son is naturally good, a son, after all, could be guided more by me, easing your worries, you would be protected by two men later on, excellent. Having a daughter isn't bad either, it's just you'll need to do more of the teaching. I'm just afraid I'll spoil her," Qi Taiguo said.

Cheng Su replied, "Well, I'll take your word for it for now."

"Then we'll see," Qi Taiguo said, crossing his arms.

That evening, Cheng Su as usual brought hot soup and dinner to Chunhua, not just for her, but also a portion for Liang Shurong, leaving them both deeply touched and at a loss for words.

On the sixth day, Cheng Su's household door was knocked, and when she opened it, she saw Liang Shurong standing at her doorstep with an elderly lady, her face creased with wrinkles but looking very hale.

"Sister-in-law, this is my mother, she's here to bring you red eggs!" Liang Shurong explained with a smile.

"Old Madam Liang, hello," Cheng Su hurried to welcome her inside.

"So you're Sister-in-law Qi, my son Rong's said all about it, grateful to you for making soup for my daughter-in-law, thank you," Old Madam Liang spoke with a rural accent, beginning with her gratitude, "Where we come from, giving birth means handing out red eggs, Sister-in-law Qi, don't look down on them, have a couple yourself for some good fortune."

With that, she handed over several dyed red eggs.

"Thank you, Old Madam, you're too kind. I didn't help much, neighbors should help each other, that's how it should be," Cheng Su said with a smile as she received them: "But you've come such a long way, you must be tired. Have you been to see your granddaughter? She's born quite lovely."

"No matter how lovely, she's still a girl," Old Madam Liang said, somewhat disappointed.

Cheng Su's heart skipped a beat, hastily saying, "Girls are good too, having a boy or a girl is the same, in the future she'll be there to cherish you as her grandmother, don't worry!"

Do all the older generations inevitably think with the same preference for boys over girls?

"I hope your auspicious words come true," Old Madam Liang said with a reluctant smile.

"I won't keep you any longer, hurry over to see your granddaughter, Chunhua probably can't do without someone by her side right now," Cheng Su urged.

"My mother just arrived, I was just picking her up, planning on dropping off our luggage before heading to the hospital, but she insisted on bringing you the eggs first," Liang Shurong said.

"There's no rush this moment, hurry over now, those two are more important."

Cheng Su saw them out the door, and hearing Old Madam Liang asking for the kitchen to make some soup before going so as not to leave them hungry, felt a tinge of envy in her heart—that's someone else's mother-in-law.

Chapter 565: It's a Person Who Commands Respect Wholeheartedly

On the eighth day of the lunar month, Joy Soon Loy Restaurant opened for business, and Cheng Su prepared a stack of red envelopes, heading to the restaurant early, but someone arrived earlier than her, Old Song.

"Old Song, happy New Year," Cheng Su greeted with a smile.

"Boss, happy New Year, may you become prosperous," Old Song returned the greeting with a smile upon seeing Cheng Su.

Cheng Su handed him a red envelope, "Here, a red envelope for the opening, good luck in starting work."

Old Song accepted graciously and thanked her, then also took out a red envelope from his pocket for her, "This is from an elder, just a little red packet."

"Ah, I didn't expect to receive a red envelope, thank you," Cheng Su said with a smile as she accepted it.

While talking with Old Song, the employees gradually arrived, taking turns wishing Cheng Su a new year and receiving their red envelopes.

When it was Qiulan's turn, Cheng Su asked, "There was no sign of anyone at your place yesterday, when did you come back?"

Qiulan yawned and replied, "I didn't get back until after midnight last night."

"No wonder," Cheng Su gave her a red envelope, "Happy New Year, good luck in starting work, and be even more dedicated this year."

"Yes."

Seeing that all the employees had arrived, Cheng Su clapped her hands, gave a few words of motivation, talking about starting the new year with a new spirit, working together to improve the restaurant, and then she organized everyone to go out for a meal after lunch service.

"Eating out?" Old Song asked.

"Yes, the New Year's meal, we won't eat at our place this time, we'll go eat at another establishment, to see how they do things. Let others serve us for a change," Cheng Su said with a laugh.

The crowd cheered.

After letting everyone disperse, Cheng Su discussed with Old Song where would be a good place to eat, considering they would need to book for so many people.

"How about we go to Spring Full Building? Their reputation is also not bad, and it would be a good opportunity to try their dishes," Old Song suggested.

Cheng Su thought about it and nodded in agreement, instructing Song Xiaojang to book the tables.

"The new hires before the festival, I plan to have them work at the new shop. The coming days, I'll pick a good date to open near the train station. How do you think Old Lu's skills are?" Cheng Su asked Old Song.

Old Lu was the head chef hired for the shop near the train station; he was around forty years old and had previously worked as a chef in another restaurant.

"He doesn't talk much, and his cooking is pretty good, but he may not pay much attention to hygiene," Old Song hesitated before speaking.

Cheng Su frowned.

Paying little attention to hygiene would not do; for anyone in the catering business, failing to uphold hygiene standards was unacceptable.

"Then we'll have another talk with him, if he doesn't improve, we won't keep him," Cheng Su said.

Old Song nodded and said, "Everything else is fine, the cutting boards, etc., and the two waitstaff are also very diligent. But didn't you say someone else was coming to work here? Why haven't they shown up yet?"

"It's my Elder Sister."

Old Song was taken aback, realizing it was a relative.

"This..."

"You don't need to feel pressured. While her company has not yet started, she'll come and I'll personally train her for a few days. How much she learns is up to her. And she'll be working at the branch near the train station, so there's no conflict with this place," Cheng Su explained.

Old Song let out a small sigh of relief and then inquired about the purchasing arrangements.

"I'm thinking of having Xiao Jiang take on this role as well. He will be in charge of overall purchasing, buying for both here and the train station branch, and it will be his responsibility to deliver there," Cheng Su replied.

Old Song didn't expect her to place so much trust in Song Xiaojang. He felt happy for Song Xiaojang and at the same time marveled at how a young woman like her managed to grow the business to such a size. Her vision and scope indeed matched those of any man.

No wonder, when speaking of Cheng Su as a boss, his son, who was usually too proud to praise others, would only give thumbs up and admiration. He respected Cheng Su for her boldness and skill, both genuinely convinced and willing to work for her wholeheartedly.

Chapter 566: Consoling Elder Sister

Elder Sister did not come over until the tenth day of the new month, but she came alone, Zhang Jisheng was nowhere to be seen.

"Since the Lantern Festival has not yet passed, my mother-in-law insists that one of us stays at home. So here I am, coming over first, and he will come after the fifteenth. That's okay, right?" Qi Fenglian asked tentatively.

Cheng Su smiled and replied, "It's okay, brother-in-law has to join the renovation team, and it's fine if he arrives later, since my friend hasn't started back at work either."

Qi Fenglian breathed a sigh of relief at those words.

Cheng Su was helping them out of a favor, and she was worried it might be hard for her.

"Big sister, have you been crying?" Cheng Su asked cautiously.

Qi Fenglian paused for a moment, then touched her cheek: "Is it that obvious?"

"Your eyes are swollen and red," Cheng Su pointed at her eyes.

Qi Fenglian gave a bitter smile and said, "I cried all the way here."

"You can't bear to be apart from Yunyun and her siblings, can you?" Cheng Su spoke directly to the heart.

Qi Fenglian nodded and sighed deeply, "How could I bear it? It's the first time in over a decade that I've had to leave them, especially Baobao, who is still so young. When I left, he cried until his voice was hoarse and still wouldn't let go. My heart, it's almost shattered."

Cheng Su said, "Children and mothers are connected at heart, he couldn't bear to let you go either."

"Indeed, it's my own flesh and blood, of course it's attached. But speaking about this now, you might not understand it fully since you haven't had a child. Wait until you become a mother yourself, then you'll know this heart-wrenching feeling, it's like hundreds of needles stabbing your heart, such pain!" Qi Fenglian said, her eyes reddening again as she spoke.

Cheng Su hastened to say, "I might not be able to feel it, but I know it must be unbearable. Big sister, you must think on the brighter side, thinking of carving out a path here and then bringing the two children over to study, reuniting the family."

Qi Fenglian nodded in agreement, "That's all I can hope for now, it's my only comfort. You don't know, seeing Baobao cry like that, I almost didn't come. But thinking deeper, if I didn't come, there would really be no way out. I have to earn something for the children, to stand up for myself. When it comes down to it, I guess I am being selfish."

"How can you call that selfish? If you ask me, women shouldn't just stay at home as housewives. Even earning ten yuan means having a job; that's your own support. And besides, you're doing it for the children, for your family. Otherwise, which parents would want to be separated from their kids? Isn't this all out of necessity?" Cheng Su exclaimed.

Who would want to suffer if they had hair on their head, and what parents, given the choice, would want their children to become left-behind children, forcibly parted from their mother and deprived of affection?

One cannot have both the fish and the bear's paw. The thing to do now is not to succumb to seasonal depressions, but to strive even harder to move forward, in the hopes of reuniting sooner rather than later.

The comfort Cheng Su offered allowed Qi Fenglian's downcast heart to receive considerable solace, and it also helped her make up her mind to work hard and strive for reunion.

As the two talked, they headed back home. When Chunhua's mother-in-law, Old Madam Liang, saw Cheng Su, she greeted her warmly and then looked questioningly at Qi Fenglian.

"This is my Elder Sister," Cheng Su introduced with a smile, "She's come to work in Qing City and will stay with us for a few days."

"Very good, I'll bring you some red eggs later!" Old Madam Liang said with a laugh.

Cheng Su then told Elder Sister that Chunhua had given birth to a daughter. Elder Sister offered her congratulations again and again. After setting down her luggage, she even wrapped a small red packet of money and went with Cheng Su to see the newborn baby next door.

Chapter 567: Royal Kinsmen and Nobles

Cheng Su led Qi Fenglian to first check out the shop at the train station to get a feel for the layout and environment, so she'd have a clear idea in her mind.

The train station was always bustling with people coming and going, especially after the New Year. Although the Lantern Festival hadn't passed yet, those who worked in the city were gradually returning, making the streets busy and lively.

Opening the door to the shop, the smell of new renovations hit them in the face, everything was sparkling clean, and it was hard to discern any remnants of the past. Moreover, the walls were deliberately painted a clean and comfortable-looking ivory purple.

Qi Fengping, considering that someone had died in the shop, felt somewhat uneasy, entering hesitantly with a sense of discomfort. But seeing how Cheng Su didn't mind at all and seemed quite at ease, she gradually relaxed.

After looking around, she didn't find anything concerning. After all, with the constant flow of people outside and it being broad daylight, what was there to be afraid of?

She hadn't done anything to feel guilty about, so there was even less reason to be afraid.

"This shop's location looks pretty good, it's all people," Qi Fengping observed the surroundings and commented.

"That's exactly what caught my eye, can't really lose out on this spot. Otherwise, do you think I would sincerely buy a shop with such a history? I'm not a fool," Cheng Su said with a laugh.

Qi Fengping retorted, "You're just fearless."

But if she weren't fearless, could her sister-in-law have built the business up to this level?

After checking out the shop, Cheng Su took her to Joy Soon Loy Restaurant and discussed various matters about the restaurant along the way.

"...You're new here and you haven't worked in this industry before. You need to observe more, learn more, listen more, and think more. If you don't understand something, ask, ask several times if you have to. In service, you need to have eyes all around and ears open to everything; your mind must be detailed, you must grasp the subtle aspects, and of course, a smile is very important," she explained.

Listening to her guidance, Qi Fenglian nodded and asked, "You suggest a suitable place where I can rent a house. When your brother-in-law arrives, it'll be good to have a place to stay as well. It's not too convenient living at your place."

Renting a house was indeed necessary, as there was only so much space at home. Although they could fit another bed in the guest room, it would be too cramped. Besides, living together as two couples would be awkward no matter how you looked at it.

If Qi Fenglian hadn't brought it up, Cheng Su had already planned to find them a place to rent. Now that she had mentioned it herself, it would be even easier to arrange.

"I will ask around and rent a place as soon as I find something suitable," Cheng Su said with a smile.

As they were talking, they arrived at the restaurant. It was almost eleven o'clock, and it was time to prepare for the lunch service. Everyone was busy getting ready, and they all greeted Cheng Su with a smile when they saw her come in.

With the customers not yet arrived, Cheng Su took the opportunity to gather everyone and introduce Qi Fenglian to the group.

Qi Fenglian had been to the restaurant before, the veteran employees knew she was Cheng Su's elder sister, and found her easy to talk to, so they all showed goodwill.

Qi Fenglian knew how to speak diplomatically and told everyone, "I'm joining Joy Soon Loy from today. Although I'll be working at a different branch, I'm still your colleague for the day. I don't know much, so I hope you won't think me clumsy and can offer me guidance. If there's anything I do wrong, please point it out."

Cheng Su also took the opportunity to speak a few words on her behalf, to which everyone naturally responded.

But when Cheng Su took Qi Fenglian around to familiarize her with the environment, they whispered, "Elder Sister, a member of the royal kinsmen and nobles, everyone, be careful not to give her any leverage!"

"It shouldn't come to that. President Cheng is quite fair and progressive, I don't think she'd show favoritism," someone said.

That person replied, "Even the fingers on a hand have different lengths, let alone a heart that tends to favor one side. If you're just bluffing with blind optimism, be careful in case someone reports you."

Qulan, who was listening on the side, said, "Stop talking about that. Just focus on doing your own job, and don't go spreading rumors. Let's get ready for the service."

The crowd dispersed.

Chapter 568: Respect from a Distance

Qi Fenglian had no idea that everyone was on guard against her. After she officially started her probationary period at Joy Soon Loy, she was willing to do anything. Whenever she didn't understand something, she would ask, and the others would explain to her. Still, she constantly felt that their warmth was lacking, although she couldn't quite understand why.

Why did she feel this way? When they were chatting during their downtime, and she joined in, the enthusiasm seemed to fade away, leaving an awkward atmosphere.

Once or twice, Qi Fenglian didn't mind, but after three or four times, she began to sense that something was off. So, she privately pulled aside Qiulan to ask whether she had done something wrong, as it seemed like everyone didn't really like her.

Uh, Qiulan felt somewhat awkward. How could she explain this?

After all, she had been at the job for a decent length of time and knew how to phrase things. She vaguely responded, "You've just arrived, so perhaps everyone isn't familiar with you yet, and that's why they don't have much to say?" She paused and then added in a joking tone: "Sister Lian, you are Elder Sister Su's elder sister. They're probably worried they won't do a good job, and you'll report them to Sister Su!"

Qi Fenglian was no fool. After a moment's thought, she understood that the unfamiliarity excuse was just politeness, and the latter was the truth. They were wary of her!

Qi Fenglian laughed it off: "We're all colleagues here, and I'm just someone working on behalf of others. How could I do such a thing!"

But no matter what she said, everyone still had their reservations. Qi Fenglian felt helpless, and alongside this helplessness, there was a subtle sense of loss and hurt.

Whether during her single days or after she got married, she was known for her good temperament. In both villages, there were few who didn't speak well of her, but here, it felt as though she wasn't well-received, which naturally made her feel dejected.

Cheng Su quickly noticed the change in Qi Fenglian's mood. It had only been a few days, but there seemed to be less of a smile on her face. Maybe she was homesick, missing her family and her child?

She mentioned this to Qi Taiguo, who replied, "You're both women, and it's easier to talk about your feelings. Why don't you ask her?"

Cheng Su found the right moment and asked earnestly, "Are you missing Baobao and the others?"

Qi Fenglian shook her head, hesitating to speak.

Cheng Su was puzzled. Could there be something she couldn't talk about?

After pressing her further, Qi Fenglian finally opened up haltingly about the attitude of the restaurant staff towards her.

"To say they're cold isn't quite right, but they just don't seem warm towards me. When everyone looks at me, it feels like, um, how do you say it... Oh, right," Qi Fenglian slapped her forehead, "they keep me at arm's length, afraid I'll stab them in the back."

She revealed a bitter smile she spoke.

Cheng Su hadn't expected this; she had been busy planning the new fast food restaurant and guiding Qi Fenglian, not paying much attention to the staff's emotions.

She hadn't anticipated this turn of events.

After a moment of thought, she said, "Elder Sister, this is human nature. It's normal for people to be cautious since you have an additional relationship with both the employees and the boss. So, some go through training in family businesses without revealing their identities, just to establish good relationships with the staff."

"But you shouldn't take it too much to heart. Just focus on doing your job well. When you're right, over time people will come to understand your character and your boundaries. As long as you hold the moral high ground, who can fault you?" Cheng Su added, "Elder Sister, this is just a minor setback. In the service industry, you meet customers of all sorts. If you can't get past these small emotions, these minor setbacks, and take everything too seriously, how will you manage later? Remember, a little hardship is motivation."

Upon hearing this, Qi Fenglian pondered thoughtfully.

Chapter 569: Attracting Investment and Financing

At the age of thirteen, the factory commenced operations, and Cheng Su, following Joy Soon Loy Restaurant's welfare policies, handed out "red packets" to celebrate the opening, and added more dishes for a festive New Year's meal.

Ning Ge, as one of the bosses, also returned. With a cheeky smile, he gave his New Year's greetings to Cheng Su and stretched out his hand, "Sister-in-law, happy New Year, wishing you prosperity."

Cheng Su, slightly annoyed, handed him a red packet and asked, "I thought you wouldn't be back until after the fifteenth?"

"I missed our company, so I came back earlier to avoid you saying I'm slacking off," Ning Ge said with a smile. "Even during the big holiday, I didn't slack off; I've secured a few orders for us."

"Really?" Cheng Su was surprised.

"Of course, it's true. I've left everything in Wang Bo's hands," Ning Ge said proudly. "Not to boast, but now our Joy Soon Loy's jam is stocked in all the big supply and marketing cooperatives and department stores, our brand is the most renowned."

"What about Friendly?" Cheng Su was most curious about their former competitor, Friendly.

Ning Ge snorted lightly, "Can they compare with us? Ever since that incident, Friendly's jam just isn't as good as before. Although it hasn't been a huge impact, they swapped good jam for bad, and that's left a bad taste in the people's mouths."

"It's a pity, indeed. If they had focused on research, they might have caught up with us. Now, it will take them quite a long time to recover their reputation," Cheng Su sighed.

"Wrongdoing always meets its demise; they brought this on themselves, nobody else to blame," Ning Ge said with a look of 'they had it coming.' "Let's not talk about them anymore. What are your thoughts on our factory's development this year?"

Cheng Su took out a new business plan and opened it.

"A corporate culture is essential. Once our factory is up and running, shouldn't we also organize some charitable activities and staff development? We need to start a canteen as well, the employee benefits are important. Besides, I'm thinking of hiring another manager. When neither you nor I are around, someone should be able to help manage," Cheng Su said. "But there's no rush on this. What do you think?"

Ning Ge sat up and gave it some thought, "Our product line is quite limited right now. What do you think about creating some new types of jam?"

Cheng Su pursed her lips and said, "That's inevitable. But as you know, our company has only been in business for less than six months, the capital cost has not been fully recovered. Investing more means greater risk and more equipment to add. Plus, I feel our factory space is too small; we need an expansion, but we don't have the funds for it."

The employee canteen is indispensable, the work area needs expansion, not only does the factory space require an addition, but the capital cost also needs to increase. They were still far from recovering their investments. With more investment, first, the capital isn't fully in place, and second, it would require more manpower. Their current factory setup was just right, and even the management was being handled by the bosses themselves.

With this scenario, how to diversify and develop?

It's not easy for a company to develop. To reach the skies in one step is nothing more than a wishful thought.

"However, if our products are too monolithic, that won't be good for the company's development," Ning Ge frowned.

"It's not that there's no solution," Cheng Su mused, biting the end of her pen. "We can invite investors and also look for financiers."

Securing investors means setting up dealerships in certain areas, but one must be cautious, as choosing dealers is not a mere matter of selection; the wrong dealers can cost you business in a whole region.

Financing, in simple terms, is finding others to invest in Joy Soon Loy, seeking investors to contribute capital in exchange for shares. With that approach, the company would have funds to further develop.

Chapter 570: Did Elder Sister Become Wild at Heart?

Finding investors and merchants to merge with isn't something that can happen overnight, it can only be added to the plan to proceed gradually.

As for the distributor, it's not entirely out of the question. Over at Ning Ge's side, there was a childhood friend who took an interest in their family's jam and even asked if they could be an agent. It's just that Ning Ge had other things on her mind at the time and didn't pay much attention to it. Now it seems, it's time to get back in touch with them.

The two of them continued to discuss the matter of the factory canteen. According to Cheng Su's idea, they might as well hire someone directly, train them at the Joy Soon Loy Restaurant and then transfer them to the factory. As for the procurement of ingredients, they would also decide the meat and vegetables on their side, which would then be uniformly purchased and delivered by Joy Soon Loy.

Of course, the salaries would naturally be kept separate, just like the new fast-food restaurant, with their own financial management and accounts.

Ning Ge also knew that Cheng Su was planning to open a branch. After hearing her proposal, he said, "You really know how to make full use of resources. It's almost like you're setting up a chain restaurant."

Cheng Su's eyebrow raised, "Waste not, want not! But what you say does seem a bit ahead of its time. If conditions permit, it's not impossible to develop in that direction."

The concept of a chain restaurant company was exciting to hear. If they pulled it off, that would be taking their business to the next level!

Seeing her calculating look, Ning Ge said, "You're not thinking of going through all this again, are you? Your new fast-food restaurant isn't even open yet!"

Cheng Su lifted her chin proudly, "If there's an opportunity and the conditions are right, why not? Life is all about pushing boundaries!"

She was only twenty-one years old, after all. The rest of her life was still ahead of her, so how could her progress possibly stop here?

As a person, only by constantly moving forward can we experience the unknown sights and roads.

Life is all about pushing boundaries.

Ning Ge repeated this to himself, and it seemed to carry quite a philosophy.

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Qi Fenglian put down the phone and sat in the living room in a daze, her eyes slightly red.

Taiguo came out of the bathroom and, noticing her expression, couldn't help but ask, "Elder Sister, what's wrong? Is there a problem at home?"

Qi Fenglian had just received a call from Yunyun and hung up looking so distressed.

Could it be that there was some trouble at home?

"Ah? No, nothing," Qi Fenglian forced a smile.

Taiguo frowned even more and sat down, saying, "Elder Sister, we're siblings, is there anything you can't tell me? Don't always keep it to yourself; it will only cause more problems and be less comforting."

Qi Fenglian pursed her lips and then said, "It's nothing really. It's just that, isn't tomorrow the Lantern Festival? Your brother-in-law and Yunyun, they all want me to go back home for the festival."

Initially, it was only Zhang Jisheng who talked about her coming back, saying it wasn't right for the women in the family to be without her during Lantern Festival. He said she should let Cheng Su know and then come back after the festival.

Qi Fenglian had only just arrived a few days ago, how could she now ask for leave to go home so soon?

Moreover, she was working hard to establish good relationships with the staff at the restaurant. In the service industry, especially in places like restaurants and hotels, holidays are always the busiest. Normally, the bosses wouldn't arrange for time off, and if she were to ask for leave specifically on this day, what would others think of her?

Wouldn't it just confirm that she was able to take leave because of her family connections? Would others be even more wary of her afterwards?

Qi Fenglian had barely refused twice when Zhang Jisheng immediately became unhappy, accusing her of growing wild-hearted after only a few days and so on, and she couldn't help but argue with him.

Zhang Jisheng was blunt and couldn't out-argue her, so he simply told Yunyun on the side that her mother didn't want her anymore. As a result, Yunyun began to cry and make a fuss on the phone, insisting on her return.

Qi Fenglian was both upset and angry: upset at being separated from her children and angry at her husband for being so misunderstanding and intentionally misleading the child.