

## The 80s 571

Chapter 571: Brother-in-law's Brain is Flooded with Water

As Qi Fenglian spoke, tears started to fall, filled with grievance and discomfort.

"He thinks as if I'm eager to leave the children, accusing me of having a wild heart and looking down on his family after a few words. If I really were like that, could I have stayed with him for over a decade? Leaving my hometown to work, isn't it all for our little family, for the children?" Qi Fenglian said as she wiped her tears.

Qi Taiguo's face darkened, and he picked up the phone, saying, "I'll call and ask him."

Qi Fenglian was startled and quickly pressed down his hand, saying, "Don't, wouldn't that make the conflict even worse? Put it down quickly. I'm just venting to you, look how hot-tempered you are."

"What he said about you is unacceptable, not to mention what he said to Yunyun. What kind of behavior is that? Isn't this going to scare the kids witless?" What truly enraged Qi Taiguo was Zhang Jisheng lying to the children, fabricating facts.

Knowing that their mother is not at home is pitiable enough, and now he's frightening the children like that. What will the children think?

Yunyun is already eleven or twelve years old, they understand things now!

"But you can't call." Qi Fenglian firmly insisted.

Qi Taiguo felt helpless and said, "Big sister, protecting him like this, will he even remember your kindness?"

"Whether he remembers or not is another matter, just listen to your big sister," Qi Fenglian chided, "I'm just expressing my frustration to you, not asking you to take action on my behalf."

Qi Taiguo sighed and shook his head, asking, "So what do you want to do? Why don't you go back tomorrow?"

Qi Fenglian hesitated and said, "I've only arrived a few days ago, taking leave wouldn't be good."

"It's only for one day."

Qi Fenglian shook her head, "Even one day isn't good."

Qi Taiguo opened his mouth as if to speak, but Cheng Su, carrying the washed dishes, entered the room and, seeing their somber expressions, couldn't help but ask.

Qi Fenglian was about to say it was nothing, but Qi Taiguo interjected, "Tomorrow's a holiday, do you think you could give my sister a day off so she can go back and then return after the celebration?"

Cheng Su was startled, a leave request?

Qi Fenglian then said, "No, no, I'm not asking for leave. He's just babbling," she said, giving him a glare.

Cheng Su set down the pots and pans and sat down, asking, "What happened? What was said on the phone just now?"

Qi Taiguo preempted by telling her what Zhang Jisheng had said, concluding, "If not for my sister holding me back, I would have argued it out with him."

Hearing this, Cheng Su's brows also furrowed, thinking to herself if her brother-in-law's brain had water in it, saying such things to a child, not fearing the child might take it seriously.

When all is said and done, the man just doesn't care, doesn't use his head.

"Well, big sister, if you want to go back, then go back. It's fine, the new fast-food restaurant hasn't opened yet anyway," Cheng Su said.

Qi Fenglian felt a surge of joy but was also hesitant, "Is that really okay? I just got here not long ago and now I'm asking for leave."

"It's fine. If you want to go back, just go," Cheng Su smiled, "It's not too late to come back after the holiday. The restaurant won't miss one person."

"This..." Qi Fenglian thought for a moment and then nodded, "Then I'll go back tomorrow morning and come down with your brother-in-law after the holiday."

"Alright," Cheng Su agreed cheerfully, "Then you should rest early. Do you want me to take you to the bus station tomorrow?"

"No need, I can go by myself, I know the way, and you'll be busy!" Qi Fenglian quickly refused.

Seeing her insistence, Cheng Su let it be.

After washing up, they went to bed. Cheng Su leaned on the bed reading a book when Qi Taiguo leaned over and asked, "Wife, are you upset?"

#### Chapter 572: Can't Let Her and the Child Grow Apart

Cheng Su found Qi Taiguo's question odd and raised an eyebrow, asking, "Me, unhappy? Where did you see that I'm unhappy?"

"I just know," Qi Taiguo pulled the book out of her hands.

When it came to discerning hidden emotions, Qi Taiguo had become increasingly adept. Although Cheng Su had agreed to let her older sister go home for the holiday, he sensed she was somewhat displeased.

"You seem reluctant to let your sister take leave to go home, is it difficult to manage?" Qi Taiguo asked.

Cheng Su pursed her lips and said, "Shall I just say it?"

"Firstly, as a boss, what I must ensure is fairness and impartiality. The rules I set apply to all employees, regardless of personal feelings. The food industry is busiest during holidays, and unless it's an emergency, I generally don't approve leaves. Of course, that's not to say one can't take leave, but a report must be filed in advance so the management can make arrangements. This way, the restaurant's staffing and service can keep up."

"Secondly, considering that my sister has only started working a few days ago and is already asking for leave, it would surely displease any other employer. Who would like an employee who asks for leave as soon as they start? My sister hasn't been getting along too well with the other employees these past few days. Now that she's taking leave, I'm afraid she will have an even harder time meshing with them later on. She was already an outsider parachuted into the team, and now that she can't even communicate well with them, future management will be even more difficult."

"Thirdly, my sister is too soft-hearted. When her husband says a few words, she becomes anxious and gives in, wanting to go back. If her husband asked her not to work and just focus on taking care of the children at home, she would continue to obey and seek peace at the expense of herself? If she doesn't stand up for herself, when conflicts arise in the future, she'll only continue to be soft, and in that case, how can she stand tall?"

Listening, Qi Taiguo furrowed his brow. He was a straightforward person and rarely overthought these matters.

Had Cheng Su not mentioned it, he really wouldn't have considered all these complexities.

"Actually, it's not so much that I'm unhappy as I am a bit upset that she isn't more assertive," Cheng Su sighed. "My sister is good in many ways, but her nature is too soft. She finally managed to toughen up and come out to work. But just because someone says a couple of harsh words, she gets anxious and wants to back down. If we reach out to help her, but she shrinks back instead of reaching out to us, we won't be able to help her!"

Understanding, Qi Taiguo felt a little ashamed of his own simplistic and straightforward approach and said awkwardly, "You've thought about this a lot; I didn't consider that aspect."

Cheng Su smiled and said, "Women's hearts tend to be more delicate, and they think more deeply. As for my sister, we're willing to support her, but it's no use if she can't stand up for herself. Ultimately, she has to depend on herself!"

Qi Taiguo nodded upon hearing this and then asked, "Then why did you finally agree?"

"Because of Yunyun," Cheng Su thought of the extra-careful and well-behaved little girl, saying, "Her brother-in-law is unreasonable, spouting nonsense like wanting to get rid of her. Are those the kind of words you say to a child? Yunyun is already grown up, and now with her mother being far from home, she's naturally frightened and sensitive. If her father-in-law's words were taken seriously by her, what then?"

"We wanted my sister to work just to give her and her children a better future, grounded in the children's needs. If this causes a rift between her and her child, then what's the point of earning more? I simply feel that we cannot let Yunyun misunderstand like that. I just didn't want my sister to have regrets," Cheng Su sighed. "The days spent growing up with a child are precious. It's just that, for now, it's impossible to have both."

After all, without first breaking free from such a dysfunctional family, it would probably stay like that for a lifetime.

### Chapter 573: Hey, Can You Do It?

The more Cheng Su spoke, the more Qi Taiguo felt ashamed and guilty. Her thoughts and considerations were so mature and sensible.

But what about him? He was just straightforward, not thinking deeply, only observing superficially. If he felt his elder sister was wronged, he'd stand up for her. If she wanted to go back, he'd bring it up without considering whether it was appropriate or the pros and cons.

People often say that one needs to pick apart and thoroughly contemplate an issue in order to truly understand it. She probably did just that.

While holding her, Qi Taiguo said, "I really don't think things through as thoroughly as you do."

Cheng Su chuckled lightly, "That's normal. If a man were to fuss over household trivialities to such an extent, it would be a bit unmanly. Just be meticulous in your work; I've got the home front covered."

Qi Taiguo hummed in agreement, but thought to himself that he also needed to change, to be more attentive in life. How could he be meticulous at work if he wasn't in his daily life? Good habits aren't formed overnight; they come from consistency over the long term.

Cheng Su was on the verge of sleep when Qi Taiguo spoke up again, "Right, I almost forgot to tell you. In mid-February, I'll be leading a training mission. We're going to Yunnan and Guizhou this time."

The army regularly takes soldiers out for training to improve their self-discipline, enthusiasm, and combat skills, regardless of the frequency or the duration.

Cheng Su jolted awake upon hearing this and asked, "How long will you be gone?"

"Can't say for sure, maybe half a month or a month. The time isn't fixed; it might be a bit longer."

"It's just training with the team, not dangerous, right?" Cheng Su's primary concern was still the issue of safety.

Qi Taiguo laughed, "It's just training, so it's not dangerous. Occasionally we'll also help the locals with a few things."

Cheng Su gave an 'Oh.'

As long as the safety index was high, there wouldn't be any problems.

Suddenly, she felt that things had been rather quiet lately, no one annoying poking around; thinking about it, hadn't that beautiful military doctor, Doctor Chiang, been missing for some time?

Cheng Su turned and asked, "Why haven't I seen Doctor Chiang around? Is she still on leave?"

Caught off guard by her question, Qi Taiguo took a moment to respond, "I'm not sure about that. The affairs of their Health Center aren't under my control. Who knows if she's come back or not!"

Cheng Su raised her eyebrows, "A person that significant is usually hovering around, and now she's gone, and you're not curious enough to ask?"

Qi Taiguo snorted, "What's there to ask? Her presence or absence has nothing to do with me. It'd be better if she never came back."

To him, Chiang Qing seemed aloof and haughty, yet she struck him as somewhat crazed. If she didn't return, it would truly be a relief.

Cheng Su huffed twice and closed her eyes to sleep.

Qi Taiguo's hand reached over, "Hey, do you want to or not?"

Cheng Su wanted to say no, but his caressing had become more skillful, alternating light and heavy touches that warmed her entire body.

Without waiting for an answer, Qi Taiguo rolled on top of her and leaned in to kiss her. Cheng Su pushed him, "Condom!"

Qi Taiguo stretched out to grab a box of condoms from the drawer, shook it, and said, "This is still from that box before New Year; there are several left. Seems like we need to step up our effort."

"Go," Cheng Su pushed him.

Qi Taiguo approached with a cheeky grin, pulled the blanket aside, and soon the bed started creaking. The man's low growls and the woman's soft moans composed a romantic symphony.

Chiang Qing didn't want to not come back, but suddenly her parents had all sorts of issues, saying they felt unwell or that they had argued and were in a bad mood, pulling at her not to leave, essentially dragging her feet on the return journey.

This time, she was pulled into this fancy café by Lu Shufen and others because an aunt she hadn't seen in a long time wanted to see her.

As soon as she saw the other party, parents with their son, Chiang Qing understood right away.

"Old Chiang, looking younger, huh..."

"Old Zeng, long time no see."

After some polite small talk, everyone sat down, and soon Chiang Qing learned all about the man opposite her, the one with big glasses and a skinny, frail appearance.

A returnee from a prestigious university abroad, he had only recently come back to the country and was now working as a section chief in some government department at the age of twenty-seven. Because he was usually so immersed in his studies, he preferred peace and had an honest nature, and thus he had delayed his marriage for so long.

At this point, what else was there for Chiang Qing not to understand? This was a setup for a blind date.

Looking at the feeble man with no hint of masculinity, she couldn't believe her parents wanted to introduce someone like him to her.

Chiang Qing kept a cold face throughout the meeting, answering only when asked, resulting in an incredibly awkward atmosphere. Once back home, she immediately blew up at Lu Shufen and the rest.

"Dad, Mom, what is this all about? Without saying a word, you introduce someone like this to me, what's the meaning of this? You both clearly know that I have someone in my heart who I like," Chiang Qing said furiously.

"What's wrong with Little Zeng? A prestigious university graduate who has been abroad, he looks good, comes from a good family, and now enjoys a stable government job. Why wouldn't he be a good match for you?" Lu Shufen said indifferently.

Hearing this, Chiang Qing became even more agitated and shouted, "Mom, you know perfectly well that I..."

"Don't talk about that Qi Taiguo. We will not agree. I see that you want to anger me to death," Lu Shufen interrupted her, "We can't afford to lose that much face."

Chiang Qing exploded in anger, "If that's the case, then you and Dad should never have gotten married and had me."

Lu Shufen's face changed, and she grew furious, her chest heaving as she pointed at Chiang Qing, "You..."

"That's enough!" Jiang Conghe, seeing his wife shaking with rage, slammed the table in his fury, "For a man, you dare to talk back to your elders? Where are your manners? I think you've been so charmed that you can't even tell north from south."

Chiang Qing pursed her lips, her face stubborn, "If you could pursue love in your days, I have the right to pursue my love as well."

"Fool, does he even like you? You're just wishfully thinking and throwing your warmth against his cold back," Jiang Conghe snapped coldly.

Upon hearing this, Chiang Qing's expression changed several times, but she said nothing and stormed upstairs.

"Stop right there, you..."

"Forget it," Lu Shufen waved her hand and massaged her temples, looking exhausted, "She's always been stubborn, don't you know?"

"Just seeing her attitude annoys and angers me," Jiang Conghe said.

"That's because you spoiled her," Lu Shufen glared at him and then continued with a headache, "I knew from the start this blind date thing wouldn't work. How could she easily submit? If that were the case, could she still be our daughter?"

Jiang Conghe deflated, "Then what do we do? Just let her be willful like this?"

He felt that if Chiang Qing kept being infatuated with that Qi Taiguo, one day she would hit a dead end, and by then, it wouldn't be as easy to turn things around as it is now.

Lu Shufen, pinching the bridge of her nose, was at a loss. What to do? Was this simply the fate shared between mother and daughter?

#### Chapter 575: Siblings Conspire and Scheme

Chiang Qing collapsed onto her own bed, sobbing for her unrequited love that no one understood.

Is there a sequence to falling in love? In the past, famous scholars and beauties had their share of such affairs. When it came to her, why was it not acceptable? Why did it make her a person of terrible sin?

You're just wishfully thinking.

Her father's words were like a sharp sword, mercilessly piercing her heart, gruesomely spelling out an undeniable truth.

Wishful thinking, indeed, that was true. The love between her parents had been mutual, with the lad and the lass equally enamored, enabling them to overcome all obstacles and achieve a happy union.

But as for her, Qi Taiguo scarcely spared her a glance.

She also knew he wasn't worth it, but to just give up, she was unwilling to do so.

Can't feelings be cultivated?

Even if he had no love or feelings for her now, what about after spending a long time together? Where did the term "familiarity breeds fondness" come from if not from spending extended time together?

Even cats and dogs develop affection after being cared for a long time, let alone a person?

Knock, knock.

"Who is it?" Chiang Qing wiped her tears and asked with a hoarse voice.

The door opened from the outside, and Chiang Qing turned her head to see her younger brother, Chiang Tian, entering.

Chiang Qing sat up, wiping the corners of her eyes, and asked, "What's the matter?"

"Oh, have you been crying? Our Chiang family's young miss, who only makes others cry, is actually crying?" Chiang Tian leaned against the doorway of her room, teasing with a smirk.

"Speak up if you have something to say. If not, get out. I'm going to sleep," Chiang Qing said coldly.

"Tsk, tsk, I'm your dear brother. Aren't you being a bit too cold to me?" Chiang Tian walked in with a smile, pulled up a chair to sit astride it, resting his arms on the chair back, and said, "This is about that man you're hung up on, eh? What's his name... Qi Taiguo?"

Chiang Qing said irritatedly, "Mind your own business and get out."

"Sis, I've got to say, your taste in men really could use some work. Why set your sights on a married man? What are you after, his prowess?" Chiang Tian looked at her with disdain.

At his words, Chiang Qing bristled like a cat whose tail had been stepped on, her voice rising sharply, "Did Mom and Dad send you? Are you here to plead their case?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Do I look like someone who listens to our parents? I just can't stand seeing you cry and carry on over a man, willing to live or die for him. If that got out, I'd be embarrassed to call you my sister. It's humiliating."

Chiang Qing's face darkened.

"But I am curious, what kind of man is he? To not take a second glance at you, who has beauty, brains, chest, and heritage?" That's what Chiang Tian was curious about. He continued, "Sis, could it be his wife is even more beautiful than you? How so?"

Chiang Qing was about to retort how that was impossible, but a spark of an idea flashed in her mind. She looked at Chiang Tian, his face handsome with those peach blossom eyes and a mouth that could charm any woman to death, and her eyes began to gleam.

"Sis, don't look at me like that; it gives me the creeps," Chiang Tian said, feeling a little apprehensive, as if he were prey being targeted by a hunter.

"Xiao Tian, for the sake of my lifelong happiness, would you be willing to help me?" Chiang Qing asked with a calculating look on her face.

"What's in it for me?" Chiang Tian raised an eyebrow. He wouldn't budge without a benefit, even for his own sister.

Chiang Qing glared at him and said, "You won't be left out. How about I argue for an investment with our uncle for you?"

Chiang Tian's eyes lit up, and he broke into a smile, "We're siblings after all, no need for talk of benefits. Tell me, how can I help you?"

Chiang Qing motioned with her finger, and Chiang Tian leaned in. The siblings began whispering together, conspiring in hushed tones.

#### Chapter 576: There is a Kind of Mother-in-Law Called Someone Else's Mother-in-Law

On the day of Lantern Festival, when families come together, Qi Fenglian hurried to the bus station before dawn to return to her hometown. She tried to be as quiet as possible, but Cheng Su still woke up. After seeing her out, Cheng Su went back to bed for a bit more sleep and didn't get up until eight o'clock.

Yawning and carrying a pot, Cheng Su stepped out of her room and smelled the scent of burning incense. She saw that Chunhua's mother-in-law was busy inserting a bunch of incense sticks.

At some point, an incense burner had appeared at the entrance to Chunhua's home, with spent incense sticks still in it from before.

"Good morning, Yuer's Grandma," Cheng Su greeted her.

Liang Shurong and his wife had named their daughter Liang Qingyu, and they endearingly called her Yuer, which rolled off the tongue quite nicely.

"Morning, Sister-in-law Qi," Old Madam Liang replied with a smile, lifting the incense in her hand, "Today's the fifteenth, you're up late. When worshiping the gods, you have to be early."

Cheng Su said with a smile, "I don't have the habit of offering sacrifices to the gods. It's enough that my mother-in-law takes care of it at home."

"How can that be? These things are passed down from generation to generation. I've heard your husband is the eldest son, right? As the eldest daughter-in-law, you have more reason to learn, because sooner or later, it will be your turn," Old Madam Liang disagreed.

Cheng Su politely responded, "Well, we'll talk about that when the time comes."

"Young people these days, they have no respect for the gods. How can this be?" Old Madam Liang shook her head, seeing Cheng Su's non-committal attitude, and carried the incense to the kitchen.

"Burning incense every single day, creating such a smoky haze—it's suffocating. This is nothing but feudal superstition," Hualing commented, standing at the doorway without anyone noticing when she arrived.

She had also gone back to her hometown with Chen Shouwang for the New Year, but she reportedly returned to her parents' home on the third or fourth day and stayed there until the ninth before coming back.

Cheng Su sniffed the scent of the incense and remarked, "Sandalwood, it's calming and actually smells pretty nice."

She didn't have any particular faith, but neither did she criticize the beliefs of others—that was respect.

Hualing looked displeased, but Cheng Su ignored her and went straight to the kitchen, only to hear the sound of someone vomiting, followed by Old Madam Liang's voice.

"Look at how violently you're throwing up. With all this commotion, no need to guess—there must be a little boy in there," she said, glancing at Guihua's belly, her voice tinged with sourness and envy.

With a forced smile, Guihua replied, "Boy or girl, it's all good, as long as the baby is healthy and complete. Look at Yuer, she's becoming livelier by the day, so adorable. If I weren't pregnant myself, I'd want to hold her."

Old Madam Liang's face lit up a bit at that, "Yes, our Yuer is a good eater too, easy to care for." She paused and added, "Right, I brought a lot of sour dates when I came, I'll get some for you later. It can help stop vomiting."

"Thank you so much," Guihua said with a pleased smile.

Old Madam Liang left with a smile.

Cheng Su entered the kitchen and, seeing Guihua's pale face, asked with concern, "Does the vomiting make you feel awful? How long does it last?"

Guihua shook her head and replied, "They say it should get better after three months."

"Maybe it's just like Yuer's Grandma said, and you've got a lively little boy," said Cheng Su cheerfully.

"Just say that here, but don't mention it to Chunhua. We don't want to upset her," Guihua hurriedly said.

"Why worry? Why would she be upset after hearing that? Yuer is so lovable," Cheng Su was unconvinced.

Guihua explained, "That's true, but she might feel uncomfortable about it deep down. She's always wanted to have a son." And then she added, "But she's fortunate too, to have such a nice mother-in-law. Although Grandma Liang also wants a grandson, I can tell she truly dotes on Yuer from the bottom of her heart."

It was true, despite always talking about wanting a grandson and lamenting that Yuer wasn't a boy, Grandma Liang still took proper care of Chunhua. She never skimped on food and drink, made sure to have delicious meals ready and washed diapers until they were spotless, rinsing them with hot water every time, and she always tenderly called her granddaughter 'good girl.'

Cheng Su and Guihua exchanged glances, seeing the envy in each other's eyes for having such a good mother-in-law—that was someone else's blessing.

#### Chapter 577: Lantern Festival

The Lantern Festival meal was sure to be a highlight, since they weren't going back to their hometown, their small family home definitely deserved a grand feast for the holiday. Plus, with Ning Ge being in Qing City, it wouldn't do just to let him go to a restaurant and get by with a meal alone.

Cheng Su carried her grocery basket to the agricultural market. On the way back from her in-laws, she had also brought home a live chicken, which she was still keeping. She thought that today would be the day to slaughter it, to spare her the continuous care it required.

During the New Year's celebrations, they'd had chicken stewed with mushrooms, or sometimes stir-fried, to the point of growing tired of it. Cheng Su planned to make something different, soy sauce chicken.

She headed to the ingredient shop to buy the necessary items, weighed a live fish, and bought a handful of chilis and green peppers.

The Lantern Festival wouldn't be complete without tangyuan, so Cheng Su purchased peanuts, sesame seeds, and flour, planning to make her own after dinner. Considering that Chunhua was still in confinement and Guihua might be too fatigued from her morning sickness to bother cooking, she decided to buy extra—making them together would be more fun.

Having made her way around the market, her grocery basket was filled to the brim and heavy to carry.

She placed the basket on the front basket of her bicycle and pedaled back to the compound.

The compound appeared quieter than usual, with the clothes-drying square stark and hardly any clothes hanging on the poles.

Perhaps it was because the new year had not yet passed, and many families had not returned, or some had left—like He Xing, who indeed had not come back.

Cheng Su suddenly remembered a saying, "There are people who will stay in your life for a while, teach you something, and then leave, becoming a memory."

Wasn't that exactly the case? People come and go, in all shapes and forms, they arrive, they depart, disappearing into the obscurities of the world.

Carrying her grocery basket home, Cheng Su stored everything in its place. She picked up the phone to instruct the restaurant and factory about work, deciding not to go there herself.

At the factory, they had told Ning Ge to come over for dinner after work, unaware that Ying Xiaoya would snatch the phone, insisting Cheng Su cook an extra portion as she wanted to join them.

On such a major holiday, there had to be a reason someone would come over uninvited for a meal—it turned out that a relative of the Ying family had passed away, and County Chief Ying and the rest had rushed to the funeral, leaving no one to cook.

Upon hearing the reason, Cheng Su agreed without hesitation, hung up the phone, and hurriedly made sure she had enough groceries.

Qi Taiguo came home for a while at noon, and Cheng Su told him that Ning Ge and the others would be coming over for dinner, so he should return early. Qi Taiguo agreed to it.

In the afternoon, Cheng Su reviewed some reference books and took a brief nap before starting to prepare dinner.

She simmered a soup of pork ribs and lotus roots, plucked and butchered the chicken, stewed sweet and sour pork knuckles—all the while, the kitchen clattered nonstop, and as the stewing meat released its aroma, appetites were keenly aroused.

After processing the chicken, Cheng Su washed the pot, added oil, and made a sauce with soy, bay leaves, star anise, among other things. Once the flavors mingled, she added the chicken to the pot, slowly turning it with her chopsticks, occasionally bathing it in the sauce.

Old Madam Liang, drawn by the scent, came by and marveled at Cheng Su's cooking method, "Chicken is usually stewed, fried, simmered, or steamed—I've rarely seen it made this way. This takes skill."

Cheng Su smiled and said, "This is a cooking style from Guangcheng in the South. Once it's ready, I'll let you have a taste."

The traditional method for making soy sauce chicken isn't like this, but rather similar to marinating in brine—preparing a large tub of soy sauce mixture to soak the chicken.

However, her method was simplified because she was only making one meal with one chicken, avoiding the need for a vast quantity, and instead opting for a straightforward simmering.

But as she looked at the chicken gradually coloring and the aroma growing ever more fragrant, Cheng Su thought to herself that with enough heart, even simple food could become extraordinary.

#### Chapter 578: Old Qi's Suspicions

After bustling in the kitchen for the better part of the day, Qi Taiguo came back early around five o'clock, rolled up his sleeves, and started to help Cheng Su with the work—killing fish.

He deftly cleaned a lively big grass carp in just a few moments. Cheng Su found it strange; after all, he had been a soldier for over a decade. One would think he wouldn't know how to do household chores, yet there he was, killing a fish like a pro, not even bursting its gallbladder.

"Before I joined the army, I was already a lad who could handle work. Didn't my dad sell fish for a while? I helped him with the stall and killed fish. Wasn't that just a trifle?" Qi Taiguo said with a smile, "I can kill chickens too. From now on, don't you do it; if the chicken makes a fuss and hits you, be careful not to get cut by the knife."

"Wow, today it was Old Madam Liang who helped me wring the chicken's neck," said Cheng Su with a raised eyebrow and a smile. She glanced at the time and added, "Ning Ge and the others will be here soon. We don't have much wine at home. How about you go buy some Huadiao wine, and we can drink a couple of cups? It's a big holiday; having some wine to cheer things up would be good."

Qi Taiguo nodded in agreement.

When Qi Taiguo went out to buy the wine, Cheng Su started cooking the fish. She marinated it first, then half-fried it in oil. After that, she put it in the pot with a base of hot bean paste, soybean sprouts, and such, making it both aromatic and spicy.

By the time the fish was almost ready, Qi Taiguo was back with the wine, and Ning Ge and the others came along, too.

They just happened to meet at the door.

"You've come just in time; the fish is ready, I'll just stir-fry some greens, and then we can eat," Cheng Su said with a smile.

"Susu, I'm gonna have to freeload off you today, sorry about that," said Ying Xiaoya as she entered the kitchen, sticking out her tongue.

"What's there to be sorry about? You're welcome anytime," Cheng Su chided.

Ying Xiaoya giggled and took the initiative to set the dining table, arranging bowls and chopsticks. In the living room, Qi Taiguo and Ning Ge were talking.

"My elder brother said, 'Don't worry, just be true to yourself, and being introspective can be a good thing,'" Ning Ge conveyed Ning Gang's words. Of course, whether they were true or how much exaggeration there was couldn't be known.

The corners of Qi Taiguo's mouth curled slightly as he said, "I didn't expect you to sound so proper when you get serious."

Ning Ge touched his nose and replied, "I don't know about these things, but I just think that to protect your country is your duty. You don't need to worry about anything else."

Qi Taiguo paused and looked over, a flash of doubt in his eyes.

That sounded so familiar. Where had he heard it before?

"What's up?" Ning Ge felt uneasy under his gaze.

Qi Taiguo stared at him for a while before shaking his head, "Nothing."

Impossible. That must have been a wrong impression. How could he confuse Ning Ge with that mysterious person? Ning Ge was a straightforward second-generation scion, while the mysterious

person, though Qi Taiguo didn't know his real identity or the role he played, certainly wasn't just an ordinary civilian, his soldier's instinct told him.

While he was pondering, Ying Xiaoya and Cheng Su came in laughing with dishes in their hands, and Qi Taiguo quickly went up to help, casting away the momentary doubt.

Ning Ge let out a sigh of relief, thinking Qi Taiguo was incredibly sharp. He was suspecting him just now, wasn't he?

And yet, he felt conflicted. Did he want Taiguo to discover the truth, or not?

"Come over for dinner," Ying Xiaoya called from the other side.

"Yeah," Ning Ge dropped the conflicting thoughts in his mind and went over.

Never mind, some things happen naturally. The course of history has always had its own destiny.

#### Chapter 579: Sweet Dumplings Reunion

The cups were pushed and the wine goblets exchanged; the wine table was in full swing.

A bottle of warm Shaoxing wine, heated by hot water, was shared among Cheng Su and the others; during the peak of their merriment, they even started giving drinking commands.

Among those present, Ying Xiaoya was a college student, and Ning Ge had also been educated abroad; the two of them naturally had no trouble with the commands. As for Cheng Su, she had lived through two lifetimes, but it was Qi Taiguo, not well-educated and known as a rough military man, who couldn't match their wordplay.

So, naturally, he ended up drinking the most because he couldn't keep up with the commands and had to be punished.

"It seems I also need to read more in the future," Qi Taiguo said with a self-deprecating smile.

Without comparison, there would be no hurt; when the rest of them played word games, they spoke with ease, and only he struggled to come up with a word, always needing Cheng Su to save the day.

"Big Brother Qi, at this rate, we couldn't compare with you in shooting or martial arts, so should we also start practicing shooting and learning martial arts?" Ying Xiaoya said, trying to comfort him with a smile.

"Exactly, every field has its specialties, and if we were to compete, we wouldn't stand a chance," Cheng Su also laughed, then added, "But I do agree with you reading more, being a refined soldier has its own charm."

"Understood!" Qi Taiguo replied, pretending to be serious.

Ning Ge and the others laughed.

After finishing the drink and tidying up the dinner table, they sat for a while; then, Cheng Su called Guihua, Hualing, and the others to make glutinous rice balls. Hualing was lazy and didn't know how to make them, so she just helped around, passing water and the like.

It was Old Madam Liang, perhaps because of years of hard work, who had the strength to knead the dough until it was the right consistency.

They also fried peanuts and sesame seeds; the weather was cold, and the nuts quickly cooled down before they added sugar to mix in. Everyone rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

You kneaded the dough; I made the wrappers for the rice balls; you wrapped the filling, I rolled them round. Talking and laughing along, the scene was bustling with activity.

Ning Ge and Xiao Ya, both lively and outgoing, had sweet tongues and freely showered everyone with pleasant words, which kept the whole group laughing heartily.

Old Madam Liang leaned in to Cheng Su and said, "These two kids are good, well-born and articulate. From their attire, they must be city kids, right?"

Cheng Su affirmed with a smile.

Hearing that, Old Madam Liang looked quite regretful and said, "Then that's it. City dwellers aren't people we rural folks can compare with; we can't match them."

Huh, did she mean to set them up with someone?

Cheng Su chuckled inwardly, excited and proud that her friends were liked and praised.

After making a large plate of rice balls, Cheng Su went to boil them. She had already started simmering a red bean sugar soup while they were kneading the dough, to serve as the base for the rice balls.

Now, the sugar soup was perfectly simmered. She dropped the rice balls into it and let them cook for about ten minutes until they were ready. The rice balls turned over, revealing their white bellies in the red sugar soup, utterly appetizing.

Once they were ready, Cheng Su moved the whole pot of red bean soup with rice balls to the sitting room and called out loudly, "Everyone, come and eat the rice balls."

There weren't enough bowls in her home, so everyone went to fetch their own bowls to fill.

After serving a few to each person, they tasted just right in sweetness, the rice ball skin was chewy, and the filling was fragrantly delicious.

"Rice balls, reunion; wishing everyone a complete and perfect reunion. In the New Year, may you have a fresh start, make new progress, and climb to new heights," Cheng Su said cheerfully as she offered several blessings.

Everyone echoed in response, their laughter floating out of the window and into the night sky, bringing a particularly cheerful note to the atmosphere.

No matter how the folks might quarrel or hold grudges in the future, the memory of this night's joyous rice ball feast would stay in their hearts.

### Chapter 580: The Future Prosperity of the Small Temple

After the fifteenth, it signified the end of the New Year celebrations. The red lanterns hanging were taken down, and a new journey formally began.

Cheng Su had already made plans for the existing industries early on. First of all, in the company's factory, a cafeteria was to be set up, along with seeking investors.

Since the opening of Joy Soon Loy Jam, this was the first time it had sought external investors. As the first distributor, it couldn't just grab anyone at random. After all, to tap into a market in a new area, if the distributor wasn't good, that area would be wasted.

Following Ning Ge's advice, he first talked to his childhood friend called Zhou Jun, who also came from a 'red' family and had some financial strength.

Cheng Su had no objections; he handled the negotiations while she took charge of business regulation in the factory and oversaw the setup of the cafeteria.

The factory was short-staffed, so Ying Xiaoya, who was in finance, had to be brought in to work under Cheng Su, following her instructions for diversified tasks.

For the Joy Soon Loy Restaurant, Cheng Su intended to manage it like a formal restaurant, dividing it into a fast food section and private dining rooms.

But the Joy Soon Loy was located in such a small place that it was difficult to expand. Fortunately, the several houses they had rented were all bungalows. If it was possible to purchase them and build additions, expansion might be feasible.

With the new train station fast food shop preparing to open and finances being tight, Cheng Su could only put the old shop's plans on hold and focus on getting the new shop up and running first.

However, Cheng Su still planned to hire someone as a cashier for Joy Soon Loy, as Qiulan was currently handling the role part-time, and wouldn't be able to cope during busy times.

In addition, she wanted to train staff step by step for the future large restaurant operations. If everyone was allowed to handle cash, it would not only be chaotic but also lead to problems.

It wasn't long after Cheng Su posted the job advertisement that someone responded, and it was none other than Luh Kai who had come in to eat.

"I have a cousin who just lost her job. She used to handle cash at the supply and marketing cooperative. The place wasn't doing well and they laid off staff, so now she's resting at home. If you think she's suitable, I can ask her to come and meet you?" Luh Kai said with a smile.

"Your cousin?"

Luh Kai nodded, "Yes, she's the daughter of the uncle who sold you the shop, named Liang Dan, only 19 this year. Her education isn't high, just high school, but she's good with numbers. She used to help my uncle with the accounting."

Cheng Su was surprised and laughed, "A rich second-generation working so hard."

As a rich second-generation, she could work or not, not to mention she was just a young girl.

Luh Kai smiled slightly, "My cousin has some peculiar ideas. I don't know where she got them, but she doesn't want to rely on her family, nor does she want to depend on a man in the future. She's determined to carve out her own path and build her own career."

Hearing this, Cheng Su felt a fondness for Liang Dan. Someone with such thoughts must be quite independent, and to have that kind of family background and still be like this was rare.

"What do you think? Want to meet her?"

"Sure, it's like I was yawning and you came with a pillow. Ask her to come and try," Cheng Su said nonchalantly. She wanted to meet the girl based on what Luh Kai had said; after a pause, she added, "But I must say, we are a small establishment. Your cousin used to work at the supply and marketing cooperative after all; she might not think much of this place."

Luh Kai's eyes narrowed, "It's a small temple now, but in the future, I'm afraid the incense will be so strong that you won't be able to get in."

It wasn't that he was flattering Cheng Su, but he had seen for himself her ability and ambition. He believed that under Cheng Su's management, the Joy Soon Loy Restaurant would achieve more than today's success.

If there was a promising future, what was the big deal about being a cashier now?