

Little Brat's 171

Chapter 171: Punishment

Ning Li thought for a moment, before speaking seriously, "Mr. Sun, I believe I was being 110% sincere as I was making my clarification."

She had stated everything clearly. She had apologized, admitted her mistake, and clarified all the details in front of the whole student body. That should have satisfied everyone.

Sun Quan sighed deeply with his eyes closed.

Geng Haifan hurriedly stepped in to ease the conversation.

"Mr. Sun, I don't think Ning Li is to blame for this. She was... just fighting back. It was self-defense, right?"

"Ning Li, if someone was bullying you and you had evidence, you should have just come to us. The school would have definitely stood by your side. Now, with your little..."

Aside from Xue Xuan, the school would certainly expel Sun Huihui.

Ning Li raised a brow.

This was what she wanted.

Sun Huihui had repeatedly tested her patience, so all she wanted to do was remove the challenger.

"I am willing to bear all the consequences. Be it expulsion or some other punishment, I will accept it wholeheartedly."

At that moment, Zhou Fei entered the office and frowned at what he had heard.

“Expelled? Who’s going to expel Ning Li? I’ll be the first one to say no!”

Zhou Fei had stayed up late yesterday to play games, so he had woken up late this morning.

He had missed the circulation of the video on the internet as well as the live clarification during the assembly.

He had only heard about what had happened when he had arrived at the school and had rushed to the office immediately.

He had come to the office to find out more details but had overheard someone talking about expelling Ning Li.

It must not happen!

Zhou Fei glared at Sun Quan.

“Mr. Sun, if I may? I think Sun Huihui should apologize to Ning Li. She was the one being bullied, so why was she the one who had to stand up in front of everyone to apologize?”

Sun Quan gave a wry look. He had not even given his verdict, yet Ning Li had already blurted it all out.

“When did I say that I was going to expel Ning Li?!”

This whole matter was serious, but at the end of the day, it was Sun Huihui who had started all this.

Even if they had to punish Ning Li, it would not be expulsion. Moreover, the school did not want to lose its best student.

“However, Ning Li did do something wrong too! What was she trying to achieve with that fiasco on stage? Turn the entire school upside-down?!”

Zhou Fei breathed a sigh of relief when he heard that. The serious look on his face was replaced by a more light-hearted expression.

“Oh, are you talking about that? Ah, I know Ning Li is a little impulsive, so... why don’t we ask her to write a self-review report to clarify her own mistake?”

Sun Quan’s heart raced when he heard the word ‘clarify’.

He turned to Zhou Fei with a wry look. He had to calm down and fight his urge to scold Zhou Fei.

It was precisely because the school had allowed Ning Li to give her clarification in the first place that the fiasco on stage had happened.

They would never dare to ask Ning Li to do anything related to any kind of clarification in future.

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Back in third-year first class, the students were restless.

“Finally, I’ve witnessed something monumental with my own eyes! I didn’t know you could make a clarification in that way!”

“I knew the video in the morning looked weird. Who would have thought that it was a part 2 and that there was a part 1 looming in the dark? What’s wrong with Sun Huihui? Why would she do that to Ning Li? There was no point in that. Look what she has gotten herself into now?” Cheng Xiangxiang sneered.

“Ning Li had all the evidence, but she did not give them to the school. Instead, she chose to reveal it in front of everyone. It’s obvious that she was trying to get back at Sun Huihui. I have to say, Ning Li really knows how to scheme deeply.”

He Xiaochen grinned.

“Cheng Xiangxiang. Since you put it that way, are you implying that Ning Li forced Sun Huihui to attack and then arranged for someone from the outside to threaten her herself? Is that it?”

Cheng Xiangxiang was silenced.

He Xiaochen looked on contemptuously.

“If Sun Huihui was guilty, people would have found out soon enough. Ning Li only revealed the truth to us in its original form without any alteration. Why is that wrong?”

He Xiaochen suddenly thought of something.

“Oh, by the way, Ye Ci, didn’t Sun Huihui distract you so that you would leave Ning Li alone? I suppose she had done it to allow those friends of hers to gang up on Ning Li?”

Her words silenced the entire class.

Usually, Ning Li and Ye Ci went home together. If Ye Ci had been with Ning Li that day, those people might not have caught Ning Li alone.

“He Xiaochen, what is the meaning of that? Sun Huihui had wanted to borrow Lil Ci’s notes to be photocopied and Lil Ci was just kind enough to help her! As for Ning Li, what happened to her has nothing to do with Lil Ci!” Cheng Xiangxiang raised her voice.

He Xiaochen shrugged.

“That’s what I am asking. I didn’t mean anything else. What did you mean?”

Cheng Xiangxiang struggled to control her breathing.

Ye Ci tugged on Cheng Xiangxiang’s sleeve.

“Xiangxiang, stop it. It’s over now. It was a dangerous situation, but Sister Ning Li is okay. If something had happened to her, I...”

“She’s strong. What could possibly have happened to her?” Cheng Xiangxiang scoffed.

Thinking of the earlier video, she felt rather apprehensive.

She had also had a conflict with Ning Li before and had lost miserably in the horse race.

Back then, she had only felt Ning Li’s arrogance, but it was different now.

In the video, Ning Li had been like the grim reaper counting down someone’s death as she casually sat down. It was scary.

“Speaking of which, is it me or is Ning Li pretty... cool today?”

Lin Zhouyang subtly raised his hand, as he admired Ning Li’s actions on stage earlier.

“I’ve made a lot of clarifications and written a ton of self-review reports, but I was nothing like her. I’m too useless! Ning Li is really the BEST!”

Looking impressed, he gave Ning Li a big thumbs up.

Ning Li had somehow become Lin Zhouyang’s idol and role model.

There were other audacious students who would defy their school, but it rarely happened in Second High.

Ning Li's situation was a little unusual as well. To be frank, all she had done was to clarify her actions.

Lin Zhouyang wished he could be as bold as that the next time he made a clarification, with the capability of leaving everyone speechless.

Ren Qian tapped his shoulder and said heavily, "Don't stop there."

He was amazed by Lin Zhouyang's thoughts.

Lin Zhouyang chuckled. "What do you think the school will do to Ning Li?"

"Only God knows."

It was then that Ning Li came back to the classroom.

Her arrival silenced everyone.

Ning Li calmly returned to her seat. She took out a piece of paper and looked at Lin Zhouyang.

"3,000 words?"

Lin Zhouyang knew what it meant.

"My idol! Do you have to write another self-review report?"

Ning Li nodded. "One English test paper."

Lin Zhouyang looked conflicted. "How about two?"

Ning Li nodded. "Deal."

Lin Zhouyang tapped on the table. "Deal!"

He took Ning Li's paper and added, "Actually, I only accept orders with three or more papers but since you are my idol, you are a regular—"

Ning Li then gave him another piece of paper.

"This self-review report has to be pasted on the notice board later. Try your best to make it look similar."

Ning Li had never written that many words before, except for the essays in literature papers.

Lin Zhouyang was confused.

Ning Li had decided to give the boy a little bonus. "Three papers."

Lin Zhouyang clenched his teeth before he clicked on his pen. "Deal!"

The others were stunned.

Ning Li's punishment was a 3,000-word self-review report?"

More importantly, she had brazenly asked Lin Zhouyang to do it for her!

Then, Sun Huihui returned to the class.

Her head was lowered but it was obvious that she had cried her eyes out.

She returned to her seat without a word and started packing her things. She did not even dare to glance at Ning Li.

Chapter 172: Little Ning Li Is Fierce, Are You Scared?

The entire class was silent.

Sun Huihui kept all her books in her bag, including the miscellaneous items that were in her desk.

The girl beside her opened her mouth to say something but eventually decided against it.

Everyone knew what this meant.

After packing up her things, Sun Huihui left without saying a word.

Her seat was left empty.

Actually, everyone had already expected this to happen.

The mistakes that she had committed had severely violated the school rules. Even if the school had spared her and allowed her to stay, all the students in Second High already knew about it.

She would have been isolated and left alone.

The moment the revelation video had played on the screen, her fate had been sealed.

Some of the students looked over at Ning Li but Ning Li did not even bother to look at Sun Huihui.

She was reading a book as if nothing had ever happened.

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Sun Huihui bumped into Pei Song in the corridor.

She froze and called him, "Pei Song."

Pei Song paused. He could guess what had happened to the girl in a single glance.

Sun Huihui flushed, her heart was pounding.

It was not because she was shy but because she was certain that Pei Song had seen the videos.

Although she knew Pei Song had never liked her, she did not want to leave him with such a bad impression.

"I...have something to tell you—"

"I warned you before." Pei Song suddenly interrupted her.

"What?"

Pei Song sized her up coldly. Behind his glasses, his eyes felt distant and sharp.

Sun Huihui realized what he was referring to.

It was the time when she had spilled milk tea onto Ning Li's English script. Pei Song had told her to get a seal for her beverage.

Back then, she had only worried that Pei Song might have seen through her actions to her true intentions, so she had not paid any further attention to his words.

Now in hindsight, she realized that it had actually been a warning from Pei Song to her.

She had ignored it and now the consequences had caught up to her.

Aggrieved, Sun Huihui bit her lips as tears rolled down her cheeks.

Pei Song intended on walking away but as he passed Sun Huihui, she said something to him.

"You like Ning Li, don't you?"

Pei Song froze.

Sun Huihui's tears started to blur her vision.

She gripped the strap of her bag tightly.

From the picture that had been taken of Pei Song and Ning Li at the airport, she had already had a hunch about it.

Despite being able to clarify that they were not dating, Sun Huihui knew Pei Song well.

He treated Ning Li differently.

If not for his feelings, she would not have done what she did to Ning Li.

“What’s so good about her? Her beauty? Her results?”

There were many other beautiful girls out there. Pei Song himself was also an ace student.

“Ning Li is not new to fights. The way she reacted when those people knelt and apologized to her said as much. She’s not a simple girl and you—”

Pei Song turned to her. “You are thinking too much. Besides, it is none of your business.”

Sun Huihui’s words choked her.

Nothing could hurt her more than Pei Song’s denial.

She wiped her tears and ran down the stairs.

Pei Song walked down the corridor.

As he walked past the back door of his own class, he glanced at Ning Li in her seat.

She was reading a book as the sunlight shone on her.

He zipped his jersey up to his chin before walking away.

“You like Ning Li, am I right?”

...

Ning Li's already outstanding reputation reached new heights after that incident.

She was not just the best student in the school, her beauty was on par with her results.

On top of that, she had forced five bullies to their knees and made them apologize to her without lifting a finger.

On the other hand, the culprit behind the incident, Sun Huihui, had packed her things and been expelled with immediate effect.

A few days later, there was news that she had transferred to Yunzhou's Virtue High.

Virtue High was a private high school that had a different quality of education and strictness of school rules compared to Second High.

The incident had gotten so out of hand that it had ruined her reputation. Not one single public high school had been willing to accept her, so her family had been forced to pay extra to send her to a private high school.

Upon her arrival, her days in Virtue High were far from pleasant.

She had been dragged into the alley by Miaomiao and her friends on her first day.

The video of Miaomiao and friends kneeling to Ning Li had embarrassed them heavily, but they did not dare retaliate towards Ning Li.

Sun Huihui became the punching bag for them to vent their anger on instead.

Virtue High, unlike the name, had many students with disciplinary problems. Miaomiao and her friends knew many of them.

Sun Huihui had been isolated from her very first day there because of Miaomiao.

As for Xue Xuan, the school had notified her parents that she had frequent contact with gangsters outside the school. She had been scolded badly by her parents and was soon transferred away from Second High as well.

She transferred to a nameless high school in Lincheng.

Both of them were cut off from Second High and no longer had any connection with Ning Li's world.

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"What about Little Ning Li?"

Cheng Xiyue enjoyed the story a lot.

"Just a 3,000-word self-review report?"

Zhou Fei concentrated on his game as he laid back on the couch. He did not even bother to look at Cheng Xiyue.

"It's not that simple. The school gave her a warning and she promised that she would achieve at least the top 5 in the upcoming Physics competition to secure a guaranteed slot in the finals. Only then will the school spare her from any further punishment.

Cheng Xiyue clicked his tongue and turned to Lu Huaiyu.

The man's eyes were half-closed.

Cheng Xiyue teased, "Second master, Little Ning Li is really fierce. Are you not afraid?"

Chapter 173: Rabbit And Carrot

When Ning Li was being bullied online, Lu Huaiyu had gone to great lengths to convince her to sue those bullies.

He had worried that the girl was too soft and kind, and might not be able to protect herself if it continued.

Now, judging from the situation, his worries were unnecessary.

Lu Huaiyu raised a brow. "What's wrong with it?"

Stunned, Cheng Xiyue was all ears.

"She got bullied. Of course, she had to fight back."

He had taught her to protect herself before and it looked like the girl had taken his teachings to heart.

However, she could have at least informed him first.

Lu Huaiyu thought back to last Friday.

He lifted his chin as he pondered the details.

Ning Li must have dealt with those bullies before she went to Ignite with Ji Shu and his friends.

Maybe it was because she had been afraid that he would find out about her sneaking out to a club so she remained silent.

Zhou Fei voiced his agreement upon hearing that. “Yeah, I couldn’t agree more! Sun Huihui had tried to lock Ning Li up the first time, but failed. Why should Ning Li have continued to be courteous? It’s great that she could deal with it once and for all.”

He even looked a little proud as he spoke about Ning Li.

“I don’t know about the others, but now Ning Li can finally have some peace at school. That’s the best thing for her because then her time won’t be wasted with distractions while she’s learning in my class.”

Zhou Fei favored Ning Li a lot. It was not only because of her results but also because of what the girl endured from her family, especially from Su Yuan.

He knew about the way that the Ye family was treating her.

“Speaking of which, Ning Li has been making notes for Ye Ci, helping her to catch up in the competitive Physics class.”

Zhou Fei shrugged. “I have no idea how the Ye family convinced her.”

Ye Ci had limited potential in competitive Physics and he had told her twice to rethink her path.

Ye Ci had insisted otherwise, so he simply let her be.

He thought that after the midterm, Ye Ci would drop out due to her declining results but the Ye family had gotten Ning Li to help her instead.

Fortunately, Ning Li’s performance was not affected, or else Zhou Fei would have marched to the Ye family to reason with them.

“She’s living under their roof, so I guess her hands are tied.” Cheng Xiyue shook his head.

The Ye family was not a good place for Ning Li. However, she was still a minor and Su Yuan was still her legal guardian and mother. Moving out of the family home was not a realistic solution.

“Oh right. Second master, on that day that Ning Li didn’t go home, didn’t you find her in some rented unit? I believe that the unit belongs to her friend?”

Cheng Xiyue felt bad for the girl as he recalled that rainy day.

“She tried to escape her family but she doesn’t even have a place to go to. Why don’t I get an empty unit for Little Ning Li to rent? No contract is needed. She can go there whenever she likes until her entrance exam is over.”

Cheng Xiyue was certainly not lacking in properties in Yunzhou.

Lu Huaiyu narrowed his eyes at him.

Officially, the name of the renter for that unit was Wei Songze, but the real tenant was Ning Li.

Lu Huaiyu was only the third person to know the truth, and he had no intention of telling Cheng Xiyue about it.

Cheng Xiyue cleared his throat and added, “I can even give Little Ning Li a 10% discount if you are okay with it.”

Lu Huaiyu propped his forehead on his palm, seemingly pondering the suggestion seriously.

All of a sudden, the door opened and someone came in.

All three men were sitting in Lu Huaiyu’s living room and the sound of the opening door caught their attention immediately.

The door had a password lock and only those who knew the password could enter.

However, since the living room was a little far away from the door, the three of them had yet to find out who had come into the mansion.

Shocked, Cheng Xiyue said, "Second master, is your brother back? Or is it your old man checking on you? There are only so many people who know the password to your door!"

Lu Huaiyu ignored him and got up.

Zhou Fei turned off his phone and sat up straight with a serious look.

Whether it was Lu Huaiyu's brother or his grandfather, he would definitely receive a lecture if either of them saw him playing games on the couch like a useless person.

He glanced in the direction of the door.

"It can't be Lu Yuxiao, right? He just passed through Yunzhou a while ago and left on the same day. How could it be him?"

"Could it be Old Master Lu? It doesn't seem like it either..."

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When Ning Li opened the door, she saw Lu Huaiyu coming towards her.

"Second brother, I thought you were busy."

She was rather surprised to see him.

It was a Saturday and she had come to return his book.

She had thought of returning the book when she had lunch with him the other day, but her mind had been on other things and she had forgotten about it.

Today, she had come to his mansion after confirming that he would be home. She thought Lu Huaiyu would be busy with HG matters, so she entered directly without pressing the doorbell.

She had not expected to see Lu Huaiyu right away.

“Yeah, I had some time to spare.”

Lu Huaiyu opened the closet in the hallway to retrieve a pair of slippers for her.

“Here.”

Ning Li fell silent when she saw the pinkish-white fluffy slippers.

The left slipper had a rabbit sewn on it and its fluffy ears wobbled as it was being taken out. The right slipper had a carrot on it.

Ning Li said hesitantly, “Second brother, are there any single-use slippers? This is a little...”

She had never seen these slippers before on her last few visits.

Lu Huaiyu’s mansion had been designed with a minimalistic concept in white, black, and grey colors.

All the slippers that he kept in the closet had the same cool tones as well. The pink rabbit slippers felt out of place.

Lu Huaiyu said succinctly, "It's convenient."

Ning Li was stunned.

What was convenient? Convenient for her to change her shoes? But she was only here to return the book.

"Little Ning Li?"

Cheng Xiyue's surprised voice sounded from inside.

Ning Li saw Cheng Xiyue coming out with Zhou Fei behind him. She was also stunned.

"Brother Xiyue, Mr. Zhou? Why are you two here?"

She then looked at Lu Huaiyu.

The man had only said that he was home. He had not mentioned that he had guests.

Lu Huaiyu noticed her gaze. Her charming eyes widened and he could see his own reflection in her eyes clearly.

She looked puzzled and confused, like a lost child looking for her parents.

He grinned at her obedient look. "They are only here for a while. They will be leaving soon."

Cheng Xiyue and Zhou Fei were both stunned.

Cheng Xiyue was here because of the project agreement.

Zhou Fei was here to ask Lu Huaiyu to boost his game ranking.

“Did you want other books to read?” Lu Huaiyu asked.

Ning Li nodded. She wanted to borrow the original version.

“Follow me.”

Lu Huaiyu went up to the second floor.

After a moment’s hesitation, Ning Li put on the rabbit slippers and followed him up.

As she walked, the rabbit ears on her slipper wobbled.

Chapter 174: Fantasy About Him

Cheng Xiyue and Zhou Fei were left behind, feeling petrified.

A while later, Zhou Fei finally spoke up.

“Since when did the second master change his taste?”

He had been deeply shocked when he saw the pink rabbit slippers on Ning Li’s feet.

Cheng Xiyue sent him a mocking glance and scoffed, “If you have the time to think about that, why don’t you think about what he has gotten you after so many years of friendship? Did he even buy you a plastic bag before?”

Fortunately, Zhou Fei had not said it in front of Lu Huaiyu, or he would have to leave in an ambulance.

Zhou Fei's eyes twitched. It was not hurtful but was extremely insulting.

"Me? What about you? You said only a handful of people know the password to his door! How did Ning Li come in?"

Cheng Xiyue felt as if he had been slapped, but he had a strong mentality. He was able to adjust his emotions accordingly and prepare himself for any kind of situation.

The pair of slippers was the first of many. The next thing would probably be a mansion.

He sighed.

This explained Lu Huaiyu's reaction when Cheng Xiyue had said he wanted to rent a unit to Little Ning Li.

He had been careless. He should not have tried to take the matter out of Lu Huaiyu's hands.

"Forget about it. Little Ning Li is choosing books. I guess we will have to wait for a while."

He returned to the living room.

Zhou Fei glanced at the stairs. He put his phone away and said, "Judging from his tone, I think you won't be able to get your contract signed today. Why are you still going to wait here?"

Cheng Xiyue chuckled. "He wasted my time and ruined my project. I can't spare him just like that."

He was going to take his time's worth back.

"You have all the time in the world. The thing is, he's wasting my student's time!" Zhou Fei finally reacted.

"The competition is tomorrow and the second master asks my student to come here just to return a book to him?"

He rolled his sleeves up, intending on going upstairs to reason with Lu Huaiyu.

Cheng Xiyue glanced at the grumpy Zhou Fei. He gave a friendly reminder because they were friends.

"If you are going up, then I'll be going. I don't want to be caught up in the middle of a bloodshed."

Zhou Fei was no match for Lu Huaiyu.

Cheng Xiyue's words successfully dissuaded Zhou Fei. He angrily stepped back a few steps and sat down on the couch.

He pulled his phone out grumpily and said, "I'll wait!"

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Ning Li followed Lu Huaiyu to the study room on the second floor.

When she entered, she picked up the scent of lemon.

She noticed that there were some lemon slices on the corner of the desk.

It was not for eating, it was only there to provide a refreshing scent.

Lu Huaiyu noticed the girl's gaze. He walked to her and took the book from her hands.

Ning Li held on to the edge of the book.

"Second brother, I know where to put the book. Let me do it."

Lu Huaiyu smiled as he sized up the girl. He let go of the book.

"Sure."

Ning Li headed to the bookshelves.

She soon found the spot from where she had taken the book the other day and saw the original version right next to the empty slot.

Lu Huaiyu also noticed what the girl was looking at.

"I... failed to understand the details in the translated version, so I wanted to look at the original version to make a comparison.

Lu Huaiyu looked at her with a nod.

"I guess so."

Ning Li took the book down. When she put the translated version back, Lu Huaiyu chuckled.

“I thought you wanted it to make a comparison. Why are you only taking one book?”

Ning Li’s heart skipped a beat. She nervously took the translated version back.

She had subconsciously returned the book to its spot.

Lu Huaiyu pointed at another book.

“You can have a look at that one as well. It is also about the same field.”

Ning Li nodded and chose another book.

“Your Physics competition is tomorrow?” Lu Huaiyu asked.

Ning Li kept the book that she had borrowed.

“Yeah. Second High has been set as the venue, so there won’t be a morning class tomorrow.”

Lu Huaiyu thought over what Zhou Fei had said earlier. “Are you nervous?”

Ning Li shook her head. Her ponytail softly caressed the back of her neck.

“No.” She clearly remembered the questions of the paper.

Moreover, she had waited two lifetimes for this competition. Why would she be nervous at all?

Lu Huaiyu smiled. He had already expected this answer.

"I wish you good luck. Zhou Fei said you need to get into at least the top 5 to escape from the school's punishment, am I right?"

Ning Li softly sighed in her heart.

She had not told Lu Huaiyu about what had happened but it was not difficult for him to find out.

She had not planned on keeping it a secret but she had been wondering if he would ask her about the incident himself.

A week later, nothing happened and she had thought that the matter had passed.

"Yeah."

Lu Huaiyu paused and laughed.

"Nicely done."

"Huh?" Ning Li was confused.

Lu Huaiyu came closer and patted her on the head.

Ning Li finally realized what the man was referring to.

If you are bullied, fight back.

If you are bullied, tell me.

Almost no one had agreed with Ning Li's method. Lu Huaiyu was the only person who praised her for this.

Something rose within the depths of her heart, filling it completely. She felt... warm.

Lu Huaiyu took a step back and sized her up with a tilted head.

Ning Li failed to understand. "What's wrong, second brother?"

"Lili, are you... a little taller now?" Lu Huaiyu raised a brow.

Ning Li was stunned for a moment, as she had not expected that particular question.

"No?"

She had not measured her height recently.

Lu Huaiyu walked closer.

The two of them maintained a distance from each other but the invisible veil in between them was broken when Lu Huaiyu took a step forward.

He put his hand on her head and compared it to his own.

Ning Li felt that if he came any closer, her nose would touch his black shirt.

"I think you've gotten taller," Lu Huaiyu said.

His voice came from above her and echoed in her ears, which made her earlobes feel a slight unusual numbness.

She could even feel the warmth of his breath above her.

The feeling was subtle but continuous, and difficult for her to break free from.

She subconsciously looked up to his sharp jawline and Adam's apple.

As he spoke, his Adam's apple undulated.

Ning Li blinked. The image from the video call a few days ago reappeared in her mind.

For a moment there, a thought appeared and occupied her mind: how would it feel to touch his Adam's apple?

Lu Huaiyu noticed her silence. He pulled his hands away and saw her stunned gaze.

He chuckled and said in his low and rich voice.

"What's wrong?"

His words pulled Ning Li back from her embarrassing thoughts.

Chapter 175: Like Him

She took a step back and shook her head.

"No, I was just thinking about something else."

Her heart was beating loudly, her blood pulsing in her eardrums strongly.

She felt as if she was in a vacuum, making it difficult for her to breathe.

Lu Huaiyu noticed her tilted head and lowered face, which only allowed him to see the high bridge of her nose and long eyelashes.

He raised a brow slightly at her unusual reaction.

He was right in front of her, so what could possibly have distracted her thoughts?

“Brother Xiyue and Mr. Zhou are still downstairs. Let’s go,” Ning Li said.

Lu Huaiyu put his hands in his pockets and looked at her. “Okay.”

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Footsteps from the stairs caught Cheng Xiyue and Zhou Fei’s attention.

They turned to the stairs to find Lu Huaiyu coming down the stairs, as Ning Li followed carrying her bag.

Dissatisfied, Zhou Fei complained, “What took you so long? Do you have any idea how precious my student’s time is?”

Lu Huaiyu looked at his watch. “Has it been that long? How come you guys are still here?”

Zhou Fei was left speechless and Cheng Xiyue scoffed at him.

Zhou Fei should know that he could never challenge Lu Huaiyu.

He smiled and waved at Ning Li. “Little Ning Li, it’s almost lunchtime. Why don’t you join us for lunch?”

Stunned, Ning Li said, "Uh...Can I say no?"

Having lunch with the three of them?

Cheng Xiyue had a sudden realization. "Oh, I know. You don't want to have lunch with Zhou Fei, right? I understand. It will be just the three of us then. Zhou Fei can have lunch on his own."

Zhou Fei tossed his phone onto the couch. "Hey! What is the meaning of this?"

"Isn't it obvious? A teacher having lunch with a student is too much pressure. What if Little Ning Li gets indigestion?"

"You!"

Zhou Fei leaned back on the couch with his hands laid back and legs crossed.

"Have you ever seen such a handsome teacher? It's not that I want to be boastful, but the girls in our school are fascinated with me."

He was speaking the truth. He was young, only a few years older than the high-schoolers. He was handsome and taught his lessons in an open-minded way.

It was safe to say that he was the most popular teacher in school.

"Oh, really?" Lu Huaiyu paused and turned to Ning Li. There was a faint smile on his lips.

His question had been directed at Ning Li.

Ning Li was two steps behind him but due to the sudden pause, she almost bumped into his back.

He was tall. Even though Ning Li was two steps up behind him, she was still only up to his height.

His sudden turn had surprised her, causing her to grip the rail tightly.

She felt a little nervous as she met his deep gaze.

She averted her gaze and said, "Mr. Zhou is quite popular at school."

Lu Huaiyu narrowed his eyes. His aura somehow seemed to grow colder.

Zhou Fei was delighted.

Cheng Xiyue sighed inwardly. In his head, he was already making plans to flee the scene. If not, he would have to call the ambulance for Zhou Fei and tidy up his mess.

Ning Li nodded. "He is not only popular with the girls, but also with the boys."

The delight on Zhou Fei's face froze.

A sudden thought popped into Cheng Xiyue's mind and he burst out into laughter.

"Oh yes, I remember you received several love letters from boys when you first started teaching in Second High, right?"

A bitter look quickly replaced the smile on Zhou Fei's face.

A young and amazing teacher was attractive to students, regardless of gender.

When he had first started teaching in Second High, he would receive gifts or letters on his table or in the homework that he collected.

Surprisingly, some had been gifted by several boys as well.

He had turned a blind eye to every confession.

The students slowly gave up after not receiving any encouragement.

Unfortunately, Cheng Xiyue had found out about it and constantly used it to tease Zhou Fei.

Zhou Fei scoffed.

“That’s just child’s play. It’s nothing. If you want to talk, what about those who liked second master—”

Before he could finish, he felt chills run down his spine.

He turned to Lu Huaiyu to see him smirking coldly at him.

Zhou Fei cleared his throat and forcefully swallowed all his words.

Ning Li blinked curiously.

Liked second master?

She turned to Lu Huaiyu.

His fair complexion complemented his perfect brow bone and the high bridge of his nose.

When he was serious, the aura around him felt as cold as a blizzard. When he was delighted, it felt as warm as springtime melting the winter snow.

On top of that, his unique noble presence and laid back temperament also felt natural.

His temperament coupled with his presence was truly unique.

She suddenly thought of He Xiaochen's question.

'Given Lu Huaiyu's attributes, it's surprising that he doesn't have a girlfriend. Maybe he likes men!'

Lu Huaiyu noticed her gaze and turned to her.

He saw the look on Ning Li's face. He narrowed his eyes and flicked her forehead with his fingers.

"What do you think, little girl?"

The flick on her forehead felt like a heavy blow to her heart.

She adjusted her bag and said, "Second brother, I still have a competition tomorrow. Can I go home now?"

It was dangerous for her to continue staying here with Lu Huaiyu.

There seemed to be an invisible power that drew her closer to him, from which she could not break free.

Lu Huaiyu stared at her for a few seconds before giving a reply.

"Okay, we'll see you after your competition."

Ning Li sighed a breath of relief.

“Thank you second brother, I’ll be going.”

She bid Cheng Xiyue and Zhou Fei goodbye before leaving the mansion

...

Back at the Ye family, Ning Li took the books out of her bag and put them on her desk.

She had a competition tomorrow, so the books could wait for another day or two.

Out of her peripheral vision, she caught sight of the glass bottle in the corner.

Inside the glass bottle was a piece of milk candy and a paper boat.

She calmed down slightly after staring at it, but something else was brewing inside of her.

She took a few deep breaths to calm her thoughts before starting her revision for the competition tomorrow.

...

The next day, Second High School.

The day for the General Science Competition for all High Schools of Yunzhou had finally arrived.

The competition consisted of two parts: the paper test and the experiment tests.

Each part would be held in the morning and the afternoon respectively.

Second High was the only venue for the competition, hence the early morning crowd.

The black Cayenne stopped in front of the entrance.

Su Yuan turned around to her daughters. "Did you bring everything you need for the competition?"

Ye Ci smiled. "I have everything, mom. Don't worry, I'm not a little girl anymore."

"Great. Don't be nervous when you are there."

Her words were obviously aimed at Ye Ci. She did not even bother to spare a glance in Ning Li's direction.

Ning Li's clarification on stage had attracted a lot of attention.

Although Su Yuan knew it had not been Ning Li's fault to begin with, she still believed Ning Li had gone too far. Also, because she had scolded her previously and was now too embarrassed to apologize, she reacted by behaving coldly to her.

Ning Li did not care. She got out and walked towards the entrance.

Ye Ci was behind her.

"Sister Ning Li, wait up!"

Chapter 176: I've Seen These Questions Before

Ning Li did not stop walking.

Ye Ci walked faster to catch up to Ning Li and spoke cautiously.

“Sister Ning Li, Mom’s concerned about you too. Since it’s all in the past, you shouldn’t hold a grudge against Mom...”

Ning Li laughed. ‘Ye Ci really thought that I was still angry with Su Yuan?’

Several days had already passed, in which time she could have persuaded her, yet she had not said anything.

She had only remembered this just as she was about to enter the examination hall.

“I’m not that free,” Ning Li replied indifferently with a cold expression.

Ye Ci frowned. ‘Did Ning Li really not care about this at all? Did Su Yuan’s deliberate distancing and coldness in the past few days not bother Ning Li? How was this possible? Everyone’s possessive...I don’t believe that Ning Li is that indifferent.’

Suddenly, Ye Ci’s eyes shimmered. “When the exam is over, why don’t you and Mom have a good talk...”

“It seems like you’re very confident about today’s exam. Even at such a time you still have the heart to worry about other people’s affairs.” Ning Li suddenly interrupted Ye Ci with a sneer.

Ye Ci choked, completely at a loss for words.

“Sister Ning Li, I...”

“Just take the test properly.” Ning Li looked at her and continued, “She’ll definitely be happier to see you do well in the exam than seeing me do well.”

Ning Li’s words were so blunt that Ye Ci did not know how to respond for a while.

After a moment, Ye Ci muttered, “I...I’m a little nervous, and I don’t know how well I’ll do on the test...”

Despite her reluctance to admit it, Ye Ci knew that her talent and understanding of physics were far inferior to Ning Li’s.

‘Was Ning Li being intentionally sarcastic?’ Ye Ci thought.

Ning Li suddenly curved her eyes into a smile. “How come? You’ve been working so hard lately. You should definitely be able to do well on the exams.”

Ye Ci was baffled. ‘What did she mean by this?’

She glanced at Ning Li suspiciously, trying to find any hint of mockery and contempt on Ning Li’s face, but Ning Li’s eyes were calm and sincere.

Ye Ci wanted to say something, but Ning Li had already turned around and walked towards the examination room.

They were not in the same examination room, so after standing in place for a while, Ye Ci walked in another direction.

...

Ning Li walked into her examination room.

Some students were from Second High and some from other schools.

Many people looked over at Ning Li.

It was not just because her face was just too eye-catching, but also because Ning Li had become famous among Yunzhou’s major high schools recently.

Ning Li walked to her seat and sat down.

There were people next to her who were whispering.

“Is that Ning Li from Second High?”

“Yeah, that’s her, the one who got first place in the city for the midterms.”

“741 marks... I finally got to see her in person! I’ve heard that her performance in Second High’s Competitive Physics class has been outstanding as well. It’s quite promising that she’ll win a prize.”

“Not only her, there’s also Pei Song. He’s supposed to be in this exam room too... Look, here he comes! That one!”

A young man with a tall and lean figure walked in. It was Pei Song.

Coincidentally, his seat was to the right of Ning Li.

He pulled out his chair and sat down next to her.

Soon after, the bell rang and the exam began.

Ning Li took the paper and quickly scanned through it.

‘Good, still the same questions...’

She picked up her pen, ignored any distractions, and began to work on the questions.

...

At that very moment, Ye Ci also received the exam paper.

She was so nervous that her palms were sweaty.

Ye Ci had put in a lot of effort for this physics competition. If she still could not get a satisfactory result this time, she would be the laughing-stock of many people.

She took a deep breath and looked at the first question.

For a few moments, she was stunned and happy.

That was because she had worked on a similar question before. There was only a change in value, so she could solve it just by applying the formula.

After completing this question, Ye Ci's initial nervousness dissipated.

She went on to the second question.

...

Ye Ci found that she was really lucky because all the questions on this paper were exactly the ones she had been reviewing recently.

She did it all very smoothly.

However, her mood upon seeing the first question changed gradually as she went on to the next question.

She had also seen this question before!

Zhou Fei had given a similar question, but Ye Ci could not understand this part very well. Although she had reviewed it, she was not flexible in its application.

Now, this question on the paper was a derivation of Zhou Fei's question.

Usually, Ye Ci would not be able to answer the question when she encountered this kind of situation, but this question was different because Ning Li had written this exact question in the notebook she gave her.

Ning Li had even specially marked it, stating the three types of derived questions that might appear.

This was one of them!

Perhaps out of defiance of Ning Li, Ye Ci had been very attentive to that notebook and had spent almost all of her time on it lately.

Thus, when she saw this question, she was able to recall the solution in the notebook and write out the answer.

Ye Ci's heart jumped violently.

'Is this too much of a coincidence?'

Zhou Fei was very experienced in this kind of competition and could predict the type of questions that would come out.

However, the questions that were on the paper were the same as the ones in Ning Li's notebook.

Ye Ci had a vague feeling that something was wrong, but after thinking further, she felt that she was overthinking it.

This was not the first time Ning Li had done this.

In their competitive physics class, Zhou Fei would often lecture them and ask Ning Li and Pei Song to write out several solutions on the board.

Those who learned well were able to integrate.

Ning Li would sometimes mention a few possible topic expansions when she was teaching others how to solve the problem.

This was probably just part of her study habits and methods.

It just so happened to be convenient for her this time.

Ye Ci suppressed these thoughts because it benefitted her anyway.

She just needed to finish this paper properly.

...

The morning passed quickly.

After the written test was over, the students handed in their papers and came out of the examination room one after another.

Ye Ci packed up her bag and still felt a bit dumbstruck.

A boy came over and asked, "Ye Ci, how did you do in the exam?"

Ye Ci returned to her senses.

"Huh? Oh, I think...it wasn't bad."

"Not bad? That's not bad?"

The boy rubbed his neck in frustration.

"Why did I find that paper so difficult?"

He was also in the competitive physics class and usually scored better than Ye Ci, but Ye Ci had made it seem like this paper was very easy for her.

Was it because he was not good enough?

Ye Ci's fingers curled up.

"I did think that it was quite difficult as well, but I guess competition questions are supposed to be like this. Just be confident in your answers and leave the rest to fate!"

The boy gave her a thumbs up.

"That's a great mentality to have!"

Who could really be so indifferent about this competition?

Ye Ci looked calm, but her heart was in a panic.

That was because eighty percent of the questions had been in Ning Li's notes!

Chapter 177: The Lucky One

To be precise, they were not the exact questions, but they were very similar and had the same solutions.

One or two questions were acceptable. After all, Ning Li had made those notes from the papers that Zhou Fei had given them before.

However, after Ning Li added those extended topics, it just became too much of a coincidence!

After doing the paper, Ye Ci even wondered if Ning Li had seen this exam paper before.

The scope of the physics competition was so wide that even Zhou Fei might not have been able to guess all the questions that would be on the paper.

However, Ning Li's notes coincidentally included almost all of the questions on today's exam paper.

Ye Ci walked out of the examination room as she pondered this.

"Brother Pei!"

The boy waved at Pei Song, who was not far away.

"Brother Pei, how was the paper this time?"

Pei Song looked as calm as ever.

"It's fine."

"I knew you'd say that."

The boy sighed helplessly.

"I guess I'm out of the game...you and Ning Li are the only hopes of winning the prize!"

Ye Ci looked up and saw Ning Li walking past her.

She hesitated for a moment, before quickly walking over.

She called out, "Sister Ning Li!"

Ye Ci walked over to Ning Li with a smile on her face, but her eyes were full of skepticism and scrutiny.

"You probably did very well this time, right?"

Ning Li raised her eyebrows and laughed.

"When have I not done well in an exam?"

Ye Ci choked.

Ning Li was so frank that Ye Ci did not know how to react.

It was very suspicious that Ning Li could predict most of the questions on this paper, yet she was so calm and collected that there was no trace of cheating.

Moreover, if Ning Li had already seen the exam paper a long ago, why would she have given Ye Ci all those questions?

Pei Song's distant and cold voice came from the side.

"Mr. Zhou has talked about a lot of the questions before, so it's not that difficult if you studied them thoroughly."

The other boy sighed and said, "Yeah, yeah, I know...That's easy for you to say, but it's hard for us mere mortals! I clearly remember reviewing those questions before, but I just couldn't remember the solutions in the exam room!"

Ye Ci's mind wavered again.

Perhaps she was mistaken?

She paused for a while before saying softly, "Sister Ning Li, I really have to thank you for this. If it wasn't for that notebook of yours, I probably wouldn't have been able to do many of the questions. You're just too good at predicting the questions!"

Ning Li did not seem to hear the underlying meaning behind Ye Ci's words and answered lightly, "There's nothing else that could possibly have come out anyway."

Ye Ci pursed her lips. It looked like she would not be able to pry anything from Ning Li...

Ning Li looked at her phone and said, "I have labs in the afternoon, so I'll go first."

After saying that, she paid no more attention to Ye Ci and left alone.

Ye Ci frowned.

...

The afternoon lab exam went quickly.

Ning Li finished the exam early and left the examination room.

As soon as she came out, she spotted Zhou Fei, who was waiting outside the cordon.

“Ning Li!”

When Zhou Fei saw her, his eyes lit up and he immediately waved.

For once, Ning Li saw that he was not playing with his phone.

“Mr. Zhou.”

Ning Li walked over and greeted him.

Zhou Fei looked expectant. “So, how was it?”

He already knew that Ning Li would come out before the exam was over, but her speed still exceeded his expectations.

Ning Li smiled.

“It should be good.”

Hearing her say that, Zhou Fei’s tense heart settled.

He was most optimistic about Ning Li and Pei Song.

Moreover, these two students were both very calm.

Now that Ning Li said that it was okay, then there should be no problems.

“That’s great!”

Zhou Fei rubbed his hands together.

“If you get into the top five, I’ll treat you to dinner!”

As he said that, he raised his eyes and saw Pei Song, who had just walked out. He added, “You too, Pei Song! I’ll treat you to dinner if you get into the top five!”

Pei Song’s eyes swept over the two of them, probably already having guessed what Zhou Fei was talking about.

Another boy, who followed behind Pei Song, teased his teacher. “Mr. Zhou, you’re too biased! You only invited Ning Li and Pei Song for dinner and not us?”

Zhou Fei rubbed his chin and smiled charmingly.

“Whoever makes it to the national finals will be invited to dinner! Is that fair enough?”

He said this because he was certain that both Ning Li and Pei Song could make it to the finals.

As soon as the boy heard this, he shrugged and said, “Mr. Zhou, there are only five slots in the entire province, so aren’t you deliberately making it difficult for us?”

They all knew Ning Li and Pei Song's standards, so their chances of getting to the national finals were great.

As for the others...getting to the provincial finals might not be a problem, but the national finals were a little too far out of their reach.

Having two slots from Yunzhou Second High in the top five of the province was already more than one could hope for. How could they expect more?

Zhou Fei said, "Be optimistic! Maybe one of you guys will exceed expectations and make it to the finals?"

The corners of Ning Li's lips curled up as she looked at Ye Ci, who finally walked out of the examination room, and murmured, "Or maybe some people are just that lucky."

...

The exam was over, so the gates of Second High were finally opened.

Exam candidates came out one after another.

There were quite a few teachers and parents waiting outside.

Ning Li walked out with the crowd and headed left.

Ye Ci hurriedly asked, "Sister Ning Li, aren't you going home?"

Su Yuan and Zhou Hua were already waiting over there.

Ning Li did not even turn to look back.

“I have something to do.”

Ye Ci wanted to say something but stopped.

She knew that it was impossible to ask anything from Ning Li.

It was better to wait and ask about that paper later.

Seeing Ning Li’s figure gradually disappear, Ye Ci withdrew her gaze and turned to leave.

...

“Lil Ci, how was the exam? ”

As soon as she saw her, Su Yuan immediately came up to Ye Ci and took her backpack.

“You must be exhausted from taking exams all day, right?”

Ye Ci smiled and shook her head.

“Thanks, Mom. I’m not tired. The exam felt fine.”

Su Yuan knew that Ye Ci had been staying up late recently in preparation for this exam. Hearing her say so, Su Yuan was both heartbroken and proud.

“Our Lil Ci is so smart. The exam certainly won’t be a problem! Mommy will cook for you today, okay?”

“Yay!”

Ye Ci smiled and answered.

Su Yuan stroked Ye Ci's hair and looked up behind her with slightly furrowed eyebrows.

"Aren't the exams over now? Where's Ning Li? Why isn't she out yet?"

Ye Ci relaxed her voice. "Oh, Sister Ning Li said she had something to do, so she won't be going home with us."

Su Yuan had already guessed this.

Her face turned cold for a while.

"Then, let's forget about her. We'll go back first."

Su Yuan had thought that Ning Li was starting to behave herself, but who knew she was still the same as before.

Ye Ci took her hand.

"Mom, don't be angry with Sister Ning Li. If it wasn't for her this time, I might not have been able to pass the exam."

She smiled with her eyes as she was happy and thankful.

"Many of the questions on today's paper were in Ning Li's notebook!"

Chapter 178: I Don't Have The Key

“What?”

Su Yuan froze.

Ye Ci nodded her head and said, “Yeah, Sister Ning Li predicted several of the questions that even our teacher said might not be tested.”

It was normal to correctly predict a few of the questions, but not most of them...

Su Yuan’s expression changed slightly.

“Did you mean the notebook she gave you?”

“Yeah.”

“The questions on the paper are in that notebook?”

“Just a part of it, but they’re all quite similar.” Ye Ci sighed and continued, “Fortunately, I studied that notebook carefully before the exam. Otherwise, I might not have been able to pass the exam this time. Sister Ning Li is really...”

Su Yuan slowly frowned.

Since Ye Ci was also involved in the competition, Su Yuan had been very attentive to it. Knowing that even the most outstanding teacher had not been able to predict the questions and yet Ning Li had, what was up with her?

Ye Ci saw that Su Yuan was silent and reached out to wave her hand in front of Su Yuan’s eyes.

“Mom, what’s wrong?”

Su Yuan returned to her senses and smiled again.

“Nothing. I’m just thinking that your father will be very happy when he knows about your results later.”

Ye Ci stuck out her tongue.

“It’s nothing. I’ll be very satisfied if I’m even able to win the provincial award. Sister Ning Li is awesome, though. Mr. Zhou said that she’ll likely get into the top five within the province and enter the national finals!”

Su Yuan did not say anything.

If Ning Li achieved it herself, that would be great. But...what if it was not through her own efforts?

1

After a while, Su Yuan said, “Let’s just leave her be. Anyway, let’s go home and relax, okay? We can celebrate that the exam is over!”

Ye Ci’s eyes lit up.

“Okay!”

...

Heyuan District.

The apartment that Ning Li rented was located here.

Since she had been busy lately, she had not come here very often lately.

Ning Li went upstairs and entered the apartment.

She went to the bedroom and pulled the curtain open.

The evening sunlight came in through the window and lit up the desolate room.

Ning Li washed her hands and rolled up her sleeves. She then set up her drawing board, and mixed her paints.

She still had not done the painting that she had promised Yu Pingchuan earlier and finally had some free time today to do so.

Ning Li's wrist felt frozen when she held the brush.

When she helped Wei Songze alter his painting previously, it was not considered her own artwork even though she had controlled the brush.

Those doodles that she casually drew with a pencil were definitely not considered her artwork either.

Thus, technically speaking, this would be her first artwork since she had been born again.

The vibrant and dull colors gradually layered on the white canvas. It felt like an invisible hand that was gently soothing her unsettled heart.

...

Ning Li painted for three hours.

She only stopped painting when it was completely dark outside and the buildings in front of her gradually lit up one after another.

Ning Li put down the palette and brushes, stood up, and moved her sore neck around.

She walked to the side, picked up her phone, and found several unread messages.

Most of them were from He Xiaochen and some others that had wished her well in her exams. What surprised Ning Li was a message from Gu Tinglan.

Ning Li had not mentioned her exam time to him, so Gu Tinglan must have had to inquire about it elsewhere.

She replied to the messages one by one.

She then scrolled through her messages and found that Lu Huaiyu had not sent her a text nor had he called.

Ning Li was stunned.

It was nearly 9:00 pm, so Lu Huaiyu should be awake, right?

Was he busy?

Ning Li frowned slightly and deliberately ignored the disappointment that she felt in her heart.

She put away her phone, picked up her bag, and prepared to leave.

Before she left, she looked at the painting again.

The painting was not complete yet. It needed several more days to complete it, but it should be smooth sailing from here.

She gently closed the door and carried her bag to the elevator.

Ding!

The elevator arrived and the doors opened.

Ning Li was about to walk into the elevator with her head down when she heard a familiar low chuckle.

“Where are you going?”

Ning Li jerked her head up and blinked her bright, round eyes.

“Second Brother?!”

‘Why had he come here?’

“Zhou Fei said that you left on your own after the exam, so I guessed that you had come here,” Lu Huaiyu said as he stepped out of the elevator.

Ning Li took a step back to make way for him. When she saw the box he was carrying, she was stunned again.

“Second Brother...is that...”

“Have you eaten yet?”

Ning Li shook her head honestly.

“No.”

Lu Huaiyu lifted his chin.

“Invite me in and I’ll treat you to dinner.”

...

The warm light shone on the dining table.

Ning Li looked at the food boxes laid out in front of her, still feeling a bit dumbstruck.

‘I’m having dinner with Lu Huaiyu?’

“This chef lives quite far away. Sorry for the long wait.”

As he said that, he handed over a wooden spoon.

“Try it.”

Ning Li digested his words and widened her eyes.

“Second Brother, did you specifically ask the chef to go back to work after hours?”

Lu Huaiyu nodded slightly.

“Fortunately, these aren’t that labor-intensive. Otherwise, I might not have made it here tonight.”

Ning Li looked at the exquisite plating in front of her and was silent for a moment.

Even if it was takeaway food, the standards were still extremely high.

If Ning Li was not mistaken, Hashima soup took several hours to boil, yet he said it was “not very labor-intensive”?

Lu Huaiyu seemed to have guessed what she was thinking and curled his lips slightly.

“I haven’t eaten either.”

Naturally, the noble Second Young Master Lu was extremely well-taken care of, so he was very particular about his meals, even if it was just a sip of tea.

Thus, all of this was normal to him.

Ning Li had not felt very hungry earlier, but when she got a whiff of the food on the table, her stomach growled.

She took a bowl of soup and handed it over to Lu Huaiyu, who looked at the wooden bowl and raised his eyebrows.

Ning Li said, “Drink the soup to warm your stomach.”

Lu Huaiyu could not sleep well and had an irregular diet, so he would eventually develop a serious stomach problem later.

It was better to pay more attention now.

Lu Huaiyu took over.

When he woke up from his nap, it had already been past 6:00 pm.

He originally thought that Ning Li would celebrate with friends after the exam, but Zhou Fei said that she had left alone after finishing the lab exam in the afternoon.

If Ning Li had not gone back to the Ye family home, then there were only a few places she could have gone to.

When he came here to take a look, he saw that Ning Li's room was lit up which confirmed his suspicions.

Ning Li paused and looked at him with stunned eyes.

"So, you arrived two hours ago?"

Lu Huaiyu paused and thought for a moment.

"Less than that. I thought that you were busy, so I wanted to wait for you to come down. However, it was already past dinnertime, so I asked the chef to send over the food."

Lu Huaiyu had only come up after seeing Ning Li turn off the lights.

Ning Li asked hesitantly, "Then...why didn't you come up?"

Lu Huaiyu had waited downstairs for nearly two hours.

Yunzhou was already very cold at night during this season.

Lu Huaiyu's thin lips curled up into a smile.

“I don’t have a key to this place, so all I could do was wait.”

Chapter 179: Second Brother, Is It Clean Now?

Ning Li did not know what to say.

‘He can’t come up without a key? What kind of reason is that?’

“Well...you could have told me so that I could open the door for you.”

Lu Huaiyu laughed and said, “What if you had been busy?”

Ning Li paused for a while.

She had indeed been busy at that time.

In those three hours, she had not looked at her phone once, so even if Lu Huaiyu had contacted her, she would not have noticed.

Lu Huaiyu was not surprised when he saw her reaction.

Even though Ning Li rented this apartment, she did not live in it. Clearly, she had other uses for this place. The two times that he had been here, the door to the bedroom was always locked.

Since Ning Li was not willing to tell him, he naturally did not probe further. Girls always had their own secrets.

Moreover, on that rainy night, she had been more willing to stay here by herself curled up on the sofa than return to the Ye family home.

It was not difficult to discern her attitude towards the Ye family.

Even so, she did not seem to have any intention of moving out of the Ye family home for the time being.

If she wanted to, she could very well move out here, but she did not.

Lu Huaiyu knew about her situation but did not ask any more questions.

He only figured that she had something she needed to do here, so he had not come up.

Ning Li pursed her lips.

“I wasn’t busy. Also, it’s just opening a door, so that wouldn’t delay anything even if I was busy.”

Lu Huaiyu laughed. “If you weren’t busy, then there’s all the more reason not to disturb you. What if you were taking a nap to catch up on all the sleep you lost lately?”

Ning Li’s upturned nose could not help but wrinkle. She muttered, “I’m not you, so I wouldn’t be catching up on sleep at this hour...”

Lu Huaiyu leaned back in his chair and thought, ‘Huh, she dissed me even when I had such good intentions to let her have a good rest? I guess she’s so relaxed around me now that she’s not afraid of feeling snarky.’

“Looks like you did well in the exam today?”

Ning Li nodded. “Not bad, I guess.”

Not only had she done well in the exam, Ye Ci had probably also done well.

Lu Huaiyu was amused.

He had known that Ning Li took the physics competition and the college entrance examination very seriously, but it seemed to be more profound than he initially thought.

As far as he knew, Ning Li did not seem to care about being the first in class.

Even when she had come in first in the city for the midterm exam, she had not seemed particularly happy.

However, she seemed a lot more relaxed after this physics competition.

Lu Huaiyu ate faster than Ning Li. After he put down his chopsticks, he looked around the apartment.

Ning Li obviously did not rent this place for the purpose of living here.

The kitchen did not even have a pot.

That was why he had brought takeaway.

If he had not come, she probably would not have eaten anything.

However, she always had a good appetite when there was food around.

After a while, Ning Li also stopped eating.

Looking at the food boxes on the table, she coughed lightly and stood up.

“Second Brother, I’ll just clean these up then.”

These were clearly not disposable takeaway boxes. They all looked so simple and delicate.

She was already embarrassed that Lu Huaiyu had come specifically to feed her.

Lu Huaiyu shook his head. "No, just leave it. I'll do it."

He was about to get up as he said that.

However, Ning Li was a step ahead of him. Her attitude was very resolute. "No, let me!"

It was embarrassing to eat someone's food and then let them do the dishes.

Without waiting for Lu Huaiyu to move, Ning Li took the lead and rushed to the kitchen with the food containers.

Lu Huaiyu looked at her scurrying back and could not help but laugh.

After a while, the kitchen was still quiet.

He felt slightly uneasy and was about to go over to take a look when he saw Ning Li stepping out slowly.

Lu Huaiyu asked, "What's wrong?"

Ning Li was silent for a moment before she said softly, "Second Brother, I'm sorry...I forgot that I don't have anything to wash the dishes here..."

Lu Huaiyu was speechless.

'Right... There wasn't even a bed here the last time I was here, so I guess having no dishwashing stuff is quite normal?'

Lu Huaiyu looked down and saw that Ning Li's cheeks were flushed. It was rare to see her looking embarrassed.

Her skin was extremely delicate and fair like porcelain. Under the light, it looked like a snow-capped mountain.

Her ponytail fell to the front of her slender neck. Her black hair against her fair skin looked so pure, yet the pink blush on her cheeks made her seem so charming.

Lu Huaiyu's eyelashes trembled slightly like the emotions in his heart, so he quickly averted his eyes.

"Then, don't bother. I'll bring it back with me later."

Suddenly, his gaze was fixed.

Ning Li noticed his gaze and looked up at him as she asked, "Second brother, what's wrong?"

Lu Huaiyu raised his hand and pointed to his right ear.

"You seem to have a stain there..."

Ning Li froze and lifted her hand to touch the same spot on her ear.

Lu Huaiyu moved his finger. "A little further back."

Ning Li moved accordingly, but she still did not feel anything.

She pushed her ponytail away and tilted her head sideways.

“Is it here?”

Lu Huaiyu caught a glimpse of her smooth and fair neck.

Her neck and shoulder lines were already extremely beautiful, so when she tilted her head like this, her delicate neck was completely exposed to him. It looked so soft and tempting.

Lu Huaiyu’s eyes darkened as he thought, ‘It only takes a slight force to leave a mark on that delicate neck. She’s like a carefree cat lying on the ground with its belly up, so trusting and defenseless against me. She doesn’t seem to understand that I could possibly harm her if I wanted to.’

The corners of his lips curled up slightly for a moment.

Ning Li touched the side of her ear for a while. Her slender fingers were also soft and slender, and her nails were light pink. Lu Huaiyu clasped her shoulders and pulled her forward as he spun her around.

There was a mirror hanging on the wall in front of him.

He lifted his chin slightly. “See for yourself.”

Ning Li moved forward a little. Only then did she see that there was a smear of paint on the right side of her ear.

She had probably got it on herself accidentally just now.

However, it certainly was not easy to spot, so she had not noticed it before.

“Oh, here.”

She touched it and turned to go to the bathroom.

“I’ll go wash up then.”

As she said that, she turned and went into the next room.

Lu Huaiyu had one leg slightly bent as he leaned against the wall. He felt a little frustrated.

The sound of water came from the bathroom.

Ning Li came out soon after.

She had not taken very long to clean up, so it was probably not a stubborn stain.

Ning took a few steps towards Lu Huaiyu and turned sideways as she lifted her hair around her ear.

“Second Brother, is it clean now?”

It seems like there was still a bit behind her ear, but she could not see it herself.

Lu Huaiyu glanced down at her.

Half of her small face was wet, and her hair was partly wet and messy as it clung to her porcelain white skin.

Her small and soft earlobes were red from being rubbed, with some water droplets gently falling slowly right onto the crook of her neck. Each drop was like fireworks, igniting little sparks in his heart.

Lu Huaiyu quickly looked away and cleared his tightened throat. "Yeah, it's fine now."

Chapter 180: It's Mine Now That You've Given It To Me

The evening breeze blew in from the balcony as a few drops of rain fell, bringing the coolness of fall into the apartment.

Ning Li glanced over.

"Is it raining?"

Fall in Yunzhou was always rainy and cold.

It would be winter soon.

Ning Li walked over to lock the sliding door to the balcony.

Once she was farther away, her sweet scent dissipated. Lu Huaiyu tilted his head slightly and tugged on the collar of his shirt.

Ning Li turned around and felt a little awkward when she saw that.

"Second Brother, are you feeling hot?"

She felt that the room was quite chilly.

Lu Huaiyu replied, "Mm, a little."

He glanced out the window.

“Are you going home?”

Ning Li nodded, put on her school uniform, and zipped up her jacket.

“Yeah.”

The light rain outside would not cause any delay.

She had come over today without any plans to spend the night here.

Lu Huaiyu nodded and said, “I’ll send you home then.”

...

It was a rainy night in Yunzhou. Falling leaves covered the streets that were lined with Chinese parasol trees.

Light rain fell on the car window, which blurred the view outside.

Ning Li looked outside for a while before she withdrew her gaze to look at Lu Huaiyu, who was sitting beside her.

He had closed his eyes and rested in the car, so he did not talk much.

‘Was he tired from waiting for nearly two hours downstairs?’

Thinking of this, Ning Li felt a little guilty.

“Second Brother,” she spoke softly.

Lu Huaiyu's eyelashes fluttered as he opened his eyes and looked over.

The car was very dark and was lit by the streetlights outside the window. The light flashed past on her beautiful and perfect face, making her eyes inscrutable.

Ning Li handed over something to Lu Huaiyu. "This is for you."

Lu Huaiyu looked down and saw a key on her palm.

This was the key to her house.

He raised his eyebrows slightly. "For me?"

Ning Li nodded her head.

Her things were mainly kept in the master bedroom anyway, so it did not matter if she gave Lu Huaiyu a key to the front door.

Lu Huaiyu smiled and said, "Are you sure? Do you have that much trust in me?"

"Didn't you also give me the password to Yunding Fenghua?"

That downtown mansion alone was enough to buy multiple three-bedroom apartments like hers.

Not to mention, her apartment was rented.

"As long as you don't feel like you got the worse end of the bargain."

Lu Huaiyu looked at the girl's bright and clear eyes with her immense trust in him.

He felt it necessary to remind the girl to be more vigilant around him.

"Lili, hasn't anyone ever told you that it's easier to get cheated if you trust people too easily?"

Ning Li blinked.

"Then...will you be deceiving me?"

Lu Huaiyu smiled. "No one can say for sure..."

Ning Li frowned as she had not expected Lu Huaiyu to say such words.

'So does he not want the key anymore? Or...'

Ning Li curled her fingers slightly to take it back.

Halfway through, she suddenly paused and handed it over again.

Lu Huaiyu saw her firmness and felt a little strange.

He had only been teasing her earlier about not having a key.

Lu Huaiyu knew very well that this apartment was not just a temporary place to stay for Ning Li.

Thus, although he wanted to take another step closer, he had stopped outside, respecting her boundaries.

Whatever she wanted to do was up to her.

If she did not want anyone to know, then he would not pry.

He had not thought that Ning Li would actually give him a key.

Lu Huaiyu's gaze fell on her hand.

"You can't regret it later once you've given it to me."

Ning Li nodded.

Lu Huaiyu helplessly rubbed his brow and let out a low chuckle.

"Why do I feel that if you were ever abducted and sold off, you would help your abductor count his earnings?"

Ning Li froze a little and muttered, "You're not just anyone..."

She owed Lu Huaiyu too many favors, so a key was nothing in comparison.

Moreover, with Lu Huaiyu's wealth, selling her would not even be enough for his pocket money.

He would not need anything from her.

Lu Huaiyu looked at her and averted his gaze.

After a long time, he smiled.

‘At least she’s highly self-aware, so it’s not entirely for nothing.’

“Okay then.”

He reached out and took the key. His fingertips grazed her palm, which felt scorching to the touch. Luckily, it passed instantly.

“It’s mine now that you’ve given it to me.”

....

The Ye family.

It was already past 11:00pm by the time Ning Li had returned.

Aunt Zhao and the others were already used to Ning Li’s behavior and did not ask any questions when they greeted her.

The villa was quiet.

Ning Li went up to the second floor.

Just as she reached the corridor, she saw that Ye Ci’s bedroom door was ajar.

She walked over and caught a glimpse of Su Yuan tucking Ye Ci into bed.

Su Yuan was wearing her pajamas and a cashmere shawl, so she had probably fallen asleep and gotten up again.

Ning Li looked on with a mocking glare. Her eyes were cold.

Su Yuan was very caring towards Ye Ci.

They had been together since Ye Ci was seven years old, so how could she not have any feelings after raising her as her own daughter?

Su Yuan had spent a lot more time with Ye Ci compared to Ning Li.

No wonder she was always biased toward Ye Ci.

In her previous life, whenever Ning Li saw scenes like this, she had always thought that as long as she was well behaved and obedient enough to meet their expectations and hopes, she would also receive the same treatment as Ye Ci. Eventually, she had realized that a person's time, energy, and love were limited.

Su Yuan had used up all of her time, energy, and love on Ye Ci and Ye Cheng, so there was no room for her.

Ning Li should not have had this fantasy from the start.

She turned around and went to her room.

However, just as Ning Li had taken a few steps, Su Yuan heard the movement and looked her way.

Su Yuan straightened up and came out of Ye Ci's room. She gently closed the door behind her and pulled her shawl. She then called out, "Ning Li, wait!"

Ning Li paused in her footsteps and turned back.

Her expression was as calm and indifferent as ever.

Every time Su Yuan saw Ning Li like this, she felt uncomfortable.

Ning Li came and went as she pleased. 'Does she really think that my house is a hotel?'

"You..."

Su Yuan opened her mouth and thought of Ye Ci, who had already fallen asleep, so she lowered her voice again.

"How was your exam today?"

Su Yuan suddenly asking this question at this late hour indicated to Ning Li that Su Yuan was not actually concerned about her results.

Looking at Su Yuan's scrutinizing and suspicious eyes, Ning Li guessed what was happening and nodded. "Pretty good."

Su Yuan was stunned.

Ning Li rarely used this tone to talk about her grades, so it seemed to indicate that she had done well in the exam this time.

"Lil Ci said that there were several questions she saw in your notes that had come out in the exam."

Ning Li's smile gradually grew.

'Several? It seems that Ye Ci's pretty reserved this time, huh?'

"Yeah, it seems like it. What's wrong?"

Su Yuan felt more uneasy the more she thought about it.

“Nothing...it just seems a bit too coincidental, doesn't it? Ning Li, tell Mom the truth. Did you see this exam paper beforehand?”