

Little Brat's 181

Chapter 181: Lili?

“Did you see it beforehand?”

Su Yuan’s words sounded as if she was asking if Ning Li had cheated in the exam.

Although Su Yuan’s voice was very soft, these words were unquestionably an accusation.

Ning Li reacted as if she had heard some kind of joke and asked, “This is a provincial competition. Where could I possibly have gone to study this paper in advance?”

Even though Su Yuan had asked that question, she still felt that something was off about it.

Even if Ning Li had the thought of cheating, how could she have gotten the exam questions in advance?

On the other hand, how could it be such a coincidence that she had guessed so many questions on the paper?

Based on what Ye Ci told her, they had done many of the questions and papers in their competitive physics class. However, Ning Li had only written less than twenty questions in the notebook that she had given Ye Ci, and most of them had come up in the test.

It was no wonder that Su Yuan was suspicious.

“Then your notes...”

“Didn’t Ye Ci tell you that even though there were only a few questions in the notebook, I purposely expanded each question?”

Ning Li suddenly laughed meaningfully.

“Besides, this would mean that she should also be able to get good results in the exam, no?”

Su Yuan frowned slightly. For a moment, she did not know what Ning Li meant by this.

‘Was she really hoping that Ye Ci would do well in the exam? Or...’

Ning Li did not seem inclined on dwelling on this matter any further, so she turned around and walked away.

Su Yuan’s lips moved as if she wanted to ask something else, but she did not know what to say.

‘Am I just overthinking this?’

...

Ning Li returned to her room, remembered something, and turned on her laptop.

She exported the previously recorded data and did some simple processing, but these were not enough.

Ning Li sat on the chair. In the dimly lit room, only the glowing light of the computer screen reflected on her face.

She rested her cheek on one hand, seemingly in deep thought.

In fact, she really wanted to borrow Lu Huaiyu’s telescope, but it might be a bit troublesome.

However, there was no laboratory on this side of Yunzhou that could undertake this amount of calculation.

She would probably still have to make a trip to the Capital.

Thinking of this, Ning Li rubbed her head in frustration.

After contemplating it a while, she finally turned off her laptop and went to bed.

....

The physics competition had finally come to an end, so every student in the competitive physics class was relieved.

The results would be announced in a week. Thus, the few days in between were one of the rare opportunities for them to take a breather.

Upon getting their results, the top students would then start preparations for the national competition, which would be even more torturous.

Those who did not do so well in the exams would have to concentrate on prepping for the college entrance exams.

Ning Li was so relaxed these days that she even took time to finish the painting that she intended on sending to Yu Pingchuan on Sunday.

Everyone could also see that Ning Li had been very relaxed recently.

On Friday afternoon, Ning Li once again took a leave of absence.

Cheng Xiangxiang looked at the empty seat and snorted.

“The results of the competition aren’t even out yet, yet she acts like she already has a guaranteed spot in Xijing University.”

‘It’s just a competition. Why is she so arrogant? Who’s to say she’ll even make it?’

Several students around her heard this and secretly exchanged glances, but no-one answered her.

In fact, even if Ning Li had not joined the competition and only relied on the college entrance examination, it would still not be a problem for her to get into Xijing University.

There was actually no need for comparison.

Ye Ci wrote some math notes and paused when she heard this.

“I think Sister Ning Li will be able to get good results.”

Cheng Xiangxiang did not want to talk about Ning Li.

“Then you’ll probably do well too, right?”

She noticed that Ye Ci had been in a rather delicate state these days.

She seemed to be happy, but nervous at the same time.

Ye Ci did not appear to be like any of the others after the exam, and Cheng Xiangxiang could not figure out what was wrong.

Ye Ci shook her head. “It’s hard to say.”

Zhou Fei had shown them the answers the day after the exam so they could use them as a cross-reference and predict their scores.

Ye Ci was able to guess her score, but she was not sure how the others did. Thus, she did not know exactly how she would rank against everyone.

...

Heyuan District.

Ning Li had been in the master bedroom painting from afternoon to evening. She finally finished the last stroke.

She stood up and stared at the painting for a while, then exhaled gently.

The next step was to simply pack it up and send it to Yu Pingchuan.

When she walked out of the room and passed by the mirror hanging on the wall, she subconsciously stopped and took a closer look.

Since the last time that Lu Huaiyu had spotted the paint on the side of her ear, she was careful about it.

Lu Huaiyu must have guessed that she could paint, but he did not ask much about it.

Ning Li suddenly recalled the small piece of painting that he had kept in that book.

Was that his painting?

She did not know what exactly was on it, but it seemed precious to him...

Ning Li shook her head and suppressed these mixed thoughts.

....

Sunday.

At 11:00 am, Ning Li took the painting with her and took a taxi to Yu Pingchuan's place.

The cab stopped at the entrance of the neighborhood, so Ning Li got out of the car and walked towards the familiar building.

The phone rang. The call was from Wei Songze.

Ning Li picked up the call and asked, "What's up?"

Ever since Wei Songze had won the gold medal in the Huatsing Cup and gotten a guaranteed place in Xijing University, he had started listening to Ning Li's advice and studied well, improving his results by the day.

That said, it had been sometime since they had contacted each other.

Wei Songze chuckled and said, "Sister Li, I heard that you've been taking time off recently. Is it because you're busy painting?"

Second High and Seventh High students were very close to each other, so it was easy to obtain any type of information.

This was especially true for Wei Songze.

Hearing his tone, Ning Li already knew what he had in mind, so she answered frankly, "Mm."

“OMG!” Wei Songze was extremely excited. “Sister Li, you finally touched the brush again! Woohoo! Let me see, please? Pretty please!”

“I’m afraid it’s not very convenient now.” Ning Li quickly refused. “I’m almost at Master Yu’s house.”

Wei Songze could hear his heart shatter to pieces.

“Sister Li, are you sending it to Master Yu right after you completed it? No! Why didn’t you tell me beforehand? You should have at least let me see it first! This won’t do...I’m going there now!”

Ning Li looked at the time and reminded him. “It’s almost time for lunch, right?”

Wei Songze immediately stopped whining.

After a while, he cautiously said. “Sister Li, after some serious thought, since this is your first painting in the past six months, it’ll be better if Master Yu sees it first. I’ll just view it later...”

Although Wei Songze wanted to see Sister Li’s painting, he cherished his life more.

Ning Li carried the painting on her back. She went up to the third floor, and raised her hand to knock on the door.

Knock, knock!

“If you say so, then...”

Before Ning Li could finish her sentence, the door to the apartment was opened from the inside.

A familiar, handsome and elegant face appeared from behind the door.

Ning Li's heart jumped wildly.

'Lu Huaiyu?! Why was he here?'

When Lu Huaiyu saw that it was her, he seemed to be a little surprised too.

His gaze fell on the painting she was carrying and raised his eyebrows slightly.

"Lili?"

Chapter 182: A Seeming Embrace

"I just brought your painting to Master Yu," Ning Li said smoothly into her phone.

Wei Songze, who was on the other end of the call, was confused for a moment and said, "What?"

"Yeah, after you're done, come over as soon as possible! Master Yu usually takes a break after lunch, so he'll be able to help you look at your work then."

Ning Li nodded and continued, "It's rare to get personal guidance from Master Yu, so do appreciate it!"

Wei Songze was still on a different wavelength. "Huh?"

"Alright, I'll hang up now. Bye!"

Ning Li hung up the phone and looked up to greet Lu Huaiyu.

"Second Brother, why are you at Mr. Yu's house?"

Quite a few people knew that Yu Pingchuan lived here, but not many were qualified to visit him in person.

Lu Huaiyu replied, "I happen to have something that needs Mr. Yu's advice. I only just arrived. Did you bring over a painting for someone?"

Ning Li's expression did not change in the slightest as she said, "Yeah, it's Wei Songze's. You probably remember him."

He did remember him. He was the one who had fought by her side, went to the police station with her, and helped her to rent a house, so of course, he remembered. Oh, and apparently he also won the gold medal of the Huatsing Cup.

It was a perfectly normal thing for Wei Songze to send his painting over to Yu Pingchuan, who was the chairman of the Yunzhou Painting Association.

Lu Huaiyu raised his hand and said, "Give it to me."

Ning Li hesitated for a moment before handing over the drawing board.

Lu Huaiyu felt the weight for a moment and smiled. "Isn't it heavy?"

This painting was half her height, yet she had carried it on her back like this.

Ning Li entered the house and gave a vague response. "It's alright. When I used to sketch portraits in the park, I would also carry a lot of things at once."

Lu Huaiyu paused for a moment.

"Is Lili here?"

Yu Pingchuan had heard her voice and walked out of the study.

Seeing Ning Li, he instantly smiled brightly.

“Master Yu.”

Ning Li pointed to the painting and said, “Wei Songze asked me to help bring over his painting first. He said that he’ll come over later.”

Yu Pingchuan was stunned for a moment before quickly reacting.

“Oh, sure! I was just wondering why he wasn’t here yet when it’s almost noon! Just put it there then. We’ll look at it after lunch.”

Lu Huaiyu put the painting in the study but did not open it.

Only then did Ning Li’s heart relax a little.

Yu Pingchuan smiled and said, “Lili, it’s rare for you to come over. You must stay for lunch, no matter what!”

Ning Li looked around.

“Where’s Uncle Lin?”

“Something’s going on at the painting association today, so he’s busy and won’t be back for lunch,” Yu Pingchuan said as he went into the kitchen.

Ning Li’s eyes swept to the refrigerator and asked, “Master Yu, why don’t we eat out today? It’s a Sunday, so we can do some shopping...”

Yu Pingchuan opened the refrigerator that was stuffed with all kinds of vegetables and meat.

He smiled and said, "We had run out of food initially, but since Lil Lin knew he would be busy for the next few days, he purposely made a trip to the supermarket yesterday. What would you like to eat? I'll make it for you!"

The corners of Ning Li's eyes twitched.

The taste of the fish soup she had last time still seemed to be lingering on the tip of her tongue.

Yu Pingchuan went over to Lu Huaiyu and said, "By the way, Huaiyu, you haven't tried my cooking before, right? You ought to try it now since you're here!"

Lu Huaiyu looked at his phone and smiled. "Thank you, but I'm afraid that I can't make it today. I have a lunch appointment with a friend today."

Yu Pingchuan was a little disappointed.

"Oh well, what a pity. Next time then."

Ning Li could not help but feel envy for Lu Huaiyu at that moment.

"Second Brother, are you leaving?"

Lu Huaiyu nodded his head.

He had already been about to leave, but he had not expected to meet Ning Li here.

"Then..."

Ning Li was about to say something when she saw that Yu Pingchuan was already pulling something out of the fridge.

Her eyelids twitched, so she immediately ran over and said, "Master Yu, since you cooked for us last time, why don't I cook for you this time? It's been a long time since you've tasted my cooking, right?"

Lu Huaiyu's hand that had been twisting the door handle suddenly paused.

Yu Pingchuan looked a bit torn.

He wanted to cook for Ning Li, but he also missed the taste of Ning Li's cooking.

"Then..."

Ning Li struck while the iron was hot and snatched the piece of half chicken and the bag of vegetables out of Yu Pingchuan's hand.

"Go and rest. I'll take care of everything quickly!"

Yu Pingchuan was pushed out of the kitchen by her.

Click.

Lu Huaiyu locked the front door and turned around to come back in.

Ning Li was secretly celebrating her win. When she saw Lu Huaiyu, she was a little surprised.

"Second Brother, weren't you just leaving?"

Lu Huaiyu waved his phone and sighed. "I got stood up."

'Eh? Someone actually dared to stand Lu Huaiyu up?'

Ning Li was puzzled for a moment.

"Then, why don't you stay..."

"Sure!"

Lu Huaiyu answered before Ning Li finished her sentence and put his coat away very naturally.

Ning Li was speechless.

Yu Pingchuan was also delighted and said with a bit of a bragging tone, "That's great! Huaiyu, Lili makes amazing soup. You sure are blessed today!"

The corners of Lu Huaiyu's lips curled up slightly.

"Is that so? Then, I ought to try it."

With that, he strode towards the kitchen with his long legs.

As he walked, he rolled up his sleeves, revealing his sculpted arms.

Ning Li froze.

"Second Brother?"

“There’s no free lunch in this world, so I’ll give you a hand. You won’t mind, right?”

Lu Huaiyu raised an eyebrow.

Ning Li looked at the watch on his wrist that was inlaid with emeralds and jade, then sighed in her heart.

Such a kingly man with such expensive hands was willing to help her. How could she refuse?

Lu Huaiyu noticed her line of sight, so he unbuckled his watch and casually put it on the table next to him.

Ning Li remembered that she still owed him a breakfast from last time.

“Then you can just wash these,” Ning Li said as she handed over a vegetable basket.

Lu Huaiyu stepped forward to take it.

Yu Pingchuan’s house was quite old and small. The kitchen was especially small and closed off.

Ning Li had felt fine standing there alone, but once Lu Huaiyu had come in, the space instantly seemed so crowded that she could barely turn around.

She stood there for a while and was about to kick Lu Huaiyu out so that she could do it herself, but she saw that Lu Huaiyu had already gone to the sink and turned on the faucet.

Yu Pingchuan watched the two of them standing together as he paced outside, still eager to be helpful.

“Lili, why don’t I help too?”

Ning Li’s face was expressionless as she said, “Master Yu, it seems that your kitchen won’t allow it.”

Yu Pingchuan felt dejected and only responded, "Oh, okay then."

Lu Huaiyu seemed to have noticed what was going on and turned to see that Yu Pingchuan was going back to the living room. Only then did he lean closer to Ning Li and lowered his voice as he said, "Are you that scared of Mr. Yu's cooking?"

Ning Li lightly snorted and replied, "You're just not blessed enough."

Lu Huaiyu did not seem to mind being teased.

"I'm actually quite curious."

However, he was more curious about her cooking.

Ning Li paused and turned to prepare the ingredients.

Lu Huaiyu suddenly said, "Wait."

Before she could look back, Lu Huaiyu had already taken a step forward and leaned down slightly to wrap his arm around her waist.

Chapter 183: Our Lili Is Amazing

Lu Huaiyu tilted his head slightly. As soon as Ning Li looked up, she could see the high bridge of his nose and smooth jawline.

The cold frown that usually seemed to be permanently etched between his eyebrows faded away and now emitted a rare warmth.

In a moment, Ning Li felt something tightening around her waist.

His long and well-defined fingers gently wrapped around her as he tied a knot behind her back.

Lu Huaiyu backed up and sized her up with a smile lifting the corners of his eyes.

“Done.”

Ning Li looked down and saw that there was now an apron hanging around her waist.

He had not touched her throughout the whole process. There had only been some friction from the clothes, but somehow, Ning Li still felt as if they were too close.

She took a step back, but the kitchen was too small, so there was nowhere she could retreat.

Ning Li dropped her head slightly and said, “Thanks, Second Brother.”

Lu Huaiyu’s eyes swept past her waist.

She was wearing a very loose white sweater today. Wearing the apron had immediately emphasized the slender and curvy lines of her waist.

It was a beautiful sight.

Lu Huaiyu recalled the scene earlier and noticed that she seemed to have lost some weight.

Just then, his phone in his pocket rang.

Ning Li looked at it and said, “Second Brother, is that your phone?”

Lu Huaiyu took it out and glanced at it, then hung up without hesitation.

“It’s just spam.”

....

At the same time, Wei Songze stared bitterly at his phone and felt torn.

‘What did Sister Li just say? Did she want me to go to Master Yu’s house? At this hour? Isn’t that too much?! Also...the painting...’

He rubbed his chin.

‘Tsk tsk...I seldom hear Sister Li get this flustered... I wonder who she ran into? Forget it... I’ll just wait a little longer.’

...

On the other hand, Gu Siyang dialed the number again.

Beep...

“The number you have dialed is unavailable. Please dial again later.”

He scratched his head.

“What’s going on? Why is Second Master Lu suddenly so busy that he isn’t even answering the phone?”

Gu Tinglan happened to pass by. Upon hearing this, he paused and looked at Gu Siyang.

Gu Siyang was sitting in the driver's seat of his car that was parked in the yard as he stared blankly at his phone.

Gu Tinglan walked over and knocked on the car window, so Gu Siyang lowered the window and looked over.

"Lil Uncle?"

Gu Tinglan looked at his nephew's phone.

"You seem to be in contact with Lu Huaiyu quite frequently lately..."

Gu Siyang snickered.

"It's just a small business. We were supposed to discuss the details today, but he hasn't been answering my calls."

Gu Siyang did not know where Lu Huaiyu was, so he could only wait in the car.

Upon hearing that, Gu Tinglan nodded and said, "So, he stood you up?"

Gu Siyang was in disbelief. "How is that possible?!"

He had not done anything to offend Lu Huaiyu. Why would he stand him up?

Gu Siyang once again fished out his phone and called Lu Huaiyu.

Beep...

No one answered, so Gu Siyang hung up the call.

“Oh, by the way, he probably blocked you.”

Gu Siyang was baffled.

In the meantime, Gu Tinglan pulled open the passenger car door.

“Well...since you’re free, give me a ride.”

Gu Siyang was rendered speechless at suddenly being ordered around.

He grit his teeth and said in defiance, “Lil Uncle, I didn’t come to Yunzhou to be your driver!”

Gu Tinglan just leaned back in the passenger seat and closed his eyes.

“Don’t worry, I wouldn’t even want a driver like you. It’s just temporary.”

Gu Siyang did not know how to react to that and floored the gas pedal. The car then sped away.

Fortunately, this was not the first time Gu Tinglan had sat in his car, so he was used to it.

“Oh right, I forgot to ask earlier. Didn’t you pester Ning Li to sign with LY earlier? How did it go?”

Gu Siyang was still annoyed, but upon hearing this, he raised his eyebrows in triumph.

“I approached her myself, so certainly it’s not a problem! She even promised to seriously consider signing with LY next year after the college entrance exams!”

Serious consideration.

This meant that there was still a possibility that she would reject the offer, yet Gu Siyang was still so happy.

Gu Tinglan could not be bothered to agitate his silly nephew again.

The Gu family was prestigious, so they had initially not agreed to Gu Siyang being involved in racing.

However, he had made some achievements in recent years, so his father turned a blind eye but was still not always particularly supportive.

The fact that Gu Tinglan asked this question already showed great concern for Gu Siyang.

“What? Lil Uncle, are you also interested in this now?”

Gu Siyang smirked and continued, “Do you have any intention of investing?”

He was certainly not short of money, and neither was LY, but who would ever think that there was such a thing as having too much money?

Besides, if he could pull his uncle in as a partner, they could present a united front at home in the future.

His father was always disciplining him, but was lenient towards his uncle.

Gu Tinglan said frankly, “No, thanks.”

He was doing well in his professional field and was certainly not interested in getting involved in Gu Siyang’s business.

Gu Siyang scoffed.

“But...if you want to sign on Ning Li, you should show me the contract first.”

Gu Siyang was surprised.

“Huh? Why? Lil Uncle, although LY is considered a small business, we still have a professional legal department!”

“That’s why I want to see it. Who knows how you bosses try to scam the newcomers,” Gu Tinglan said in a calm tone.

Gu Siyang was once again speechless and thought, ‘Ha! Before you say these things, can you first donate all the trust funds under your name? Are you even my uncle?!’

“Oh wait, there’s probably no need for that...” Gu Tinglan suddenly thought of something and laughed.

‘With Lu Huaiyu around, who could possibly scam Ning Li?’

...

An hour later, Ning Li finally finished cooking.

There were four dishes and one soup on the table.

Shrimp with celery, pork ribs with pepper and salt, roasted yam with chestnuts, beef slice with salsa, and chicken soup with pine mushroom.

The rich aroma filled the air.

Yu Pingchuan sat in the main seat, while Ning Li and Lu Huaiyu sat facing each other.

The old man was greatly moved.

“Just think, it’s been almost a year since I’ve had Lili’s home cooked meal! Huaiyu, sit down and try it!”

As he said that, he handed Lu Huaiyu a bowl of soup.

“Not everyone is lucky enough to taste this!”

Lu Huaiyu’s gaze fell onto the bowl of soup.

“Thank you, Mr. Yu.”

Ning Li also looked over at the same time. Her eyes flickered.

“Master Yu, I did most of the work this time. Why isn’t the first bowl of soup for me?”

Yu Pingchuan laughed out loud.

“Huaiyu’s a guest, yet you want to be petty about this?”

Lu Huaiyu raised his eyebrows and gave Ning Li the bowl of soup he had just received from Yu Pingchuan.

Ning Li’s eyes curved as she smiled at him.

“Thanks, Second Brother. Let me serve you a bowl.”

As she said that, she served him another bowl of soup.

The soup was clear, with two slices of pine mushrooms and not even one piece of chicken.

Yu Pingchuan did not notice.

Lu Huaiyu lowered his eyes to look at it and raised his eyebrows.

He was indeed extremely picky when it came to food, so he would never eat the chicken meat that had been boiled in the soup.

However, very few people knew this.

He lifted his head and looked at Ning Li.

Yu Pingchuan smiled eagerly and urged him. "Huaiyu, quickly, have a taste!"

Lu Huaiyu sipped the soup with a spoon.

Yu Pingchuan looked at him and asked with great expectation.

"What do you think? Isn't our Lili a great cook?"

Lu Huaiyu gently nodded with a smile.

"Our Lili is amazing."

Chapter 184: I Like Them All

Lu Huaiyu's voice was deep and collected, like the sound of someone plucking on a cello, which could easily stir one's heart.

Ning Li held her bowl with both hands and looked down. The tips of her ears inexplicably tingled.

When Yu Pingchuan heard Lu Huaiyu praising Ning Li, he was so elated and proud that he did not notice the way this man addressed his star pupil.

"Lili, how was your physics competition?"

Yu Pingchuan had not seen Ning Li for a while and had originally wanted to ask her about the painting. However, since Lu Huaiyu's presence made it a little inconvenient, he found another topic.

Ning Li replied, "The results will be out tomorrow."

Yu Pingchuan nodded.

"By the way, I heard that if you do well in this exam, you'll have to go to the Capital for some intensive training?"

At that, Lu Huaiyu raised his eyebrows slightly.

Ning Li nodded and said, "The top five in the province will be sent to the Capital to participate in the intensive training during the winter holidays for two weeks. The national finals will be held at the beginning of March."

"Two weeks?"

Yu Pingchuan was interested.

"Coincidentally, I'll be back in the Capital during that time. Why don't you stay at my place?"

Ning Li smiled helplessly and reminded him. “Master Yu, the provincial results aren’t even out yet, so I’m not even sure if I’ll be going. Besides, that intensive training is a full-board program, so we’re not given the option of staying in our own accommodation.”

“Oh, I see...”

Yu Pingchuan was a little disappointed.

“I just thought of taking you...”

His voice suddenly stalled before he continued, “Never mind then. That can wait until you’re done with the competition.”

It seemed like he was not at all worried about Ning Li failing the exam.

Ning Li suddenly said, “Oh, right! I saw that many fruits in your refrigerator weren’t very fresh, so I cleared them out for you.”

Yu Pingchuan’s heart thumped.

‘Oh no! My apple, longan, and cantaloupe!’

Yu Pingchuan’s hand trembled slightly.

“But...but I just bought them yesterday, it should be fresh...”

“Oh? Did you buy that much yesterday?”

Ning Li smiled and continued, “It looks like you’ve been taking in quite a bit of sugar lately...”

Yu Pingchuan knew that he had made a slip of the tongue and immediately sat upright.

“No, it wasn’t me! It’s all Lil Lin’s fault. He bought it himself! He just likes to buy a bunch of things all at once... I’ve tried telling him several times, but he just...”

“Then I’ll tell Uncle Lin not to buy so much next time. Otherwise, it’s too wasteful.” Ning Li took a bite of the shrimp. “After all, you can’t eat them, and Uncle Lin certainly can’t eat all of it by himself, right?”

Yu Pingchuan said, “You’re absolutely right! We’ll scold him later!”

Lu Huaiyu watched their interaction from the side and found it quite amusing.

Yu Pingchuan was well-respected in the industry. He seemed mild-tempered, but he was actually a straightforward and aloof man.

He was never interested in such mundane matters.

Many in the industry wanted to get in his good graces, but in the end, they were unmercifully rejected.

Due to this, even if his place of residence was known by many, no-one dared to visit him without permission.

Lu Huaiyu had known Yu Pingchuan for many years, yet he had never seen the old man treat anyone else the way he treated Ning Li.

He was so eager to cook for Ning Li and would not stop praising her. Even when Ning Li controlled his diet, he listened to her.

If this scene had been witnessed by those who were rejected by Yu Pingchuan, they would surely be shocked senseless.

Previously, Yu Pingchuan said that he and Ning Li had met in Lincheng.

The old man was always more generous and nice to children, but the way he treated Ning Li was completely different.

Lu Huaiyu smiled and said, “Mr. Yu, Ning Li’s words seem to be more effective than Mr. Wang Yan.”

Wang Yan was Yu Pingchuan’s only apprentice, and they were as close as father and son.

Even so, it seemed as if even Wang Yan might not be able to persuade Yu Pingchuan as well as Ning Li did.

Yu Pingchuan grunted. “What’s the point of mentioning him? How can he even compare to Lili?”

Lu Huaiyu’s eyes hovered over both of them for a while. He smiled and teased unintentionally.

“For those who didn’t know better, they would think that Ning Li is your new apprentice.”

Ning Li jumped a little.

Yu Pingchuan choked violently and waved his hands repeatedly.

“How could you think that?”

Lu Huaiyu saw how quick his denial was and gently raised an eyebrow.

“I noticed that Lili seems to be interested in art. Haven’t you ever considered her before?”

Yu Pingchuan choked for a moment.

“Have you seen Lili’s artwork?”

As he said that, he darted a glance at Ning Li.

“No, I haven’t.” Lu Huaiyu shook his head.

Yu Pingchuan breathed a sigh of relief.

Ning Li smiled and said, “Master Yu is very picky. It’s not that easy to become his apprentice.”

This was the truth.

Over the years, countless people had wanted Yu Pingchuan to be their teacher, but apart from Wang Yan, the old man had not accepted anyone else.

Lu Huaiyu’s phone lit up.

He looked at it and saw that it was a call from Gu Tinglan.

Since he was almost done eating, Lu Huaiyu answered the call.

“Hello?”

Gu Siyang’s sulky voice came through from the other end.

“Second Master Lu, what couldn’t we discuss before you blocked me?”

Lu Huaiyu's expression did not change as he looked at his watch.

"Alright, I'll go over soon."

Gu Siyang was puzzled. "No, wait...you..."

Beep...

Lu Huaiyu hung up the phone.

Gu Siyang was baffled. 'What the hell is going on?!'

Gu Tinglan took his phone back and said, "It seems like he's done with whatever he was occupied with, so you can make your way to wherever you agreed to meet him before. Take this phone call as your driver's fee."

As he said that, Gu Tinglan pushed open the car door and got off.

Gu Siyang was left confused and alone.

'Why was everyone in Yunzhou so difficult to deal with?!'

....

"Second Brother, are you leaving?" Ning Li asked.

Lu Huaiyu nodded.

Yu Pingchuan said, "Lili, please send Huaiyu off. I'll clear these up."

Although his house was old, it was fully equipped with a dishwasher, so it did not take much effort.

Ning Li agreed and got up to leave with Lu Huaiyu.

Lu Huaiyu took his jacket and draped it on his arm.

Ning Li followed him downstairs.

When they reached the stairs, Lu Huaiyu stood still and gave her a sideways glance.

“Alright, you can go back inside now. It’s quite cold outside.”

Ning Li then waved her hand obediently.

“See you later, Second Brother!”

Lu Huaiyu looked at her and suddenly lifted his hand to flick her forehead. “Good job with the cooking, but...”

He leaned down slightly and lowered his voice, but he could not hide his smile.

“Next time, you don’t have to go through so much trouble. I’ll like everything that you cook.”

Before Ning Li could react, he had already withdrawn his hand, turned around, and walked away.

The man’s tall and upright figure faded away.

Ning Li rubbed her forehead. Only then did she feel embarrassed.

When she had swapped her bowl of soup with Lu Huaiyu, she had not thought much of it. She had done it subconsciously.

She had thought she was being subtle enough, but Lu Huaiyu had still noticed.

Ning Li had not felt it at the time, but looking back now, it seemed like...

“Sister Li!”

Wei Songze’s voice suddenly rang out.

He kept looking back as he walked up the stairs.

“Sister Li, I think I saw your second brother?”

Chapter 185: You Did Well On The Exam

“You don’t have to question your eyes.”

Ning Li came back to her senses and suppressed those thoughts.

“It was him.”

Wei Songze froze for a moment and immediately understood.

“So...what happened just now was because of him...”

Ning Li did not say anything and turned to go upstairs.

“Since you’re here, go up and take a look.”

This meant that she acquiesced.

Wei Songze finally understood what was going on and grinned.

“I knew it! There aren’t many people who can make you become like this, Sister Li. Only this second brother of yours...”

Ning Li glared at him, which made him shut his mouth immediately.

‘Tsk... Wasn’t it the truth? So, why can’t I mention it then?’

He begrudgingly followed Ning Li upstairs and asked, “He just left, so I guess that means you had lunch together at Master Yu’s house?”

“Mm.”

“Yikes, did Master Yu personally cook? Are you guys feeling alright?”

Wei Songze was already giving her a sympathetic look as he asked this.

Ning Li said lightly, “I cooked.”

Wei Songze was shocked. “What?!”

‘If I’d known this, I would’ve come earlier!’

Ning Li glanced at him.

“Don’t make it seem as if you’ve tried my cooking before.”

“But I’ve smelled it!”

Wei Songze felt like crying.

As they spoke, the two of them arrived at the third floor.

Wei Songze could only comfort himself that even though he had missed Sister Li’s home cooked meal, at least he still got to see her paintings.

...

At 4:00 pm, Ning Li and Wei Songze left Yu Pingchuan’s house together.

Wei Songze looked at her several times and asked expectantly.

“Sister Li, are you really not considering selling this painting?”

Ning Li nodded.

To her, this painting was different.

Seeing her resolute attitude, Wei Songze knew that he could not persuade her otherwise. Thus, he could only sigh with regret.

“If that buyer sees this, he would surely like it very much. He’d probably be willing to pay several times the usual price.”

Ning Li's painting skills seemed to have improved a lot more than before. More importantly, Ning Li's overall standard had also improved significantly.

When Yu Pingchuan had seen her painting earlier, he had smiled so much that his eyes disappeared.

He also said that he was not going to exhibit it at the Yunzhou Painting Association. Instead, he would just bring it to the Capital.

Ning Li said, "Why don't you worry about how to improve your exam results instead?"

Speaking of this, Wei Songze was quite proud.

"Sister Li, you shouldn't look down on me. I got the highest score in my midterm exams for the past two years!"

"The midterm exam is the city's general exam, so the paper's pretty simple. That doesn't mean anything."

"Excuse me..."

Only then did Wei Songze remember that the person standing in front of him was the freak who had gotten 741 marks in the midterms.

'I shouldn't have mentioned it..."

...

Gu Siyang was quite bitter after being stood up by Second Master Lu.

After using Gu Tinglan's phone and confirming that Lu Huaiyu had indeed blocked his number, this bitterness reached its peak.

Gu Siyang was sitting in his car contemplating if he should still go to the appointment.

'If I go, it would be too humiliating, but if I don't go, it'll be a big loss...'

While he was contemplating this dilemma, he received a call from Lu Huaiyu.

After thinking about it, he decided to answer the call.

A minute later, Gu Siyang's expression went from being bitter to excited.

"Yes! I'll be right there!"

As he was pulling on his seat belt, he could not help but ask, "Second Master Lu, it's rare that you're willing to give up such a big profit! I only waited for a short while, yet you're being so generous. Thanks!"

Lu Huaiyu answered lazily with a smile, "It's worth it."

Gu Siyang was so touched that he wanted to cry.

'It turns out Second Master Lu thinks that my time is so valuable!'

"Second Master, what did you encounter today that made you so happy?"

Lu Huaiyu raised his eyebrows.

"Is it so obvious?"

“Yeah!”

Gu Siyang grinned. “What is it? Maybe I’ll get to experience it too?”

Lu Huaiyu smiled faintly and ruthlessly refused. “That might be a bit difficult.”

...

Monday.

The results of the physics competition were announced early in the morning. The atmosphere of Second High’s first class was tense.

After all, the seniors who had participated in this physics competition were all from the first class.

Several people gathered to discuss it.

“Is it out yet? When exactly are the results coming out?”

“I don’t know, but it’s definitely soon. The school will be notified first before making it public. I just saw Mr. Zhou on the phone in the office. I don’t know how it’ll turn out...”

“I just want second prize in the province. The third prize in the province will do too! At least it’ll give me some extra credits in the college entrance exam. Just a one-mark advantage in the college entrance exam is enough to get ahead of a thousand people!”

“Hey, only us rookies are nervous. Look at the geniuses Ning Li and Pei Song... They aren’t even flinching!”

He Xiaochen looked up from the paper and glanced at Ning Li, who was reading an extracurricular book that was two centimeters thick.

She had inadvertently glanced at it twice before, and saw that it was all in German with some colorful pictures of celestial planets and a large set of data.

Ning Li had mentioned that she had already read the Chinese translation before. Now, she was just cross-referencing and confirming some small details, so it was not very difficult.

When He Xiaochen heard that, she could only nod her head woodenly.

There was no way she was capable of reading that.

“Ning Li, you’re really not feeling nervous?” He Xiaochen asked in a small voice.

Ning Li turned the page without raising her head and answered, “The test is already over. What’s there to be nervous about?”

He Xiaochen looked at her with admiration. ‘Wow, so this is what a big shot is like!’

Ning Li finally turned to look at her. “What’s wrong?”

He Xiaochen patted her chest and took a deep breath.

“Nothing, I was just amazed. I’m used to it now!”

“Ning Li.” Geng Haifan suddenly appeared at the classroom door as he waved at Ning Li with a smile. “Please follow me to the office.”

The crowd went silent and immediately looked at Ning Li.

This scene could not be more obvious!

Ning Li must have won the prize! Looking at the situation, it was most likely the first prize too!

“Pei Song, you too.”

The smile on Geng Haifan’s face was very bright.

Everyone could already tell what was going on.

Ning Li put her book away, got up, and walked over.

Pei Song was a few steps behind her as he walked out of the classroom.

Many students secretly exchanged glances.

Although they had long guessed that this might be the outcome, it still gave them quite a shock to witness it for themselves.

“Hey, it looks like Second High will have two candidates in the national finals this time!”

Several people sighed.

Only five finalists were chosen in the province, and they had gotten two spots this time, which was a pretty amazing ratio.

Geng Haifan’s eyes were full of joy and appreciation as he looked at both stellar students.

However, he did not walk away immediately. Instead, he looked into the classroom again and swept a glance around, seemingly looking for someone.

“Where’s Ye Ci?”

Everyone was stunned.

‘Why is Mr. Geng looking for Ye Ci now?’

“Mr. Geng, are you looking for me?”

Ye Ci had just happened to come back from the washroom and froze when she saw Geng Haifan with Ning Li and Pei Song standing next to him.

Geng Haifan waved at her.

“Ye Ci, you did very well in the exam this time!”

Chapter 186: Congratulations

Ning Li and Pei Song were standing next to Geng Haifan.

These two were the best students in their competitive physics class.

Now, Geng Haifan was complimenting Ye Ci’s good exam results in front of both geniuses.

How great was that?

All the students in the classroom, and even Ye Ci herself froze for a moment.

She could not help but look over at Ning Li.

In fact, after leaving the examination room, Ye Ci had known that she would be able to achieve good results. However, this situation...

Geng Haifan said, "Come along to the office."

Ye Ci nodded, and the three students followed behind Geng Haifan.

After they were completely out of sight, the students in the first class went into a frenzy.

"What's going on? Ye Ci actually followed them to the office?"

"It makes sense for Ning Li and Pei Song to be called to the office, but why Ye Ci?"

Lin Zhouyang withdrew his gaze, upset by these words. He slapped the back of the boy's head.

"What else could it be? Didn't you hear Mr. Geng? Ye Ci did very well in the exam, that's why!"

As he said that, he had a smile of triumph on his face. He looked even happier than if he himself had scored well in the exam.

The boy who had been hit covered his head and turned back with a twisted face.

"But...Ye Ci and those two geniuses aren't even on the same level..."

This boy was also in the competitive physics class, so he understood the situation better than the rest.

Even without taking Ning Li and Pei Song into consideration, his results were usually better than Ye Ci's.

At best, she was an average student in that class.

The highest achievement she could potentially get was at provincial level.

‘But now...the teacher had called her as well?’

Lin Zhouyang could not bear to hear anyone insulting Ye Ci at this time.

“Ye Ci’s been working very hard lately, so it’s normal to score well in the exams, right? Besides, is she not allowed to overachieve a little?”

The competitive physics class was a tough class to get into, and winning a prize was not based on hard work alone.

In a competition among the top students, it came down to talent.

Lin Zhouyang knew this, so he had added that sentence at the end.

The boy who had been hit was speechless and could only seek Ren Qian’s help to back him up.

“Qianzi, do you think this competition relies on luck?”

Ren Qian was in the math competition, so he definitely knew more about this than Lin Zhouyang.

Lin Zhouyang frowned in dissatisfaction.

“She’s not relying on luck, okay? Can’t you see that she worked hard for this?”

Ren Qian thought about it for a while and smiled as he shrugged his shoulders. “Well, those who are on the same level as Ning Li and Brother Pei can’t just rely on luck. They must have some ability.”

....

The physics office was extraordinarily lively that day.

Not only the physics teachers were present. Several of the other school leaders, such as Sun Quan were also there.

As soon as Geng Haifan brought the students in, everyone in the office looked over at once.

Everyone had smiles on their faces and were clearly elated.

“You’re here!”

Ye Ci followed behind, still a bit stunned.

She had always been considered an honor student in Second High, so the teachers had always been nice to her.

However, today was the first time she had been looked upon with such great admiration.

Sun Quan was unprecedentedly warm.

“The three of you have really done us proud this time!”

His eyes swept from Ning Li and Pei Song, before finally landing on Ye Ci.

“Previously, I only knew that Ning Li and Pei Song were excellent students. I didn’t expect Ye Ci to be so outstanding as well! You got fifth place in the province!”

Ye Ci was instantly dumbfounded.

'I got...fifth in the whole province?'

Ye Ci thought that she had misheard and spoke hesitantly.

"Mr. Sun, did you just say that I'm...fifth in the province?"

Seeing her look of disbelief, Sun Quan smiled and said, "Yes, you did! We've already confirmed it, so there's no mistake."

In fact, they also understood Ye Ci's reaction. After all, when they had first heard the news, they had also been in doubt as to whether it had been another student with the same name.

That was because they had only thought that Ning Li and Pei Song were capable of getting this ranking and had not expected Ye Ci to give them such a big surprise.

Pei Song's eyes moved slightly and lingered on Ye Ci for a few seconds.

They had been in the same competitive physics class for such a long time, so they knew each other's standards after so many quizzes and tests.

He had also not expected Ye Ci to actually get this ranking.

Ye Ci was shocked at first, but she slowly recovered and started to feel an uncontrollable joy.

'Fifth in the province! What a great honor!'

During this period, she had been very worried about this physics competition and had not expected to achieve these results.

All the hard work and stress she had gone through were finally worth it!

The corners of her lips curled up to reveal an unexpected smile, as if she was also joyfully overwhelmed by this news.

"I...I didn't expect this either..."

Zhou Fei leaned back in his chair lazily and suddenly said, "Ye Ci, I didn't hear you mention anything after you came out of the examination room that day. It turns out that you managed to go through it so smoothly."

Ye Ci's heart skipped a beat and subconsciously looked at Zhou Fei, meeting his gaze.

Unlike the joy in the other teachers, Zhou Fei's handsome face had a smile, but his eyes were calm and even a little scrutinizing.

Ye Ci inexplicably felt a momentary guilt, but she then felt that there was no need to feel that way.

Of course she knew that the only reason she was able to get this grade was that a vast majority of the questions on that paper were the same as the ones in Ning Li's notebook.

Without that notebook, she probably would not have been able to do even half of that paper.

'But...so what? She hadn't stolen that notebook and she had done that paper all by herself. She definitely deserved this ranking in the province!'

That notebook had also been given to her by Ning Li.

Even if anyone thought something was wrong and wanted to investigate, the first one to be investigated should be Ning Li.

Thinking of this, the guilt Ye Ci felt vanished.

Anyway, the competition was over and the results were out. What belonged to her was hers to keep!

“Speaking of which, I have to thank Sister Ning Li...”

As she said that, she looked towards Ning Li and scrutinized her expression.

She had initially thought that Ning Li would be very unhappy about this. However, since the time they had entered the office, Ning Li’s expression had remained as calm and indifferent as ever. Ning Li had not even shown the slightest bit of surprise when she heard that Ye Ci had gotten fifth place in the province.

It was as if Ning Li did not care at all.

Ning Li noticed Ye Ci’s gaze and suddenly looked over at her.

Her eyes were bright and clear as if she could see through everything.

The corners of Ning Li’s lips curved up slightly. “Congratulations.”

Ye Ci did not feel the sincerity in Ning Li’s words.

Anyway, who would sincerely congratulate their opponent?

Perhaps Ning Li was just putting up a calm facade, even though her heart was bitter at this moment.

Thinking of this, Ye Ci smiled

Chapter 187: Ning Li

“Sister Ning Li must’ve done better in the exam, right?” Ye Ci asked.

There were many teachers in the office. All three of them had been called there, yet they had announced Ye Ci’s results first.

Ye Ci thought, ‘Perhaps Ning Li and Pei Song’s results aren’t as good as mine...’

“Yes,” Zhou Fei suddenly spoke.

At the mention of Ning Li, the smile on his face became much more genuine.

He enunciated word by word, “First. In. The. Province. Of course, there’s no better achievement than that!”

Ye Ci’s smile suddenly froze.

‘Ning Li got first in the province?!’

“Pei Song also did very well in the exam with only one point lower than Ning Li, so he’s ranked second in the province.”

When he mentioned his star pupils, Zhou Fei’s face was filled with pride and honor.

These outstanding students had been taught by him, so naturally, he was happy.

Sun Quan and the others were a little jealous.

Zhou Fei was extremely young and had only been a teacher at Second High for a short time, but he had proven to be a great teacher.

In the beginning, when they heard that he had been asked to lead the competitive physics class, many teachers had opposed it, especially a few of the experienced veteran teachers. They were all unimpressed.

However, the principal had insisted, so they had no choice but to comply.

As a result, Zhou Fei's class had produced the first, second, and fifth rankings in the province!

All from their school!

How many high schools were there in the province? How many students had participated in this competition?

They had actually taken up three out of the five slots.

Such a record would surely make them the envy of other schools.

This achievement alone would be enough for Second High and Zhou Fei to brag about for several years to come.

If not, the school would not be this excited.

Ye Ci's face flushed red.

Only now did she realize that the teachers had only announced her results first because they were the most surprised by it.

Ning Li and Pei Song's results in this physics competition were considered a "normal occurrence".

To the teachers, Ye Ci and the two geniuses were on completely different levels.

Ye Ci then recalled the way Ning Li had said “congratulations” earlier and felt even more irritated.

Ning Li got first place in the province, yet she had congratulated Ye Ci. Was she being sarcastic?

“That’s great! Mom and Dad will be very happy when they find out.”

Ye Ci had paused for a while to think before she finally said something.

Ning Li raised her eyebrows lightly.

It was hard to say whether Su Yuan and Ye Ming would be happy or not. In any case, all she could see was that Ye Ci was not very delighted.

Sun Quan and the others did not notice this subtle shift in mood.

To them, this was a big win for the school.

“Yes, remember to tell everyone in your family about this good news when you get home! Also, you guys will have to prepare for the national finals.” Geng Haifan reminded them.

These words finally pulled back Ye Ci’s thoughts.

She looked up in a daze.

“The national finals?”

“Yes.” Zhou Fei gently tapped the table with one finger. “I mentioned it to you guys before, remember? The students who get into the top five in the province will be the provincial representatives and will

participate in the national finals early March of next year. By that time, you won't just be representing Second High or Yunzhou, but the whole province."

At the mention of this, several of the teachers' faces turned serious.

Ye Ci vaguely felt that something was off, but she could not pinpoint it.

Zhou Fei continued, "The certificates for this provincial competition will be delivered to you soon, and the good news will officially be announced tomorrow. After that, you'll have to focus on the national competition. If you can win a prize in the national finals, it would basically be a guaranteed admission to the top colleges and universities."

This speech moved Ye Ci.

She wanted to get into Xijing University, but with her last midterm results, she was afraid that it would be a little difficult.

Placing fifth in the provincial competition earned her a few extra credits for the college entrance examination. Although this was good, it still could not guarantee her a spot in one of the best universities in the country.

'If I can do well at the national finals...'

Ye Ci nodded her head seriously and said, "Thank you, Mr. Zhou. We'll definitely work hard."

Zhou Fei gave her a look and nodded in response.

He was actually still skeptical about Ye Ci's achievements.

However, without evidence, he would not simply say anything.

“Also, during the winter holidays, you’ll need to set aside two weeks to attend the intensive training in the Capital. Everyone okay with that?”

Ning Li and Pei Song both nodded their heads. “No problem.”

They had both prepared for this a long time ago.

Ye Ci froze for a moment.

She had never thought that she could achieve this ranking, so she had never thought about the intensive training during the winter break.

Hearing what Zhou Fei said, she hurriedly replied, “No problem, Mr. Zhou.”

Zhou Fei nodded his head in satisfaction.

“Great! You guys can head back first. Adjust your mental state to prepare for the national finals. I’ll rearrange your study content and progress.”

“Thank you, Mr. Zhou.”

...

The three students left the office one after another.

Ye Ci sent a text to her parents before catching up to Ning Li.

“Sister Ning Li, I just told Mom and Dad the news. They’re both very happy and said that they will be hosting a celebration party this Saturday night. What do you think?”

The corners of Ning Li's lips seemed to be smiling.

'Isn't it a bit too late to ask for my opinion when you've already shared the news and the decision to have a party has already been made?'

However, Ning Li did not mind it.

"Sure."

Ye Ci blinked in surprise. "Then when the time comes...will you attend?"

The last time at Su Yuan's birthday party, it had been so unpleasant that they were all still traumatized.

Who knows if Ning Li would be willing to cooperate with this celebration party.

Ning Li glanced with a faint smile.

"Don't worry. It's a good thing, so of course, I'll be there."

Knowing the Ye family's style, they would host a big celebration to announce to the world that their daughter was ranked fifth in the province.

'That's great. The grander, the better.'

Seeing Ning Li's honest response, Ye Ci felt relieved.

However, upon thinking further, Ye Ci felt a slight feeling of disdain.

How could Ning Li not care about this?

With this achievement, Ning Li would get more attention from her mother as well, right?

Being the first in the province would also be a good debut for her at the party.

“Okay, then I’ll reply to them.” Ye Ci said as she took out her phone and fell behind.

Ning Li continued to walk towards the classroom.

By this time, classes had already begun at the senior building, so there was no one else in the corridor except them.

Suddenly, Pei Song, who had been walking in front of them, slowed down his pace and glanced sideways at Ning Li, who had just happened to catch up.

They had arrived at the back door of their classroom.

The front and back doors were closed, so the people in the classroom could not see what was happening in the corridor.

Pei Song stood still and looked at Ning Li.

The young man’s posture was lean and straight. His expression was as distant as ever, and the light in his eyes behind his thin lenses was cold and indistinct, like a fog that shrouded her.

He said, “Ning Li, congratulations.”

Chapter 188: What Candy Do You Want This Time?

Ning Li looked up and smiled. “Back at you.”

Pei Song had only gotten one point lower than her, which was also an excellent achievement.

A breeze blew the slightly messy hair on her forehead, which made her porcelain skin seem even more fair and delicate.

Her beautiful eyes were slightly curved and seemed to be filled with glimmering light.

Pei Song could almost hear the sound of his heart pounding.

It felt as if it was trying to leap out of his chest.

The more he tried to ignore it, the louder it became.

He lowered his eyes and turned to walk away.

His legs were long, so he moved far away from Ning Li in a few strides.

When he came to the front door of the classroom, he raised his hand and knocked on the door.

This period was English class.

Kong Rou knew where they had been, so without any question, she smiled and let them in.

Pei Song and Ning Li came in one after another and returned to their seats.

Soon, Ye Ci also returned to her seat.

As soon as these three appeared, they immediately attracted the attention of every student in the classroom.

He Xiaochen could not hide her curiosity and asked in a low voice.

“Ning Li, have the results come out? How was it?”

Ning Li nodded. “Not bad.”

This news would soon be made public, so there was no need to hide it.

He Xiaochen was excited. “Did you get first place? Did you make it to the national finals?”

“Yup,” Ning Li said.

“I knew it!”

He Xiaochen’s eyes glowed. “OMG! You really made it to the top five in the province! Holy sh*t...”

“First.”

Ning Li took out the book she had been reading earlier and flipped the page.

He Xiaochen gasped and thought, ‘Girl, can you not say such earth-shattering words with such a calm expression? This news is very exciting, ok!’

She had been deskmates with this genius for some time now. She thought that she had already gotten used to Ning Li’s amazing achievements and could accept anything calmly, but she was still too naive.

Ning Li was a real freak.

“Then what about Pei Song? Did he also...”

“Second.”

He Xiaochen glanced at Pei Song.

‘Sigh... God is always so unfair. How could they be blessed with such good looks and brains?!’

“Then, what about Ye Ci? Why did she follow you guys?”

Ning Li did not even raise her head when she said, “She got fifth.”

It took He Xiaochen quite a while to digest these words.

‘Ye Ci... Fifth in the province for the physics competition?! Was the examiner blind?! Ye Ci’s skills in physics are certainly not as good as mine. How did she get fifth place in the whole province?!’

He Xiaochen was puzzled and finally managed to say, “I didn’t know that she’s been hiding her intelligence all this while...”

The corners of Ning Li’s lips curved down lightly.

“Yeah...”

...

Before the official announcement of the results, the entire senior class of Yunzhou Second High had already heard this amazing news.

Ning Li, Pei Song, and Ye Ci had scored first, second, and fifth respectively in the provincial physics competition!

Ning Li and Pei Song's supernatural performances were already a recognized fact, so there was nothing anyone else could do except lament how insanely smart they were and look up to them.

However, what was going on with Ye Ci?

"Fifth in the province? Is Ye Ci even that good?"

"Did the school confirm it? They wouldn't make a mistake in this kind of thing, right?"

"I heard the students in the competitive physics class say that her results are usually just average in their tests. Sometimes when the teacher asked her to solve problems on the board, she seemed to be stuck. How can that kind of standard get fifth place in the whole province?"

"Maybe she's just low-key? Look at Ning Li. Rumor has it that she used to be in the lowest class in Lincheng, but she became a genius here, right? Maybe Ye Ci is the same."

"Ye Ci doesn't seem like that though. She's always trying to be the best. Why would she deliberately pretend not to learn?"

"Do you think she cheated?"

In the afternoon gym class, a few girls had gotten together to exchange gossip.

One of the girls had just finished speaking when the back of her head was suddenly hit by something.

She screamed in pain and turned around quickly.

"Who did that?!"

Not far ahead, Cheng Xiangxiang was holding a badminton racket in one hand and looked at them with a scowl on her face.

She had hit that girl with a shuttlecock.

Ye Ci was standing next to her.

The group of gossiping girls looked at each other and stopped talking.

Cheng Xiangxiang said in a cold voice, "What nonsense were you just talking about?"

Whether it was Cheng Xiangxiang or Ye Ci, the ordinary students could not afford to provoke them because of their family background.

Thus, the few girls quickly conceded.

"No, we didn't say anything."

Cheng Xiangxiang held the racket and was about to storm over.

"What, so you don't dare to admit what you said?"

Ye Ci pulled her back. "Xiangxiang, forget it... Let's go."

Cheng Xiangxiang was furious. "But, they falsely accused you!"

Ye Ci glanced at the girls. "My conscience is clear."

One of the girls stepped forward and said, “Ye Ci, we’re sorry... We didn’t mean that.”

Ye Ci’s face was expressionless as she pulled Cheng Xiangxiang away.

It would only be more humiliating if they fought in a place like this about this matter.

After walking out of the gym, Cheng Xiangxiang was still angry.

“Lil Ci, aren’t you angry? Why is it considered as talent when Ning Li scores well, but when you do, they think it’s fishy?”

Ye Ci shook her head, took a deep breath, and suppressed the rage in her heart.

She forced a smile and said, “There’s no need to care about what other people think.”

Originally, Ye Ci had been very happy about her results. She had not expected such conspiracies to circulate in school.

Once someone started talking about it, this kind of gossip would spread like wildfire, whether it was true or not.

Ye Ci had not expected that after doing so well in the exam this time, she would attract suspicion instead of receiving the envy and admiration of others.

Her initial good mood dissipated and her chest felt suffocated.

If not for the fact that there was still a crowd watching, she would not have held back her anger.

“Yeah, they’re all just jealous of you and can’t stand that you’re better than them!” Cheng Xiangxiang held Ye Ci’s arm and continued, “Don’t worry, the school already confirmed your results, so those girls can talk all they want! Anyway, you’re the one who got extra credit for the college entrance exam.”

As she said that, she looked back.

“By the way, you still have the national finals, right? When the time comes, come back with an award and slap it in their faces!”

At the mention of this, Ye Ci’s heart thumped.

Since she found out that she had to represent the province in the national finals, she felt like a boulder was weighing on her mind.

Cheng Xiangxiang’s words made her feel worse.

She pursed her lips before she gave a very faint smile. “Mm.”

...

Ning Li sat in the bleachers and watched as the field was buzzing with activity.

Suddenly, the phone in her pocket vibrated.

She took it out and looked at it. It was a message from Lu Huaiyu.

[What candy do you want this time?]

Chapter 189: Your Second Brother

Ning Li considered it for a while.

[Hazelnut praline chocolate.]

Lu Huaiyu quickly replied.

[Secretly playing with your phone in class again?]

Ning Li snorted.

[It's just P.E.]

Lu Huaiyu did not reply.

About half a minute later, just as Ning Li was about to put away her phone, he called her.

Ning Li looked around and saw about a dozen students sitting on the bleachers. They were all scattered and far away from her, so she answered the call.

"Hello, Second Brother?"

A lazy voice came through, "Just one chocolate for doing so well in the exam? You're too easily satisfied."

Ning Li kicked the bleachers lightly.

"I think it's fine."

There was nothing she wanted, so Lu Huaiyu's candy was enough for her.

"Do you have time this Saturday?"

“Probably not.”

“Do you have something to do?”

Lu Huaiyu was a bit surprised. Ning Li had just finished the provincial competition and achieved such good results, so she should be relatively free this week.

Ning Li replied and looked forward, just in time to see Cheng Xiangxiang and Ye Ci walking past the field not far from her.

It looked like they had just finished playing badminton.

A flash of contempt appeared on Cheng Xiangxiang’s face as she spoke. She then smiled faintly, but it looked more bitter rather than happy.

“The Ye family is having a celebration party on Saturday,” Ning Li said.

Lu Huaiyu could already guess what was going on when he heard this.

“For Ye Ci?”

Ning Li replied, “I’m going too.”

Lu Huaiyu smiled.

Knowing the Ye family’s style, they would certainly insist on Ning Li’s attendance.

After all, she was the Ye family’s adopted daughter on paper.

Ye Ming liked to keep up his reputation. Regardless of whether he accepted Ning Li as his own, the party had to be so impeccable that no one would be able to pick a fault.

However, this celebration was mainly for Ye Ci.

Even though Ning Li had gotten first place in the province, to the Ye family and many people in the upper society of Yunzhou, she still could not compare to Ye Ci, who had placed fifth in the province.

After all, Ye Ci was the legitimate daughter of the Ye family.

On the other hand, Ning Li would always be just an outsider.

Lu Huaiyu suddenly chuckled. "If you go, someone would be unhappy, right?"

Ye Ci was very competitive and arrogant. Since young, she had been coddled by her family.

Now that she was being pressured by Ning Li, she would not be happy.

The corners of Ning Li's lips curved up. "Maybe, but they seem quite sincere in inviting me."

'Especially Ye Ci.'

Ye Ci certainly did not want Ning Li to steal her limelight, but that was precisely why Ye Ci had to invite Ning Li.

She wanted Ning Li to know who the true host of the party was.

'So what if Ning Li is number one in the province?'

Ning Li's background had already determined that she would never be able to be on the same level as Ye Ci.

"So, you're going?" Lu Huaiyu had already guessed what Ning Li wanted to do and asked casually, "Will it be at the Jinsheng Hotel?"

Jinsheng Hotel was the property of the Ye family. Su Yuan's birthday party had also been held there previously.

Ning Li answered, "Mm, so I don't think I can hang out with you, Second Brother."

Lu Huaiyu laughed and said, "It's alright. You have fun then! I'll give you the chocolates the next time we meet."

Ning Li smiled lightly, "Okay."

"Ning Li!" He Xiaochen came up the stairs from the stands, speaking as she walked. "I've been looking for you all day! Pei Song and the others are playing basketball, do you want to..."

Ning Li turned to her and pointed at her phone.

Only then did He Xiaochen notice that Ning Li was on the phone, so she lowered her voice and put her hands together.

"Oops, I'm sorry! I didn't know that you were on the phone. Whose call is it that is better than watching our class monitor play the game..."

"A game?"

A cool and deep, nonchalant sounding male voice that could be heard.

He Xiaochen stopped talking abruptly and froze in place.

‘What kind of divine voice was that?!’

Ning Li coughed and said, “Second Brother, my deskmate is looking for me, so I’ll hang up now.”

Lu Huaiyu said, “Mm. Watching a basketball game sounds good. Go have fun.”

Ning Li looked at her phone. ‘Why did something sound...off?’

He Xiaochen was shocked.

“My Goddess Ning Li, was that your second brother?! ”

Right after she blurted it out, He Xiaochen immediately covered her mouth.

‘OMG! I got too excited and carelessly blurted out my secret nickname for Ning Li... This was so humiliating!’

Lu Huaiyu suddenly laughed.

Even though he did not say a word, his low chuckle still made the tips of Ning Li’s ears turn red.

Ning Li did not know if it was because He Xiaochen called her goddess or whether it was because of something else.

She was inexplicably embarrassed.

“My deskmate likes to joke around. Second Brother...”

“Is it the one you bought an ice cream for previously?”

Ning Li sighed in her heart.

Lu Huaiyu was too smart for his own good.

Whatever he wanted to know, he would definitely find out.

“Yeah, it’s her.”

He Xiaochen stood by the side, dumbfounded.

‘Wait a minute, these two celestial beings seem to be talking about me! Ice cream? Was it the one I ate last time?’

Lu Huaiyu spoke in a light tone, “Cool, this deskmate of yours is quite interesting.”

Since Ning Li was quiet, introverted and kept everything to herself, it was good for her to have more bubbly friends.

Ning Li breathed a sigh of relief.

“Then Second Brother, if there’s nothing else, I’ll hang up now.”

After Ning Li hung up, she put away her phone.

“OMG...” He Xiaochen suddenly crumbled.

Ning Li was startled and turned to see He Xiaochen's grieving face.

"Ahhhhhhhhh! That's your second brother?! He's so handsome and he even has such a sexy voice?!"

He Xiaochen wanted to pull her hair out from feeling so ashamed.

Initially, she had wanted to make a good impression on this handsome hunk, but now her dreams were shattered.

Ning Li said, "Don't worry, Second Brother doesn't care about these things..."

He Xiaochen grabbed her hand and asked, "Did you guys just talk about ice cream? How does your second brother even know about that?"

Ning Li honestly said, "I clicked on the post you shared that day and he happened to see it."

He Xiaochen thought, 'Thanks. I can die in peace now that the gods saw my meager post...'

How could she ever imagine that such godly people would see such earthly things?

'I don't deserve it!'

Ning Li gently patted her back. "Are you...okay?"

He Xiaochen held her chest and spoke with difficulty, "I'm fine... I can take it..."

Chapter 190: Work Harder

He Xiaochen swore that if Ning Li was on the phone in the future, she would never utter a single word before the call ended.

Ning Li coughed lightly and said comfortingly, "Second Brother said that you're quite interesting."

He Xiaochen's eyes teared up. "I think that clowns are quite interesting as well..."

Ning Li was speechless.

He Xiaochen was devastated.

How could the Goddess Ning Li ever understand the pain of mere mortals?

Ning Li looked towards the field.

"Didn't you say that Pei Song and the others are playing basketball? Want to go see?"

He Xiaochen had suffered a huge blow and had little interest in this now.

"There's no point now... I'd better go back and do my homework..."

'I must uphold my image of being a diligent student! As Ning Li's deskmate, how can I behave so playfully?'

Ning Li did not have much interest in watching the game either, so when she heard this, she did not insist on it.

"Then, I'll join you."

He Xiaochen finally felt some warmth from her tablemate.

"Oh, Ning Li... You're too nice!"

...

The two of them walked towards the school building.

Physical education class had not ended yet, but several students from the first class had already returned to the classroom.

Some of the more diligent and hardworking students would spend all their time reading and doing homework, especially since their PE teacher was not very strict. They would go back to the classroom on their own.

When Ning Li entered the classroom, she found that besides the few who usually stayed back in the classroom, Ye Ci was also sitting at her desk.

She had a physics book open on her table and seemed to be studying very hard.

He Xiaochen saw this and could not help but whisper.

“That’s a rare sight! Ye Ci actually came back early from PE class?”

PE class in Second High was held at the same time for the entire grade, so the students from the twelve classes could mingle around. The girls and boys were separated and allowed to enroll in different classes according to their interests.

There were boys and girls basketball, soccer, taekwondo, table tennis, badminton and so on.

Ye Ci was in the girls’ badminton class.

She was pretty and had a good figure, so when she played badminton, she often attracted the attention of many people.

Ye Ci obviously enjoyed the attention.

This was the first time she had left early.

It was no wonder that He Xiaochen was so surprised.

Ning Li's gaze fell on Ye Ci's book.

It was the classic collection of questions from the national physics competition.

He Xiaochen also saw it.

"Wow, the fifth in the province is truly a different breed. Only now does she review these questions."

After the news of Ye Ci's results had spread, there had been all kinds of skeptical voices going around in school.

Although there were only a handful of students in the competitive physics class, they were all the brightest from each class, so most of them were a little arrogant.

There was nothing they could say when Ning Li and Pei Song won first and second place, but what was going on with Ye Ci?

In the past two months of studying together, they were all clear on her standard.

How could she possibly have gotten fifth place in the whole province at her level?

Thus, everyone had their doubts.

Soon, this doubt spread across the school.

Their school was most sensitive about results, especially in this physics competition because those who won also got extra credits in the college entrance examination.

It was no wonder that everyone was so concerned about this.

Ning Li smiled faintly.

“The national finals will be held soon, so of course it’s necessary to prepare well.”

...

The next day, the results of the physics competition were officially announced.

Ning Li, Pei Song, and Ye Ci’s portraits were also posted on the school’s bulletin board.

Quite a few people had gathered around the board.

“First in the province... I gotta hand it to her, man. I hope Ning Li can bless me so I can pass in physics!”

“Is this their school ID photo? Has it been photoshopped? Ning Li’s just too pretty!”

“I saw her once before in gym class. She was 10 meters away from me, but she was so good-looking. This photo doesn’t even do her justice.”

“Really? These three people together are like the best-looking group in our school, don’t you think?”

“I agree about Ning Li and Pei Song, but Ye Ci’s still a little out of their league.”

Ye Ci was also very beautiful. Otherwise, she could not have been one of the most popular girls in school for so long.

However, there was always something to compare to.

Ye Ci's photo alone was indeed innocent and beautiful, but next to Ning Li, she seemed a little lackluster.

Beauty was always subjective.

"I don't care who looks good. I just wanna know how exactly Ye Ci got fifth place?"

"What do you care? The provincial competition is so strictly regulated, so of course, it was through her ability."

"Well, we'll know her real abilities after the national competition..."

....

Self-study class.

A girl who sat behind Ye Ci gently tapped her on the shoulder.

This seat had been empty since Sun Huihui had transferred to another school.

"Ye Ci, how do you solve this question? Will you teach me?"

The girl asked in a whisper as she handed over a piece of paper and pointed to a question on it.

Ye Ci turned back and looked at it. "Sure."

She took the paper and began to read the question, only to find that it was a physics energy conservation problem.

After reading it, Ye Ci looked a little glum because she did not know how to solve it.

"Let me do the math first."

She turned around with the paper and started to do the calculations on a piece of draft paper.

Five minutes later, she still could not figure it out.

The girl behind her could not help but ask, "Ye Ci?"

Ye Ci got a little anxious. "Almost done."

The girl then waited for another five minutes.

Seeing that Ye Ci had been writing, but delayed in writing the answer, the girl finally understood and asked tentatively, "Ye Ci, if you don't know how to solve it, I can ask the class monitor..."

"Which question is it that is so difficult?"

A boy next to them came over and took that piece of paper away.

He took a look at it, thought about it for about ten seconds, then quickly took a pen to calculate it.

Ye Ci did not have a good feeling about this.

That boy quickly solved the problem and handed the piece of paper over.

“Is this the answer?”

The girl nodded in surprise.

“How did you solve it?”

“It’s simple, just use these three formulas...”

The boy explained quickly and concisely.

“Ah, so that’s how it’s done...”

The girl thanked him, then looked at Ye Ci again. “It doesn’t seem that hard.”

The boy had also been involved in the physics competition and had won a provincial award before. He casually said, “Some of the questions in the competitive physics class are much more difficult than this.”

Ye Ci felt unsettled and gripped the pen until her knuckles turned white.

Of course, Ye Ci was aware of the rumors in school.

After a few days, she had inadvertently heard so many of these rumors.

However, no one had accused her of cheating to her face, so she could not exactly defend herself.

That would only make her look guilty and overly sensitive.

Thus, Ye Ci chose to turn a blind eye, but only she knew how suffocating it felt.

At this moment, she knew what her classmates thought of her in their hearts, but she could not say anything.

The girl behind her left.

Ye Ci hesitated for a while before taking her phone.