

## **Collapse 106**

### Chapter 106: Coward [First Order Requested]\_1

"It seems like it was during junior high. I was a young boy, poor and timid. I knew what people called me but didn't dare to counter; I could only run home and cry to my father.

"But my dad said I was spineless, that I only came back to ask him for money. He valued money more than anyone else. He wouldn't spare even a cent for me, as if it were his life.

"Later, a boy—my roommate—blatantly bullied me. When I was squatting on the balcony washing my clothes, he sat right on my head. At that moment, my head was buzzing, and everything went black. Then, my face was pushed into the water. My nose hit the bottom of the basin, I couldn't breathe, and my eye socket got bruised. That's when I truly learned what it meant to see stars after being punched.

"I was scared, a complete coward. But at that moment, I don't know where I found the courage, but I flipped him over, punched him to the ground, and kept hitting him. They had never seen me so enraged; everyone was stunned. They didn't pull me away until I had beaten him so badly he couldn't make a sound.

"The incident escalated significantly, even alarming the grade-level director. I heard the bully's family was rich and had a good relationship with the director. When his dad heard about it, he immediately came to the school. I was standing outside the grade-level director's office, and passers-by were all pointing fingers at me.

"His dad came and started yelling and swearing at me, calling me a wild child with no proper upbringing. I had finally stood up for myself for once, and I wanted to retort. But then I thought about it, and it was true—I was like someone with a father who didn't raise them. Other kids' dads would rush over the minute something happened, but my dad was probably out drinking somewhere.

"All the anger I had kept bottled up evaporated in an instant, and then I cried. I felt truly wronged and didn't know who to confide in. No one liked me, not even my own father. I wondered, if he disliked me so much, why didn't he just strangle me when I was born."

At this point, Zhao Lei's eyes reddened. He continued, "Seeing the situation, my class teacher pulled me away. As I was being dragged off, that man was still spewing curses. Eventually, my dad arrived. I don't know how the matter was settled, but I heard the guy I fought with suffered a broken nose. My dad had

to pay a lot of compensation money, an amount that would have taken my incompetent father years to save.

"I saw my dad bowing and scraping to the grade-level director, just like a dog. I didn't understand. It was clearly the other person's fault, so why was everyone blaming me? The teachers, my classmates, even my own father—he was scolding me too. He said I was a money-waster, too impetuous, and only caused him trouble. He said he would have been better off not having me.

"Actually, I didn't want to live in this world either. I even wanted to ask why they brought me into this world without asking for my opinion."

Zhao Lei spoke these words with remarkable fluency, as if he had replayed these memories countless times. The slightest trigger would unleash the entire flood of recollections. He went on, "Of course, he only said those scolding words to me at home. In front of others, he had to maintain his image as a good father. People who knew him all said he was a great dad.

"But only I know if he was truly as good as others claimed.

"Later, I cautiously finished high school and got into university. Do you know? He wasn't willing to give me a single dime. Even my university tuition fees were only handed to me on the very last day. He also gave me his old, broken mobile phone. I guess he must have bought a new one for himself. At that moment, I decided I would never ask him for money again and never wanted to see him again.

"I consider myself a capable person. I managed to earn some money through my own efforts, so I no longer had to wear the same set of clothes for an entire season. I even got a girlfriend, my first love. During this period, my dad never visited me and rarely called. Even when he did call, he would hang up in less than a minute.

"Later, he somehow found out I had a girlfriend. He immediately called, yelling and cursing, demanding that I break up with her. He said I was spending money on women outside instead of sending it home and insisted I break up immediately.

"I definitely wasn't going to listen to him. So, he bought a train ticket and came to my school to confront me. When he saw my girlfriend, he started verbally abusing her. I don't know what he said to her, but afterward, she suggested we break up."

This father is a bit of a psycho, isn't he? Fatty grimaced.

Zhao Lei then said, "After that, I never had another girlfriend. Even after graduation, I never took the initiative to contact my dad.

"I couldn't make it in the big city, so I returned here. But I had no intention of living with him. I rented a place outside and worked hard, earning a little money.

"Over these years, I haven't contacted him much, and our relationship is just so-so, though not as awkward as it used to be.

"Later, my ex-girlfriend found me again. She said she still couldn't forget me and wanted to get back together.

"I came up the mountain this time to talk to my dad about this. We're getting married. Originally, I didn't want to bring it up with him, but after thinking about it, I decided I should tell him. After all, he is my father."

Reaching this point in his story, the young man, who was about twenty-five or twenty-six, gave a scornful laugh. "But to my surprise, he's unreachable," he said.

After listening to Zhao Lei's account, everyone present had strange expressions.

If his father, Zhao Guanhai, was dead, Zhao Lei would undoubtedly be the prime suspect.

"You don't need to worry." Zhao Lei shook his head slightly. "I wouldn't do something like that. Although my dad has always been bad to me, I know he's not actually that evil."

Brother Mobile pursed his lips. "And what makes you conclude that your dad isn't so bad?"

This was the most bizarre father he had ever encountered, rotten to the core.

After Brother Mobile spoke, Zhao Lei frowned in confusion. "I used to hate him to the bone. But I don't know why, recalling these things now, I don't find him so hateful anymore. Actually, I don't really know how I reached that conclusion. Perhaps time has diluted those feelings."

The others exchanged glances. That explanation didn't seem very reliable.

Zhao Lei continued, "Actually, you don't need to go to so much trouble to find my dad. He's always like this. Sometimes, when I needed to contact him for school matters, I couldn't reach him. He'll show up on his own eventually."

By the time he finished speaking, it was completely dark outside. It was pitch black, with only the occasional sway of tree branches breaking the stillness.

"You don't need to worry," Zhao Lei said. "The road will be cleared in a few days. Then you can go down the mountain. My dad will probably come back too."

The one who shows up then might be a ghost, though.