

Little Brat's 81

Chapter 81: Am I Not Kind To You?

Ning Li did not want to answer the question. In fact, she wanted to run away if she could.

She did not expect Gu Tinglan's unexpected question, and it made the atmosphere thick with tension and awkwardness.

A slight pause later, she said, "Thank you, Master Gu, but no thanks."

The horse itself was expensive and was not something one could give away like candy. Moreover, Gu Tinglan had gone through a lot to get the horse from another country.

Gu Tinglan found it unfortunate that Ning Li and Yu Pingchuan rejected his present firmly. "Okay, then. But if you have the time, do visit us in Gangcheng, Mr. Yu. You can watch it race, and I'll be sure to accompany you the whole trip with utmost hospitality.."

Gu Tinglan might have grown up abroad, but the Gus owned a lot of properties in Gangcheng. As a result, in the entire Gangcheng, the man was as good and influential as a local.

Ning Li considered the offer seriously.

However, Lu Huaiyu said, "I remember that the race in Gangcheng is held in March every year. Lili is in her third year of high school this year, so I don't think she will be able to make it to the race next March."

Gu Tinglan did not seem to mind Lu Huaiyu's rejection. "There's one more race in August. She can visit us then."

Lu Huaiyu went silent.

Tang Ziqing held his breath nervously, itching to leave right away.

If he had known that Gu Tinglan called Lu Huaiyu out today just to tell the man all those strange things, he would never have agreed to accompany him.

Abruptly, Ning Li broke the awkward silence. "Thank you for your invitation, Master Gu. If we have the time, we'll be sure to visit."

She had to show some respect for the kind invitation, after all.

Lu Huaiyu frowned slightly.

Gu Tinglan nodded with a smile. "It's a deal."

...

Su Yuan waited for Ye Cheng in the parlor, but the boy had been gone for a long time. Her patience was wearing thin. She thought that the boy was being mischievous and wanted to skip equestrian class.

After some consideration, she decided to go and look for him.

The moment she walked out of the parlor, she saw a few people heading towards her.

It was Cheng Xiangxiang and her friends. Ye Cheng was also there, but the boy looked dispirited like a deflated basketball. The excitement and joy he showed earlier were gone.

Su Yuan wanted to ask the reason why, but she soon noticed that Cheng Xiangxiang was not in the mood as well.

Worried, she walked over, and the two girls told her what had happened earlier.

“Ning Li is here as well?” Su Yuan was astonished. “What’s she doing here?”

Ye Cheng pouted. “I don’t know, but even that Lu dude is here.”

Su Yuan knew that she was referring to Lu Huaiyu. It was not surprising to see Lu Huaiyu in the club, but why would he bring Ning Li along?

Moreover,...

“She knows how to ride a horse, and even defeated Xiangxiang in a race?”

It sounded even more outrageous.

Everyone knew Ning Li’s background before she came to the Ye family, so where and when did she learn how to ride a horse?

...

“Are you talking about her riding skills?”

“I have a friend who runs a horse club at Lincheng, and Lili would visit from time to time. Gradually, she learned how to ride and mastered the techniques,” Yu Pingchuan explained as he paced.

He walked into the parlor with Lu Huaiyu, and the two of them sat down opposite each other.

Tang Ziqing had gone off to handle some private matters whereas Gu Tinglan was checking on his horse. In the meantime, Ning Li went to the bar to get a drink.

As Lu Huaiyu took a glance at the bar, Yu Pingchuan decided to answer honestly since his companion was curious.

"I see. She's a smart girl."

Yu Pingchuan was happy to hear praises being sung about Ning Li. "Isn't she?! She learns very quickly!"

Lu Huaiyu was in deep thought. A moment later, he marched to the bar as well.

Ning Li was waiting for Lu Huaiyu's coffee when she heard footsteps behind her. She spun around.

Lu Huaiyu said, "I didn't know you were this close to Mr. Yu."

"Mm-hmm. Mr. Yu is very kind to me."

Ning Li did not want to delve into the topic, but since she ran into Lu Huaiyu here, there was no reason for her to hide it anymore.

The attendant then brought the cup of coffee over.

"Sir, your coffee."

Ning Li ordered a glass of lemon water. She also told the attendant to serve Yu Pingchuan a glass of water.

While the aromatic fragrance of the coffee permeated the air, Lu Huaiyu took a sip and asked nonchalantly, "So, are you saying I am unkind to you?"

Ning Li was speechless.

He then quickly shifted the topic.

“Did you know Gu Tinglan before this?”

Ning Li simply shook her head. “No. The first time I saw him was at Old Master Cheng’s birthday dinner.”

Lu Huaiyu rubbed the edge of the coffee cup softly with his finger. “So, he’s like a stranger to you, right?”

Ning Li took a sip of her lemon water to calm herself down.

The man had always sounded laidback with a hint of arrogance, but his words were not to be disputed.

He then said, “If someone you are not familiar with wanted to invite you to some event, you can always say no if you don’t want to go.”

Ning Li knew what he was trying to imply. From an outsider’s point of view, she had only met Gu Tinglan a few times and they were by no means close.

Lu Huaiyu seemed to think that she only accepted the offer because she was too shy to reject it.

Ning Li shook her head. “No, I actually wanted to go.”

Lu Huaiyu turned to her and propped his elbow on the counter.

“Really?”

“Yeah. I think he’s quite a nice guy.”

Lu Huaiyu took a sip of coffee. His nonchalant look remained as he answered, “Is that so.”

...

Gu Tinglan let out a sneeze in the middle of checking on his horse at the stables.

Annoyed, he sniffed and scratched his nose. Someone must be gossiping about him behind his back.

“Are you hiding here because you don’t want to go back?”

Tang Ziqing came down to the stables after settling his own business. He scoffed and mocked Gu Tinglan when he found the man there, “Why must you step on the tiger’s tail? Are you trying to make him mad?”

Tang Ziqing finally experienced Lu Huaiyu’s overprotection first-hand and found it astounding.

Nevertheless, Gu Tinglan had basically asked for it when he tried to reach out to Lu Huaiyu’s ‘food’.

Gu Tinglan smiled. He had done it because, first of all, he wanted to find out more about Lu Huaiyu’s condition.

Second of all,...

“No, I actually thought Ning Li and I clicked quite well back there.”

...

Ning Li stole a glance at Lu Huaiyu. She actually had limited meetings with Gu Tinglan, even in her past life, but she trusted the man with her heart because he had saved Lu Huaiyu’s life before.

Chapter 82: One Step Away From Getting Married

Tang Ziqing sent them off himself.

Gu Tinglan stood in front of his car. He ignored the invasive gaze at him and smiled at Ning Li and Yu Pingchuan. "Well, I hope to see you two in Gangcheng next year."

Yu Pingchuan was overjoyed while Ning Li simply nodded.

The car then finally sped off.

"I didn't know Dr. Gu was this hospitable," Lu Huaiyu said nonchalantly as he averted his gaze. He enunciated 'Dr. Gu' heavily, as if he was reminding someone of the man's title.

Gu Tinglan might have come from a renowned family, but he had always kept a low profile. He spent his recent years in physiological research and barely had any connection in his family's business.

Thus, many people did not know he was the young master of the Gu family.

Gu Tinglan smiled without being overly concerned. "Since it's still a family business, I give it my due attention when I have to."

Lu Huaiyu scoffed.

The Gu family was extremely influential in Gangcheng. The horse races they held every year were considered phenomenal, and they were no short of visitors like Ning Li and Yu Pingchuan.

Moreover, the horse races were only considered a tiny portion of the Gu family's business.

Gu Tinglan's invitation was actually redundant.

"If you are interested, I'm more than happy to see you there. After all, the name Lu Huaiyu is quite influential in Gangcheng as well," Gu Tinglan said as he looked at Lu Huaiyu.

It was the truth. After all, Lu Huaiyu had won the bid for his watch that cost 13 million in Gangcheng.

He came with a fist of gold, and his family was powerful and wealthy. On top of that, his cold and arrogant attitude, coupled with his unrivaled looks, made him an exquisite flower beyond anyone's reach. Countless women in Gangcheng would jump on him if they had the chance to.

Lu Huaiyu looked at Gu Tinglan.

Speaking from his own heart, Gu Tinglan looked decent and kind. He was a humble gentleman while his temperament would easily win people's fondness, but that was all just surface level. No one could say for sure what he was like deep down.

At least, based on what Lu Huaiyu knew, Gu Tinglan was not as harmless as people perceived.

"If I remember correctly, Dr. Gu, you're 30 this year and still haven't gotten married. Isn't Old Master Gu worried?"

Gu Tinglan smiled warmly. "I have a few brothers at home. Even if my elders want the younger generation to get married, I won't be the first in line. Thank you for your concern, Second Master Lu."

"You're welcome. I'm just thinking that 30 years old isn't young anymore, and waiting it out doesn't sound like a good idea."

"Yes, it is. I remember Ning Li is just 17 this year, am I right? According to the law, one is considered an adult at 18. I really shouldn't compare," Gu Tinglan sounded rather sentimental as he spoke.

Lu Huaiyu squinted his eyes and scoffed. "Hmm, 18 is considered an adult, and 20 is the legal age of getting married. If you look at it this way, it's not really that far away."

Speechless, Gu Tinglan looked at Lu Huaiyu and pondered upon the words. It seemed like the man was trying to find something out from his words.

"Second Master, are you being serious right now?"

“You don’t need to test me,” Lu Huaiyu stated word for word. “At least, I don’t think you should take the risk on this matter.”

...

On the way back, Yu Pingchuan chatted to Ning Li about Lu Huaiyu.

“Lili, how did you get to know Lu Huaiyu?” The man did not ask her the question in front of the others earlier, but that did not mean he was not curious.

Ning Li recalled her first meeting with Lu Huaiyu. “Brother Xiyue had to deliver the invitation to the Ye family, and Lu Huaiyu was there with him, so that’s how we met.”

Yu Pingchuan nodded. A quick thought later, said with a laugh, “He’s a proud man. It’s rare to see him be this thoughtful about someone.”

Ning Li did not know how to continue the topic. Indeed, Lu Huaiyu was sweet to her, but she had no idea why. From the first time they met, the man seemed to care a lot about her.

“Well, our Lili is always lovable, aren’t you?” Yu Pingchuan said happily.

When he first saw Ning Li a few years ago, he liked the girl a lot.

Maybe every aspect of her really did click with Lu Huaiyu.

Ning Li merely kept quiet and looked outside the window.

...

Yu Pingchuan wanted to send Ning Li home, but she refused.

Aside from the distance, if any of the Ye family saw her with him, she would have some explaining to do again, so Yu Pingchuan did not insist since he knew that the girl had a complicated family.

When Ning Li arrived home, Su Yuan and Ye Cheng were still not back.

Even though Cheng Xiangxiang was not severely hurt, she was terrified and had gone to the hospital just to be safe. Su Yuan and Ye Cheng accompanied her for the check-up and only came back after dark.

Ning Li was in her room studying and answering mock test papers when she received a call from Ji Shu.

A loud engine rumbling could be heard from the other end.

Ji Shu shouted, "Sister Lili, are you coming to Xiaosong Hill?"

Ning Li rejected without a second thought, "No."

A loud boo and a wave of groans sounded from the other end. She could even hear people calling her.

"Sister Lili, come on!"

"Yeah! We are waiting for you here! Some of us came here just for you!"

Ji Shu shoved the guys away. "Go away! Didn't you hear that Sister Lili isn't coming?! I told you guys, but you just don't want to believe me! Are you happy now?"

Ever since Ning Li made a name for herself in that race at Xiaosong Hill, a lot of the underground racing enthusiasts had fallen for her.

She broke the time record of the Xiaosong Hill race, and no one has been able to break her record since. Even the fastest attempt was 40 seconds slower than her record.

A lot of fans came for her and wanted to either have a race with her or even just steal a glance of her, but Ning Li never showed up anymore.

“Sigh! It’s all Jiang Fan’s fault! If he did not lose 5 million to Ning Li the other day, she might still come for races!”

“Hahaha! It’s not entirely his fault! Who would have thought he would lose the race?”

“Too bad! Aside from her skills, Sister Lili is jaw-droppingly beautiful among the underground racing circle. Speaking of her beauty, Second Master Lu didn’t even kiss her after she won the race. What was he thinking—Ouch! Why did you hit me, Ji Shu?!”

Ji Shu covered his phone and kicked the person away. “Sister Lili is still on the phone. Shut up!”

“I’m just telling the truth.” He looked at the guys with contempt.

“You guys know nothing! Do you know that Sister got first place in Second High’s monthly test? She’s studying and is a decent human being, unlike you people who waste time on races!”

One of the guys whistled. “Ji Shu, stop criticizing us because you are literally talking about yourself! Hahaha!”

Ji Shu grunted. He walked to a quiet corner to continue the call. He actually wanted Ning Li to come over, but she had said that she would not be racing in the foreseeable future, so there was nothing he could do.

Based on the result of her monthly test, she was serious when she said she wanted to spend more time studying.

Of course, the main reason that she stayed away from the underground race seemed to be because she had gotten strong financial support. In short, Lu Huaiyu was wealthy.

Sigh.

“Sister Lili, you don’t need to care what the assh*les say. I’ll teach them a lesson later!”

“I won’t. But are you calling me just to ask me about this?”

Ji Shu bitterly kicked a pebble away. He rubbed his chin and said with a smile, “You know me best, Sister Lili. I actually have something else that I want to talk to you about.”

“Hmm? What is it?”

“FN wants to sign me up. What do you think?”

Chapter 83: Maybe There’s A Better Way

FN was one of the top racing car clubs in the country. Their racing teams had gotten champion in national-level races more than once.

If Ji Shu were to be signed to FN, he would then be a professional racer.

He liked racing a lot, and it had always been his dream. Now, with FN knocking at his door, it seemed to be a golden opportunity.

Ning Li stopped writing.

“What are the conditions?”

The delight in Ji Shu's tone was obvious as he explained, "The basic contract is already 5 million per year, and the bonus from racing and other endorsements are considered extras."

5 million was not enough to move Ji Shu, but he liked the sound of the deal. Moreover, if he got the racing bonus and other endorsements, it would be a considerable amount of income, so it was quite tempting to him.

Ning Li simply grunted as a reply.

"What does NULL say?"

She sounded nonchalant, which felt strange to Ji Shu as she should not be reacting so indifferently.

After all, they had known each other for quite some time now, and she should know how important this contract meant to him. He thought that she would be happy for him.

"NULL said it's up to me."

NULL would accept racers on his behalf from time to time, but they were mostly underground races. When it came to professional races, he was never involved.

Ji Shu sensed something in between Ning Li's words. "Sister Lili, is the...condition not good enough?"

"No." Ning Li paused for a moment before she added, "I'm actually thinking about FN. They are not good enough. If you are calling to ask for my opinion, I only have one piece of advice for you: don't sign it."

Ji Shu did not expect her to say that.

He had already planned to negotiate the terms with FN, so he was actually calling to inform Ning Li of the good news, but who would have thought that she would say no?

“No, wait, why not? Why not, Sister Lili? That’s FN that we are talking about.” Ji Shu was baffled.

While it was every racer’s dream to join FN, Ning Li had said no precisely because it was FN.

The racing club was famous, especially in recent years. All the racers that it signed on were amazing and performed outstandingly. However, none of those glorious achievements could make up for the owner’s mistake.

In Ning Li’s past life, Ji Shu had also joined FN around this time. Everything was smooth at the start and he even won a few national-level championships. He was young and brave back then, and he achieved a lot in a short period of time.

However, just when he was about to lead the team abroad for a race, the owner of FN got into trouble because he was caught doing drugs.

The entire FN group was involved, and all the related personnel, including Ji Shu, were arrested for investigation.

He was unable to make it to that year’s national-level race, but it was not just one race that got affected; his life was severely impacted.

After the owner of FN was arrested, the media launched furious attacks at the group and FN sank into the whirlpool of condemnation. The public called them a ‘den for junkies’.

FN eventually went bankrupt and the racing team was disbanded, but the worst had yet to come.

What robbed Ji Shu of his prestige was his urine drug screening report—it returned positive. He was knocked off his precious pedestal overnight and became someone everyone resented.

However, the report was actually tampered with. Even though Ji Shu did another screening test to prove his innocence, it was too late to change people’s impression of him. Henceforth, he was permanently banned from the racing league.

FN was not somewhere he should go.

"I know, but there is more than one racing club. FN is not the only one."

Ji Shu was a great racer with potential. If FN had their eye on him, most racing clubs would love to have him.

He flipped his hair, feeling rather moody because of what Ning Li said.

"The others are simply not as good." He liked FN the most but since Ning Li voiced her disapproval...

Ning Li had a glance at the calendar.

"Well, why don't you wait it out? Maybe you will find something more suitable. The contract usually lasts 3 to 5 years, so it's best to err on the side of caution."

"Okay..."

Ji Shu might have been a year older than Ning Li, but he always behaved like an obedient little brother in front of her. Despite being a proud and arrogant person, there were only a handful of people who could tame him, and Ning Li was one of them.

Ning Li could tell that Ji Shu was a little disappointed. She said with a smile, "If they really want you on their team, they won't mind being turned down the first time. Maybe there's a better offer waiting for you, like an offer from LY."

"LY?" Ji Shu scoffed. "Sister Lili, you really dream big."

LY was another prestigious racing club that was considered even bigger than FN.

“LY only signs 2 racers per year, and they have already used up their slots this year.” While Ji Shu might be confident in himself, LY was still a distant goal for him.

Ning Li chuckled. “Who knows?”

Ji Shu should receive an offer from LY next month.

Ning Li had actually met the owner of LY and found out that they had the intention of recruiting Ji Shu from the start. Unfortunately, back then, Ji Shu had already signed with FN, so they were forced to give up on him.

Footsteps came from outside the door.

“I have to go now,” Ning Li announced.

Ji Shu simply answered with a soft grunt.

Right after Ning Li hung up the phone, knocks came from her door.

“Ning Li? Can you open the door?”

It was Su Yuan.

Ning Li walked to the door and saw her mother standing outside. She was still wearing the same white outfit from the day, so she had probably just come back from outside.

“Yes?” Ning Li was as cold as ever, and it made Su Yuan frown.

Nonetheless, Su Yuan decided to calm her emotions because she had her reason for approaching the girl.

“Do you have time to talk? I want to have a chat.” She seemed to have reverted to the elegant and delicate Mrs. Ye. It was quite rare for her to show this side of hers in front of Ning Li.

“Just spill it.” Ning Li did not budge as she had no intention of letting her mother into her room.

Still, Su Yuan insisted on entering. “Ever since you came, we’ve never sat down and talked properly, so why don’t we go in first?”

Ning Li stared at her and scoffed, “It’s fine. We’ve never really talked in the past few years, but we still came this far anyway, didn’t we?”

Su Yuan felt uncomfortable as if something stung her in the heart. She never thought that Ning Li would be this stubborn and difficult to teach. She had tried to lower herself and be as gentle as possible, but Ning Li did not appreciate her effort at all.

Neither of them was willing to take a step back, and the limbo lasted for a few moments.

In the end, Su Yuan decided to take a step back because she was not here to argue with her daughter.

“Fine. We’ll talk here.” She took a breath and arranged her words before she said, “Did you go to the horse-racing club with Second Master Lu today?”

Finally, Ning Li knew why her mother was here. She said nonchalantly, “No.”

“No?” Su Yuan frowned in disbelief. If she had not been with Lu Huaiyu, who else could it be?

Cheng Xiangxiang and Ye Cheng had said that she was with Lu Huaiyu during the day and that the man had even lent her his helmet and knee guards.

“It’s okay to tell me about it. You don’t have to—”

Lie.

Su Yuan did not utter the last word, but the look on her face was self-explanatory.

Ning Li found it disgusting. If Su Yuan did not believe her, why even bother asking?

The moment Su Yuan realized that the conversation was heading towards a dead-end, she changed the topic.

“Then, what about your riding skills? Where did you learn how to ride a horse?”

Although Ning Li curled her lips, she did not look like she was smiling.

Chapter 84: I'll Send It To Her

It was a little too late for Su Yuan to ask Ning Li about her horse-riding skills now.

“I learned it when I worked part-time at the stables as a training assistant earning 120 per day with meals and accommodation provided for.”

The look on Su Yuan's face froze for a moment when she got the answer. Of course, she knew what a part-time job at the stables meant.

An equestrian club usually had professional trainers teaching equestrianism, and sometimes, there would be an assistant helping out. The assistant's job revolved mostly around preparing things for the lesson, and their tasks were mostly tiring and dirty.

Su Yuan could not wrap her head around the fact that Ning Li had beaten Cheng Xiangxiang in the horse race. It was then that she realized she understood nothing about Ning Li.

All she knew about her daughter was limited to what she saw on the few pieces of paper. She knew nothing about the real Ning Li.

Therefore, she came to Ning Li and tried to have an intimate conversation with her. She had thought of many possible answers but not this.

Whenever she brought Ye Cheng to equestrian class, she would never spare a glance at the assistants. Now, she found out that her daughter used to work such a tiring and dirty job.

“Y-you...How could you do such a job?” Su Yuan found it difficult to accept.

The curve on Ning Li’s lips gradually flattened. “Because I have to make a living, why else?”

Silenced, Su Yuan’s words were stuck in her throat.

Nevertheless, Ning Li did not care about how Su Yuan reacted as well. “Though I assume it’s much cheaper than Ye Ci and Ye Cheng’s equestrian classes.”

Su Yuan could not stay for a moment longer, so she turned around and left. Every word that Ning Li spoke was like the sharpest blade, cutting her heart and reminding her that she had neglected her daughter.

Ning Li barely reacted, looking away and going back into her room

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Cheng Xiangxiang skipped school on Monday, but no one really cared.

The incident at the track was embarrassing, and Cheng Xiangxiang did not want anyone from her school to find out.

Ye Ci knew what happened, but maybe because she had embarrassed herself in front of Ning Li a few times now, she dared not act rashly anymore. She did not even mention a word along the way to school. Instead, she looked weary and somewhat dispirited.

Ning Li had a glance at her but did not say a word.

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The first class of the day was English.

“Ye Ci? Ye Ci?”

Kong Rou walked to Ye Ci’s table and knocked on it.

Ye Ci slowly opened her eyes and she realized that she had fallen asleep in class.

Everyone else in the class looked at her. It was normal for a third-year student to lack sleep, but it was a first for Ye Ci to fall asleep during the first class of the day.

Concerned, Kong Rou asked, “Are you feeling okay?”

Ye Ci blushed. “I-I’m fine...Maybe it’s because I couldn’t sleep yesterday. Sorry, Ms. Kong.”

“It’s okay.”

Kong Rou was a lenient teacher, especially to a role model student like Ye Ci who always behaved. Since it was just a tiny and rare offense, she tended to be more caring.

“Come on. Recite the third passage from your textbook. It will keep you awake.”

Ye Ci looked nervous. She finally realized that was the homework from last Friday, and she had slacked over the weekend, so she could only remember so much from the passage.

She stood up awkwardly. She started off fine but started to stutter at the second part.

Everyone knew that she had not memorized the passage at all.

“This is rare. Who’d expect there to be something Ye Ci can’t recite?” He Xiaochen said softly.

Kong Rou also noticed it, then she told Ye Ci to sit down. She sighed and said, “Are you doing okay lately? Is it because of the pressure? You don’t need to be worried. I’ll give you one more day to memorize it.”

Ye Ci lowered her head in embarrassment. She had never been so ashamed before.

“I understand. Thank you, Ms. Kong.”

...

The bell rang.

Ye Ci sat at her place quietly. She had to relieve herself from the humiliation.

Sitting behind her, Sun Huihui could not help but tap on Ye Ci’s shoulder. “Hey, Lil Ci, what’s wrong with you today?”

Ye Ci shook her head.

It was then that Sun Huihui saw dark circles under her eyes. “Your circles are really dark. Lil Ci, did you sleep yesterday?”

Ye Ci smiled forcefully. "I'm fine. I was just doing some revision last night, and I sort of slept a little late."

The busybody Lin Zhouyang also came over and after listening to her reasoning. He could not help but say, "How long have you been revising?"

Ye Ci had missed two days of class, but other than literature, she was basically up to speed. Therefore, there was not too much for her to revise. Moreover, it had been a few days, and given Ye Ci's previous efficiency, she should have finished all the revision by now.

Sun Huihui suddenly thought of something. She rolled her eyes at Lin Zhouyang and said, "Lil Ci is not the same as you. She still has to attend the competitive Physics class."

After all, the competitive Physics class demanded higher concentration and time.

Lin Zhouyang suddenly realized the truth of the matter. "Oh, I see."

Alas, it was not that simple.

Ye Ci had attended competitive Physics class for quite some time now. She had been doing fine at the start, but as the classes went on, she found it difficult to keep up.

Each time Zhou Fei finished teaching the class, she would have to spend a lot of time digesting the content. Only then she could understand what he had taught in class.

Despite her efforts, she always ran into dead ends while answering questions. She even had to compare the answers and study them for a long time to be able to understand a single question.

On top of that, Zhou Fei tended to briefly explain a certain question which proved to be a problem for her because she did not even know the steps or formula behind it, so she had to ask others for help.

It was okay once in a while, but as it piled up, it took a toll on her physically and mentally.

Besides, the competitive Physics class progressed faster than normal classes. If she could not understand what Zhou Fei taught now, it would be even more difficult for her to understand the class in the future.

She spent her weekends studying everything from the competitive Physics class, which resulted in her forgetting her English homework. It was so physically demanding that she even fell asleep in class.

Sadly, she just could not tell her friends about it.

"I can't sleep after a certain hour. I think I will just have to sleep earlier next time."

Then, a piece of paper was put on her table. She looked up and saw the guy that sat beside her in competitive Physics class.

The guy had more papers in his hand. "This is what Mr. Zhou will teach today. Let's have a look at it first."

"Okay."

Ye Ci rolled the paper up and wanted to put it into the desk while the guy went on distributing the papers to the others.

"Class monitor, here's your paper."

"Ning Li, yours."

The guy had one piece of paper in each hand when he was at Ning Li's and Pei Song's spot.

"Oh, Mr. Zhou said to try to finish the paper before class tonight because he wants to use them."

Pei Song took the paper. "Mm-hmm."

Ning Li took it and had a glance at it. "Okay, I'll give it back around noon."

Ye Ci's hand froze. She did not know whether she should keep the paper in her desk or take it out and do it right away.

Chapter 85: You Skipped My Class Because Of Him?

Ye Ci turned to Ning Li for a quick glance.

Ning Li had placed her pencil case on top of the paper above some books.

Compared to other people's desks, which were filled with books, Ning Li's desk was clean and tidy.

On her desk were mostly textbooks. She barely had extra study materials and definitely no notes. The only extra papers were the mock test papers she had gotten that day.

She would finish all the mock test papers the day she received them and had never procrastinated until the next day.

Of course, the definition of 'finishing' was different in Ning Li's case.

She rarely did papers with basic questions and would only do selected questions if the paper was a little too difficult. If the teacher did not require her to show the steps, she would just write the answer.

The teachers doted on her a lot, so they tended to shut their eyes at her answering method.

After all, the placement of the monthly test was still on display at the notice board downstairs.

Ye Ci hesitated for a while and eventually took the paper out from her desk.

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A minute before the class ended, Ning Li finished answering the last question, and she then put the cap back onto her pen.

“59, 58, 57,...”

Lin Zhouyang was staring at his watch. One of his legs was already stepping out of his seat and his eyes were staring at the door as though he was trying to spring out like a leopard.

Ren Qian kicked his chair. “What are you doing?”

“There’s sweet and sour pork ribs today at the cafeteria! If you are late, you won’t get any!” Lin Zhouyang said in an annoyed tone.

“I didn’t get any last week! This week, the sweet and sour pork ribs are mine!”

“Can your brain think of something else for once?” Ren Qian rolled his eyes and sighed.

“You know nothing! The stall’s sweet and sour pork ribs are the best I have ever eaten! On the contrary, you and Brother Pei don’t even look forward to having a good meal. Something must be wrong with your brains!” Lin Zhouyang did not see anything wrong with his anticipation.

Ren Qian nodded. “Good idea. I would like you to help me and Brother Pei raise our standards, so can you please get two sets of sweet and sour pork ribs for us later?”

Lin Zhouyang was shocked and confused.

“I think he’s right,” He Xiaochen said softly.

“Ning Li, have you tried it before? It’s really delicious.”

He Xiaochen usually skipped the rush hour during lunch just to save time, so since she was praising the sweet and sour pork ribs, it must be something else.

“Hey! Lin Zhouyang, can you get me one set as well?”

Lin Zhouyang glanced at He Xiaochen bitterly. The girl reminded him of his lousy English scores, so he sourly signed an ‘OK’ with his hand.

He Xiaochen looked at Ning Li. “Ning Li, do you want to have lunch together?”

Ning Li kept the papers away. “I have to send the papers back to Mr. Zhou. You guys go ahead.”

“Come on. It won’t take long. We can just ask Lin Zhouyang to get another set!”

It was just another set of meals, so whether it was two sets, three, or even four extra sets, it did not matter.

He Xiaochen looked at Ning Li with utmost enthusiasm.

A quick thought later, she agreed. “Okay.”

He Xiaochen quickly glanced at Lin Zhouyang. “One more set for Ning Li!”

Lin Zhouyang was more confused than ever. Somehow, he felt like he had become the class coolie.

Ring!

Before Lin Zhouyang could say a word, he reflexively dashed out of the classroom the moment he heard the bell.

“Here I come! Sweet and sour pork ribs!”

Everyone else was silenced by his passion for the dish.

He Xiaochen looked pleased. “It seems like we will be having sweet and sour pork ribs today.”

Ning Li took out another book while holding the papers in her hand.

It was then that Pei Song got up. “You can give me your papers. I’m going to the teacher’s office, and I’ll be passing by the Physics department.”

Ning Li shook her head. She pointed at the book that she had taken out. “It’s okay. I still have to return this book.”

Because she had gotten the book from Zhou Fei, it would be better for her to return it herself.

Pei Song glanced over at the cover of the book. He had seen the book on Zhou Fei’s table before. It was an original version in English and was about astrophysics.

Ning Li also had a glance at Pei Song’s papers. He seemed to have finished them as well. In his other hand was a survey statistics paper, which he had to deliver to the teacher’s office.

Pei Song pulled the zip of his jersey up and said, “Then, let’s go together.”

...

The moment the bell rang, the whole academic building was filled with students shuffling around.

Ning Li was walking with Pei Song, and their combined presence caught a lot of attention.

The two of them had earned the first and the second place respectively in the monthly test, and coupled with their astounding looks, it was difficult for them to lay low. They turned heads wherever they went.

In the corner, Duan Xu and several of his friends saw the couple from afar, and one of his friends jostled him with his elbow. “Hey, Duan Xu, isn’t that Ning Li? Why is she with Pei Song?”

“How would I know? Wait, what does it have to do with me?” Duan Xu said.

His friends looked at him with ridiculing gazes.

“I thought you liked Ning Li. But Pei Song is really a great guy. He’s only 6 points behind Ning Li. You, on the other hand, are like heaven and earth compared to her. I suggest you give up.”

Duan Xu slapped the guy jokingly. “What are you talking about?! Ms. Genius there is my lifesaver! How can I think of her like that?”

“Really? That’s what everyone is talking about—”

Duan Xu said bitterly, “Wait, what is with you guys? She’s the top genius of our school! She’s way out of my league!”

His friends looked at one another puzzledly before one of them said, “Yeah, she’s out of your league, but you can still hope!”

Duan Xu jumped on the guy. “Shut up! Or I’ll shut you up myself!”

...

In the Physics department, other than Zhou Fei, two other Physics teachers were present as well.

However, the two teachers were marking papers and going through the students' homework whilst Zhou Fei was playing games on his phone.

"Mr. Zhou."

Zhou Fei looked up excitedly when he heard his name called.

"Hey! Ning Li, Pei Song, why are you guys here together?"

He saw the papers in their hands and immediately knew why they had come. "Huh? You guys are done? Okay, put the papers down. I'll look at them later."

Then, Pei Song put the paper down and walked away.

"Mr. Zhou, I'm done reading this book." Ning Li passed him the book.

Zhou Fei's fingers were dancing on the screen of his phone, and he had a side glance at the book. He said in sheer disgust, "No, no! I don't want it!"

Ning Li's hand froze halfway. The book had not even touched the table when things became awkward for her. "You really don't want it back?"

"I really, really don't want it!"

The book reminded Zhou Fei of Lu Huaiyu and how the man had tortured and insulted his intellect. Therefore, the book was an eyesore and also a pain in the heart for him.

He waved at Ning Li. "This belongs to Lu Huaiyu. Just give it back to him when you see him."

Ning Li kept the book. "Okay, I'll...be going then."

Suddenly, Zhou Fei thought of something. "Oh, regarding the question about the ferrofluid I gave you in class the other day, he did it for you, am I right?"

Pei Song, who was at the exit of the office, paused and froze all of a sudden.

Ning Li's voice confirmed it behind his back.

"Yeah."

"I knew it!" Zhou Fei grunted.

"Aside from my prestigious first place, which he snatched away from me during our school days, he's trying to snatch my student now? That b*stard!" How very low of him!

"Ning Li, you'd better stop asking him to help you with your homework, get it?"

Those who did not know might assume Zhou Fei was incapable of teaching his own student.

Ning Li finally understood why Zhou Fei had been behaving strangely recently. She held her laughter back and said, "Mr. Zhou, it was just a coincidence. I was with my second brother the other day, and he simply did it for me."

Zhou Fei got angrier. "So, you skipped my class because of him?"

Pei Song then walked out of the office.

Chapter 86: Please Help Her

Ning Li cleared her throat. She thought that Zhou Fei already knew why she was absent the other day.

“I wouldn’t.”

Zhou Fei said nonchalantly, “Your explanation doesn’t sound convincing at all.”

He finally knew what happened. It was the b*stard, Lu Huaiyu’s evil plan!

If this continued, as a teacher, he would lose his respect and presence in front of his student, Ning Li. He clenched his teeth and put his phone away.

No, he had to save Ning Li from Lu Huaiyu’s claws. He had to prove to the man that Ning Li was his student!

...

Ning Li returned to the classroom to put the book back on her desk before she headed to the cafeteria.

She ran into Pei Song downstairs, so the two of them went to the third floor together.

When they arrived at the cafeteria, He Xiaochen and the others were already there.

“Ning Li! Monitor, here!” He Xiaochen waved at them, her action catching a lot of attention.

Ning Li then went over and sat down beside He Xiaochen. Pei Song sat opposite her with Ren Qian and Lin Zhouyang sandwiching him.

When Ning Li looked at the dish in front of her, she said to Lin Zhouyang, “Thank you.”

Flattered, Lin Zhouyang sighed heavily. “I got five sets today and only got one thank you in return.”

He Xiaochen looked at him with contempt. "I helped you write the template for your essay, but I didn't get a 'thank you' either."

It should have been a barter system, but someone decided to be calculative about it.

Lin Zhouyang gave in right away. "Right, right, you are right! Please continue to help me and I will get 100 sets for you!"

He Xiaochen took a huge bite of sweet and sour pork ribs.

"Oh, Brother Pei, we are going to have a small test tonight. I think someone is going to be eliminated. What about you guys?" Ren Qian asked.

"As usual."

The competitive Mathematics and Physics classes consisted of the best students in Second High, but only the cream of the crop could actually win a prize.

The fierce competition was unimaginable.

Therefore, the competitive class usually held tests every now and then to eliminate those who could not keep up. It was to inform the students about their own strength and placing.

Those who fell behind would be advised to give up on the competition and focus on the entrance exam instead.

Some of the open-minded students would also give up before it was too late.

After all, the competition had great demand for concentration and time, thus common students would not be able to handle it.

“Ning Li and the monitor will be okay. I’m just wondering how the others are doing.” He Xiaochen then thought of what happened earlier in class. “I think Ye Ci is a little dangerous.”

Lin Zhouyang found her words unsettling. “Why is she in danger?”

“Can’t you tell? Ever since she joined the competitive Physics class, she was already obviously reaping more than she could sow, and this is just the start. It will only get harder from this point onwards. In my opinion, she should drop out of competitive Physics while she can, or else, it might mess up her entrance exam.”

Although Lin Zhouyang wanted to argue, he found He Xiaochen’s words reasonable as well, especially the last part. He had a general idea of Ye Ci’s standards, but if she were to drop out just like that, given the girl’s personality, she would feel terrible.

He looked down and ate in silence.

In the end, he could not hold back his concern and asked Pei Song softly, “Brother Pei, can you, like, help her?”

Ning Li drank some soup nonchalantly. She had heard the same thing before in her past life. The only difference was that back then, Lin Zhouyang had asked her instead of Pei Song.

Back then, everyone assumed they were the closest of sisters, and helping each other out would have been natural.

Even she agreed to a certain extent.

In the end, she realized how foolish and naive her thoughts were.

This time, she did not give Ye Ci any chance because she displayed the conflict and disharmony between her and Ye Ci on the table for everyone to see. By doing so, she saved herself a lot of trouble.

Ren Qian smiled. "Help? How? If she can make it, she can; if she can't, she can't."

Pei Song did not comment on it either. "It's up to her."

...

In the Competitive Physics class, Zhou Fei spent the first 40 minutes talking about the papers he had distributed earlier in the day.

After a 10-minute break, he distributed a new set of papers.

"The duration is 70 minutes with a maximum score of 100. All the questions in this paper are what I talked about in class. Give it a try, and it will give you a rough idea of where your current standards are. Whether you should go or you should stay, you guys have to think it through."

Zhou Fei had a last glance at the clock.

"Begin."

...

The paper he distributed was designed to filter out the best from the mediocre, so it ought to be difficult.

Time flew by.

After Ning Li finished the last question, she looked at the clock and realized that she had used 57 minutes to answer all the questions. She used the remaining 13 minutes to check all her answers again.

Zhou Fei rolled up the paper in his hand as he said, "Those who have finished the paper may leave."

The students in the class submitted their papers one after another.

Ning Li packed her bag and was prepared to leave as well.

After Zhou Fei had collected all the papers and left, the class groaned in misery.

"My gosh! The number of questions is ridiculous! And the level of difficulty! I got stuck at the first question!"

"Me too! I thought I could come back to the question that I couldn't answer, but then the paper didn't even give me the chance to!"

"I left all 3 essay questions at the back blank. I'm dead meat."

"Hey, Ye Ci, how did you do?" the boy beside Ye Ci asked out of concern.

Ye Ci was glad that she had been burning the midnight oil for a couple of days. "I left one blank and didn't have enough time to answer the last question."

"Wow! You are going to pass this time!" the boy said out of jealousy.

Ye Ci tightened her lips. "I don't know. There are a few questions that I'm not so sure about..."

"You still did great."

"Ning Li, what about you?" someone asked.

Ning Li shrugged and simply replied, "I answered everything."

Ye Ci suddenly felt like it was extremely hard to breathe.

Chapter 87: Going Back To The Capital

The boy gasped in shock before he slapped himself.

“Busybody! Why must you ask that question?!”

The boy had been in the same class with Ning Li for quite some time now, and he should have expected it. Why would he ask her just to be insulted by the answer?!

Ning Li walked out of the classroom with her bag.

The thrill of luck and the tiny bit of joy disappeared as Ye Ci watched Ning Li walk away. She thought she had done okay, but compared to Ning Li...

She then got up and chased after her.

“Sister Ning Li, this coming Wednesday is Mom’s birthday. Have you thought of what present to give her?”

Ning Li was walking down the stairs when she heard Ye Ci call her. She paused for a moment before she continued walking.

“No.”

She refused to remember this particular day.

However, Ye Ci did not sense anything strange from Ning Li, so she added with a smile, “Well, what we usually do is hold a grand birthday dinner for Mom every year on her birthday. It will be lively then. Even our aunts and uncles will be there.”

Jinshen Hotel was a five-star hotel chain managed by the Ye family's business.

Ning Li barely responded while there was even a hint of frustration between her brows. She seemed uninterested in the event.

"I always paint a painting for Mom on her birthday. I'm not sure about Lil Cheng, but Mom loved them anyway." Ye Ci carefully sized up Ning Li's reaction. "If you can celebrate her birthday with her this year, she will be delighted."

"Is that so?" Ning Li was as cold as ever.

Ye Ci's eyes sparkled. Her lips curved into a warm smile and she said, "I'm sure she will!"

The two of them were already at the school exit where Zhou Hua's car was parked around the corner.

The black Cayenne was both subtle and eye-catching at the same time.

"It's great if she really feels that way."

...

When she got back to her room, Ning Li took her things out. When she saw the book about astrophysics, she sent a message to Lu Huaiyu.

[Second Brother, Mr. Zhou told me to return the astrophysics book to you directly. When are you free? I'll deliver the book to you.]

Lu Huaiyu did not reply immediately, seemingly busy with his matters.

Nevertheless, Ning Li was not overly concerned and simply put her phone aside.

Ever since Lu Huaiyu found out about her outstanding results, he had stopped urging her to complete the extra exercise books he had bought for her.

Right now though, Ning Li selected a few and started doing.

Two hours later, after she came out from the bath, she finally saw Lu Huaiyu's message.

[I'm away from Yunzhou for two days. Keep the book, for now. You can give it back to me later. I also have some extra collections at my place. If you want to have a look when you have the time, go to my place and you can choose for yourself.]

Lu Huaiyu was not in Yunzhou?

Ning Li wiped her hands and sat on her bed to type.

[Okay. Thank you, Second Brother.]

...

At the capital airport.

"Second Master, you are finally back! How are you feeling after the flight?"

Fang Qingyun took Lu Huaiyu's luggage and put it into the trunk of the car.

Lu Huaiyu nodded and then got in while Fang Qingyun got into the driver's seat and started the car, driving them away from the airport.

“How’s Grandfather doing?”

Fang Qingyun looked into the rear mirror and sighed. “Hmm, he’s not been doing well lately. He’s been bedridden for days now. Dr. Yan said he must take a good rest for some time. You should know that your grandfather has been talking about you lately.”

Lu Huaiyu asked nonchalantly, “Oh? He didn’t talk about my brother?”

“I...You know about your brother’s unusual occupation, so it’s quite difficult for him to come back. We didn’t even inform him about your grandfather’s condition this time.”

Lu Huaiyu softly grinned. “I think Grandfather assumes I have too much free time in Yunzhou.”

“Haha, Second Master, you’ve mistaken your grandfather—”

“Did he go to Fangli Garden today?” Lu Huai asked all of a sudden.

Fang Qingyun said, “No, Fangli Garden is closed today—”

His voice stopped abruptly and the atmosphere in the car fell into an awkward silence.

As Lu Huaiyu leaned back and smiled, Fang Qingyun cleared his throat to break the silence.

“I...uh...Second Master, it’s been a while since you came back and your grandfather misses you a lot. Please don’t tell him I told you that!”

Lu Huaiyu simply grunted lazily. “Sure.”

He had received a phone call from home saying that his grandfather was not looking well, so he had gone back in a hurry.

When he asked his brother about what happened but realized that the latter did not get the news, he had a hunch about what was going on. He could have stayed behind, but since his grandfather resolved to this method, it would be best for him to go back for once.

Fang Qingyun sighed a breath of relief. He looked into the rearview mirror and realized that Lu Huaiyu was staring at his phone from time to time, seemingly waiting for something.

“Second Master, are you having some kind of emergency?”

Lu Huaiyu raised his brow, but his eyes were glued to his phone. “No.”

He had to come back on short notice and did not get to inform her. To his surprise, the girl was not even curious and did not even ask where he had gone.

Fang Qingyun did not find his answer convincing at all. It was his first time seeing Lu Huaiyu like this.

A moment later, Lu Huaiyu decided to take the initiative and send her a message.

[I went back to the capital. I'll be back in a few days.]

...

Ning Li was already in her bed, preparing to sleep. When she saw Lu Huaiyu's message, she blinked curiously.

He had never spoken about it before, but since he was originally from the capital, it was not odd for him to go back once in a while.

However, the late-night flight was evidence of something urgent.

Returning the book was not a priority anyway, so she simply sent a short message to him.

[I got it. Do what you need to do.]

Lu Huaiyu read the message a few times. She did not ask why he had gone back to the capital or when he would be back in Yunzhou.

Fang Qingyun had a feeling that the atmosphere in the car felt strange. Lu Huaiyu had been staring at the phone for quite some time now. What exactly was he reading?

After some thought, Lu Huaiyu finally knew what to reply, but before he could type a word, Ning Li sent him a second message.

[I'm going to bed. Goodnight.]

Annoyed, Lu Huaiyu put his phone away.

"Little rascal."

Fang Qingyun's radar picked up what his second master said.

Who? Who could the little rascal be?

Having worked for the Lu family for 20 years and practically watching Lu Huaiyu grow up, he had never heard Lu Huaiyu say something in such a tone.

Lu Huaiyu sounded like he was angry but not entirely furious. In fact, he sounded a little...

Fang Qingyun did not know how to describe the feeling. While he was pondering about how to ease the strange atmosphere, he saw Lu Huaiyu pick up the phone and type something seriously.

[Goodnight.]

Ning Li turned her phone off, then she put it beside her bed and closed her eyes.

...

The car drove all the way to a military district.

The wide avenue extended all the way forward with green trees lined up on both sides.

It was dark. The lights from the street lamps were bright and the shadows cast by the trees looked like they were dancing.

The car finally stopped in front of an independent mansion. When Lu Huaiyu got out, someone came to welcome him.

"Second Master, you are back."

Lu Huai asked as he walked inside, "Where's Grandfather?"

"The old master is in the study. Do you want to see him now?"

Lu Huaiyu paused. "It's late. I don't want to disturb him, so we'll talk in the morning."

Chapter 88: Don't Bully Her Because She's A Girl

The moment his voice subsided, a strong voice came from behind.

"You little brat, don't you know that it's manners to visit your elders when you come back?"

Lu Huaiyu spun around.

“Grandfather, Uncle Yan said you’ve been bedridden for a few days now. It’s late, so why are you still up?”

Lu Qishan’s heart skipped a beat. He almost forgot that he was ‘unwell’. He curled his fist in front of his mouth and coughed. “Yeah, I’m unwell, but I can’t sleep either.”

As Lu Huaiyu stared at the man, Lu Qishan looked away out of guilt.

“Uh, Old Master feels better already.” Fang Qingyun quickly came in and eased the awkward situation. “He’s happy now that you are back, Second Master. When he’s happy, his body also feels better!”

“Yeah, yeah! That’s it!” Lu Qishan nodded repeatedly.

Lu Huaiyu grinned softly. “If that’s the case, why don’t we call Brother back? I believe that you will feel a lot better with the both of us here.”

Lu Qishan grunted. “Don’t even mention that kid! It’s even more difficult to contact him than calling you back.”

“I supposed it’s because you forced him into a blind date and urged him to get married the other time.”

Back then, Lu Huaiyu had still been in Yunzhou, and he heard that his brother had fled the house at night due to an important mission. He had not been back since then.

“He isn’t young anymore!” Lu Qishan was exasperated at his elder grandson.

While both his grandsons were outstanding, they had never been in a relationship even until now.

“Don’t end up like your brother! The longer you stay single, the harder it will be for you to get married!”

Lu Huaiyu smiled. "You don't need to worry about that. I'm not like my brother."

"You'd better not be." Lu Qishan looked at him with a suspicious gaze. "I heard that the girl from the Xu family went to Yunzhou just for you, but you didn't treat her well."

When his grandfather mentioned Xu Yini, Lu Huaiyu responded thinly, "She went there for Old Master Cheng's birthday dinner, not for me."

Lu Qishan almost had a heart attack when he heard that. Anyone who was not blind could tell that Xu Yini had gone to Yunzhou for him.

She had liked Lu Huaiyu for many years, and it was no longer a secret, but Lu Huaiyu kept his distance from her. In fact, besides Xu Yini, Lu Huaiyu never really paid attention to any girls around him for the past few years.

Lu Qishan sat down on the couch. "Yini is a good girl. She practically grew up with you, and you are telling me you don't like her?"

Lu Huaiyu tilted his head and said in an indifferent and lazy tone, "There are many girls out there who like me. Am I supposed to like all of them?"

Silenced, Lu Qishan carefully sized up his grandson and noticed that Lu Huaiyu's condition was a lot better than before. "You've been in Yunzhou for quite some time now. When are you planning to come back?"

Lu Huaiyu poured himself a cup of tea.

"I'm not planning to come back in the foreseeable future."

His succinct answer reminded Lu Qishan of something.

“You said you were there as a study companion. Is that it? Is that what’s keeping you there?”

Lu Huaiyu simply grunted as an agreement.

Lu Qishan sat up straight. “I heard that girl is only 17, a third-year high-schooler, and she’s living with the Ye family. You basically have nothing to do with her...”

Lu Huaiyu was not surprised that his grandfather knew about Ning Li, but it was not a problem for him because he would have to tell his family sooner or later.

When Lu Qishan recalled what Gu Tinglan had told him over the phone, he forcefully swallowed his words back down his throat.

Some careful thought later, the man said, “Fine. You can be in Yunzhou, but on one condition: you mustn’t bully her because she’s a girl.”

He had heard of Ning Li’s background and felt sorry for the girl. He was fine if Lu Huaiyu wanted to offer a helping hand, but he was just worried that his grandson would fall too deep for this girl.

Lu Huaiyu smiled. “You are thinking too much.”

He thought of the brief messages she had sent him earlier. He was not sure whether he was bullying her, or if it was the other way around.

...

In the evening competitive Physics class, Zhou Fei had not joined the class yet, but the class was rather lively tonight.

“I heard that the results for the mini-test are out! I wonder how much my score is. I’m already sad just thinking about it.”

“The ranking this time is important. If you can’t get a satisfactory result, you might be told to leave the competitive class.”

“It’s normal, isn’t it? It happens every year, and there’s more than one school participating in the competition. If we can’t get a good ranking, we won’t be able to do well in the finals.”

“Sigh. I’ve actually thought about it. I’m not suitable for competing, so I’m leaving after this class.”

The person who wanted to leave was a tall boy, and his confession attracted the attention of the majority of the class.

“Really?”

The boy nodded and shrugged. “I’m no match for the geniuses. It can’t be helped. If I go back to prepare for the entrance exam, I think I can still make it.”

His words silenced a few of his friends.

Everyone in the competitive Physics class was smart in their own way, and they had their own ego and pride.

However, the competition was cruel. There was always someone better than you no matter how hard you worked and it was difficult to catch up.

Everyone knew it deep down, but when it boiled down to logical thinking, throwing in the towel was not easy to do.

Ye Ci was not part of the conversation, but she heard all of it. She frowned and looked at Ning Li uncontrollably. Beside Ning Li was Pei Song.

The two of them obviously did not share the same worries as the others, so there was no need for them to join or listen to the conversation.

Zhou Fei then came in with the papers and the class quietened down.

Everyone looked at him, anxiously waiting for him to announce the results.

He scanned the class quickly and said, "There are 32 of you in this class, and 11 of you either scored 100 or borderline passed."

The class was so quiet that they could hear a pin drop.

Zhou Fei had prepared the paper himself, and he purposely added questions with high marks at the end. Those who left those questions empty would never get high scores.

After the mini-test, the class already knew that the result would be terrible, but it seemed like it was worse than expected.

There were two stacks of papers in Zhou Fei's hands.

"The left stack belongs to those who have passed; the right stack belongs to those who have failed. When I call your name, come up and take your paper."

He took the first paper.

"Liu Weiwei: failed."

The tall and slim boy walked over. He sighed when he took the paper, but maybe because he had thought this through, he accepted it with an open heart.

"Zhang Lin: failed."

A short-haired girl walked over and teared up when she saw her paper. She returned to her seat quietly.

Zhou Fei did not read their scores out loud, but according to the sequence, they practically knew their ranking in the class. That was more than enough for the students.

He continued calling out names and giving out papers.

Those who got their papers had a complicated look on their faces whereas those who were yet to be called prayed as hard as they could, hoping that their names would be called later than sooner.

“Ye Ci.”

Ye Ci’s heart skipped a beat.

Zhou Fei then took the first paper from the left stack after he had finished distributing the right stack. Her name was the first he called.

“61.”

Chapter 89: Her Birthday

Those whose names had been called earlier looked at Ye Ci.

61 points. She had passed the test, but it also meant that she ranked 11th in the mini-test. It was decent, considering the overall results of the class.

A lot of the other students were jealous of her, but Ye Ci did not feel the same way. She was shocked. She thought that she could have at least scored 75 marks, but she only managed to not fail, which was a huge deviation from her expectations.

As for being 11th in the class, she might have been better than the rest, but there were still ten more students who did better than her.

She went out and took her paper before Zhou Fei continued calling out more names.

Ye Ci had a careful look at her paper. Other than the questions that she had left blank, the questions that she answered and had been quite confident that she had gotten right turned out wrong as well.

Soon, Zhou Fei was down to the last two papers.

Up until this point, only Ning Li's and Pei Song's names had not been called.

"I wonder how high the two of them scored."

"The highest score now is 81. I think Pei Song and Ning Li can get at least 90!"

"You can't say for sure. The paper was terribly difficult! I'm more curious which one of them did better."

Zhou Fei said loudly, "Pei Song: 94."

The class fell into silence.

94! Pei Song had scored 13 points higher than the third place!

More importantly, Ning Li still had not gotten her paper. She must have gotten a higher score than Pei Song.

Zhou Fei looked around. He intentionally paused for a moment and dramatically announced, "Ning Li: 100."

The class stilled once again. Everyone looked at her in dismay.

“Holy sh*t! Is she even human?!”

“If she has a brain, what do we have in our heads?”

“100? 100 again? Isn’t it irritating?! 100?!”

“I know it’s not irritating to her, but, man, I’m jealous!”

Zhou Fei tapped on the writing board.

“Now that you’ve learned your scores, go home and think about the competition. I want an answer tomorrow. The preliminaries are coming and you still can drop out if you want.”

It was not the first time he tried persuading those who could not keep up to drop out of the competitive class. It was not that he did not want his students to participate in the competition, but he knew that the competition demanded talent rather than hard work.

He really hoped that those who lacked talent would walk away instead of wasting their time on this. If they had the time to work hard, it would be better for them to work on something else rather than waste their time on this competition.

“Okay. Let’s get on with the lecture today.”

Zhou Fei then continued where he left off in his lecture yesterday.

Ye Ci sat in her place and stared at the scarlet red 61 on her paper. When she thought of Ning Li’s perfect score, she felt bitter and aggrieved. She had always been excellent since she was young, but ever since Ning Li arrived, she realized that her glorious achievements were nothing.

At first, she did not take Ning Li seriously. After all, her background, her results, her manners, and every single aspect outshone Ning Li by a mile.

“Ye Ci, are you going to continue the competition? You passed the test and got 11th in the class,” the boy beside her asked softly.

Ye Ci did not know how to answer the question. Others might not have known it, but she knew that she only passed the test because she spent the entire weekend revising.

Her hard work paid off, but it was also time-consuming to the extent that she did not have the time to do other things.

She forgot to memorize the passage for English, and she had yet to finish her Mathematics homework. She did not even start revising her Biology.

The few guys behind her were talking about Ning Li.

“I think Ning Li and Pei Song are aiming for the first prize. Sigh, we really cannot compete with them.”

Ye Ci tightened her lips and forced a smile. “I think I’ll continue. It’s interesting.”

Ning Li had a quick glance at Ye Ci. Then, she softly grinned after she looked away. She anticipated Ye Ci’s choice because she knew that her stepsister would never want to lose willingly, which was exactly what she was hoping for.

...

At night, Ye Ci talked to Su Yuan about the competition.

Ye Ci insisted on continuing. Su Yuan was unfamiliar with the competitive class situation, so since Ye Ci insisted, she agreed to let her daughter continue.

Wednesday arrived in the blink of an eye.

It was Su Yuan's birthday, and the best VIP room in Jinshen Hotel was reserved for her birthday dinner.

After the last class in the afternoon ended, Ye Ci packed her things and wanted to leave for Jinshen Hotel. She had a quick glance at Ning Li while she was tidying up.

Ning Li was still sitting in her seat and showed no intention of leaving.

"Sister Ning Li, we should be going by now." Ye Ci walked over. "Uncle Zhou is waiting for us outside the school."

It was inappropriate for them to be late.

When Ning Li looked at her coldly, Ye Ci reminded her, "Today is mom's birthday. Did you...forget?"

Ning Li grinned. "How could I forget?"

They had no class in the evening, so they just had to tell the teacher that they were leaving school.

Ning Li then grabbed her bag and said, "Let's go."

...

In the banquet hall on the 16th floor of Jinshen Hotel, when Ning Li and Ye Ci arrived, most of the guests were already there.

They could hear laughter and chatter from outside the door.

Ye Ci opened the door.

"Dad, Mom, we are here!"

The lively hall quieted down upon her arrival.

Ning Li had a quick scan of the hall.

Ye Ming and Su Yuan were there, and Ye Cheng was sitting in between them. Beside the couple were a woman in her 30s and a boy around 15 to 16 years of age.

The woman was Ye Ming's sister, Ye Ting, while the boy beside her was her son, Su Pei.

She had gotten married at a young age and gave birth to a son, which solidified her status within the family. Therefore, she used to look down on Su Yuan in the early years.

She only came to the dinner because of her brother, Ye Ming.

"Oh! Lil Ci, you are back! Here, have a seat!" Ye Ting smiled and waved at Ye Ci but turned a blind eye to Ning Li as if she was invisible.

Chapter 90: A Painting

"Auntie!"

Delighted, Ye Ci went over to Ye Ting.

Ye Ting patted her head affectionately.

"It's been a while, Lil Ci. You've grown even more beautiful now. Did you miss me?"

"Of course, I do!" Ye Ci hugged her aunt gleefully. The two of them looked as close as mother and daughter. "Auntie, it's been a while since you came back."

Ever since Ye Ting married a man in the capital, she barely came back to Yunzhou. Most of the time, she only returned because of Ye Ci.

Ye Ci lost her mother when she was very young, and Ye Ting loved her like her own. Therefore, Ye Ting slowly accepted Su Yuan because she treated Ye Ci like her own daughter.

“Come, sit beside me.”

Ye Ci also said hi to Su Pei who was playing games on his phone and simply nodded to his cousin.

Ye Ting glared at her rude son, but he simply turned a blind eye to her.

Su Pei was born when his father was quite elderly, and the boy grew up with utmost attention and care, which resulted in his arrogance and hot temper. He was in his second year of high school this year and was addicted to games, so he never really paid attention to his studies.

If it was not for his wealthy background, the boy might have already been expelled.

The reason he followed his mother here was that he was involved in a fight at school, and he was instructed to stay at home for a few days to reflect on his actions.

Ye Ting brought him here, hoping that he could learn a thing or two from his cousin. Unfortunately, the more she cared for her son, the more unruly he was. As a result of his rebellious nature, he gave Ye Ci the cold shoulder.

To him, Ye Ci was the kid next door to whom his mother would compare him, and he found it irritating.

It was not the first time she was being ignored by him anyway, so Ye Ci was not overly concerned.

She tugged Ye Ting's hand softly and switched the topic.

Ye Ming then called Ning Li over, “Ning Li, come here.”

The man cared about his reputation a lot, especially at family gatherings of this scale. He tended to be as thoughtful and considerate as possible in front of everyone.

Ning Li went over and pulled a chair out for herself, then Ye Ting finally noticed her.

“Su Yuan, is this your own daughter?”

The room went silent for a moment.

Ye Ting was being overly frank, and her comment was unnecessary, However, she did it on purpose.

Ning Li looked at Ye Ting and noticed the woman sizing her up. Ye Ting might have been flashing a courteous smile at her, but behind that fake smile was cold hostility.

Ning Li understood the hostility behind Ye Ting’s fake smile. Su Yuan had taken good care of Ye Ci for many years, and even after she gave birth to Ye Cheng, she tried her best to look after Ye Ci in every aspect.

Ye Ting was satisfied with Su Yuan’s performance, so she did not want to be calculative anymore.

However, with Ning Li’s arrival, things changed.

Ning Li was Su Yuan’s own flesh and blood, and Ye Ting was also a mother herself. Therefore, she knew what it meant when it came to her own flesh and blood.

Moreover, Ning Li and Ye Ci were born just three months apart from each other.

Ning Li’s arrival would surely distract Su Yuan, so what would happen to Ye Ci then?

When Su Yuan suggested taking Ning Li into the family, Ye Ting had disagreed strongly, but Ye Ming cared about his image and reputation more.

Ning Li was still a minor, so as her mother, Su Yuan had the responsibility of taking care of her daughter. If Ning Li was simply allowed to wander outside, it would surely damage the Ye family's reputation.

Since the Ye family was wealthy, surely they could house one more girl under their roof. Ye Ting failed to convince her brother then, and the rest was history.

Now, seeing Ning Li with her own eyes, unusual emotions arose in Ye Ting's heart.

Su Yuan was embarrassed. "Yes, she's my daughter. Ning Li, where're your manners? She's your aunt."

Ning Li replied nonchalantly, "I remember that Father is the only son."

The atmosphere froze in awkwardness. The name Ning Haizhou was definitely taboo in this family, and Ning Li's straightforwardness did not show any respect for anyone at the table.

The smile on Ye Ting's face became colder.

As expected of a rascal from some rural city, the girl never had proper education and did not have any actual parents to teach her manners!

"Ning Li!" Su Yuan sounded stern. "What is that about?!"

"I'm telling the truth. Am I not allowed to do that?" Ning Li asked innocently.

Ye Ting's resentment was already showing on her face. There was no room for courtesy anymore.

Meanwhile, Ye Ming frowned. "Okay, just calm down. Ning Li is new to the family. She's still adapting to her new environment, so just give her some time. Besides, it's your birthday today. Have a seat."

Ye Ting glared at Su Yuan. "Su Yuan, I suppose you are going to have a hard time ahead of you."

Ning Li's poor behavior and impudence proved to be a time bomb; no one knew when she would explode or what kind of damage she would cause in the future.

As a result, Su Yuan was deeply embarrassed.

Ning Li simply leaned in her chair nonchalantly, as if she was completely fine with the awkwardness.

Ye Ci blinked nervously before she said with a smile, "Oh, right, Mom, I got you something. Do you want to open it right now?"

She then gestured to the attendant to bring her present over. Since the present was inconvenient for her to bring along, she had someone deliver it to the hotel beforehand.

She was the daughter of the Ye family, after all, and the Ye family owned the place. Of course, she could simply call someone to do her a favor.

Su Yuan found a way to temporarily escape the awkwardness, so she smiled and said, "Sure!"

The attendant quickly brought the present over.

As Ye Ci mentioned, it was a painted portrait of Su Yuan.

In the painting, it was a dark, quiet night and the background was an empty street. The main subject, Su Yuan, was walking towards the front and looked up into the sky slightly as if she heard the wind calling. Her eyes were sparkling in surprise. She wore a decent coat while her hair was slightly messed up by the wind, but it did not affect her delicate beauty.

The overall color of the painting was warm and the strokes were refined. Even though it was a painting, the joy in her eyes was obvious.

Su Yuan was astonished when she saw the painting, and she got carried away by her delight for a while. She looked at Ye Ci in gratitude.

It was also Ye Cheng's first time seeing the painting and the way his mother was portrayed in the painting baffled him. He asked, "Sis, is this really Mom? Why does she look different?"

Ye Ci smiled. "This is Mom from ten years ago. Of course, she seems different."

Su Yuan affectionately moved her fingers across the canvas and said softly, "I didn't know you remembered this."

"Of course, I remember. That day, I left the house because I was angry and you went looking for me for a long time."

Ye Ci had a hard time accepting Su Yuan when she first arrived, so she stormed out of the house out of anger. At night, she got lost on the streets and became afraid. She hid in a dark corner and started crying.

It was then that Su Yuan found her.

"Starting from that day onward, I decided to call you my mom." Ye Ci looked embarrassed when she said that, but her affection and reliance in between the lines were obvious.

Ye Ting caressed the girl's head lovingly. "Lil Ci, you are really caring. Your painting skill is getting better and better."

Su Yuan stared at the painting for a while more before she told the attendant to keep it safe.

"Thank you, Lil Ci. I like the present a lot."

Ye Cheng was a little jealous. "If Sis gave you this, then you won't like the present I'm going to give you."

Su Yuan tapped the boy's forehead gently. "No, I like everything you give me."

Only after she appeased the boy lovingly, Ye Cheng grunted softly with a hint of jealousy.

"Sure, you like my present, but you like Sis' present more!"

Ye Ci then looked at Ning Li. "Oh, right. Sister Ning Li, didn't you prepare a gift for Mom as well? Why don't you take it out for her now?"

Everyone looked at Ning Li who shifted her attention away from the painting.