

Back To The 80s: President's Doted Wife

Chapter 66: Chapter 66: Knocking on Doors for a Job

The restaurant was making money, and Cheng Su's mood lifted. She didn't stop to rest until she got home in the evening, whereupon Li Qiumei, the daughter-in-law of Platoon Leader Lu who lived upstairs, came downstairs with her sister, Li Qiulan, and a baby in her arms.

"...Sister Su opened a small restaurant?" After exchanging pleasantries, Li Qiumei inquired about Cheng Su.

Cheng Su paused for a moment, then laughed, "I don't think I mentioned it, how did you know?"

It was indeed strange. She hadn't really told anyone around here, so how did they know she had opened a restaurant?

Li Qiumei glanced at her younger sister and said, "If this girl hadn't seen it, I wouldn't have known Sister-in-law Qi that you had such a skill."

Cheng Su was taken aback and looked at the younger sister. At the tender age of a budding flower, she was very simple. Cheng Su knew that Qiulan had come from their ancestral home especially to help her older sister care for her newborn during her confinement period.

Li Qiulan, seeing Cheng Su looking over, felt a little shy and said with her head lowered, "Today as I was looking for a job, I passed by your restaurant. I've walked down that road a few times and noticed it used to be the Wang Family restaurant, but it changed today. And since I saw you locking the door, I boldly guessed it might be yours?"

Cheng Su cut a plate of watermelon and set it on the table, smiling, "Yes, I just opened for business these past few days. Have some watermelon."

Li Qiumei had just noticed the plate of bright red watermelon and, after politely demurring for a bit, couldn't resist taking a piece and crunching into it. It was so sweet and delicious!

It seemed Commander Qi's days were truly good. Looking at the table, whether it was apples or watermelon, these were items ordinary households couldn't afford to enjoy so freely. Right as she relished the fruit, a sudden tug on her sleeve made her turn; it was her sister, who then puckered her lips toward Cheng Su.

Li Qiumei then averted her gaze to see Cheng Su holding a slice of watermelon. She didn't eat it right away, but rather took a toothpick and began picking out the watermelon seeds onto a small plate at the side. Then, she slightly turned her body and began to eat the watermelon with small bites, not making a single sound.

Her eating style was indescribably refined and elegant, and her own way of eating just now...

Li Qiumei felt a slight warmth on her face, a mixture of embarrassment and shame, as she put down the watermelon rind and took out a handkerchief to wipe her mouth. She began to observe Cheng Su more closely.

Cheng Su's hair was tied up high, she was dressed in a dacron blouse and slacks, sitting sideways yet with her feet together and her back straight, maintaining a very proper and neat posture.

She was so refined, so dignified, so elegant. Wasn't it said that Sister-in-law Qi was from the same town as her husband, and from a rural background too?

But her bearing resembled that of urban folk.

Li Qiumei found it a little perplexing.

"Eh, why aren't you eating?" Cheng Su put the watermelon rind down and saw Li Qiumei staring blankly at her, which made her laugh.

Li Qiumei laughed awkwardly, and Li Qiulan then asked, "Sister Su, are you looking to hire people for your restaurant?"

Cheng Su's mouth hung open slightly as she looked at the two sisters.

"It's like this, my sister has been job searching lately. If your place is hiring, would you consider her?" Li Qiumei also stated her purpose of the visit.

"You want to work at the restaurant as a waitress?" Cheng Su looked at Li Qiulan. "But aren't you supposed to help your sister take care of the baby?"

"She came here just to look after me during my confinement, but since I've finished with it and there's not much to do daily, I can manage the baby easily. As for her, she doesn't want to return to our hometown and has been thinking of finding a job." Li Qiumei spoke with a smile: "Since I saw you've opened a restaurant and if you're hiring, anyone would do, but my sister working with someone familiar would ensure she's looked after a bit."

A smile flickered across Cheng Su's face; she truly hadn't anticipated hiring someone she knew.

After a moment, Cheng Su's smile faded, she cleared her throat, and looked at Li Qiulan seriously, "It's true I'm hiring, but working in a restaurant isn't as laid-back as a factory, it's really hard work. At my place, you have to do everything, help with the vegetables and cooking, wash dishes, clean, greet customers—in short, a jack-of-all-trades and master of none, you'd have to do it all."

She had no choice; her business was small and just starting, so naturally, the people she hired would have to work hard and do all kinds of tasks.

Of course, this situation wouldn't last forever. Once her business developed, she would implement proper hotel management practices. But talking about hotel management was still premature at this point.

And as for Li Qiulan, was she willing to do such hard work?

"Sister Su, I'm not afraid of hardship. I'm willing to do anything and will do it well. Just give me your orders," Li Qiulan hurriedly declared her position.

Cheng Su sized her up. The girl was pretty, with neatly trimmed and clean nails. She then said, "If you're not afraid of hardship, come and give it a try. As for the salary..."

"You decide; we're all living in the same building, it would be good for this girl to learn some skills from you," Li Qiumei said earnestly.

Her words were sincere, but why?

Li Qiumei considered herself somewhat discerning in judging people. For example, she didn't believe Cheng Su was just a coarse country woman after observing the way she ate watermelon.

Looking at the house, everything was neat and tidy. You can tell a person's character by their home. Someone who keeps a clean and tidy home usually has self-discipline and quality.

And the most important point was that Cheng Su had not been here long, less than a month, and unfamiliar with life here. Yet she had quietly opened a restaurant.

That was a real skill. In this courtyard full of wives and daughters-in-law, who didn't work or do handicrafts at home? Yet it was exactly she who went into business!

Her sister Qiulan was uneducated and might suffer if she worked elsewhere. Li Qiumei figured it would be better to let her work with someone familiar, where she wouldn't be bullied.

It seemed that Qiulan had gotten along with everyone since her arrival, indicative of her adept social skills.

Therefore, Li Qiumei truly believed that Cheng Su was a highly capable person. Qiulan could perhaps carve out a path for herself by learning from her, right?

Even if that wasn't the case, working with her for now and switching jobs later was also an option.

"The girl is at the right age to learn skills. Just command her to work without any reservations," Li Qiumei said.

"My sister is right; Sister Su, please feel free to give me orders," Li Qiulan echoed her statement.

"Don't worry, if you're my employee, you'll have to do what's required. Let's talk about the salary," Cheng Su said with a smile. "Here's what we'll do; you'll go through a trial period. During this time, you'll be paid twenty yuan, including meals, for three months. After the trial period, the salary will be thirty yuan a month, with a year-end bonus. What do you think?"

"Thirty yuan a month?" Both sisters were surprised and delighted.

Cheng Su nodded and added, "But if you don't pass the assessment after the trial period, you won't be able to continue working. What do you think?"

"That's only fair; in business, it's crucial to be clear and straightforward," Li Qiumei was quite liberal in her thinking.

Moreover, the salary Cheng Su offered was really not low, and it included meals, which was much better than factory work.

Li Qiulan was also very willing, never having imagined that Cheng Su would offer such a high salary.

"Then welcome to becoming an employee of Joy Soon Loy," Cheng Su extended her hand to Li Qiulan, as she recruited her first employee.

Chapter 67: Chapter 67: Eloquent

The next day, Li Qiulan was already waiting upstairs early, intending to leave with Cheng Su, which really puzzled Chunhua and the others.

"Starting from today, I'll be working at Sister Su's restaurant, so I'm just waiting to leave with her," Li Qiulan said with a smile.

"Restaurant?" Chunhua was taken aback, looking at Guiying: "What restaurant?"

"I have no idea," Guiying was also puzzled. Had Sister-in-law Qi opened a restaurant?

"I've opened a restaurant, here, come over and support it when you have time," Cheng Su suddenly appeared behind them and said, handing out a promotional flyer.

The sudden voice startled Chunhua, who complained: "You can really scare someone to death."

Cheng Su chuckled twice and said, "Sorry about that, didn't know you were so faint-hearted. Qiulan, let's go."

"Okay."

Watching them leave, Chunhua and Guiying exchanged looks, then finally inspected the flyer. Indeed, a restaurant was opened. Where did Cheng Su get the capital?

Cheng Su, carrying a vegetable basket with Qiulan, headed straight to the farmers' market to buy ingredients for lunch.

On the way, Cheng Su patiently explained the workflow and tasks of the job. Because of the hot weather, it was necessary to get to the farmers' market early to buy fresh ingredients, which would ensure the dishes tasted better.

Qiulan took note of everything, also keeping her sister's advice in mind while quietly learning from Cheng Su's way of handling things.

After a round of shopping, she discovered that Cheng Su was exceptionally eloquent. Whether dealing with the young, the elderly, or children, her words were so charming that she often got a bunch of scallions for free even though she only purchased a few pounds of vegetables.

Moreover, she noticed Cheng Su always carried a smile. Although it faded once they were alone, as soon as she met someone, the smile returned. The speed of this change made it seem as though she wore several masks.

To Qiulan, it seemed unnecessary to smile at some particularly unpleasant-looking people, yet Cheng Su still did so. It left Qiulan quite perplexed, and she couldn't help but ask about it on the way back.

"A smile is the best language in this world. The simplest way to express oneself between people is with a smile. It's an amazing power that can bring you unimaginable strength. Especially for those of us in the service industry, smiling is even more crucial. Remember this, never be stingy with your smile," Cheng Su replied with a smile.

Li Qiulan nodded, half-understanding.

Back at the restaurant, the two began to bustle about. As Qiulan was a novice, Cheng Su inevitably had to teach her while working swiftly. After all, they didn't have much time. Delays could push back the lunch opening.

It was Li Qiulan's first day at work in the restaurant and she was still on probation. She didn't dare to take it easy, following Cheng Su's instructions closely, carefully observing her actions, and making a mental note to look, think, and learn more. This was her first job after all; being fired after just a couple of days would be embarrassing. It was one thing to lose face herself, but to also tarnish her sister and brother-in-law's reputation was a whole other level of shame.

And having Li Qiulan, the new assistant, made Cheng Su's work much easier. After all, as a woman who had been doing household and farm work since she was young, washing and chopping vegetables was a piece of cake. Plus, although she wasn't very talkative, she was quick-witted. Cheng Su only had to explain something once, and Qiulan would understand, sparing the need for excess explanation.

Chapter 68: Chapter 68: Some New Tricks

Experience proved that a business couldn't be perfect with just one person's efforts, but teamwork often produced amazing results.

Two days ago, Cheng Su was by herself in the small restaurant, unable to fully stretch her hands and feet, but now, with the addition of Qiulan, she could move freely. Together, they had prepared the lunch meals, and Cheng Su also taught Qiulan how to serve the food. She took charge of selling meal coupons and clearing tables, as well as cooking in the kitchen when orders came through.

In this way, although it was still busy, there was more order compared to the previous days, and Cheng Su could catch her breath, not being so rushed that she had no time even for a sip of water.

In fact, according to Cheng Su herself, they were still short-handed, but her small restaurant had just opened. Everything had to be taken step by step: one had to eat one bite at a time. When the business reached a certain scale, it wouldn't be too late to hire more people. For now, she was prepared to work harder. And although the business was starting up, it wasn't exceptionally booming just yet. Cheng Su would never overstate the situation.

Fortunately, both Cheng Su and Qiulan were young and had the stamina to sustain themselves despite the exhaustion. After all, being young came with boundless energy.

Cheng Su was two years older than Qiulan, and as they were of similar ages, Qiulan was eager to learn and asked many questions. Cheng Su was always willing to share her knowledge, leading to a harmonious relationship between them.

"...Sister Su, you really know a lot." After wrapping up the lunch service and cleaning up the restaurant that day, Qiulan sincerely praised Cheng Su.

Cheng Su said, "I learnt it all from books, you know, the saying 'Knowledge from books makes one behave wisely,' reading more is certainly beneficial!"

Qiulan nodded, hesitated for a moment, and then asked, "Then Sister Su, why didn't you continue to finish high school and go to college? If you had gone to college, you would have had a lifetime without worries about food and drink."

In those days, getting into college was like becoming a Successful Candidate in ancient times. Once one succeeded, it meant bringing glory to one's ancestors, and soaring to success was just around the corner.

After thinking for a bit, Cheng Su said, "Going to college doesn't guarantee anything. Besides, I felt differently back then, maybe I was just lazy, so I didn't continue my studies."

Qiulan seemed to understand her thinking and teased, "If you ask me, I think it's actually because you're so fond of Commander Qi that you'd rather marry him early than continue your studies, right?"

Cheng Su was taken aback.

She had hit pretty close to the mark. This body's, Niannian's, thoughts were all on Qi Taiguo, wanting to marry him early and thus not even considering furthering her education.

Seeing Cheng Su at a loss, Qiulan became somewhat panicked and hurriedly said, "Sister Su, I was just speaking off the cuff, please don't take it to heart or get angry."

Cheng Su smiled and pinched her cheek, saying, "Don't be nervous, I'm not angry. Because you're not quite right, but you're not far off."

This time, it was Qiulan's turn to be stunned.

Cheng Su didn't explain further, but formed a peak with her hand above her eyebrows, looking up at the sun high in the sky, and said, "It's too hot today, we've finished our tasks, do you want to try something new?"

"Hmm?"

Cheng Su pointed to two pineapples sitting in a basin, specifically bought for making sweet and sour pork earlier in the day. They had used two for the lunch service, and these two were leftovers.

"Eat pineapple?" Qiulan thought Cheng Su wanted to eat it and said, "I'll go slice it up."

Cheng Su said, "We will eat, but we're not going to eat it directly. Instead, we're going to make it into a shaved ice dessert."

Qiulan was puzzled again. Shaved ice, what was that?

Chapter 69: Chapter 69: Iced Slush

What is shaved ice? In her previous life, she had seen this dessert commonly served at many sweet shops and favored by young girls. With the weather growing increasingly hot, she recalled the shaved ice she had eaten before when she saw the refrigerator at the restaurant.

Cheng Su had already frozen a basin of ice with cold boiled water in preparation. Now, with leftover pineapples, she planned to make some pineapple jam as a sweet sauce topping.

Speaking of pineapple jam, it was something she thought of from the strawberry sauce added to ice cream in McDonald's of the past. Although strawberries weren't available yet, it didn't matter since they had pineapple.

After listening to her explanation, Qiulan sliced the pineapple and soaked it in salt water before chopping it into small pieces.

The cooking, of course, was carried out by Cheng Su herself. She started by adding white sugar and rock sugar, squeezed in some lemon juice that she bought, and stirred everything together evenly, then poured it into a small pot. She heated it over low heat until the water was all evaporated, leaving the pineapple jam thick and ready.

Cheng Su tasted it, finding it delightfully tangy and sweet.

"Wow, it tastes even better than sweet and sour pork!" exclaimed Qiulan, her face lighting up with surprise as she tried some.

"It's not much now since it's hot. Wait until it's completely cooled, that's when it's truly delicious," Cheng Su said, blinking her eyes.

"Sister Su, you're so capable!"

Cheng Su smiled contentedly and placed the entire pot of jam in well water to cool it. Then she took out the prepared ice and took turns with Qiulan to crush it with a hammer.

It was a pity they didn't have a machine to crush the ice. If they did, they could have simply put it in and stirred, and it would have turned into small pieces without the need to hammer it so laboriously.

She placed the finely crushed ice in a bowl and ladled a generous spoonful of jam over it, then tasted it.

The chill dispelled the heat, leaving behind a refreshing sweet and sour sensation, appealing to both the young and old. If she sold this, it would definitely be tastier than popsicles made with plain sugar water!

"Here, have a taste," Cheng Su offered a bowl to Qiulan.

Qiulan looked at the bowl and said, "It looks delicious!" then took a spoonful and her eyes sparkled.

"What do you think?"

Qiulan smiled and said, "It's tastier than a popsicle. How did you come up with this?"

Cheng Su was quite pleased and replied, "I'm a foodie. I always research food, hehe. The way we crushed the ice didn't quite meet my expectations. If it were crushed finely by a machine, that would be the real deal. Besides, if I knew how to make ice cream, that would be even tastier. But for now, we have nothing, and making that would require a lot of effort, so let's stick to ice," she said.

Qiulan was genuinely astounded and said, "Even this shaved ice is an eye-opener for me, let alone what you called ice cream, which must be even more amazing, right?"

"You will taste it eventually," Cheng Su responded.

Qiulan thought to herself that she had no idea what that was and wondered if it was expensive.

"Another bowl?" Seeing their bowls empty, Cheng Su laughed and served another, saying, "In this hot weather, eating this is just to feel refreshed. But you shouldn't have too much, or it might upset your stomach. Even if you love it, don't overindulge. I only have you as an employee, and if you get sick, I'll have no one to work."

Qiulan's face turned red, and she nodded.

Cheng Su finished another whole bowl of shaved ice. Her restaurant was near a school and, with the weather being so hot, if she sold shaved ice, many students would likely come, right?

Thinking of this idea, her eyes began to shine.

With a luxury item like a refrigerator and her culinary skills, selling shaved ice on hot summer days would be a great way to pad her purse. Why not give it a try?

Chapter 70: Chapter 70 Sold Out

Cheng Su belonged to the sort of person who would act upon an idea as soon as it struck her. For instance, when she wanted to make some ice desserts with jam, she bought a whole basket of pineapples and also prepared clean glass jars for later use.

While Qi Taiguo hadn't yet returned, Cheng Su, like a bird freed from its cage, was hardly absent from the small courtyard. She now had a new idea and started fiddling with the pineapple jam once again.

A basket of pineapples didn't cost much; peeling, chopping, and soaking them was tiring work, her hands aching with the effort. But the scent of the jam cooking in the air, sweet and tart, brought her joy. Especially when she saw the silky jam being poured into the clear glass jars, the sense of satisfaction was immense.

This jam was alright; the making of it was, after all, quite simple. However, making crushed ice was giving Cheng Su a real headache. Ice could be made, but crushing it was just too difficult. What a hassle! She thought, the twenty-first century is much better, for the ice slush in cold drinks there could be easily made with slush powder.

Another thing was that Cheng Su couldn't guarantee that these ice desserts would sell well. After giving it much thought, she decided to buy some small plastic ice cubes, which she then put in bags and smashed with a hammer. She packed the crushed ice in boxes and chilled them in a foam cooler during lunch for sale.

But the ice turned out too coarse, and in a moment of inattention, it had all melted, unable to achieve the same sandy texture as a machine could.

"Oh my, what's all this?" During lunchtime, the diners who came to eat noticed the silky jam and the bowl of crushed ice, which looked so pleasing to the eye and mouthwatering, that they couldn't help but ask out of curiosity.

"They are sweet treats I dreamt up during my free time," Cheng Su said with a smile. "This is pineapple jam; you can spread it on bread, or just eat it like this."

As she spoke, she deftly scooped a bowl of sugared ice slush from the sealed box, added two spoonfuls of softly cooked red beans, topped it with two spoonfuls of pineapple jam, and handed it over, saying, "It's great for cooling off. I call it 'ice slush.' It's twenty cents a bowl, but during the opening period, I'm only charging ten cents. Try it, brother."

When the man heard that a bowl of ice was to sell for twenty cents, he was taken aback; after all, a meat dish only cost twenty cents as well. How could they afford such a thing?

But he soon heard her say that she would only charge ten cents if bought together with a meal, and he was intrigued. After all, Cheng Su's culinary skills were obvious, and this ice slush was unheard of; he wanted to try it.

"Alright, I'll have a bowl to try something new," the man accepted it.

By now, a crowd had gathered around to watch him taste it, eagerly asking what it was like.

After a few bites, the man's entire face relaxed and he said, "You might as well buy a bowl and try it yourself. It's really good, but..." he looked at Cheng Su and gave a wry smile, "I can't let my daughter see this, or she'll be nagging me for it every day."

The crowd, upon hearing this, was somewhat puzzled.

Cheng Su laughed and said, "These treats are particularly favored by children and young ladies. If you say so, I feel assured."

Since he said it, it proved that these sweets would be even more popular with children and girls, which were indeed the target customer groups Cheng Su had in mind for her products.

After all, sweet treats like this are mostly liked by that demographic.

"I want to try a bowl too. I've never seen this before!" After hearing Cheng Su's explanation, the crowd began to clamor.

Cheng Su crisply acknowledged them and swiftly proceeded to serve the ice slush with red beans and jam while Qiulan was busy selling the meals; both of them were so busy that they scarcely had time to collect the money.