

Little Brat's 101

Chapter 101: Lu Huaiyu Has A Girlfriend?

Old Master Lu missed his grandson a lot, so he schemed and plotted for a way to trick Lu Huaiyu to come back.

However, Lu Huaiyu returned to Yunzhou after staying in the capital for just a few days. An outsider might have assumed that Lu Huaiyu had moved to Yunzhou for good.

Xu Yini thought of asking for more details, but on second thought, she gave up.

“I see.”

“What is the matter, Miss Xu? Maybe we can help?”

“It’s fine, Uncle Fang, I’ll call him later.” Xu Yini hung up the phone, feeling frustrated.

Mei Li turned around and had a glance at her. Other than Lu Huaiyu, she could not think of anyone else Xu Yini was concerned about. She might have not met Lu Huaiyu in person before, but based on the picture that the paparazzi took the other day, she could tell that the man was a looker.

Moreover, Lu Huaiyu was famous, and the socialites who had fallen for him could form a line around the earth.

Even though Xu Yini claimed that he was not mad, all the pictures, information, and related terms on the internet were deleted swiftly; not a single mention remained.

In addition to Xu Yini’s mood, it seemed like someone was really mad even though she clarified things as soon as possible.

“Yini, Second Master Lu has taken all the pictures down from the internet. It’s going to be alright, right?”

Xu Yini simply grunted in response.

Lu Huaiyu was the face of the entire Lu Corporation. Anything about him would attract the attention of the mass media, and as a result, the Lu Corporation's profit and benefits might be affected. Therefore, it was normal for the man to be cautious.

"Then—" Mei Li stopped all of a sudden.

The assistant beside her could not help but ask, "Does he already have a girlfriend?"

Xu Yini frowned. "What nonsense are you blabbering about?" she said in an unhappy tone.

The assistant was a freshman and was practically an innocent girl. The words came out of her mouth without thinking, and she did not expect Xu Yini to get mad. She quickly apologized, "I'm sorry, Sister Yini, I'm just saying..."

Her question made Xu Yini's already bitter mood worse.

Lu Huaiyu was not a celebrity. Even though he was embroiled in a scandal with Xu Yini, the picture did not show his face at all, so the general public did not actually find out who he was.

In short, while Lu Huaiyu did not suffer any loss or any damage to his image or reputation, he was concerned about the scandal as well.

Xu Yini was smart, hence she knew what her assistant was trying to say.

Lu Huaiyu was not concerned about himself. Instead, he was actually concerned about that particular someone being associated with the scandal.

However, as far as Xu Yini knew, he had no women around him.

The Xus and the Lus had been friends since their grandfathers' generation, but throughout the entire year, Xu Yini had barely met Lu Huaiyu, let alone the rest of the family.

Suddenly, the image of a girl popped into her mind. She was slightly surprised but quickly shook her head to discard the image as she believed she was overthinking because there was nothing important about a 17-year-old girl studying in high school.

“Let’s not talk about this anymore. Where’s the script? I want to have a look.”

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A third of the students did not turn up in Competitive Physics today.

Zhou Fei’s paper deterred a lot of the students which was what he was aiming for. Only a handful of them could win a prize, and most of them did not have the gift, so it was better for the students to concentrate on something else.

Ye Ci did not leave though.

Nevertheless, Zhou Fei did not say anything about her decision. He gave the students a chance to make the right choice, so whatever happened from this point onwards was beyond his control.

After class started, the students noticed that Ning Li was absent.

“Where’s Ning Li?”

“No way. She got a perfect score the last time, yet even she dropped out? Then—”

Pei Song shot a glance at Ning Li’s seat.

Zhou Fei could not help but say, "What are you guys talking about? Ning Li is just taking a day off."

Even if Ning Li wanted to drop out, he would not let her do so.

"Pei Song, answer the question."

Pei Song reluctantly looked away from Ning Li's seat.

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"Sister Lili, you're finally here! I've been waiting for you!"

Wei Songze finally saw Ning Li coming out of the elevator. He had been waiting for her at the entrance for a while, and her eventual arrival was comforting. Behind him were a ton of parcels.

"Do you know how long it took me to bring all the boxes here?"

Ning Li had a glance at him before she opened the door. "Are you trying to say it's tiring for your followers?"

"Come on, Sister Lili. You don't need to make it obvious."

Ning Li opened the door. "Bring everything in."

Wei Songze sighed and nodded. "Okay."

The two of them moved around seven to eight boxes into the apartment.

"Sister Lili, are these all yours? Aren't they a little too much?" Wei Songze scratched his head puzzledly.

As far as he knew, she was not someone particular in terms of her living style and could leave most of the things back at Lincheng's old house. Therefore, he had no idea what the boxes were for.

However, Ning Li did not say a word.

Wei Songze grabbed a chair and sat down. "Sister Lili, your second brother was looking for you last night, and I told him about this place. You won't mind, right?"

She froze for a moment. It seemed like Wei Songze did not know that Lu Huaiyu had already come to the place.

"Yeah, it's fine."

Wei Songze rubbed his chin. "I thought so. We are all on the same side after all."

Ning Li tossed a box at him. "Watch your mouth."

He pouted. "What? If you didn't treat him like one of us, I wouldn't have told him that much either. Look, didn't he save us from the station before this? And he even looked for you in the middle of the night."

Ning Li stared at him quietly.

Wei Songze zipped his mouth. A while later, he thought of something and said, "Oh, right, Sister Lili, the guy who bought your paintings contacted me again recently."

Chapter 102: Can't You Trust Lu Huaiyu?

Ning Li bent over and took the items out of the boxes, unconcerned about Wei Songze's question.

“I told the guy that we are out of stock and that I’ll contact him when we get any new stuff. Speaking of which, Sister Lili, it’s been a while since you drew anything. It’s been around three months right?” Wei Songze said.

Other than the last-minute help at Tsinghua Cup, he had not seen Ning Li pick up a paintbrush. Even he wanted to see her painting again, let alone the art collector.

Ning Li froze. Actually, it was not just three months. Since her past life, she had not picked up a paintbrush for such a long time that she almost forgot how it felt to draw a stroke on the canvas.

“I’ve been a little busy lately. We’ll see,” she replied.

Wei Songze was not surprised as well. “I guess so. You are the genius of Second High, and you have to maintain the first place. I bet you have to study hard.”

As far as he knew, good students had to work hard in order to keep up their excellent results. The score on the test paper determined whether one loved or hated studying.

Ning Li thought about it and said, “It’s manageable, but I’ve been quite busy lately.”

Wei Songze found her reasoning strange. “Huh?”

She had moved all her things here from Lincheng. Other than studying, what else could she be busy with?

“I have to go to the capital next Saturday,” Ning Li merely said.

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After Wei Songze left, Ning Li stayed behind and unboxed all the parcels.

A lot of the boxes contained books from mechanical blueprints to astrophysics textbooks; some of them were even printed versions.

On top of that, there was even a disassembled easel, a bunch of paints, and a stack of sketches.

She took all of them out and arranged them nicely before she locked them up in one of the rooms. Then, she took out the pajamas from Lu Huaiyu, washed them, and dried them on the balcony.

After that, she bagged all the sketches and returned to the Ye family.

She was not 18 years old yet, so she was renting the place under Wei Songze's name. Nevertheless, it was not appropriate for her to stay here for long. However, the place was a decent storage option for the time being.

Besides, she had other plans to stay in the Ye family.

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When she returned home, Su Yuan was doing a flower arrangement in the living room.

Su Yuan had stayed up late last night because of Ning Li, and it was Cheng Xiyue's phone call that finally made her calm down and succumb to rest.

However, Ning Li leaving the house without telling her made her mad, so she could not go to sleep at all.

After a quick nap in the morning, she went to have a facial treatment and a full body spa to ease her tension.

When she heard Ning Li walk through the door, she put the last dendrobium into the vase, adjusted its height, and turned around to her daughter. Glaring at her, she asked, "Where have you been last night?"

Ning Li walked upstairs without pause. “Why ask if you already know?”

Ye Ci already knew that she had gone to Lu Huaiyu’s place, so Su Yuan would have known as well.

Su Yuan planned to have a good conversation with her and even felt bad when she saw the gift from Ning Li yesterday. She planned to apologize to her daughter, but after what the girl did last night, she changed her mind.

Aside from leaving the birthday dinner on her own, Ning Li did not even come back last night.

“Ning Li!” Su Yuan frowned. She strode upstairs and stopped Ning Li.

She was arranging flowers to improve her mood, but now it was ruined again.

“It’s fine if you don’t want to join the party, but why are you sleeping over at someone else’s place? You are just 17. Where are your manners?”

The whole mansion was quiet, thus Su Yuan’s scolding echoed loudly.

Evidently, she was frustrated.

Even though the man was Lu Huaiyu, if news of this went out, it would only cause unwanted rumors. She would be criticized for her ability to raise a daughter.

“Someone else’s place?” Ning Li chuckled. “I don’t have a house in Yunzhou anyway, so every place is someone else’s place to me.”

“You—”

“Besides, it’s not my first time staying out for a whole night. I did that many years ago and never stopped doing it, so why are you so angry about it?” Ning Li sounded frivolous as if she had nothing to do with this.

Su Yuan was silenced for quite a while before she said, “You were staying with your grandmother last time, and how she brought you up is none of my business. But you are here with me now and you must listen to me.”

Su Yuan could tell that subtlety did not work with Ning Li, so she had to do this the hard way.

Ning Li decided to be frank with her mother. “I’m afraid that’s a little difficult.”

Su Yuan did not know how to continue the conversation. Ning Li was stubborn and never listened to people’s advice.

Aunt Zhao came in and tried to ease the conflict. “My, my, Madam, Miss, calm down. Have a seat and we can talk this over peacefully. Why the argument?”

“Miss, Madam is just worried about you. You went to a man’s house alone, after all. That’s a little—”

Ning Li had a glance at Aunt Zhao. “It seems like you don’t trust Second Master Lu, Aunt Zhao.”

Aunt Zhao was shocked. Lu Huaiyu was such an influential person that even Ye Ming had to be courteous in front of him and call him Second Master Lu. On the contrary, Aunt Zhao was just a nanny.

If Lu Huaiyu knew about this...

Aunt Zhao nervously said, “Miss, you’ve misunderstood my meaning. I didn’t mean that. I’m just—”

Ning Li did not say a word as well. She stared at Aunt Zhao with a cold gaze.

Aunt Zhao was petrified as she did not know how to continue the conversation. Now, it seemed like criticizing Ning Li's behavior would be indirectly questioning Lu Huaiyu's character.

"Mom!"

Ye Cheng came from the side and stared at Ning Li cautiously. "Just forget about her. She can stay out as long as she likes. Why are you doing this?"

Su Yuan was a lot gentler in front of the boy. She caressed the kid's head and said, "Lil Cheng, don't say something like that. She's your sister, after—"

"She's not my sister!"

Ye Cheng only had one sister, and it was Ye Ci.

Ning Li was not in the mood to see the mother and son show, so she went upstairs.

Su Yuan wanted to hold her back, but the words that Ning Li said stopped her. She looked at Ye Cheng and said, "Your teacher told me your Mathematics is getting worse. What happened?"

Ye Cheng got angry when his mother mentioned his studies. "I knew all those questions, but I was just careless."

She frowned. "It's fine if you are careless once or twice, but you keep doing it. You—"

"Aaargh! The teacher already told me about it at school and now I have to hear it from you again? Mom, please, you are giving me a lot of pressure."

Frustrated, Ye Cheng shook Su Yuan's hand away.

Su Yuan said after a soft sigh. "Okay, okay, I'll stop. You know what you should do, and if you keep getting poor scores, I will have to hire a tuition teacher for you. Got it?"

Ye Cheng rejected the idea, "A tuition teacher? I can just ask Sis to teach me."

Chapter 103: She Is More Beautiful Than Xu Yini

The boy was playful, arrogant, and capricious. He never paid attention in school and his results were terrible.

His mother had hired tuition teachers for him before but all of them left due to various reasons and none of them lasted for a month.

In the end, Ye Ci had to tutor the boy herself and finally got him under control. However, ever since Ye Ci started her third year, the tutoring stopped.

Su Yuan disagreed, "Your sister doesn't have the time."

Ye Ci had been busy with the Huatsing Cup. Everyone thought that she could seize the scholarship by becoming the champion and get a guaranteed slot to Xijing University. Unfortunately, things did not go as expected.

Now, in order to get to Xijing University, Ye Ci would have to win a prize in the Physics competition or get a good score in the upcoming entrance exam.

Su Yuan got news about Ye Ci's results in the previous monthly test. Given the girl's current placing and score, it would be a little risky. Therefore, she had to give Ye Ci her full support, be it in the competition or in the entrance exam. She must get a slot into Xijing University.

Every second mattered now. The girl could not be distracted by tutoring Ye Cheng.

Ye Cheng was sour about it. "Tutoring me is a piece of cake to Sis, but if she's really busy, then just forget about it. I don't want a tuition teacher."

Su Yuan was having a headache. Given the boy's temper, he could very well scare off all the teachers she hired. A while later, she said, "Fine. Go back to your room. I'll talk to your sister later."

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"Tutoring Lil Cheng?"

Ye Ci was taking off her uniform after coming back from class, and she froze when she heard her mother.

"Yes. Lil Cheng's results have been going downhill recently. I said I wanted to get him a tutor, but he rejected the suggestion. He said he only wants you to tutor him."

Su Yuan had a complicated expression on her face.

Ye Ci took her uniform off and thought for a while.

"But you are busy yourself. You have to prepare for the competition and the entrance exam. I think...it's not a good idea," Su Yuan said.

Ye Ci turned around and showed her a smile. "It's okay. He's only in fifth grade, and it's as easy as pie to me. I'll tutor him. It won't take up a lot of my time."

Su Yuan felt bad for the girl. "Your classes and schedules are packed to the brim. If you tutor him..."

Ye Ci shook her head. "Lil Cheng is my brother, so it's my duty to guide him. Don't worry. I'll talk to him later."

Su Yuan sighed a breath of relief. "He always listens to you."

Ye Ci nodded. "Go have some rest. You didn't rest properly yesterday."

Su Yuan felt even worse when she heard Ye Ci remind her about that. She had been worried about Ning Li for the whole night last night, but the girl did not even say a word to her or apologize for staying out for the whole night.

In contrast, Ye Ci came back from a whole day of classes and still had to worry about her mother.

"I'm fine. You, on the other hand, haven't been resting properly lately. You should have a good rest. I'll leave you be."

"Okay. Thank you, Mom."

"Good night." Su Yuan left and softly shut the door.

The smile on Ye Ci's face faded as she looked at her desk. The notes and study materials from today's class were scattered across her desk.

On top of the pile were the notes from the competitive Physics class today. After a portion of the student dropped out of the competitive Physics class, Zhou Fei had sped up his lesson.

Ye Ci only managed to take down all the notes but had yet to understand some of them. The midterm test was coming up, and every teacher started to increase the amount of homework for all the subjects.

Ye Ci's schedule was already stretched thin, and now she had to be responsible for Ye Cheng on top of everything else. She did not want to say yes, but she had been the best all these years. She just could not say no to her mother.

Frustrated, she opened her books.

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Saturday arrived in the blink of an eye.

Starting this week, the third-year students had extra classes on Saturday morning, meaning that they would only have one and a half days of rest left in a week.

After the morning class, He Xiaochen asked Ning Li out for lunch.

Behind Second High was a street filled with food stalls and restaurants. The students loved coming here to grab a bite. The street also attracted a lot of students from Seven High.

It was a lively afternoon. The two girls sat down in a restaurant selling beef noodles. He Xiaochen was obviously a regular based on how well she knew her way around the place.

“Sir, two bowls of beef noodles, please.”

“Coming right up!”

He Xiaochen rubbed her hands excitedly. “Ning Li, you have to give it a try. The beef noodles here are the best.”

Ning Li had a feeling that she was always either eating or studying whenever she was around He Xiaochen. She did not have a lot of friends in her past life, so she had no idea that He Xiaochen was such a glutton.

“Alright, if you say so!.”

Soon, two steaming hot bowls of noodles were served.

He Xiaochen’s eyes sparkled. “Food, here I come!” She was grateful for this beautiful day.

A few male and female students in the Seven High uniform came in and sat down beside the girls. They were having a heated discussion.

One of the girls said, "Hey, did you hear that Xu Yini is coming to Yunzhou today?"

Ning Li froze when she heard the name.

"Really?"

"Of course! The fan club announced it! They say that she has an event later in the evening, so she has to be there. The fan club is ready as well."

The girl who spoke seemed to be Xu Yini's hardcore fan as she grasped every detail of Xu Yini's schedule.

The other girl questioned, "She has to show up at an event? I thought she came from a rich family. Why is she taking jobs like this?"

Xu Yini became popular right after her debut. As a movie star, she tended to maintain her image. A movie star rarely showed up in variety shows, let alone at a small event like this.

When she first gained her popularity, there was gossip saying that she traveled in a luxurious car that was worth tens of millions at her debut and that the movie she starred in was a big production directed by famed directors. People suspected that she must have a sugar daddy behind her.

However, people soon found out that it was her father's car and that she was just a beautiful, rich girl. Someone like her would never have to worry about resources, thus she gained a lot of fans.

"It isn't the same this time. This event is an endorsement for a jewelry shop in collaboration with HG. That's why she is coming," the girl announced proudly.

"That's one of the top eight luxury brands! Too bad I'm just too broke and can't afford to own the same brand as my goddess."

“Me too. HG usually never holds this kind of event.”

“My goddess is different! HG belongs to the Lu Corporation. You guys know that, don’t you? According to reliable sources, Yini is a childhood friend to the second master of the Lu Corporation. She’s unrivaled!”

Ning Li continued eating her noodles.

The girl was talking happily and got excited as she went on. “I’m going tonight! If I can see her in person, I’ll die in happiness.”

One of the guys said, “I think Xu Yini isn’t that beautiful. What’s with the obsession?”

The moment the words escaped the guy’s mouth, the other girls glared at him angrily.

“What did you say?”

The guy sighed and gestured inside the restaurant with a tilt of his chin. “Look at that girl sitting inside there. She’s even more beautiful than Xu Yini.”

Immediately, the boys and girls peered inside the restaurant.

Chapter 104: A Bookmark

At the corner of the restaurant, two girls were sitting opposite the group.

The one on the left wore a pair of glasses, appearing all quiet and timid. On the other hand, the girl on the right had a ponytail and looked as fair as snow. Her eyes were exquisite, and her nose was sharp. Her eyelashes curled upward, and with every blink, it seemed like a butterfly flew down from the snowy mountains.

The beef noodle shop was an old one. The interior decorations were aged, but with her sitting there, it felt like her glow illuminated the entire place. Even though it was just her side profile, she was unbelievably breathtaking.

It felt like there was an invisible aura around her. It was pure and clean, and she felt distant, so distant that one could hardly get close to her.

The group went silent for a moment.

A moment later, one of the girls said in disdain, "She's...okay I guess."

"She's okay?" The other girl looked at her and saw an angry glare.

The first girl whispered, "That's a bare face without makeup!"

Xu Yini might be beautiful, but as a celebrity, she was perfectly packaged from head to toe. The reason she gained immense popularity after her debut was that she looked innocent. To the masses, she looked and felt like their first love.

However, this unnamed girl at the corner of the restaurant looked even more bewitching. Other than the pureness she exuded, she looked cold and exquisite. Her character was unrivaled.

One of the boys took out his phone and had multiple glances at Ning Li.

"That's the new girl in Second High. She's dubbed the most beautiful girl in the school."

Ning Li also had made a name for herself. On the first day in Second High, someone had already snapped her picture and posted it on the campus forum.

Seven High was just beside Second High, so it was only normal that they knew about her existence.

“Really? Let me have a look.”

The first guy moved closer to his friend and had a glance at the phone. After he made sure it was really Ning Li, he sneered, “She’s not that photogenic.”

He thought that she was already pretty in the picture, but seeing her in person now, the picture did not do her uniqueness any justice.

“I don’t care. I like Xu Yini the most. She’s rich and polite, and you can’t just like a person based on their looks,” the girl grumbled.

There were quite a lot of rumors about Ning Li, especially the one whereby she had almost pushed someone off the rails. It even trended for a while, so others outside the school knew about it. She might be beautiful, but her heart was black and she paled in comparison with Xu Yini.

He Xiaochen got frustrated when she overheard the group. She wanted to go and argue with them.

Ning Li suddenly said, “Is it enough? Your noodles?”

He Xiaochen was stunned. “Huh?”

“Do you want ice cream?”

He Xiaochen’s eyes sparkled like stars. “Of course!”

Ning Li smiled. “Come on, I’ll buy you some ice cream.”

“Yay! Ning Li, you’re the best!”

With Ning Li’s ice cream, He Xiaochen felt better as the coolness eased her anger. The two of them finally paid for their noodles and walked past the group of boys and girls.

The first girl lowered her head and buried herself in her food. Nevertheless, Ning Li turned a blind eye to them and walked out with He Xiaochen.

The two girls bought ice cream from the store next door.

He Xiaochen took a big bite that soothed her temper instantly. She turned around to Ning Li and asked, "Are you not mad? Those girls actually have the guts to talk about you like that."

Ning Li smiled. "It's nothing."

The girls were Xu Yini's fans, so of course, they would defend their idol. As long as the comments were not offensive, Ning Li would rather stay away.

"Okay, but I think you are better looking than Xu Yini." He Xiaochen squinted her eyes at Ning Li. "If I were a man, I would go for you without a doubt."

Ning Li did not say a word.

"So, are you going back home later? Or do you want to go shopping?"

Ning Li shook her head. "I have something to do in the afternoon."

"Okay." He Xiaochen was a little disappointed before she thought of something. She took her phone out and took a dozen pictures of her ice cream before editing it.

"Here's ice cream from Ning Li. I'm going to flaunt this in front of those guys. Hahahaha..."

"Okay...You have fun. I have to go now."

He Xiaochen nodded repeatedly. "Alrighty!" She felt like she held the world in her hands as long as she held the ice cream from Ning Li.

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Ning Li returned to her rented unit and took the dry pajamas from the balcony. She bagged them and took a taxi to Yunding Fenghua. In the car, she sent a message to Lu Huaiyu. [Second Brother, are you home now? I'm returning the book and the pajamas.]

A moment later, Lu Huaiyu replied: [I am at HG. I'll go back later. You can go in on your own. The study is on the second floor.]

Ning Li stared at the reply for a few minutes.

[Okay.]

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Half an hour later, Ning Li arrived at the mansion.

Lu Huaiyu had already told her the password last time, so she had access to the house.

The mansion was empty. Ning Li went straight to the second floor. Beside the master bedroom were a small study and a big study.

The doors were unlocked, so she went in just fine.

The big study was huge. Racks of books were lined up neatly, and in the center was a table carved out of wood. The pattern of the original log remained clear on it. The fragrance of paper and aged books filled the room.

Ning Li walked to the table and put the book she got from Zhou Fei down. In a side glance, she saw another book on the table: 'The Simple History Of Time'.

It seemed used, and other than Lu Huaiyu, she could not think of anyone who would even open the book.

Ning Li picked it up for a glance.

Suddenly, a piece of paper fell out. It was a bookmark.

Just when she wanted to bend over and pick it up, a familiar voice came from the entrance.

"Lili?"

Ning Li turned around.

"Second Brother? You're already back?"

Lu Huaiyu saw the book in her hand and then saw the bookmark on the floor. He squinted his eyes and walked over.

"Give me the book. I just finished it yesterday. Let me put it back."

Then, he bent over and picked up the bookmark before Ning Li could. Swiftly, his long fingers curled around the bookmark and tightened it into his palm.

Chapter 105: He Is Not Around

Ning Li had a glance at his hand, but Lu Huaiyu seemed reluctant to show her the bookmark.

It was just a piece of paper. She had a glance at the edge and noticed that it was a sketch of some sort, but she did not get a clearer look.

In the end, she gave him the book.

Lu Huaiyu put the paper back inside. He took the book Ning Li returned and put it back on the second row of the rack.

Ning Li was behind him.

“Second Brother, I’ve washed your pajamas and put them downstairs.”

Lu Huaiyu simply grunted in reply before he said, “You may choose any book on that row and have a look.”

Ning Li looked at where he was pointing at. The room was huge and there was a collection of books.

“Have you read all the books here before?” she asked.

“Almost.”

Lu Huaiyu had stayed in Yunzhou for almost a year now and was quite free since he rejected most of the jobs and meetings. Whenever he could not sleep, he would read to kill his time.

Ning Li stood in front of the other rack and scanned through the books. She then took one from the middle.

This particular book was wrapped nicely, and its cover was 2 mm thick. It felt quite heavy in her hand as well.

Lu Huaiyu had a look at her choice. "That's the original German version. If you want to read it, there's a Chinese translated version beside it."

Ning Li paused for a while before she put the book back and took the translated version.

Lu Huaiyu did not notice the little pause.

She then put the book into her bag. "Thank you, Second Brother. I'll be going now."

"Wait." Lu Huaiyu held her back. "Are you free later?"

Ning Li looked at her watch. It was 2:00 p.m.

"Yeah, what's up?"

"A friend of mine gave me a new set of coffee beans and a coffee machine. If you are free, can you help grind the coffee beans?"

Lu Huaiyu noticed her unusual reaction when he asked the question. He smiled and said, "Consider it payment for staying here the other night."

Ning Li put her bag down and said, "Okay."

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On the first floor, Ning Li went down and saw a brand new coffee machine on the island kitchen. There were also a dozen bags of coffee beans beside it.

"Second Brother, all these...should be expensive, aren't they?"

Lu Huaiyu looked at her. “Nope. My friend started a coffee shop earlier but lost interest. He sold this to me at cost price before even opening it.”

Ning Li went quiet for a moment. The machine alone was worth more than a coffee shop in Yunzhou’s city center. Who was that generous to sell it to him at cost price?

She walked over and had a look at the coffee beans. The beans came from all over the world and were the best coffee beans handpicked by professionals. The accessories were only found in the most expensive coffee shop out there, yet Lu Huaiyu brought everything back like they were Christmas presents.

“I’ll have to read the manual for this.” She then took the manual by the side.

“We aren’t in a rush. Take all the time you need.”

Lu Huaiyu sat on the couch opposite her.

Ning Li looked up and saw the bright sun outside the window. It shone through the ceiling-to-wall windows and shed a glorious glow on his face. Something inside her stirred and felt strange to her.

She asked, “Second Brother, which flavor do you want to try?”

Lu Huaiyu thought about it. “Mandheling.”

Ning Li looked a little reluctant. “But it will take a lot of time to grind.”

Indeed, it would take hours to transform the beans into coffee.

“It’s fine. I can wait.” Lu Huaiyu did not mind at all.

Ning Li took the can of coffee beans out and was about to roast them.

“Second Brother, are you fine with your schedule?”

Lu Huaiyu looked at her. “What schedule?”

The man usually did not have any activities starting from the afternoon.

“I heard there’s an event at HG tonight.”

HG was one of the Lu Corporation’s subsidiaries, and it seemed like it was having a huge event tonight. Therefore, she thought that he would attend it.

Lu Huaiyu raised a brow. “Do I look that free to you?”

Ning Li went silent as she stared at the coffee beans in her hands. It seemed like the man stopped her from going back just because he wanted to watch her make coffee.

“Oh.”

...

On the giant screen in front of the mall HG owned, Xu Yini’s promotional video was already up.

In the video, she was looking at the camera with exquisite makeup and a stunning smile. She caressed her face with her porcelain-white fingers, her finger adorned with a scarlet red ruby ring. She looked beautiful and elegant.

The mall had a lot of banners with her face on them as well, and the place was filled with balloons and flowers. The scale of this event was self-explanatory. There were already a number of fans waiting outside.

Compared to big cities like the capital and Gangcheng, Yunzhou was just an average city.

Therefore, Xu Yini's surprise appearance excited the fans, all of whom had been waiting outside since the morning.

Around 5:00 p.m., a car arrived at the entrance.

One of the fans shouted, "Yini!"

The crowd immediately got excited and screams filled the air. The security guards came in to control the situation and cleared out a path for the car.

"Sister Yini, a lot of your fans are out there." The assistant was in awe of the sheer number of fans.

Xu Yini had gotten used to the scene. She was scrolling her phone instead of being surprised.

Since the car windows were tinted black, no one from the outside could see what was happening in the car.

"Bunch of noisy apes," she complained in a frustrated tone.

The assistant zipped her mouth shut.

"Yini, we are here. Go get dressed. The event will start at 6:00 a.m.," Mei Li said from the passenger seat as she opened the door.

The car was parked at HG's private parking lot where no fans were allowed.

Xu Yini kept her phone away. She had sent a message to Lu Huaiyu about her arrival but did not get a reply at all. More precisely, after the last call she got from the man, her texts and calls had all been one-sided

The man did not answer anything from her; there was not even a text. Lu Huaiyu had always been cold to her, but his distant behavior got worse after that incident.

She was mad at first. It was just a picture, and she had clarified it right after it got out, so why the cold shoulder?

However, after a few days and still nothing from Lu Huaiyu, she got restless.

Coincidentally, her endorsed brand had an event in Yunzhou that she agreed to attend. She wanted to use this opportunity to have a straight talk with Lu Huaiyu.

Xu Yini got out of the car and entered the elevator.

...

Right after the elevator door opened, Feng Yao was already there waiting for her. He showed a welcoming smile when he saw Xu Yini.

“Miss Xu, hello.”

Xu Yini knew the man. He was the regional manager of HG in Yunzhou.

“Mr. Feng.” She shook his hand firmly.

Given the man’s status, he did not have to welcome her by himself, but Xu Yini was not just any celebrity. She was the daughter of the Xu family. Feng Yao was a smart man who dared not be careless.

“The journey here must have been tiring for you. The waiting room is ready for you. Do you want to go there now?”

Xu Yini walked forward. "Not now. I want to see Huaiyu first." She found out that HG had an internal meeting earlier in the day, thus Lu Huaiyu should be in the building.

Stunned, Feng Yao said, "I'm sorry, Miss Xu. Second Master is not here."

Xu Yini froze. "He's not here?"

Chapter 106: My Dear Ning Li

Feng Yao was a little surprised by Xu Yini's reaction.

"Yeah. The second master left after the meeting ended."

"He went off that early?" Disappointed, Xu Yini frowned.

Feng Yao was also at a loss for words. "Yeah, the second master rarely accepts jobs in the afternoon or the evening."

He thought that since she was Lu Huaiyu's childhood friend, Xu Yini would know about this.

Xu Yini tightened her lips. She came all the way from the capital just to see Lu Huaiyu, yet she missed him just like that.

"Where is he now?"

Feng Yao thought about it for a moment and smiled apologetically, "The second master has his own private schedule, so we have no idea."

The truth was that several executive members of HG knew where Lu Huaiyu would be at this time of the day: his house.

Since Xu Yini did not know that though, it was not necessary for him to tell her.

Xu Yini reacted bitterly to that response.

Mei Li went up to her. "If that's the case, why don't we prepare ourselves for the event first?"

Frustrated, Xu Yini suppressed her anger and disappointment as she marched forward.

...

At Yunding Fenghua, Ning Li filtered the freshly ground beans a second time and put them into the pot.

The rich aroma of coffee permeated the air.

Lu Huaiyu stood up and walked to her. "It seems like you learned a lot at the coffee shop."

He was always picky with his coffee. He asked Ning Li to prepare the coffee for him because he wanted to test her skills.

Well, it seemed like her skills had exceeded his expectations.

"The owner teaches me sometimes, and it's not that hard to learn." Ning Li did not even look at him when she said that.

Lu Huaiyu stood opposite her, and thanks to his towering height, he was peering down at the tiny spiral of her hair. She was concentrating on making the coffee and would blink from time to time, which made her eyelashes sparkle.

He took his phone and sent a message.

[Coffee beans: okay.]

...

Cheng Xiyue read the message in a meeting room. He sat straight up cautiously as if he was facing his greatest enemy.

The marketing manager, who was giving a presentation, saw the look on Cheng Xiyue's face and his heart skipped a beat. A moment later, the marketing manager cautiously asked, "Mr. Cheng, is there anything wrong with the data?"

Cheng Xiyue recovered from his shock. He put his phone down and said, "Oh, no, it's fine. Please continue."

The marketing manager confirmed it thrice before he continued his presentation.

Cheng Xiyue could barely listen to the presentation anymore, so he quickly replied to the message.

[Aren't you asleep?]

The man was usually sleeping at this time of the day. His habits never changed ever since he came to Yunzhou. Even Cheng Xiyue dared not contact him at this hour.

What could have happened today?

[No. I'm busy.]

Cheng Xiyue pondered the statement. 'Busy? The word busy should be omitted from his dictionary.'

Then, he suddenly thought of that time when Lu Huaiyu had gotten drunk, which made him anxious.

[What are you busy with?]

At the same time, he screenshotted the chat and sent it to Gu Tinglan. He thought something must have happened since Lu Huaiyu was skipping his nap.

A while later, Gu Tinglan replied. [Who is he with today?]

Cheng Xiyue thought about it.

Lu Huaiyu went back after the meeting at HG, and usually, he should be taking a nap alone at home. Who else could he be with?

Moreover, he was talking to Gu Tinglan about Lu Huaiyu's condition. Why would the doctor ask such a strange question?

Then, Lu Huaiyu replied with a picture of a cup of coffee.

Cheng Xiyue knew that Lu Huaiyu loved coffee, but the man never sent him a picture of a coffee before. He frowned and zoomed into the picture. After a careful look, he noticed something.

The table, the cup, and everything else looked familiar. The man seemed to be at home.

He knew Lu Huaiyu just bought a coffee machine and got a ton of coffee beans. He figured that the man wanted it to add to his collection and not to make coffee by himself. In fact, making coffee was not something the man would do.

He forwarded the message to Gu Tinglan.

[Dr. Gu, I want to ask if this is proof that his condition is getting worse.]

A while later, Gu Tinglan replied, [No. Look at the spoon.]

Cheng Xiyue zoomed in and finally saw something that became the answer to his question. The spoon showed a reflection of someone, and it was someone familiar.

Cheng Xiyue went silent for quite a while.

'Is he being fed something?'

...

While waiting for the coffee to boil, Ning Li took her phone out and saw that someone had tagged her in WeChat.

She tapped on it and saw He Xiaochen's status.

[My dear Ning Li bought me ice cream today! It's delicious! @Ning Li]

The picture was the ice cream that she had bought for He Xiaochen earlier. The lighting was good and the ice cream looked delicious.

"What are you looking at?" Lu Huaiyu asked because the girl was staring at her phone.

At the next moment, he squinted his eyes at her and raised a brow. Then, he leaned forward slightly.

The kitchen island was in between the two of them, but Lu Huaiyu's towering height allowed him to have a peek at her phone.

When he got close, the unique smell of refreshing cedar entered her nose. Even though the room was filled with the aroma of rich coffee, the smell on him remained refreshing and was extremely distinct.

Even the warmth from him felt like it could scald her without touching; all he needed to do was get close to her.

Ning Li subtly stepped back and drew distance from the intimacy. Her reaction allowed Lu Huaiyu to have a clearer look at the words, and he uttered the words softly in his charming voice, "My dear Ning Li..."

His rich and pleasant voice entered her ears, tickling her eardrums. They were like an enchantment that could bewitch someone.

Ning Li quivered while her eyes turned red.

Chapter 107: Paying Back the Favor

Lu Huaiyu paused for a moment before he straightened his body and chuckled. "Your classmate is really interesting."

For whatever reason, even with him moving away, the strange pressure remained.

Ning Li turned her phone off and looked down.

"Xiaochen likes sweet stuff."

With the cup of coffee in his hand, Lu Huaiyu said with a frivolous tone, "Well, that ice cream seems nice."

Ning Li looked at him in surprise. As far as she knew, he disliked sweet stuff, even ice cream from a grocery store.

"How does your cup taste?" she asked.

Lu Huaiyu nodded. "It's alright."

Or rather, it was a perfect cup of coffee.

He was extremely picky with his coffee, be it the sweetness, the bitterness, or the aroma. There were only a few who could get his taste right.

However, Ning Li's coffee ticked all the boxes for him, and it was perfect.

If he did not watch her make him the coffee for the first time, he would have thought that she prepared this a long time ago after doing deep research on him.

Judging from the look on his face, Ning Li knew that she had passed. She sighed a breath of relief and smiled brightly, her eyes curving into sickle moons.

"As long as you like it, that's good."

Lu Huaiyu's heart throbbed for a moment while he watched her smile. "I praise you a bit, and you are already as thrilled as a child."

"Of course. I troubled you the last time and I feel bad, so this is me paying back the favor," Ning Li said as she tidied up the place and washed her hands. She owed Lu Huaiyu a lot of favors and would feel better if she could return them one by one.

Lu Huaiyu squinted his eyes, put his cup down, and smiled brightly. "Oh, really?"

The girl was just 17 years old, but she had her debts counted clearly. She was one step away from listing all of them down on a piece of paper.

He had flown back from the capital in the middle of the night, found her in the rain, and brought her home, but all he got was a cup of perfect coffee?

Ning Li got her bag. "Second Brother, I've cleaned the coffee machine and arranged the coffee beans. They are at the lowest drawer of the center cabinet. If there's nothing else, I'll be going."

Lu Huaiyu said, "Alright, then."

...

Xu Yini waited for a long time, but there was still no message from Lu Huaiyu.

In the dressing room, the makeup artist was fixing her hair.

Xu Yini called Cheng Xiyue who finally picked up after a long wait.

"Yo, Yini, to what do I owe this call?" Cheng Xiyue said in a flippant tone as he loosened up his tie and walked out of the meeting room.

"Brother Xiyue, I'm in Yunzhou. Do you want to have dinner tonight?"

Cheng Xiyue paused. He knew that Xu Yini was in Yunzhou for the event because HG had been pouring money into their advertising.

However, he knew who exactly she wanted to meet at the dinner.

"Well, I'm afraid dinner is not convenient. I still have meetings to attend, and there's a dinner I have committed to at 7 tonight."

Xu Yini was a little disappointed. "Then...do you know where Huaiyu is now?"

Cheng Xiyue knew that she was actually asking for Lu Huaiyu. He shrugged and said, "He should be at home now."

Before Xu Yini could feel happy, he added, "But he's been resting well recently, so Gu Tinglan said it's better to leave him be."

Xu Yini took a deep breath. "Okay, I'll look for him tomorrow."

After that, she hung up the phone. It was then that Mei Li came in and shook her head upon hearing Xu Yini.

"Yini, I told Qinqin to book a 10:00 a.m. flight tomorrow. I'm afraid you won't have the time to meet him."

Xu Yini frowned. "I thought we're leaving the day after tomorrow. What's with the sudden change?"

"The fashion director of G&S is arriving at the capital tonight. He's there to prepare for the collection show for the autumn/winter season. He has a tight schedule, and I went through hell just to secure a meeting with him tomorrow. We cannot miss this."

Mei Li looked rather excited.

"They still haven't picked the model for the opening walk, and everyone is fighting for it. If we can get it and you can perform, maybe we can work together."

Xu Yini was a little stunned. "What? I thought they would never pick anyone to endorse their brand."

"I didn't say it's an endorsement. It's just a brand ambassadorship, and this is the first brand ambassador that they are selecting from China. A lot of people are dying to get the spot."

There were distinct status differences in the fashion world between the famous brands, and the chain of influence was obvious. Among them, G&S stood at the highest point. Their products were extremely well known and they came from Europe.

There were more than 500 years of history behind the company, but throughout half a millennium, they had never elected a brand ambassador before.

However, because G&S was taking on a whole new strategy, they were looking for a brand ambassador for a particular series of designs rather than an endorser. Since they would not conflict with Esya's interest directly, Mei Li fought for Xu Yini to get the meeting.

Even though it was just a brand ambassadorship, the title was bigger than Esya's endorser, which explained Mei Li's excitement.

"Based on what I heard, a lot of people in the industry are looking out for the fashion director and trying to win favor from him. Whosoever wins his fondness will be the biggest winner. I'm sure that person will be laughing in their sleep."

Xu Yini came from a good background, and she could use her resources to easily expand her network and connections that were usually off-limits to most people. However, it did not include G&S.

"I understand." She put her phone away.

Qinqin, the assistant, said, "Sister Yini, it's time. We have to go down now."

Xu Yini then lifted her dress and went downstairs.

...

HG was extremely lively on a Saturday night. There was a huge crowd in every corner of the mall.

Xu Yini emerged from the elevator and heard loud cheers for her outside.

The crowd was chanting her name fanatically, "Yini! Yini!"

Xu Yini put on a wide smile and looked at her fans. She waved at the crowd as she walked out.

The cheers got louder, and some of the fans got so fervent that tears rolled down their faces. They waved banners with her name on them and turned on purple light sticks, which was her official fan club color.

Meanwhile, there were more than a dozen security guards paving the path for her. The emcee invited her on stage together with the chief of Esya for the Asian region. It was extremely lively.

“Now, Yini, we heard that you came all the way from the capital just to be here tonight. This is for the fans—I want to ask you what drives you here, or what motivates you to travel all the way here?”

The emcee passed her the microphone.

Xu Yini looked into the camera with a sweet smile. “It’s because there are people that I love here.” She paused and then added, “My beloved Ripples are here waiting for me, so of course I have to come.”

Ripples was what her fans identified themselves as. The crowd got even wilder when she said that.

“Aaaah!” Yini is so beautiful! I can’t!”

“What did she say? She came here for us? OMG! YINI G.O.A.T!”

“YINI! WE RIPPLES LOVE YOU FOREVER!”

Xu Yini’s confession to the camera ended up trending for the night.

Chapter 108: He Doesn’t Like This

[Xu Yini’s Ripples]

[Xu Yini in Yunzhou]

[Xu Yini is here because of the people she loves]

A few terms related to Xu Yini went on the trending list of topics.

It was almost like Christmas for the fans as they cheered and celebrated in the square in front of the mall.

[Any Ripple who isn't in Yunzhou is crying!]

[Jealous]

[Aaah! Yini is so good to her fans! She looked extremely alluring when she said that on camera! I feel like she's talking to me! I'm gonna get married to Yini!]

[Why do I feel she's actually confessing to someone? Is that particular someone in Yunzhou?]

That particular post on Weibo was swarmed with Ripples, bashing the original poster for disrupting the peace and atmosphere.

Xu Yini had just denied being in a relationship, and her daily schedule was packed. She did not even have the time to see someone.

Half an hour later, the original poster removed his post due to pressure from the fans.

The little incident faded without causing too much of a 'ripple'.

...

Ning Li also saw the clip with Xu Yini's confession.

Those who knew Xu Yini better knew who she was confessing to. At this point, Ning Li was not surprised at all.

In her past life, Xu Yini had been madly in love with Lu Huaiyu. She was bold, extreme, and brazen. Almost everyone knew that she was trying to win his heart, but she failed regardless.

Many were confused by the outcome though. Normally, any man would feel flattered when a woman with Xu Yini's looks and background was so madly in love with him for so many years.

If Lu Huaiyu already had someone in his heart and rejected Xu Yini, it was entirely possible, but Ning Li never heard of him being in love with any girl.

Lu Huaiyu would rather stay in his mansion for the whole afternoon just for a cup of coffee than attend the event organized by HG.

This point alone showed that he did not like being under the spotlight or being with Xu Yini.

In the clip, Xu Yini looked exquisite. Her smile at the camera was sweet and pure.

Even Ning Li had to admit that Xu Yini was very likable, even more so with the girl's wealthy background. If Xu Yini was not Lu Huaiyu's type, who would be his ideal type?

The thought suddenly froze Ning Li. For some reason, she felt an unusual frustration deep down, but it was quickly suppressed.

Then, she closed the app and booked herself an air ticket.

...

The mid-term test was around the corner, and the third-year students had to hasten their speed.

The pressure on the students and the atmosphere in each class started to increase, especially with the first class. No one in the first class was in the mood to joke anymore. Everyone buried their heads in their books.

During the afternoon's self-learning period, Cheng Xiangxiang ran into some problems with a Mathematics function and was unable to solve it even with multiple attempts.

She wanted to ask Ye Ci for help.

“Lil Ci—”

The moment she turned around to Ye Ci, however, she saw the girl sleeping on her table again.

Cheng Xiangxiang gently nudged her.

“Lil Ci? Lil Ci? Wake up.”

Ye Ci slowly opened her eyes, but she remained tired.

“Lil Ci, what's wrong with you lately? Have you been losing sleep at night?”

Ye Ci rubbed her eyes and sat up straight. “No. I tutored Lil Cheng yesterday and slept a little later than normal.”

“You tutored him?” Cheng Xiangxiang was shocked. “Our studying schedule is packed right now, yet you are still tutoring him?”

She knew how bad Ye Cheng was with studies. The boy was not worthy of Ye Ci's attention and time, especially with the mid-term test around the corner.

“Can’t you just get a tutor for him? You do know that other than the normal curriculum, you are still taking part in the Physics competition right? You don’t have the time for him.”

“It’s not that serious actually.” Ye Ci sighed. “Besides, the boy doesn’t like a tutor. Those who we hired before left in less than a month.”

“Even so, you can’t just shoulder all the burden yourself. Is it because of your mom?”

Ye Ci nodded.

Cheng Xiangxiang pouted. She turned to look behind her. “Say, Lil Ci, Ye Cheng has more than one sister, right? If he really needs a tutor, I think someone else is more suitable than you.”

Ye Ci knew who exactly Cheng Xiangxiang was talking about. She had thought about it at first, but it remained a decision.

“Are you talking about Sister Ning Li? I don’t think it’s workable. Lil Cheng dislikes her more than the tutors. He would never want her to be his tutor.”

“Never? And you guys just let him be?” Cheng Xiangxiang poked Ye Ci in the arm and argued, “Are you out of your mind? The reason why the tutors left was that they couldn’t handle the boy’s temper and they dared not talk about it. Ning Li is different.

“On top of that, she is related to Ye Cheng by blood. Even if she is a little harsh on Ye Cheng, you guys won’t say anything about her, right? Besides, she got first place in the last monthly test. She’s good at her studies but doesn’t even want to tutor her own brother? What kind of sister is that?”

Ye Ci was deeply moved by Cheng Xiangxiang’s words. She had been extremely exhausted recently with everything piling up on her. She used to be good in her studies and always got the top 10 in tests and exams. Even when she did poorly, she would never drop out of the top 20.

Now, the Physics competition alone was more than what she could handle. For the first time in her life, she realized that she was not talented.

However, whenever she thought about Ning Li's perfect score, grievance rose from her heart.

Everyone knew that Zhou Fei favored Ning Li. The different subject teachers were also polite and delighted when they mentioned Ning Li's name; they had nothing but praise for the girl.

She could never live with the defeat if she dropped out of the competitive Physics class.

As for Ye Cheng...

"I'll go talk to Mom when I go back," she said.

...

On Friday afternoon, Ning Li went to the teachers' office.

"You want to take a day off?" Geng Haifan was a little surprised.

Ning Li nodded. "I don't think I can make it to class later, or tomorrow's class either."

"What's the reason? Are you feeling ill?" Geng Haifan looked concerned.

Ning Li smiled. "No. Actually, there's something I need to settle back at home, so I have to go back."

"I see." Geng Haifan knew about Ning Li's background, so he knew she was referring to her home at Lincheng.

In the end, he approved her application.

“Go and do what you have to do. Come back as soon as possible and prepare for the mid-term test next week.”

“Thank you, Mr. Geng.”

...

Ning Li returned to class and packed her things.

He Xiaochen just found out that Ning Li had to be absent for a few days. With a heavy heart, she pleaded, “Ning Li, come back soon.”

With Ning Li away, He Xiaochen would not be able to enjoy her beautiful face anymore.

Ren Qian heard the conversation as well. He pushed himself away from the desk and looked at Ning Li curiously. “Ning Li, are you taking a few days off?”

Ning Li nodded.

“Man, I thought I could ask you for some advice after I finish this paper.”

Lin Zhouyang turned around. “You can just ask Brother Pei to help you.”

“Brother Pei is not around in the afternoon.”

“Huh? Why not?”

“What do you mean ‘why not’? Brother Pei doesn’t need to tell you when he is going home.”

Lin Zhouyang scratched his head awkwardly. "This is a little coincidental."

Unlike Ning Li's devil-may-care attitude, Pei Song was a role model student. Other than never being late or leaving class early, he barely applied for leave as well.

Chapter 109: Meeting

Every word and action from Pei Song followed the strictest rule; there was simply no flaw with the guy. Therefore, his sudden furlough was surprising, let alone the fact that it overlapped with Ning Li's leave.

Therefore, Lin Zhouyang's surprise was understandable.

Ning Li had already packed her things and was about to leave.

"Brother Pei, when are you leaving after this?" Lin Zhouyang curiously asked.

Pei Song answered without looking, "After the first class in the afternoon."

The timing was a little different from Ning Li's.

Ren Qian gave Lin Zhouyang a side glance. "How's your vocabulary going?"

Lin Zhouyang cried out loud. "Abandon! A.B.A.N.D.O.N!"

...

"Ning Li is leaving?"

Cheng Xiangxiang turned around and saw Ning Li walking out of the back door.

Ye Ci shook her head. "I don't know. Sister Ning Li rarely talks to us about her whereabouts."

"So, does that include her staying out for a whole night? Who knows what she's doing out there?" Sun Huihui said. She slammed her book on the desk, seemingly irritated by the fact.

Lin Zhouyang might have said those words unintentionally, but those who heard them might have thought differently.

It was rare for Pei Song to take leave from class, yet it coincidentally overlapped with Ning Li's leave. The coincidence was uncanny.

Cheng Xiangxiang smiled and looked at Sun Huihui. She whispered, "Are you irritated by our class monitor?"

"N-no?" Sun Huihui denied instinctively. "I'm just saying Ning Li is...She's always with our class monitor. Aside from the English presentation the other day, someone saw her having a meal with the class monitor at the cafeteria. And now, the two of them have applied for leave together..."

The more Sun Huihui realized it, the more irritated she felt.

Lin Zhouyang, who was memorizing his vocabulary, overheard the conversation. He looked up in confusion and said, "I mean I can ignore the other facts except for the meal at the cafeteria. Miss Sun Huihui, were you ignoring my existence the whole time?"

Up until now, the group had only one meal together at the cafeteria, and all five of them had been there. Sun Huihui made it sound like Ren Qian, He Xiaochen, and Lin Zhouyang had been invisible during that meal. She singlehandedly robbed the glorious achievements of all three of them.

"Besides, Brother Pei and Ning Li barely speak to each other. I don't think they will have a common topic."

Sun Huihui rolled her eyes.

Lin Zhouyang sometimes found that he could not understand a girl's thoughts.

...

Ning Li returned to her rented unit to retrieve her sketches before she took a taxi to the airport.

Wei Songze knew that her flight was in the afternoon. He insisted on seeing her off, but she told him to stay home.

“Sister Lili, it's your first time alone in the capital! You have to be careful! If you run into any bad guys—” Wei Songze nagged like an old lady through the phone.

“What if I run into bad guys?”

Wei Songze was stunned for a moment before he said with a serious tone, “Then...please go easy on them. If you cause any trouble there, no one will be able to bail you from the station...Hello? Hello?”

Ning Li hung up the phone. Anyway, it was not her first trip to the capital and she was not there to cause any problems.

...

At Yunzhou Airport, Ning Li got out of the taxi and then received a message from Su Yuan.

[You took leave for the day? Where are you going now?]

After what happened last time, Su Yuan tried not to care about Ning Li's whereabouts. The girl was stubborn and uncontrollable, thus Su Yuan had no way around her.

However, after hearing about this from Ye Ci, Su Yuan could not help but send Ning Li a message.

Ning Li was still her daughter, and she could not just turn a blind eye when the girl went missing.

Ning Li replied: [Lincheng. Back on Sunday]

Su Yuan did not ask for a reason after she saw the destination, Lincheng.

Ning Li put her phone away.

There was always a crowd in the airport. She checked in at the counter, went through security, and soon arrived at the boarding gate.

She wore a white hoodie and a pair of jeans instead of her school uniform. Her hair was tied into a ponytail and she did not put any makeup on. All she had was a messenger bag, yet her presence attracted a lot of attention.

Her flight was at 6:15 p.m. She had 40 minutes more before boarding, so she simply found a spot and sat down.

...

Gu Tinglan was talking through the phone while holding a briefcase, "I got it. I'll be at the boarding gate soon."

The voice on the other end of the call said something and he smiled.

"There's no use for you to rush me now. This is the last flight of the day."

His reason vexed the person on the other end of the phone. "I think that's an excuse. What's with the private jet that you bought last year? Is it for show?"

Gu Tinglan was not bothered by the reaction. "I just came back from abroad, and I still haven't applied for the pilot's course."

The other person cursed at him.

Suddenly, Gu Tinglan looked forward and saw a familiar figure. He checked his boarding details again and confirmed that he was at the correct boarding gate.

He then smiled. "I'm at the boarding gate. I'll talk to you when I reach the capital."

Before the person could say another word, he hung up the phone and went up to the familiar figure.

...

Ning Li was looking at her phone before she sensed someone coming closer to her.

She slowly looked up and saw Gu Tinglan beside her.

Gu Tinglan smiled happily. His smile was warm and kind as if he was Prince Charming. "Ning Li, what a coincidence running into you here!"

Ning Li sized up the man who was in a white shirt coupled with a pair of pants, with a blazer hanging over his arm. Beside his feet was a briefcase. The man seemed to be on a business trip.

She stood up.

"Dr. Gu."

Why would she run into Gu Tinglan at this timing?

Gu Tinglan looked around before he asked, "Are you alone?"

She did not deny it.

"Does your family know about this?"

Ning Li believed that Gu Tinglan knew about her little escapade from home the other night, so she nodded. "I've applied for leave from school."

Gu Tinglan nodded. "Does...Lu Huaiyu know about this?"

Chapter 110: Such A Coincidence

Ning Li found Gu Tinglan's question confusing. He made it sound like she had to report to Lu Huaiyu wherever she went.

As a matter of fact, she had told everyone that she was going back to Lincheng, but only Wei Songze knew that she was actually going to the capital. Lu Huaiyu did not even know she was leaving Yunzhou for the weekend.

She rubbed the boarding pass in her hand tightly. It seemed like she could not fool Gu Tinglan anymore.

"Not yet."

Gu Tinglan nodded. "For how long?"

"For the weekend. I still have to go back to class on Monday." Since she could not escape Gu Tinglan, she might as well be honest with the man.

Gu Tinglan sat down beside her. "There's still some time before boarding. Sit down."

She then sat down.

Gu Tinglan looked at her with a meaningful gaze. He looked like he was trying to pry the girl open to find out more. Ning Li was only 17 years old. What was so important that she had to fly to the capital on a weekend alone?

Judging from her brief luggage, he could tell that she was not there for a getaway.

The calmness in her eyes and her tone made it seem like she had prepared for this a while ago.

Fortunately, Gu Tinglan knew where to stop. Ning Li's privacy was involved, and since the girl did not tell him more, he should not be asking why she was going to the capital.

"Dr. Gu, you are going back to the capital for a business trip?" Ning Li asked.

"I guess you can say so, but it's not entirely right." Gu Tinglan smiled awkwardly as he recalled the contents of the phone call earlier. "I've got a friend's appointment."

Ning Li nodded silently. She heard that Gu Tinglan had grown up aboard and most of the Gu family properties were scattered across the globe. However, the Gu family knew their roots and had been maintaining a strong connection with their own businesses within the country.

Gu Tinglan came from an excellent family, and the man was amazing himself. He was very likable. It was rare for him to come back to the country, so attending social gatherings was common for him.

"Do you have a place to stay in the capital? If not, I can do you a favor."

"Thank you, Dr. Gu. I've booked a place." Ning Li really wished that she could part ways with Gu Tinglan after reaching the capital. It was already surprising to meet the man at the airport, and she did not want her plans to be disrupted.

Gu Tinglan was a smart man, and he knew what Ning Li was hinting at. Nevertheless, he was not concerned at all. Instead, he smiled and gave her a name card.

“This is my name card. I’ll be in the capital for a whole week. You can contact me if there’s anything you need.”

Ning Li received it with both hands and thanked the man. Given Gu Tinglan’s status, there were countless others who tried to win his favor, so the name card was considered a precious gift.

Gu Tinglan then looked out of the window and suddenly asked, “Ning Li, have you ever seen me before?”

Ning Li froze for a moment. She subtly denied it, “No.”

Did Gu Tinglan notice something hence the question?

However, Ning Li had always been careful and she only had limited meetings with Gu Tinglan, so he should not have noticed anything strange.

“Really? I’ve never met you before, but I feel like I know you from somewhere.”

Ning Li’s heart throbbed for a moment as she looked at him. In her past life, Gu Tinglan had said the same thing to her before, ‘I feel like I know you from somewhere.’

In this life, her encounter with Gu Tinglan was entirely different from the past life, yet Gu Tinglan said the same thing.

He locked eyes with the girl and explained with a smile, “Maybe it’s because you are from Lincheng?”

“Lincheng?”

Ning Li remembered that the man had been to Lincheng the other day, appearing to be investigating something. She did not ask him for details though.

“Mm-hmm. I’ve been there before. It’s not too bad.”

Speaking of Lincheng, Gu Tinglan sounded a lot softer. It seemed like that place meant something else to him.

“It’s your first trip there, right?”

“Yeah.”

Ning Li felt strange. Lincheng was just a normal rural city and there was nothing stellar about it. There were a ton of other similar cities in the country.

Given Gu Tinglan’s background, why would he be fond of Lincheng?

“However, I went there on a limited schedule and didn’t get the time to enjoy the place. If I have the chance to go there again, can I ask you to be my tour guide?” Gu Tinglan was rather persistent about Lincheng.

Ning Li was stunned for a moment. “Sure, but there’s really nothing special about Lincheng...”

“I like Lincheng’s hospitality. The people there are friendly. Looking at them alone makes me feel good.”

“Okay...”

Since Gu Tinglan put it that way, there was no reason for Ning Li to reject him.

“Passengers of M3692 on the flight from Yunzhou to Jincheng, you may start boarding now...” The sweet voice of the flight attendant came from the broadcast.

Gu Tinglan then got up.

“Let’s go.”

Ning Li sighed a breath of relief. She ought to part ways with Gu Tinglan after the flight.

...

Alas, thoughts were usually better than reality.

When she boarded the plane, she realized that Gu Tinglan had booked an economy seat.

He noticed Ning Li’s surprised gaze as well. After he pushed his briefcase into the upper compartment, he said calmly, “Well, it was a last-minute ticket. There were no more seats.”

It was a solid reason.

However, when Ning Li realized they were only one row apart from each other, she started to think that maybe it was a bad day to travel.

Fortunately, after Gu Tinglan sat down behind her, he did not ask anything else. He shut his eyes, seeming to be asleep.

Ning Li turned her phone off and the plane soon took off.

...

Forty minutes later, the flight attendant pushed the meal cart around. The flight provided two types of meal: rice with unagi and kung pao chicken rice.

Ning Li went for rice with unagi.

Then, she heard a voice behind her. "Rice with unagi, please. Thank you."

He took the rice box from the flight attendant and asked, "Ning Li, do you like unagi as well?"

Ning Li shook her head. "No, I'm just allergic to peanuts."

The kung pao chicken had nuts in it, so she had no other choice.

Gu Tinglan froze for a slight second and smiled. "Really? I have a friend who is also allergic to peanuts. What a coincidence."

Ning Li disagreed. There were people who were allergic to all kinds of nuts, and she had met a lot of them as she grew up. It was not that rare, to be honest.

As for the mentioned friend, Gu Tinglan had a sea of friends, so it was not surprising that he had such a friend at all.

Gu Tinglan leaned back in his seat. A quick thought later, he shook his head silently. Ever since he met Ning Li, he had been noticing uncanny coincidences with her.

...

In Huanxing Entertainment in Jingchen, the capital, Mei Li was rushing Xu Yini to get prepared.

"The meeting tonight starts in half an hour. We have to leave right now. Edmond has a great impression of you, and he said he will introduce you to the son of G&S. You have to seize this chance!"

Edmon was the fashion director from G&S.

Xu Yini's busy schedule was finally paying off. In addition to her solid background, she stood out from the rest of the competitors and entered the final selection phase.

This upcoming meeting was a private one, and there were only three celebrities invited, one of which was Xu Yini.

According to reliable sources, the son of the owner of G&S would also be there. This meeting would highly determine who would win the ambassadorship.

Xu Yini tucked her hair behind her ear.

“Don't worry. I'll get this.”