

Collapse 119

Chapter 119: Hengming Middle School_1

As if fearing Gu Mian might not understand, Fatty began to explain, "A labor market, also known as a human resource market, is similar to a vegetable market. But unlike a vegetable market where vegetables are sold, what's sold in a labor market is human labor. Don't misunderstand, though; it's not human trafficking or anything illegal. It's just people selling their manual labor.

"There are virtually no rules there. In simple terms, it's a large group of people gathering, waiting for employers to select workers. If a buyer needs work done, they'll drive to the labor market, usually in an old van. Most of the work people get hired for there is extremely dirty and exhausting. Some of it is even hazardous. The jobs are unstable, usually lasting just a day, but they pay well.

"In the labor market, there are far more workers than jobs. Hordes of people wait to be picked, and when a vehicle approaches, they swarm it. Some don't even ask what the job is; they just desperately try to squeeze in, terrified someone else will snatch the opportunity. You see, in the labor market, once peak hiring time passes, very few employers show up. That's why the workers waiting there scramble onto any vehicle they see. First-time buyers at this market often get frightened by the scene.

"The advantage of finding work through the labor market is that you get paid daily, and the pay is good. The disadvantage is that you can't do it long-term because the work is so fucking exhausting. You work from early morning till late night, only stopping for meals. There are two reasons for this. First, someone's always watching you, and if you try to take a break, they'll cuss you out. Second, the work is so grueling you have to push through on sheer willpower. If you pause even for a moment, you'll collapse from exhaustion and won't be able to get up again.

"If you consistently find work there long-term, I reckon you'd work yourself to death within a few months."

Fatty coughed. "Don't ask me how I know all this so clearly."

Because you've worked there before, Gu Mian thought, not needing to guess.

The voices from his cell phone continued. However, the conversation seemed to have shifted. It was no longer Zhao Guanhai and Brother Li; Zhao Guanhai was now talking to someone else, and it didn't sound like they were on a phone call.

A somewhat rough, youthful voice spoke first, "Brother Zhao, I've seen you here for several days straight now. Are you holding up?"

Zhao Guanhai's voice replied, "I'm holding up, I'm holding up. I'm not even forty yet; still young, I'd say."

"Come on, you're so thin and frail, I'd believe you if you said you were fifty. But Brother Zhao, I honestly never thought you could endure this kind of hardship. I remember back when I was in high school, I saw you drunk and making a scene outside the supermarket. Back then, I thought I should steer clear of you if I ever ran into you again. Who'd have thought we'd end up as colleagues now? Even if it's only been a few times, it must be fate."

"Ah, that's all in the past. Best not to bring it up."

"Haha, isn't there a saying, 'a prodigal son's return is more precious than gold'? Right, Brother Zhao, I still remember your son. That little kid who was desperately trying to pull you away from the supermarket entrance back then? What grade is he in now?"

"He's in junior high, ninth grade. He's got the high school entrance exams coming up soon. I need to earn more to save up for his tuition and living expenses."

"So, does your son know you're out here doing this kind of work?"

Zhao Guanhai fell silent for a moment, then said dejectedly, "Of course not. That kid has always looked down on me. If he found out his old man could only find hard labor jobs in the labor market, he'd laugh his head off. I made him board at school precisely so he wouldn't find out."

The young voice hesitated. "I heard your relationship is pretty strained."

"Nothing to hide. My relationship with my son really isn't good. It's my fault. I didn't look after him properly when he was little. All I knew was drinking. After I drank, I'd just kick back and not care about a thing. My son... he had a really tough childhood."

"But Brother Zhao, you've turned over a new leaf now. Look at how hard you're working to earn money— isn't it all for him? If you go back and explain things to your boy, I'm sure he'll understand."

Zhao Guanhai seemed to hesitate for a moment.

"Let's wait. I know a lot of people at his school look down on my son. That fight he got into recently? It was because of that. I'll tell him when I've saved up enough money and don't have to find work here anymore. You know how it is for us working here—we're all afraid of being seen, afraid of running into acquaintances. If my son found out... I'm scared he wouldn't be able to hold his head high at school anymore."

"Sigh, you really have it tough. Oh, by the way, Brother Zhao, a foreman contacted me. Said there's work tomorrow and asked me to find a few guys. It sounds pretty easy, and the pay isn't bad for a day. Interested?"

"What kind of work?"

"Looks like they're repairing a road somewhere. They need people to mix cement and help unload cement bags when trucks arrive. It's three hundred for the day. The job's pretty easy; not many trucks will come in a day, so there'll be time to rest. It's much lighter than your usual jobs like unloading cargo or hauling iron posts."

"That job sounds really good," Zhao Guanhai's voice came through. "I've really been struggling these past few days; I'm about at my limit. This would be a bit easier, let me rest some, and the pay is good too. Thanks."

"Don't mention it. Just treat me to a good meal when your son is successful in the future."

Zhao Guanhai chuckled, his tone a bit lighter. "Right, where's the job tomorrow?"

"I haven't checked yet. Let me see..."

"The intersection of Songjiang Road and Anchang Road..."

"...Hengming Middle School."

The young man's voice trailed off, sounding very hesitant as he read the last part.

Then, an awkward silence fell between them. NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON NOVELFIRE.NET

But Zhao Guanhai's voice quickly broke the silence. "Hengming Middle School, huh? My son goes to school there. In that case, I... I can't go. No, definitely not."

"Think about it, Brother Zhao. You've been exhausted for days; you can't keep doing heavy labor. I know you're reluctant to take a break, but it's rare to find an easier job like this with good pay. You could actually get some rest doing this. Don't just dismiss it because of the location."

Zhao Guanhai refused firmly. "No. My son studies there. What if he sees me?"

"You probably won't run into him. Just cover yourself up well—wear a hat or something. Even if he sees you, he won't recognize you."

Zhao Guanhai fell silent again for a moment. "Actually, it's not just about my son seeing me. Some teachers and students at his school know me..."

"I've embarrassed myself plenty of times before; I'm used to it. Being seen by them wouldn't be a big deal for me... I'm just afraid that if they see me, they'll mock my son again. I can handle the shame myself, but I'm worried my boy won't be able to hold his head high. Let's just forget it. Forget it..."

"Sigh. So, what's your plan? Go back to the labor market tomorrow for more of that back-breaking heavy labor?"

"I'll see tomorrow. I'll check if any construction sites need people for unloading or carrying goods."