

Little Brat's 31

Chapter 31: Block Booking

Ning Li looked at her.

‘So generous, yet so familiar.’

In her past life, Ning Li was hospitalized for more than a month, so she had to miss Master Cheng’s birthday dinner.

After that, the family held another party for Ye Ci to celebrate her getting first place in the Huatsing Cup.

The celebratory party was supposed to be held right after the competition but since Ning Li was still in the hospital, Ye Ci asked Su Yuan and Ye Ming to delay the party. So other than celebrating her win, they could also celebrate Ning Li’s discharge from the hospital.

Ning Li was rather moved back then.

She had mistakenly thought that her new family welcomed her wholeheartedly.

However, what happened after that proved her wrong.

Back then, Ye Ci used the same excuse to lend Ning Li her dress.

Ye Ci had worn that particular dress before, but most importantly, the dress was custom-made for her.

It would not fit on another person.

While guests were mingling and cups went gaily round during the party, Cheng Xiangxiang looked at Ning Li with contempt and sneers.

“Don’t you know that the dress is custom-made? Lil Ci’s name is sewn on the belt! How can you wear it to a party?”

After that particular night, Ning Li became the joke of the entire Yunzhou.

“Did you hear? The step-child of the Ye Family didn’t even have a decent dress. She simply wore Ye Ci’s custom-made dress to the party!”

“I think she wants the dress to herself because it’s beautiful. Did she even look into the mirror though?”

“She’s just an uneducated girl from some rural area, what could she possibly know? The Ye Family has it the hardest for having to deal with the mess that is her.”

Even though Ye Ci highly recommended the dress to Ning Li, no one cared.

The way Ning Li was staring into Ye Ci’s eyes made the latter a little nervous.

“...S-Sister Ning Li? What’s wrong?”

Ning Li looked away and said calmly, “No thanks.”

Su Yuan frowned. She thought Ning Li did not understand the situation.

“Master Cheng’s birthday dinner is an official occasion, are you planning to attend in your jeans?”

“I don’t like wearing someone else’s dress,” Ning Li said.

Ye Ci's face froze at Ning Li's reply.

Ye Cheng almost bolted up from his chair. "My sister is trying to help you by lending you her dress! What's with your attitude?!"

Su Yuan signaled a glance to Ye Ming, who then quickly diverted the glance to Ye Cheng.

"It's none of your business. Sit down and have your dinner."

Ye Cheng grunted and then grumbled, "She's here to steal someone else's mother, why would she care about a dress?"

The atmosphere at the dining table fell into silence.

After a while, Ye Ming said with a heavy tone, "She's your mother's daughter and also your elder sister. Be mindful of your words."

Ye Cheng did not answer but the look on his face showed that he was not happy.

The tense atmosphere almost suffocated Su Yuan.

Ever since Ning Li came to her house, the days had not been peaceful for her!

Now, she could not even have dinner in peace.

Nevertheless, she suppressed her anger. "You only just came here, so we don't have time to prepare all those for you. Even if you want to buy a new dress now, you won't make it—"

Ning Li put down her chopsticks and stood up slowly.

“You don’t have to worry about that. I’ll settle it myself.”

Her words almost choked Su Yuan.

However, before Su Yuan could say a word, Ning Li had left the table and went upstairs.

Ye Ci puckered her lips in silence. “I don’t think Sister Ning Li has money for a new dress, so...”

Su Yuan bellowed, “Just let her be!”

Ye Cheng stuck his tongue out behind Ning Li’s back.

He really hoped Ning Li would be rejected at the entrance tomorrow.

...

Ning Li returned to her room and opened up a parcel that she had received.

Inside the parcel was a used silver laptop, which seemed a little heavy.

Before she came to Yunzhou, she had packed all her things and had them delivered here, but only a few were sent to the Ye Family.

She plugged the laptop in, switched it on, and opened up her mailbox.

There were two unread emails in her mailbox.

One was from G&S’s design department, which was sent three days ago, and another was from Lin Fengmian, which was sent a week ago.

She clicked on the first email.

“Dear Ning. Congratulations! Your design has made it into the final round after going through multiple rounds of judging. We will be having our Autumn-Winter Collection Show in the capital a month from now, and the final round of the competition will also be held then. We hereby sincerely invite you to the event.”

G&S was an international fashion design corporation. Their business included but was not limited to exquisite jewelry, bags, coats, and more.

From the ridiculous price to the classic and modern fashion collection, every piece of their product was sought after by socialites and celebrities alike.

After Ning Li had gotten into the accident in her past life, her hands were permanently damaged and it stopped her from painting ever since.

She had to go through intense rehabilitation to be able to move her hands again, and when she got better, she switched to designing jewelry and clothes.

She had a good eye for color, hence even though she could never hold a brush anymore, she was still talented in creating.

G&S Corporation recently held an international competition to select a fashion designer to design their next product line-up. Tens of thousands of designers, including her, joined to compete just for that one spot.

She knew she would make it to the final round because she did it before in her past life.

However, it was Ye Ci who appeared in the fashion show instead of her.

All the drafts and designs that she made became Ye Ci's work.

A quick thought later, she replied to the email and told G&S she would be there herself.

Then, she clicked on the second email.

It was a short message compared to the first one.

“Sister Li, I’m doing fine by myself here. You don’t need to worry about me. Send my regards to grandmother.”

Ning Li stared at the email for a while before she simply replied, “Okay.”

...

Ning Li went out early in the morning the next day.

She went to Yunzhou’s biggest mall.

The first and second floors of the mall were filled with shops that sold extravagant female apparel.

Buying a dress at the last minute was indeed a troublesome matter, but the shops would have new selections now and then, so finding a suitable one should not be that difficult.

The mall was grand and dazzling, and Ning Li in her plain T-shirt and jeans did not fit at all.

She walked into a shop.

The receptionist saw her but was not bothered.

Ning Li pointed at one of the dresses. "Hi, I would like to try this."

The receptionist gave her a fake smile. "I'm sorry, we're not open for business today."

Ning Li looked at the opened glass door.

If the shop was closed, why would the doors be opened?

The receptionist just could do better with her excuse if she did not want to serve Ning Li. The debut release occurred at N-ov3l-B(j)n.

"Oh? Isn't that Ning Li?"

Just then, Cheng Xiangxiang was walking past the entrance with one of her friends.

"Ning Li? The girl from the Ye Family?"

The girl beside Cheng Xiangxiang was intrigued when she heard the name.

"What is she doing here? Dress-shopping?"

Immediately thinking of the birthday dinner, Cheng Xiangxiang covered her mouth and chuckled.

"Grandfather's birthday dinner is tonight. I bet she came here shopping for the occasion. Look at her, she doesn't even have a proper dress for the occasion and she has to buy it herself."

Cheng Xiangxiang then walked into the shop with an arrogant look.

The receptionist put on a bright smile the moment Cheng Xiangxiang walked in.

“Ms. Cheng, what brings you here today?”

Cheng Xiangxiang pointed at the dress that Ning Li had pointed at earlier. “I want this one.”

The receptionist’s smile turned bitter.

“Uh... Ms. Cheng, I’m sorry, we’re not doing business today.”

Cheng Xiangxiang was stunned by the receptionist’s words.

Suddenly, Ning Li’s phone rang.

She took a glance at the caller ID before she answered the call. “Second Brother?”

Lu Huaiyu’s laid-back voice entered her ears.

“Are you free? Can you come to HG Building’s second floor?”

“I’m actually here... Is there anything?” Ning Li asked.

Lu Huaiyu paused before he said, “Hold on.”

Ning Li was confused by the answer.

A while later, someone came into the shop.

The receptionist immediately went up to him.

“Second Master Lu! You’re finally here! I thought you said you were coming with your lady friend to try out some clothes. Where is she?”

Chapter 32: About Him And Her

Lu Huaiyu walked into the shop and his gaze fell onto the girl who was standing in the middle of the shop.

The receptionist welcomed him with a flattering smile. “Second Master Lu...”

The moment Lu Huaiyu looked at that receptionist, his eyes turned cold.

The receptionist’s heart skipped a beat and what she was about to say were all stuck in her throat.

Lu Huaiyu moved his long legs and walked towards the girl she saw.

Ning Li looked up at him in his seductive eyes.

He lifted a brow and smiled. “You’re early.”

He thought that as a high school senior’s schedule would be packed and as such, Ning Li might want to sleep a little longer on a Saturday morning.

He had planned to call her a little later but she was already in the shop.

The receptionist’s smile froze on her face.

She shifted her eyes between Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li before she stopped at Ning Li and her eyes widened.

The girl with the T-shirt and jeans was the girl that Second Master Lu mentioned that he would be accompanying for dress-shopping?

Judging from her clothes, both the T-shirt and jeans combined was not even 300 RMB, and she looked like a high-schooler!

However, Second Master Lu seemed exceptionally caring toward her.

Since when did Yunzhou welcome another upper-class socialite?

As anxiety rose in the receptionist's heart, she nervously bent over and apologized.

"I'm sorry, miss. I didn't know you were the one we were waiting for. I apologize for my rude behavior earlier."

Ning Li looked at Lu Huaiyu and said, "I don't class today, so I thought I'd come earlier."

Lu Huaiyu nodded.

Today was Old Master Cheng's birthday dinner, and judging from the Ye Family's attitude, he did not think they would care about Ning Li, so he thought of bringing her shopping for a proper dress.

It turned out that because he did not tell her earlier, the girl was mistreated.

"Saw anything that caught your eyes?"

Ning Li shook her head.

The receptionist remained bent over.

Since both Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li did not talk to her, she dared not straighten herself. She had only been in that position for a while, yet she was already sweating.

Lu Huaiyu nodded.

“Let’s go to the next shop then.”

Ning Li thought the same and was about to walk out of the shop.

However, Lu Huaiyu reached out to her shoulder and grabbed her black bag off her back.

His movement felt natural and smooth.

Ning Li wanted to tell him that she had nothing in the bag, but when she saw his handsome side profile that looked as if he did not mind, she swallowed her words.

Cheng Xiangxiang was stunned by Lu Huaiyu’s action.

She had seen Lu Huaiyu before.

Her impression of him was a proud and somewhat lazy young master who came from the capital.

Since when did he care so much about someone? It was not just anyone, but Ning Li!

Right before the two of them left, Cheng Xiangxiang called out to him, “Second Master Lu!”

Only then did Lu Huaiyu turn around as though he had finally noticed Cheng Xiangxiang and her friend.

He looked incredibly handsome with his deep-set eyes, which looked like she was staring at the deepest part of the sea. It felt like she could easily fall for him, especially with his sharp eyes, keen gaze, and his blue blood presence, which made him unrivaled.

Cheng Xiangxiang and her friend were so stunned that they blushed unconsciously.

At the very next moment, Lu Huaiyu shifted his attention from them and looked at the receptionist.

“It seems like the owner of your shop misunderstood my message.”

The receptionist’s face turned pale.

A notice was sent from HQ last night at 8:00 p.m., telling all the shops in the mall that Second Master Lu would be visiting today with a girl for dress-shopping.

All shops were told to stop all walk-in sales and serve only Second Master Lu and his friend.

Everyone talked and gossiped about it for a while. They had no idea which lady was fortunate enough to win over Second Master Lu’s favor.

All the shop owners were nervous and eager to welcome Second Master Lu. They brought out all their best dresses for him and his friend to browse, hoping that they could win this competition and ultimately the lady friend’s favor.

As someone in the service industry, the receptionist should know who to appeal to but she screwed up without even knowing it.

Not only did he show Ning Li a poor attitude and showed no intentions of serving her, but she also allowed Cheng Xiangxiang and her friend inside the shop.

Even though Cheng Xiangxiang and her friend were just browsing and the receptionist said they were not doing walk-in sales for the day, Second Master Lu was angry with the uninvited presence and poor service.

The receptionist explained nervously, "It's not like that Second Master Lu, I..."

"Worker No.1573, I don't wish to see her in HG after 12:00 p.m. today. HG doesn't need someone with poor service and attitude."

Lu Huaiyu was talking through the phone and it scared the receptionist even more.

HG was a part of the Lu Family's property. Just Lu Huaiyu's words alone were enough to cease her career and ruin her future.

No luxury brand retail shops would want her now.

"And tell Feng Yao to hold a training session for everyone in management today at 3:00 p.m. If something like this happens again, he can kiss that bonus away this year."

Feng Yao was the general manager of HG.

After hanging up the phone, Lu Huaiyu signaled Ning Li with a slight move of his chin. "Let's go. I'll bring you to the next place."

Everyone else in the shop, other than Ning Li, was invisible to him.

As the door closed, the atmosphere in the grand and luxurious retail shop plunged to awkwardness and the three ladies were left alone in silence.

The receptionist's eyes were red and she looked dispirited.

The girl beside Cheng Xiangxiang whispered, “Xiangxiang, I thought you said your brother is close with Second Master Lu, but it seems like he’s not that... close with you?”

It was not just that, but Cheng Xiangxiang felt like a stranger in front of Lu Huaiyu.

Embarrassed, Cheng Xiangxiang said, “He’s my brother’s friend, okay! Do you know every one of your brother’s friends? I guess not!”

The girl puckered her lips in silence.

Lu Huaiyu was not just anyone, and if Cheng Xiangxiang could get closer to him, she would not end up embarrassed.

Lu Huaiyu was simply out of Cheng Xiangxiang’s league.

Cheng Xiangxiang felt terrible.

Judging from what she heard earlier, Lu Huaiyu had booked the entire second floor for Ning Li just to get her a dress.

What was going on?

She strode out of the shop and looked at the two of them, walking further away. Then, she took her phone out and called someone.

“Hello? Lil Ci? I have something to ask you.”

...

The second floor of the mall was usually lively on a Saturday, but because of Lu Huaiyu, it was quiet.

However, wherever Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li went, the shop owners and receptionists welcomed them passionately.

Lu Huaiyu brought Ning Li to the biggest retail shop on the second floor.

Ning Li saw the eye-catching logo at the front.

G&S.

‘Great. This is the most expensive shop here.’

She sighed and followed Lu Huaiyu inside.

The shop owner was a woman in her thirties. She looked beautiful with her delicate makeup on and felt kind. She also had a unique presence to her.

She welcomed them with a smile and served them herself.

“Second Master Lu, welcome. These are our newest collections. I believe they will fit Ms. Ning Li perfectly, especially this piece. Why don’t you give it a try, Ms. Ning Li?”

It was an off-the-shoulder, soft-gray tulle dress with a minimalistic design. The innermost lining of the dress had countless sequins that were sewn by hand, and with several layers of tulle, the dress resembled the mysterious starry sky.

Lu Huaiyu sized up the dress.

The receptionist of the shop brought over some coffee and pastries.

“Second Master Lu, Ms. Ning.”

Ning Li looked at the coffee and pastries, then shook her head. “He doesn’t drink this type of coffee.”

At the same time, Lu Huaiyu said, “The cutting won’t fit on her. It has to be trimmed a bit.”

The soft voice of the girl and the magnetic voice of the man blended into one.

When their voices subsided, the shop turned quiet.

Lu Huaiyu raised a brow and turned around.

Chapter 33: You Are Still So Young

The lady shop owner, Wen Qi, smiled.

“It seems like Second Master Lu and Ms. Ning are close enough to understand each other well.”

She had heard rumors about Ning Li’s identity.

Even though she did not know how Lu Huaiyu had gotten so close to the step-daughter of the Ye Family, the way Ning Li was able to change the lazy and frivolous Lu Huaiyu into someone caring showed how important she was to him.

The moment the words escaped Ning Li’s mouth, she realized that something was wrong.

For a moment there, she even felt Lu Huaiyu’s sharp gaze on her, so sharp that he could see through her.

Fortunately, Lu Huaiyu quickly shifted his attention away.

“Send this dress for alteration.”

The shop usually would not accept the customer’s request for alteration on a high-end luxury dress, but Lu Huaiyu was not just any customer.

Wen Qi smiled. “Let me take it from here.”

She had been in the luxury brand business for many years now, so she, too, had outstanding sewing skills.

“Ms. Ning, this way please.”

Ning Li followed Wen Qi to the dressing room.

Lu Huaiyu then sat on the couch at the corner.

The receptionist swapped the coffee for a cup of tea for him before she walked away nervously.

The other receptionists of the shop then got together and started to communicate through their curious gaze.

‘It has been some time since Second Master Lu came to Yunzhou but even Mr. Feng couldn’t get a meeting with him. Who’s this Ning Li girl that has changed Second Master Lu into a different person?’

‘Don’t talk to me about the girl. I’m just bedazzled by Second Master Lu’s looks!’

‘Speaking of looks, Ms. Ning Li is really beautiful too! Even the T-shirt and jeans didn’t dampen her beauty! I wonder how she’ll look like in our dress?’

‘Say, are you guys not curious why Second Master Lu knows Ms. Ning’s waist measurement that accurately?’

‘Watson! Bravo! You’ve solved the case!’

...

Feng Yao, the general manager, led several other executives into the retail shop once they heard Lu Huaiyu stopped by.

They had known since yesterday that Lu Huaiyu wanted to select a dress for a lady friend, so they ordered their workers to be mindful during his visit.

Who knew it would go wrong at the very first shop!

Feng Yao felt bitter at the situation.

When Feng Yao and the other executives arrived at the shop and saw Lu Huaiyu waiting quietly at the corner, they were surprised.

They had never seen Lu Huaiyu waiting for someone, and it made them wonder who the lady in the dressing room must be.

One of their workers just had to be rude to her.

“Second master.”

Feng Yao walked up to Lu Huaiyu and called him after taking a deep breath.

“I apologize for our mistake. I hope you can forgive us.”

Lu Huaiyu simply looked at them.

When Feng Yao noticed that Lu Huaiyu was not mad, he thought it was strange.

Lu Huaiyu was well-known for his hot-temper and his harsh methods of doing business.

Feng Yao thought Lu Huaiyu would never forgive someone who made such a huge mistake, but now it seemed like the Second Master was in a good mood.

“No more next time.”

Lu Huaiyu sounded succinct, calm, and not angry at all.

Feng Yao was overwhelmed by the mercy.

“Yes sir! We will enforce our management from now on! Thank you, Second Master! Thank you—”

Then, Feng Yao remembered it was Lu Huaiyu’s lady friend whom the receptionist had treated poorly, hence he looked around for the lady.

After working in the company for so many years, he knew Lu Huaiyu would never let this slip if the lady remained offended.

However, she was nowhere to be found.

A slight pause later, he carefully asked, “Second Master, I wonder where’s your lady friend—”

Swoosh!

The curtains of the dressing room were pulled.

Lu Huaiyu looked at the dressing room as though he had sensed something.

Under the shop's glamorous lighting stood a tall and slender figure.

Her soft and straight hair fell over her shoulder like the waterfall, and it had a layer of soft glow.

Her skin was as fair as porcelain and her eyes were as clear as crystal.

Her slender neck and distinct collarbone glowed as well.

The minimalistic design complimented the girl's slender figure as if she was a blooming flower, youthful but unaware of how alluring she was.

The dreamy, soft gray tulle dress was spread open and together with the sequins, the dress looked like the milky way. It was soft yet dazzling, as though all lights were on her.

She was the brightest star in the milky way.

The shop fell into instant silence.

Her beauty was the kind that could only be admired and not disturbed.

Wen Qi could not help but sigh.

She had already witnessed Ning Li's beauty inside the dressing room, so she reacted to it better than the others.

She praised softly, "The dress really suits Ms. Ning well."

The dress was already beautiful by itself, but it looked even more stunning on her.

Ning Li looked at Lu Huaiyu and said, "How do I look, Second Brother?"

She believed the dress suited her well too.

Lu Huaiyu did not answer. Instead, all he did was stare at her deeply.

Even Feng Yao and the other executives were stunned and impressed.

For a moment there, a realization popped up in Feng Yao's mind. 'No wonder Lu Huaiyu paid so much attention to her. She's beautiful!!'

He praised Ning Li as well., "Ms. Ning, you look great in the dress!"

Lu Huaiyu suddenly looked at the man. "Is HG closed or what? Why are you guys standing here?"

Feng Yao and the other executives trembled in shock when they heard Lu Huaiyu.

'Wait, isn't he accompanying Ms. Ning to try on the dress? He was fine a moment ago, what caused the sudden change?'

Feng Yao quicked said, "Uh, if there's nothing else, we'll be leaving. Please enjoy yourselves, Ms. Ning, Second Master."

Lu Huaiyu glanced at them and everyone left in a hurry.

Even after they left, the executives had no idea what just happened.

“Uh, Mr. Feng, we don’t see Second Master Lu a lot here. If it’s possible, please tell us more about him so that we won’t offend him without knowing.”

They had heard rumors that the Second Master was hard to deal with, and after experiencing it first-hand today, they knew it to be true.

All they did was stand there, but somehow, they had made the Second Master mad.

Feng Yao was at a loss for words as well.

He, too, had no idea what happened, but he knew one thing.

“Forget about the others. Remember, from now on, we must take good care of Ms. Ning.”

One of the executives was surprised.

“I heard she’s the stepdaughter of the Ye Family who had just come to Yunzhou not long ago. Who would’ve thought she was this close to the second master? Does it mean the Ye Family is trying to win his favor?”

Feng Yao waved his hands after a quick thought.

“Have you ever seen him so caring of someone?”

The other shook their heads.

“Good, then you guys know what you should do and how you should talk to the lady. Be mindful of your actions from now on.”

...

Lu Huaiyu stood up and walked to Ning Li.

Ning Li felt an unusual heat from his gaze as if his eyes were blistering hot, and it burned her.

Lu Huaiyu looked at her and said, "When's your birthday?"

Surprised, Ning Li said, "26th June."

Lu Huaiyu paused slightly. He seemed moved.

Ning Li asked curiously, "What's wrong?"

Lu Huaiyu smiled and tapped her head, mumbling, "You are still so young."

Chapter 34: What She Liked

His tap was soft yet firm, and it was quick.

His cedar fragrance lingered at her nose.

Ning Li felt that Lu Huaiyu's words were a little inappropriate but she could not pinpoint what.

Wen Qi looked at the two of them and said, "Second Master, Ms. Ning, are you going to take this dress?"

Lu Huaiyu looked at Ning Li.

Ning Li nodded.

Wen Qi then said, "We also have a pair of heels and a bag that goes together with the dress, do you want to take a look?"

Since Ning Li had decided to take the dress, it would be better for her to take a whole set.

So, she followed Wen Qi and browsed through all the recommendations.

After selecting everything, Ning Li went back into the dressing room and changed into her T-shirt and jeans.

Since the dress had to be altered, Ning Li returned to the VIP waiting section.

Before she could sit down, Lu Huaiyu stood up and waved at her.

"Give me a hand."

Ning Li was confused, but she went over anyway.

"What's wrong, Second Brother?"

Lu Huaiyu moved his long and slender legs and brought Ning Li to another section.

Seeing this next section that was lined up with rows of suits and formal shirts, Ning Li fell silent for a second.

She was sure Lu Huaiyu had a ton of suits and shirts for a formal dinner back at his house.

“Pick one.”

Lu Huaiyu signed by moving his chin.

Ning Li looked at where his eyes were on and realized he wanted to pick a tie.

He definitely did not lack ties, but since he wanted her to choose one, she did as she was told.

Ning Li asked for the color and design of his suit and shirt before she eventually chose a black tie.

Lu Huaiyu seemed to suit black a lot.

He took it and then slightly lifted his chin to tie the tie on himself.

The contour of his jawline from the side was perfect, and as he lifted his head, his sexy Adam’s apple was also showing.

His slender fingers moved around his neck, and the initially loose collar was now zipped tight by the black tie.

The laziness in him faded, and his deep, seductive eyes made him look somewhat more restrained.

Ning Li took two steps back.

Lu Huaiyu had his back to her but she could see him through the giant mirror in front of him. Every detail on his face was perfectly reflected in the mirror.

She had to give it to Lu Huaiyu for being such a gifted model. On top of his God-favored looks, his unique presence outshone everything around him.

He had what it took to attract countless socialites and ladies from the capital to court after him.

Lu Huaiyu lifted his eyes and caught the girl sizing him up through the mirror.

Suddenly, they locked eyes in the mirror, and he lifted his lips into a grin.

“How do I look?”

Ning Li was stunned for a moment before she nodded honestly.

“It looks good on you.”

Lu Huaiyu turned around and leaned forward toward her a little.

This time, they locked eyes face to face with the distance between them shortened in a split second.

As the two of them breathed, Ning Li could feel the endless warmth from his body and even see a tiny reflection of herself in his deep eyes.

The feeling of being squeezed in a tight space enveloped her again, and she could not help but hold her breath.

Deep down, she was not just an innocent 17-year-old, and with Lu Huaiyu’s posture, the temptation was lethal.

Lu Huaiyu’s lips then curled into a deep smile as she softly flicked her forehead.

“You have a good eye.”

She did not know whether he was referring to her choice of the tie or something else.

He straightened his body, hooked his finger on the tie, and pulled it off his collar.

He then gave the tie to Wen Qi and said, "Put them together."

"Will do, Second Master."

Wen Qi told the receptionists to pack the selected items separately.

"Second Master Lu, the total is 628,000 RMB."

Compared to a custom-made dress, a ready-made dress was a much lower price.

However, G&S's price would never let someone 'down'.

Just as Ning Li was about to pay for it, Lu Huaiyu stopped her.

He gave Wen Qi his card and stuffed Ning Li's card back into her purse.

Ning Li still insisted on paying.

"Second Brother, this is mine. I should pay for it myself."

Ning Li wondered why Lu Huaiyu wanted to pay for her dress.

Lu Huaiyu looked at her and then lowered his face to hers, where he teased her with a smile.

"I took a kid out shopping and if the kid had to pay with her pocket money, I'd become an after-meal joke if word got out."

Ning Li was stunned.

Wen Qi watched from the side and had the urge to laugh.

She started to wonder if Ms. Ning and Second Master Lu were really close, or was it all just a show?

Ning Li thought Lu Huaiyu's words were quite reasonable.

Besides, it would not be appropriate to argue with him in front of strangers.

"Then... Thank you, Second Brother."

Deep down, Ning Li sighed.

She was already in his debt and now with the dress, she owed him even more. She ought to repay his favor if she had the chance.

When Lu Huaiyu spoke next, his tone was even deeper, and the warmth of his breath burned as it brushed past her ears.

"Keep your pocket money for candies."

Ning Li was speechless.

Lu Huaiyu was really treating her like a little girl.

She looked up at him. "I haven't had a candy in years."

Lu Huaiyu smiled and decided to play along. "Okay okay, I'll buy you candies later."

Ning Li was at a loss for words.

However, Lu Huaiyu did not think there was anything wrong with what he said. He then looked at his watch and realized that it was already 11:00 a.m.

"Send everything to the Ye Family except for my tie."

Wen Qi smiled and nodded.

Ning Li originally planned to return home after buying her dress, but judging from Lu Huaiyu's order...

He looked into her eyes and said, "Let's have lunch and I'll send you home."

...

Ning Li followed Lu Huaiyu along to a Japanese restaurant that was on the top floor of the mall.

As a member-only establishment, the restaurant was decorated with elegant designs which gave it a peaceful and quiet atmosphere.

The two of them got into the VIP room.

Lu Huaiyu passed the menu to Ning Li.

"You can order whatever you fancy."

Just then, the phone he had put on the table buzzed.

He had a glance at the message and it was from Cheng Xiyue.

[I've just finished my meeting. Are you still in HG with Little Ning Li?]

[Old Qin said you're at his restaurant for lunch. Which room are you in? Send me the location and I'll drop by.]

Lu Huaiyu then replied.

[You can come two hours later. It's full and there's no seat for you.]

Having just grabbed his car keys, Cheng Xiyue was stunned.

[Lu Huaiyu, you better not push it! You're still using my member card!]

Lu Huaiyu replied calmly.

[Yeah, but the land is mine.]

Cheng Xiyue was speechless.

It was said that Cheng Xiyue slammed the door on his way out of the meeting room and it shocked all the workers in the company.

It was also said that Cheng Xiyue had called Old Master Cheng, proposing to buy out HG, but he got scolded by the old man instead.

It somehow became a little gossip among the workers.

“Tsk tsk. It’s not even the birthday dinner yet and the grandchildren are already fighting for his wealth. The rich just want to get richer and richer!”

...

Ning Li was clueless about the many things that had happened within that half a day.

She ordered a few dishes based on her preference and then passed the menu back.

“Second Brother, I’ve ordered a few things. Take a look and see what else you’d like to add on.”

Lu Huaiyu raised a brow at her choices.

Fugu sashimi.

He did not take raw stuff yet she ordered it.

“I heard you worked in a cafe before,” he suddenly asked.

Ning Li’s heart skipped a beat.

“Yeah.”

“Do you know how to make coffee?”

“...A little.”

Lu Huaiyu stared at her for a while, and Ning Li’s heart beat faster.

Just when she thought Lu Huaiyu would ask her about the coffee, what he said next defied her expectation.

“What’s your favorite?”

Chapter 35: Huaiyu?

“Mocha.”

Ning Li grabbed her cup and took a sip of tea.

Lu Huaiyu raised a curious brow.

Mocha tasted sweet but bitter at the same time, so he did not expect the girl to like such a mature flavor.

Ning Li glanced at him before quickly moving her eyes away.

Mocha was not actually her favorite. Instead, she liked espresso more, which was also Lu Huaiyu’s favorite.

However, that was not something she could reveal at this time.

“What color do you like?”

It only took Ning Li a second to answer. “Blue.”

“Your favorite subject?”

“Physics.”

“Favourite food?”

“Sichuan cuisine.”

“Who do you like?”

Ning Li turned silent.

She put her cup down and asked, “Second Brother, are you doing a background check on me?”

She was fine with the questions until the last one.

Lu Huaiyu chuckled. “So, you don’t have a person you like?”

“Of course not. Besides, you told me to not fall in love at my age, didn’t you?”

Lu Huaiyu raised his hands and rubbed his temples with a grin.

He looked happy but helpless at the same time.

He said, “If you have any questions that you’d like to ask me, ask away. I’ll answer them.”

Ning Li shook her head. “I don’t have any questions.”

It was just lunch. Why the barrage of questions?

Lu Huaiyu squinted his eyes.

Knock. Knock.

There were a few knocks on the door before the waiter came in and served the food.

Lu Huaiyu paused the topic for the time being.

It was Ning Li's first time having a meal with Lu Huaiyu alone.

He had a unique presence to him that made him seem cold and distant like he was an unreachable mountain peak.

However, the Lu Huaiyu now was laid back and relaxed.

His sharp gaze and keen eyes were gone, and what replaced it was patience and kindness.

If those folks from the capital were here and saw Lu Huaiyu in his current state, their jaws would fall on the floor.

"The papers I bought for you the other day, have started doing them?"

Lu Huaiyu picked up a piece of tuna sushi with his chopstick and asked.

Ning Li was quiet for a moment before she answered, "I've... done some of them."

"How is it? Is it difficult?"

"It's alright, I guess."

“You can come to me if you have any problems.”

It might have been years since Lu Huaiyu did any high-school mockup tests, but he believed he should be able to help the girl with some questions.

Ning Li reminded him, “Second Brother, we have teachers at school.”

Even if she ran into some problems, she could ask the teachers at school. Why would she trouble Lu Huaiyu instead?

The man’s time was gold, especially the time he spent in Yunzhou for rehabilitation. It would be best if he was not disturbed.

With that in mind, she hesitated slightly before asking, “And... Second Brother, you won’t be in Yunzhou for long right?”

She remembered that in her past life, Lu Huaiyu was only in Yunzhou for less than a year.

After a quick calculation, she assumed he should be back at the capital before the new year.

“It’s not yet decided.”

Lu Huaiyu looked at her and did a mental calculation of the time.

“I still have some matters to deal with here. I can leave when I’m done, so maybe after or before the new year.”

Ning Li frowned.

‘That long? Is it because of his condition? Is it not getting better?’

She wanted to ask these questions but realized not many knew about him rehabilitating in Yunzhou.

It would be inappropriate for her to ask.

Lu Huaiyu looked at the girl and captured every emotion on her face. He could not help but chuckle.

“You’re going back to the Ye Family in the afternoon?”

Ning Li nodded.

“Great, I’ll drive you.”

...

Two hours later, Ning Li saw a grudgeful-looking Cheng Xiyue.

Seeing that he was in a bad mood, Ning Li quickly recalled her past memories for a hint.

In her past life, Old Master Cheng’s birthday dinner was a success and everything went smoothly.

If such, then what caused Cheng Xiyue’s bad mood?

Cheng Xiyue saw Ning Li and Lu Huaiyu walking towards him together but he did not want to say a word.

It was until Ning Li got into the car did he ask begrudgingly, “Little Ning Li, how was lunch? Is the Japanese cuisine up to your expectations?”

Ning Li nodded. "It was not bad."

Her words made his mood worse.

"Was... it full?"

A quick thought later, Ning Li said, "Not at all."

Cheng Xiyue's urge to buyout HG grew stronger after he heard the answer.

He glared at Lu Huaiyu but before he could say a word, Lu Huaiyu's phone rang.

Lu Huaiyu took a glance at the phone and hung up.

When Cheng Xiyue caught a glimpse at the caller ID and knew it was Dr. Gu, his bad mood faded slightly.

If Dr. Gu was calling at this hour, it must be about Lu Huaiyu's condition.

However, Ning Li was in the backseat.

Lu Huaiyu leaned back on the passenger seat with his usual coolness, as though the phone call was not important.

Cheng Xiyue, on the other hand, dared not ignore the fact that Dr. Gu called.

A quick thought later, he said, "Little Ning Li, I suddenly thought of something that I must settle at home. It's quite urgent..."

Ning Li was surprised. "It's fine. I'll go back on my own—"

“Since you’re coming to our mansion for the birthday dinner, why don’t you come with me?”

Cheng Xiyue made an impromptu decision.

Ning Li believed it was a little inappropriate but Lu Huaiyu said, “Sure. I’ll tell the guys to deliver her things to Chengs’ residence instead.”

...

Ye Family.

Ye Ci was sitting in her room, staring blankly at her phone on the table. Her mind was in a mess.

Cheng Xiangxiang had just given her a call to ask if she knew about Lu Huaiyu accompanying Ning Li dress-shopping at HG.

Of course she had no idea!

She was not at all interested when Ning Li left in the morning. She assumed Ning Li would not be able to buy anything decent given her background.

She was sure Ning Li would come back crawling to her, asking for a decent dress to wear.

However, she did not expect Ning Li to go shopping with Lu Huaiyu!

Judging from Cheng Xiangxiang’s tone, Lu Huaiyu even bought out the entire floor for her!

Ye Ci thought about it and realized that Lu Huaiyu showed extra care to Ning Li.

If they were not close, why would he do so much for her?

“Lil Ci, are you done?”

Su Yuan’s voice came from the door.

Ye Ci took a deep breath to compose herself before she got up to answer the door.

Su Yuan came in and saw several dresses laid out on her bed. Curious, she asked, “You haven’t decided yet?”

Old Master Cheng’s birthday dinner would be grand and all of Yunzhou’s upper-class folks would be there, so they could not afford to make any mistakes.

She had chosen the dress and the accessories for Ye Ci long before this just so her daughter could surprise everyone.

It was almost time for dinner and Ye Ci was still in her casual clothes.

Ye Ci forced a smile. “I was thinking since Sister Ning Li isn’t back yet, so I should wait...”

Su Yuan reacted strangely to Ye Ci’s words.

“Cheng Xiyue called and said Ye Ci had already left for Chengs’ residence. He told us to not worry about her.”

Ye Ci was pissed but she still forced a smile.

“I’m glad. I didn’t know Brother Xiyue cared so much about Sister Ning Li.”

Su Yuan found it irritating.

It was Ning Li's first appearance at such an occasion as a part of the Ye Family, yet she went ahead with Cheng Xiyue. How could she humiliate her family like that?

"Whatever. I don't care."

...

Ning Li arrived at the Chengs' residence.

Cheng Xiyue had just parked the car on the porch, and before Ning Li could get down, she saw a graceful woman walking towards them.

She walked to the car and bent over slightly to knock on the car window.

Ning Li could only see half of her made-up beautiful face through the window.

A sweet and gentle voice rang out.

"Huaiyu?"

Chapter 36: I Want To Meet Her

Lu Huaiyu was initially taking a nap. However, when he heard someone calling him, he opened his eyes which flickered with coldness.

Cheng Xiyue chuckled while watching from beside.

“What brings you here, Miss Superstar?”

Upon hearing the name, Ning Li immediately knew who the lady was.

It was Xu Yini, the Young Lady of the Xu family from the capital.

As the Xu family’s only daughter, Xu Yini was spoiled rotten.

Xu Yini looked innocent and gorgeous, and she came from a wealthy family too. When she came back from studying abroad at 20 years old, she chose not to inherit her family business and instead, went into the entertainment industry.

Last summer, Xu Yini starred in her first-ever teen movie, *My Second Love Letter*, and it immediately went viral once the movie premiered. It was the highest-grossing film at the box office.

Just like that, Xu Yini became the nation’s first lover overnight.

No wonder Cheng Xiyue teased her.

Xu Yini winked cheekily at them.

“What’s the matter, Brother Xiyue? You don’t want me to be here?”

Then, Cheng Xiyue got out of his car and raised his hands to make a surrendering gesture.

“I dare not do so. I heard that you’re swamped with work and don’t even have time to sleep. That’s why I asked you. If you fall sick from exhaustion, Uncle Xu would be heartbroken, for sure.”

Coincidentally, Lu Huaiyu got out of the car as well.

Xu Yini shifted her gaze to Lu Huaiyu, and her eyes lit up.

She pressed her lips together into a smile.

“It’s not as bad as you say. Anyhow, it’s Old Master Cheng’s 60th birthday. I need to be here, right?”

The Xu family, Lu family, and Cheng family were family friends. However, Old Master Cheng had been enjoying his life in Yunzhou these past few years, and since he rarely returned to the capital, his interaction with the Xu family had lessened.

Cheng Xiyue glanced at Lu Huaiyu, who was standing beside him.

Young Lady Xu was clearly here because of Lu Huaiyu.

Xu Yini slightly walked up to Lu Huaiyu.

“Huaiyu, long time no see.”

She had brought forward finishing her studies and returning to the capital because she feared that Lu Huaiyu would fancy the ladies in the capital. Who would have thought that Lu Huaiyu would come to Yunzhou?

Xu Yini was tied up with work recently, yet she forcefully rejected 2 advertisements to be here today, just so that she could meet Lu Huaiyu.

Lu Huaiyu nodded and returned to his usual unfriendly and cold behavior.

“Send my regards to Uncle Xu.”

Xu Yini bit her lips.

Xu Yini had sacrificed so much to be there just for Lu Huaiyu to reply with one sentence. He did not even ask how she was doing.

“Huaiyu, I—”

Just as she was about to speak again, she saw Lu Huaiyu walk to the backseat and open the door.

Xu Yini was stunned.

There was somebody else in Cheng Xiyue’s car?

A young lady got out of the car.

The lady looked like she was only about 17 or 18 years old. She was dressed simply with a ponytail, and she was carrying a black backpack. She seemed like a high schooler.

However, her appearance could not hide her beauty.

She could attract countless attention just by standing there.

Xu Yini stopped and looked at Lu Huaiyu to see a rare hint of patience between his eyes.

Lu Huaiyu took the initiative to open a door for someone?

A strong feeling of crisis arose in Xu Yini’s heart.

A glint flashed across her eyes as she asked with a smile, “Who’s this?”

Cheng Xiyue lifted his chin and answered her, "Let me introduce you. This is Little Ning Li, and this is Xu Yini. Ning Li, you should recognize her, right?"

Ning Li glanced at Xu Yini before her.

The well-tailored white mermaid skirt outlined her curves perfectly. With her waist-length silky smooth dark hair down and light make-up on her face, she looked innocent yet seductive, which made her look remarkable.

"Hi, Miss Xu."

Xu Yini was even more surprised.

She had known Cheng Xiyue for many years, so she understood his behavior.

However, Cheng Xiyue rarely expressed such intimacy, even if the lady was her cousin, Cheng Xiangxiang.

Who was this Ning Li? Where did she come from?

Since Xu Yini came from an eminent family in the capital, she had no idea about the situation in Yunzhou.

Nevertheless, Ning Li's name sounded familiar to her...

"Ning Li..."

Suddenly, Xu Yini's expression shifted.

Was she the main character in the school violence that caused a stir on the internet a few days ago?

“You—”

“They’ve already sent your stuff to the guest room. Let me bring you there.”

Lu Huaiyu interrupted her.

The Chengs’ residence was a standalone villa, and because they had plenty of guests today as well, it would be best for Lu Huaiyu to accompany Ning Li.

Ning Li glanced at Lu Huaiyu.

Cheng Xiyue said that he had something urgent to attend to after Lu Huaiyu hung up his call. Hence, Ning Li figured that Cheng Xiyue’s reason to return home was just an excuse. The real reason they came back was because of Lu Huaiyu.

“Thank you, Second Brother.”

After that, Lu Huaiyu brought Ning Li into the villa.

The smile on Xu Yini’s face stiffened as she watched the two of them leave.

From the very beginning, Lu Huaiyu had never looked Xu Yini in the eye before.

Besides, just now—

“Did she call Huaiyu... Second Brother?”

Cheng Xiyue simply smiled.

“Little Ning Li is just 17 years old. Of course, she has to call him brother, right?”

However, Xu Yini kept quiet.

That was not what she meant at all.

“That Ning Li, she’s a Second High student?”

Cheng Xiyue raised his brows and looked at Xu Yini.

“That’s right.”

Only then did Xu Yini breathe a sigh of relief.

Indeed, she was the girl.

Xu Yini had nothing to worry about then.

By any measure, Lu Huaiyu would not fancy a girl who was from a humble family and had such a temper.

...

Ning Li tailed behind Lu Huaiyu as they walked to the guest room on the third floor.

There was still some time left before the banquet started, so not many guests were there yet.

Along the way, the two of them did not bump into a lot of people.

When they entered the guest room, Lu Huaiyu’s phone buzzed again.

Once again, he rejected the call.

Ning Li turned to look at him. "Second Brother, you should go if it's urgent. I can handle it from here."

Upon realizing that Ning Li was relatively calm and was not at all nervous even though she was here for the first time, he was a little relieved.

"You should get some rest first. Come to me if there's anything."

"I will."

After that, Lu Huaiyu took a glance at his watch.

"The banquet is starting at 6:00 p.m. I'll come and get you later."

Ning Li wanted to tell him that since she was there already, he did not need to come and get her. However, when their eyes met, Ning Li could not help but nod at Lu Huaiyu.

Only then did Lu Huaiyu leave her.

...

Gu Tinglan was waiting for someone in the living room on the second floor.

When the door was pushed open, he put down the book and lifted his head to look.

Walking in the room was Lu Huaiyu.

Gu Tinglan observed Lu Huaiyu's expression. Once he had confirmed that Lu Huaiyu's condition was better than he expected, he relaxed a little.

"Second Master Lu, is there something urgent?"

Lu Huaiyu acknowledged him with an 'mm'. The debut release occurred at N-ov3l-B(j)n.

"Something very urgent."

Gu Tinglan was very curious.

Lu Huaiyu had not slept, yet his mental condition seemed stable.

It was quite unusual.

When Gu Tinglan recalled the news that came from HG, he leaned forward and asked him with a smile, "Second Master Lu, did you bring the young lady here? Is there any chance that I can meet her later?"

He really wanted to know what kind of person could have such a massive impact on Lu Huaiyu's illness.

Lu Huaiyu lifted his eyes and stared at him.

For some reason, Gu Tinglan felt as if his gaze carried a warning.

However, Lu Huaiyu then shut his eyes.

"We'll see."

...

Ning Li went to the bedside. Just as she was about to arrange her dress, she realized that a box had fallen to the ground.

It was Lu Huaiyu's tie, which was sent together with her stuff.

Ning Li pondered for a moment before she picked it up, thinking that she would pass it to Lu Huaiyu.

The moment after she pushed open the door and just before she could step out of the room, Ning Li heard voices of people mocking her from outside her room. "She's just a burden that no one wants. Does she really think that she's a Young Lady from a distinguished family?!"

Chapter 37: The Lady Beside Him

Ning Li stopped.

Her room was in the back part of the corridor, so the ladies must have gathered there to gossip about something.

"You're right! I heard that she was previously in Lincheng, where she always skipped school and involved herself in fights. Now that she's staying with the Ye family, she must have thought that she has changed from rags to riches."

"Her father was a murderer! Have you seen the video that's on the internet? She really looked like she was going to push that person down from the building. It scared the hell out of me!"

"I don't understand why Second High didn't expel her. Aren't they keeping a time bomb by their side? I'm really impressed by how kind Uncle Ye and Lil Ci are."

Suddenly, Ye Ci's soft and gentle voice rang out. "There must be a reason for that incident. Big Sister Ning Li is quite a nice person."

“Lil Ci, are you threatened by her? It’s not worth defending such a person. Oh yeah, I didn’t see her together with you and your family. Is she not attending the banquet?”

The lady, who was speaking, snorted.

“Ning Li must know that she’s a disgrace, so she purposely excused herself from the banquet, didn’t she? I heard that when she was in Lincheng back then, she had to work to earn a living. I’m afraid someone like that won’t even have a gown for tonight.”

The ladies snickered when they heard her words.

However, when Ye Ci heard those words, the smile on her face faded.

Then, what Cheng Xiangxiang told her on their call resurfaced in her mind.

Ye Ci simply smiled at them and provided no explicit answer.

“Big Sister Ning Li has something urgent to attend to last minute, so she didn’t come with us, and she—”

Click.

The door behind the ladies was suddenly open.

Ning Li stepped out of the guest room.

The ladies, who were gossiping, were so terrified that they quickly turned their heads to look.

Upon realizing it was Ning Li, contempt and ridicule immediately appeared on their faces.

Almost everyone recognized Ning Li now because of the incident on the internet that had caused an uproar.

One of the ladies lifted her chin and sized up Ning Li.

When she saw Ning Li's bare but stunning face, she got envious. Nonetheless, when she realized that Ning Li was wearing jeans and a pair of white sneakers, she felt better.

"So, you're Ning Li? Didn't anyone ever teach you that it's rude to eavesdrop?"

Ning Li glanced at the lady and her lips curled into a cold smile.

"Didn't anyone ever teach you that talking behind someone's back is not something to be proud of either?"

That simple sentence almost choked the lady to death.

"You!"

Suddenly, that lady took a look around her surroundings. As if she had thought of something, she raised her voice at Ning Li.

"Who knows what you're doing here!? This is the Chengs' residence. Do you think you can just walk in here?"

Ordinary guests were prohibited from entering the Cheng family's guest rooms on the third floor.

The way they saw it, she must have sneaked in. After all, she did not come in with the Ye family, yet here she was.

The lady's gaze fell onto the box that was in Ning Li's hand.

“Are you trying to steal something?”

Ning Li’s expression turned cold.

“It’s best to think before you speak.”

If the lady said that Ning Li was trying to steal something in Chengs’ residence, did she mean that their security guards were useless?

However, the lady thought Ning Li was embarrassed and frustrated, so she sneered.

“I don’t think you can afford to buy that brand even if you worked for 10 years. If you didn’t steal it, then you bought it?”

When the lady finished her question, a clear burst of laughter came from behind them.

“Sister Li, there you are!”

The ladies turned their heads to look and saw a thin, tall figure walking toward them.

The man looked princely and playful.

His short grey hair was exceptionally eye-catching, and his brown eyes were gazing at all of them. He exuded an arrogant aura that could not be concealed.

It was Ji Shu.

Today was a rare occasion to see him in a formal suit, yet he still carried out a wild and playful vibe.

The ladies were stunned when they saw him.

The Ji family was very successful in their business, and since Ji Shu was the only son they had, they spoiled him. That was how it was to be born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Ji Shu strode toward Ning Li with one hand in his pocket and a playful smile on his face.

“Brother Xiyue said that you’re on the third floor, so I came to see you. What happened here? Who the hell made Sister Ning Li unhappy?”

While Ji Shu was speaking, he widened his eyes as he stared at the ladies.

Aside from Ye Ci, the rest of them were in a daze.

Ning Li knew Ji Shu? Moreover, it seemed like she was very close to Young Master Cheng too.

Ning Li then said softly, “Nothing much. They think I’ve stolen something.”

Ji Shu then swept his eyes downward.

It was definitely an expensive brand, but... was she short of money?

“She must be blind, right?”

Ji Shu sneered.

“How would Brother Xiyue react if he finds out that a guest he brought here was accused of stealing?”

At that, the expressions of the ladies suddenly became interesting.

Ning Li was... brought here by Master Cheng himself?

If such, then they were doomed for doing what they just did.

Ye Ci took a step forward and uttered, “Big Sister Ning Li, Ji Shu, you’ve misunderstood us...”

However, Ji Shu interrupted her. “Sister Li, it’s almost time.”

Ning Li sent a message to Lu Huaiyu.

[Which room are you in? I would like to pass you your tie.]

After a second, he replied to Ning Li’s message.

[Maybe later. I’ve got something urgent to settle now. Why don’t you hold on to it first? I’ll get it from you later.]

Ning Li locked her phone before she glanced at Ji Shu and said, “Let me get ready.”

...

The lobby of the Chengs’ residence.

All of Yunzhou’s famous and well-known individuals were gathered in the lobby. They were all in their best attire, toasting and enjoying themselves.

The guests clustered together in the lobby. It was lively and boisterous.

Cheng Xiangxiang and Ye Ci stood together, their eyes locked in one particular direction with their heads lifted.

“Look, that’s Xu Yini. I heard that she’s Second Master Lu’s childhood friend.”

Coming back to her senses, Ye Ci looked at Xu Yini and frowned.

As a matter of fact, most of the attendees were looking at Xu Yini as well.

Xu Yini looked innocent and beautiful, and she came from a famous family too. She was indeed the focus of the entire banquet.

“Yini, tonight’s opening dance is yours.”

Cheng Xiyue’s father, Cheng Baiqing, said to her with a smile on his face.

Xu Yini withdrew her gaze and smiled back at him faintly.

“I’m afraid not. I’m terrible at dancing.”

Cheng Baiqing then laughed out loud. “I know Cheng Xiyue can’t get you to dance! It’s the brat from the Lu family—”

Xu Yini’s face blushed a little.

Cheng Xiyue glanced at his father, speechless.

However, Cheng Baiqing raised his hand and asked his son, “Go get Second Master Lu. See why he’s taking so long. A lot of guests are waiting for him—”

Suddenly, the crowd fell silent.

As if the crowd had noticed something, they shifted their gaze in one direction.

A young lady appeared under the bright lights.

The off-the-shoulder tulle gown not only outlined her thin and delicate waist but accentuated her long and fair neck, as well as her bright collarbones.

Her long hair was let down and curly at the ends.

The lady was drop-dead gorgeous.

Beside her stood a rather young man.

The young man looked cold and distant.

Lu Huaiyu raised his brows a little when he realized that everyone's gaze was on Ning Li.

He tilted his head and glanced at Ning Li. Then, he stretched out his hand and chuckled. "Did I forget to tell you that I don't have a female companion today?"

Chapter 38: I'll Guide You

The man's soft laughter rang beside her ears, and she could feel a mix of his warm breath and the refreshing fragrance of white pine. It felt as if he was far yet within reach.

Ning Li lifted her eyes only to see Lu Huaiyu looking at her with extreme patience.

On such an occasion and with Lu Huaiyu's status, he definitely needed a suitable female companion.

Who would have thought that Lu Huaiyu would make such a mistake?

Ning Li paused for a moment before she finally reached out her hand and took Lu Huaiyu's arm.

Again, Lu Huaiyu lowered his eyes to look at Ning Li.

Her arms were thin but smooth as silk. Under the dazzling lights, she seemed like she was glowing.

Lu Huaiyu's pure black suit perfectly complemented Ning Li's fair complexion. After all, black and white may be simple colors but they created the most impact.

Lu Huaiyu shifted his eyes a little to conceal the indifference within them. Then, he parted his red lips a little and whispered in a voice that only both of them could hear.

"Walk with me."

...

Everyone in the lobby fixed their eyes on both of them who were walking shoulder to shoulder.

The two of them were so flawless that when they stood side by side, it shocked everybody else.

The young lady's gown was glittering, and as she moved, the tulle fluttered and formed tiny arcs as if she was walking on the milky way.

The young man next to her was tall and slender, and he had a cold yet aristocratic presence to him. The black suit he donned was like a night sky that embraced the lady and the galaxy.

It was very rare to see him in a white shirt tonight, and on his black tie was a lapel pin that shone so bright, it was as if it was resonating with the star.

They matched perfectly, almost like a marvelous painting.

The bright and grand lobby suddenly lost all its colors.

The crowd was astounded as well.

Most of them were acquainted with Lu Huaiyu, and even if they had not met before, they had heard of his reputation. However, his noble aura was much more distinctive in person than the rumors.

However, the lady beside him—

“Who’s this lady? She’s so beautiful, she must be somebody, right?”

“The man next to her is the Second Master of the Lu family from the capital. If she can show up with him, she must come from a prominent family too!”

“She’s drop-dead gorgeous, and she has a gracious aura. Let’s find out where she’s from.”

With amazement and admiration written all across their faces, people started to whisper about Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li.

Cheng Xiangxiang knew that Ning Li had chosen the gown with Lu Huaiyu. However, never did expect that he would escort her into the lobby in such an intimate manner!

A young man got closer to Cheng Xiangxiang, yet his gaze was still on Ning Li when he asked, “Xiangxiang, do you know her?”

Cheng Xiangxiang felt uneasy, but she simply laughed when she heard his words.

“Of course, I know her. What’s wrong? Don’t you know who she is? She’s Ning Li!”

“Ning Li? That sounds a little familiar...”

Suddenly, the man stopped speaking and he was visibly shocked.

“You mean she’s the one whom the Ye family welcomed back recently?”

“Yes. She’s very famous in Yunzhou these days. How can you not recognize her?”

Although Cheng Xiangxiang was smiling, there was a hint of contempt in her gaze.

That man did not know how to react for a while, and when he looked at Ning Li again, his gaze was different.

It turned out that she was not a young lady from a distinguished family but a lowly woman with a humble background.

He then stroked his chin. “But... she’s really pretty...”

Even though Xu Yini was supposed to be the most stunning at the banquet, she paled in comparison to Ning Li.

Xu Yini was indeed innocent and good-looking, yet after some time, she looked a little dull. This was what set her and Ning Li apart.

Ning Li’s beauty was much more subtle but nothing could compare to it.

Cheng Xiangxiang stared at the man beside her. “What’s the matter? Do you fancy her?”

The man replied to her with a smile, “Friends with benefits maybe, but the others—”

Before the man could finish his sentence, he suddenly felt a chilly gaze on him.

Lu Huaiyu was staring at him with icy-cold eyes.

The man was so pressured that he immediately kept his mouth shut as his body tensed up.

Ji Shu happened to walk by, in which he glanced at the man and snickered.

“Dai Li, if you don’t want both of your eyes, you can donate it to the needy.”

How dare the man talk nonsense when Lu Huaiyu was personally bringing the lady over.

He must have a death wish.

Dai Li froze up and just as he wanted to retort to Ji Shu, he realized the latter was not somebody to be trifled with. Hence, all he could do was swallow his pride.

While Dai Li watched from the side, he could not help but think to himself, ‘Are they having some sort of relationship?’

...

Lu Huaiyu brought Ning Li to meet Old Master Cheng and the others.

Old Master Cheng was very surprised to witness such a scene. Thus, he observed Ning Li for a while and could not help but laugh out loud.

“Huaiyu, this is your first time you’re willing to bring a young lady to such an occasion. You’re really catching on, aren’t you?”

Ning Li’s heart skipped a beat as she subconsciously looked at Lu Huaiyu.

First time?

Had he never—

However, Lu Huaiyu did not seem to have noticed Ning Li’s gaze. He simply raised his brows and reminded Old Master Cheng.

“Uncle Cheng, Lili is only 17 years old, and she’s still a senior in school.”

Although Lu Huaiyu told Old Master Cheng that, he did not deny what Old Master Cheng said to him just now.

The smile on Xu Yini’s face slowly disappeared when she saw the both of them standing so close together with their hands on each other’s arm.

All of them knew that Lu Huaiyu attended these occasions as a free man and he would never bring anyone with him.

That was why Xu Yini did not request to be his female companion.

Who would have known...

Feeling that Lu Huaiyu’s words were a little awkward, Old Master Cheng cleared his throat before he answered, “Oh, she’s still a kid.”

Cheng Xiyue went over and whispered a few words to his grandfather.

After that, Old Master Cheng gazed at Ning Li even lovingly.

He did not know Xiyue and Huaiyu cared for her so much because she was such a pitiful kid.

“Since you’re here, please enjoy yourself. Let them know if you need anything.”

Ning Li smiled politely at Old Master Cheng, with the dimples beside her lips showing.

“Thank you, Old Master Cheng.”

Seeing how Ning Li was a well-behaved and kind kid, Old Master Cheng fancied her even more.

Xiyue had even told him to be more kind toward Ning Li because she had never attended such an occasion before.

Nonetheless, Old Master Cheng could tell that the young lady had good manners and behavior!

Suddenly, as if he had noticed something while looking at them, Cheng Baiqing took a glimpse at Xu Yini.

Then, he waved his hand at her and said, laughing, “Yini, you were abroad for the past few years, we haven’t had the chance to see you dance. So, to open to dance—”

Of course, Cheng Xiyue would be her dance partner.

However, Xu Yini smiled with her eyes as she answered him, “I haven’t danced for a while now so I’m a little rusty. But... I heard there’s a lady from the Ye family who won second in the province-level dancing competition last year.”

Xu Yini then glanced at Ye Ci.

Ye Ci was standing at the side with Su Yuan.

Upon hearing Xu Yini's words, Su Yuan's eyes instantly lit up.

It was a golden opportunity for Ye Ci to do the opening dance with the Cheng family's Young Master.

Thus, Su Yuan smiled as she looked at Ye Ci.

Ye Ci was a little tempted, but she hesitated when she saw Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li standing there.

Beside her, Cheng Xiangxiang suddenly voiced out, "I've got a suggestion."

She smiled at Ning Li.

"If I'm not wrong, Ning Li's wearing the latest gown from G&S. Since this is her first time meeting everybody officially, why not let Ning Li do the dance?"

The crowd plunged into silence as they secretly exchanged looks.

Ning Li came from a poor background in Lincheng. What kind of dance did she know?

Cheng Xiangxiang did so just to humiliate her on purpose!

However, if Ning Li rejected her, admitting that she did not know how to dance in front of so many people, it would be extremely embarrassing.

Cheng Xiyue scowled, and just as he was about to say something, Lu Huaiyu suddenly turned his head to look at Ning Li, whom he asked, "Do you know how to dance?"

Ning Li hesitated for a second. "Just a little bit."

Lu Huaiyu then smiled at her. "I know a little as well. I think I can guide you."

Chapter 39: A Little Hot

Xu Yini's expression froze a little.

"Huaiyu, are you going to dance?"

No one had ever gotten him to dance on such an occasion before.

Lu Huaiyu lifted his chin slightly, and an idle smile appeared on his elegant and noble face.

"I'm the one who brought her here, so if she's going to dance, I'll be her partner."

While Xu Yini hesitated for a moment, Lu Huaiyu had already walked toward the center of the dancefloor with Ning Li.

The light fell on their bodies.

Lu Huaiyu stood still in front of Ning Li as he reached his hand toward her.

Then, Ning Li rested her palm on his.

His palm was thick, strong, long, and warm.

Tiny sparks, that burned wildly yet silently, ignited the moment their skins touched.

Lu Huaiyu paused for a second before he swiftly moved half a step toward Ning Li. He then wrapped his hand around her unbelievably slender waist and hugged her in his arms.

In an instant, the distance between them shrunk.

It was as if an invisible barrier between them was crushed.

Ning Li could even feel the incessant heat on Lu Huaiyu's body, and she was so shy that her ears burned.

Holding onto her breath, Ning Li rested her other hand on Lu Huaiyu's shoulder.

Lu Huaiyu lowered his head and inched closer to her. "Just follow my steps later."

Ning Li agreed to him softly.

Lu Huaiyu then lowered his eyes, where he could see her tiny hair whorl and her thick, long lashes moving as she blinked. He felt as though something had swept his heart away.

Ning Li was a sweet girl.

He could still feel the delicate curves of her slender waist on his palm, even though there was a tulle between them.

He tightened his hand slightly.

...

A piece of soothing music rang out.

Cheng Xiangxiang clenched the wine glass and sneered. “How daring of her to dance in front of everybody. I’d like to see how she can pull off!”

A glint flashed across Ye Ci’s eyes when she heard the tune.

That piece of music started off slow and gentle, but its midsection was relatively fast-paced, which made it challenging to dance to. Even professional dancers found it hard to dance to that piece properly.

The Cheng family had initially planned for Xu Yini to perform it, so they purposely picked that piece.

Yet now, it proved that their choice had caused a little trouble.

Ning Li might very well embarrass herself in front of all the famous and well-known individuals from Yunzhou.

Ye Ci chuckled and said, “Big Sister Ning Li is smart. I don’t think it’ll be a problem for her since she agreed.”

On the dance floor, Lu Huaiyu put his hand on Ning Li’s waist as he moved his long leg toward her.

As with partners who had good chemistry, Ning Li stepped back a little at the same time.

Lu Huaiyu raised his brows a little.

With their bodies so close to each other and their footsteps surprisingly in sync, their dance looked rhythmic and beautiful.

The both of them did not look like they were dancing together for the first time.

This was especially true for Ning Li. Contrary to the crowd's expectations of her scrambling around, Ning Li's steps were light and her movements were agile. She could even coordinate perfectly with Lu Huaiyu as well.

Soon, they were at the section of the piece where the pace was faster.

Lu Huaiyu let go of her, and Ning Li tiptoed as she spun.

As she spun, her dress spread open, drawing a perfect curve, and the glitters on her gown shone as bright as the stars.

Many in the crowd were shocked.

"Isn't Ning Li from Lincheng? And didn't she used to be poor? How does she know how to dance?"

"If she can pull off such a move, she must have trained hard for years, right?"

"The beginning part was not that difficult. Ning Li should be able to perform well if someone is there to guide her. But the tricky part is toward the end—"

The pace gradually hastened. That section would be repeated several times, and it had a fast tempo yet loud, powerful tone.

One of Ning Li's hands was holding onto Lu Huaiyu's hand tightly, and as she moved her feet, she lifted off into a turn that spun around for a few times.

Every turn she did was on the beat, and her tulle gown fluttered as she spun.

It looked easy to do a jump into several spins. However, those with keen eyes would know that those moves required great strength for the performer to complete the move beautifully.

Ye Ci clenched her fists subconsciously.

Cheng Xiangxiang's expression had stiffened as well.

Ning Li... knew how to dance?

The music eventually reached its climax, and Ning Li's movements were getting increasingly quicker as well. Yet, it was unbelievably clean and gorgeous.

The 17-year-old Ning Li in her past life definitely did not know how to dance.

At Ye Ci's celebration party, she was made fun of by everybody because of it.

Ning Li trained hard in private the next few years, drenched in sweat.

Despite that, no one invited her to dance again later.

The only time was...

Ning Li stopped all of a sudden when it reached the climax. Then, she bent her waist backward into an unbelievable arch.

Lu Huaiyu moved closer to Ning Li so she could fall into his arms.

He was so tall and husky that it seemed like he had her enveloped in his arms.

Ning Li could almost hear his heartbeat.

When the music ended, the massive lobby plunged into dead silence.

After a moment, Cheng Xiyue was the first one to return to his senses, and he immediately applauded them with a smile.

With his clapping breaking the silence, more clapping sounds rang out before soon, it flooded the entire lobby.

“Little Ning Li, is this what you meant by just a little?”

Cheng Xiyue clicked his tongue.

If that was what she meant, then all of them were considered amateurs.

Cheng Xiyue could not tell that Ning Li was actually hiding her light under a bushel.

However, Xu Yini’s expression looked terrible.

Cheng Xiangxiang scowled as she murmured, “Lil Ci, didn’t she have to work to earn a living back then? Where does she have the money to learn how to dance?”

Ye Ci shook her head.

“I’m not sure where she got the money from...”

If she knew that Ning Li would take the spotlight, she should have just seized the opportunity for herself just now.

However...

Ning Li stepped away from Lu Huaiyu's arms. She was so exhausted from the dance that her breathing was hard and even her cheeks were blushed.

Lu Huaiyu took a glance at Ning Li before he quickly withdrew it.

Not noticing him, Ning Li smiled as she said, "It's all thanks to Second Brother for guiding me well."

Old Master Cheng laughed at them.

"Don't give this brat too much credit! He's already so arrogant! What will happen if you compliment him more?"

Lu Huaiyu curled up his lips into a smile. "Yes, Lili danced perfectly just now."

Both of them were perfectly in sync in that performance, it made for a splendid opening dance.

Old Master Cheng waved his hand and said, "As long as you two had fun."

The music started again, and this time, the guests slid onto the dancefloor.

At that, Lu Huaiyu and Ning Li left the dancefloor.

After they were some distance away, Lu Huaiyu led Ning Li to the seating area.

"Take a break here. I need to make a call. I'll be back in a while."

Ning Li simply nodded at him, without a question. She took a glass of juice and sat down.

Lu Huaiyu then strode toward the direction of the balcony.

He pushed open the French window and the wind blew in.

Lu Huaiyu stood still and lifted his hand to loosen his tie. However, the burning sensation in his heart had yet to fade away.

At that moment, somebody walked over from behind.

“Second Master Lu?”

Lu Huaiyu turned his head to the side and realized it was Gu Tinglan.

As he met with Gu Tinglan’s concerned gaze, Lu Huaiyu asked, “Do you have a cigarette?”

Gu Tinglan’s gaze shifted. “You’re not feeling well?”

Lu Huaiyu did not look good, but he did not seem to be sick...

Lu Huaiyu admitted with a hoarse voice.

He felt irritated and stuffy. It was as if something was wanting to break free.

In fact, Lu Huaiyu had been able to control his emotions very well recently, yet it seemed that he could not do so tonight.

His fingers trembled a little. He could still feel the warm and delicate feeling from her touch.

Lu Huaiyu did not seem like he could suppress it.

Chapter 40: Where Did He Touch You

Gu Tinglan handed Lu Huaiyu a cigarette.

Lu Huaiyu held the cigarette between his long and slender fingers before he turned around and leaned against the railing. Lu Huaiyu drew his hand closer, and just as he was about to light the cigarette, he saw Ning Li sitting on the corner of the couch, enjoying a glass of juice.

He paused for a while and his fingertips brushed the lighter but it did not ignite.

Gu Tinglan followed his eyes.

A picture was worth a thousand words.

Back then, Gu Tinglan was standing behind the crowd and did not go forward to see what was happening on the dance floor. All he caught was a glimpse of a fresh face.

Yet now, he could clearly see Ning Li's face.

It was no wonder Lu Huaiyu hid Ning Li as if she was something precious.

Upon noticing that someone was looking at her, Ning Li turned her head and glanced in the direction of the balcony.

Ning Li was shocked to see the man who was standing next to Lu Huaiyu.

Gu Tinglan?

He was at the banquet as well?

In Ning Li's past life, the first time she met Gu Tinglan was not so soon. At that time, his relationship with Lu Huaiyu was already great.

Seeing that he was in Yunzhou this early on, she assumed it must be because of Lu Huaiyu.

Gu Tinglan blinked in surprise.

Then, Lu Huaiyu asked him all of a sudden, "Do you know her?"

When Gu Tinglan heard Lu Huaiyu's indifferent tone, he answered with a laugh, "I'll know her if you introduce her to me."

However, Lu Huaiyu did not move a muscle, signaling that he clearly did not want to.

Gu Tinglan did not mind that as well. "Oh yeah, I heard that Miss Ning was from Lincheng? She must be very familiar with Lincheng, I suppose."

He was planning to visit Lincheng, so there might be something Gu Tinglan could ask Ning Li.

Although Lu Huaiyu did not know what Gu Tinglan was going to do in Lincheng, he assumed it was personal. Hence, he questioned idly, "With Gu family's power, do you need to ask for someone's help if you want to investigate something?"

Gu Tinglan just smiled at him.

Lu Huaiyu was really protective of Ning Li.

...

At a corner of the lobby.

Su Yuan was chit-chatting with a few of her friends.

“Madam Ye, you’re really humble. Your second daughter is amazing, but I never thought that your eldest daughter is that outstanding as well! Why didn’t you tell us anything?”

“Yeah, you must have put a lot of effort in Ning Li all these years.”

While the ladies were joking around, they secretly exchanged thoughtful glances.

Before this, none of Yunzhou’s prominent families knew about Ning Li’s existence, which showed how badly Su Yuan wanted to hide her failed marriage.

If it were not because Ning Li had no one to take care of, Su Yuan would not have wanted to see this daughter of hers again.

How outstanding Ning Li was had nothing to do with Su Yuan.

Su Yuan’s smile stiffened.

Nonetheless, the ladies just smiled at her without saying anything else.

They could tell from Su Yuan’s expression that she had little to no knowledge of Ning Li.

However, that was not trivial.

A lady suddenly questioned Su Yuan, “Oh yeah, I realize Second Master Lu takes really good care of Ning Li. Do they know each other?”

In Yunzhou, only the Cheng family had a closer relationship with Lu Huaiyu. The other families had no chance to know him even if they wanted to.

Su Yuan straightened her back and replied, "Well, kind of."

After that, the ladies became quite excited. "Well, if there's a chance, can Madam Ye help us a little bit?"

...

"Miss Ning."

A figure appeared in front of Ning Li.

Ning Li raised her eyes, and when she got a clear look at the person's face, a cold glint flashed across her eyes.

Dai Li.

He was Yunzhou's famous rich brat. Dai Li hounded Ning Li in her previous life, and his behavior was ridiculous. He even asked someone to drug Ning Li, but luckily, she realized it and managed to get away from him.

Ning Li never thought that she would see him again.

"I'm Dai Li. Can we be friends?"

Even though Dai Li looked courteous and well-mannered, greed and hunger lit up within his eyes, exposing his intentions.

"Do I have the honor to dance with you?"

Despite Ji Shu's warning, Ning Li was Dai Li's cup of tea.

Especially after he had seen Ning Li dance, he felt as if something was tugging his heart.

"I'm sorry, but I'm a little tired."

Ning Li's eyes were cold.

Having never imagined that he would get rejected, Dai Li was shocked at first, but then he became furious.

After all, Ning Li was just the Ye family's stepdaughter. Why was she so arrogant?

Dai Li's eyes brightened while he smiled at her. "Then, can I sit here with you and we can talk?"

By then, Dai Li had already walked to her side and sat down without waiting for Ning Li's answer.

At the balcony.

Gu Tinglan was explaining his plan to Lu Huaiyu, "I'll be leaving for Lincheng tomorrow—"

Before he could finish his sentence, Gu Tinglan could see that Lu Huaiyu's expression had turned cold.

After that, Lu Huaiyu strode toward the hall.

One glance and Gu Tinglan knew that something horrible was going to happen.

Lu Huaiyu's mental condition was not very stable at the moment. If somebody pissed him off then, Gu Tinglan had no idea what would happen.

He immediately followed closely behind Lu Huaiyu.

Ning Li stood up the moment Dai Li sat down on the couch.

"I'm busy. Excuse me, Young Master Dai."

Quite a few people were looking in their direction.

When they saw that scene, various expressions appeared on their faces.

Dai Li was instantly blue in the face.

Dai Li was from an eminent family, and he looked quite good as well, so he had never failed to get any lady that he wished for.

Never did he imagine that he would be rejected by Ning Li.

Subconsciously, he stretched out his hand to grab Ning Li. "Miss Ning—"

The moment his fingers touched Ning Li's wrist, she quickly backhanded his hand!

Pain instantly shot up his hand and Dai Li's expression turned pale.

"M-my hand!"

Ning Li let go of his hand, emotionless.

“Young Master Dai, please have some self-respect.”

However, Dai Li’s thumb was in a weird position, and it was Ning Li who had broken it!

He was so frustrated and anxious that Dai Li could not help but yell, “Ning Li!”

Dai Li’s voice sounded extremely piercing in the enormous lobby.

The surroundings fell silent, and the crowd looked in their direction.

Who would have imagined that Ning Li could do such a thing on such an occasion!?

Cheng Xiangxiang was the first one to stand up for Dai Li.

“Ning Li, Dai Li just wanted to dance with you. You could’ve rejected him if you didn’t want to, but why do you need to attack him?”

When Su Yuan heard something, she immediately rushed in that direction.

Upon seeing Dai Li’s deformed thumb, her eyelids twitched. “Ning Li, apologize to him!”

However, Ning Li just glanced at Su Yuan coldly.

Old Master Cheng and the others had noticed the situation there too.

Xu Yini frowned and uttered, “I think we need to send him to the hospital as soon as possible. Otherwise, it would be bad if his thumb becomes disabled.”

Her suggestion alerted Cheng Baiqing.

Hence, he quickly told someone to get the car ready.

A lot of people were sizing up Ning Li, whom Cheng Xiangxiang scolded indifferently, "Ning Li, this place is not Second High!"

Her words immediately reminded the crowd about the video that had gone viral on the internet.

It seemed like Ning Li was not someone they should mess with...

At such a young age, Ning Li could behave so cruelly without having to think twice!

Ning Li then replied to her, "I've rejected him, but he was the one who still insisted."

Cheng Xiyue then walked toward Ning Li.

He knew what kind of person Dai Li was, so he spoke up for Ning Li. "It doesn't matter now. Let's send Dai Li to the hospital—"

"Hold on."

A cold and hoarse voice suddenly rang out.

Lu Huaiyu walked to Ning Li's side, where he glanced at her hand and then stared at Dai Li.

He walked up to Dai Li and held up the latter's injured hand. "Did you use this hand to touch her just now?"

Dai Li instantly broke into a cold sweat.

The next moment, Lu Huaiyu folded Dai Li's whole arm all the way back before he kicked Dai Li in his chest!

Crash!