

Full-Level 781

Chapter 781: Not Giving In

Ye Leng'an's actions and voice instantly snapped Murong Yumeng back to reality, though there was still a hint of confusion in her eyes.

Nevertheless, being from a prominent family, Murong Yumeng quickly composed herself. She turned to Ye Leng'an with a faint smile and continued speaking, "Junior Sister Ye, I never expected to run into you here. It truly seems like fate! Although I've heard your name mentioned many times back at school, we've never had the chance to meet. It's quite unexpected to cross paths here in this small town."

"Senior Sister Murong, do you believe this is fate?" Ye Leng'an smirked slightly. "You seem to have forgotten why you wanted to find me. Have you truly forgotten the reason?"

These words caused Murong Yumeng to falter.

Clearly, she now remembered the recent event and was well aware that Ye Leng'an and her companion had witnessed everything.

"Junior Sister Ye, please don't misunderstand." Murong Yumeng regained her composure and smiled. "Since you're already aware of everything, there's no need for further explanation. I came here solely for that suite. Can you accommodate me? Of course, I'll compensate you generously – double the room rate, plus arrange another suite for you. If you have any other requests, feel free to ask. If it's within my means, I'll do my best to fulfill them."

There was no hint of arrogance in her tone, nor did she attempt to bully others. Instead, her attitude was remarkably humble. Hence, despite sharing the same objective as Xiao Lingling, to outsiders, she didn't appear in the wrong.

Ye Leng'an smiled and responded without hesitation, "Since Senior Sister Murong has expressed yourself sincerely, I shall respond in kind. That's not possible."

Before Murong Yumeng could interject, Xiao Lingling couldn't hold back any longer. "You don't know what's good for you!"

Not only Xiao Lingling but also the other young masters and misses from Murong Yumeng's entourage wore unfavorable expressions. When they looked at Ye Leng'an, their gazes were filled with hostility. If it weren't for the inappropriate setting and Murong Yumeng's silent reprimand, they might have intervened earlier.

No one present expected Ye Leng'an to outright refuse Murong Yumeng.

After all, Murong Yumeng had already humbled herself. Ye Leng'an could have easily agreed to relinquish the room, satisfying everyone. Yet, contrary to expectations, she unhesitatingly declined.

Especially considering Murong Yumeng's distinguished background as a member of the Murong family, Ye Leng'an showed no fear of offending anyone.

Murong Yumeng appeared momentarily stunned, unable to comprehend. "Are you rejecting me?"

"Yes," Ye Leng'an affirmed with a smile. "What? Senior Sister Murong, are you negotiating with me or trying to coerce me?"

She completely disregarded Xiao Lingling, directing her gaze solely at Murong Yumeng. It was evident she didn't take Xiao Lingling seriously, treating her as nothing more than a mere distraction.

Xiao Lingling's expression soured further, but constrained by the public setting, she remained silent, standing sullenly by.

"I didn't intend that." Murong Yumeng's smile appeared strained. "Since Junior Sister Ye disagrees, we won't force the issue."

"In that case, we'll take our leave." Ye Leng'an clasped Huangfu Ruiling's hand and waved at Murong Yumeng, smiling. "Goodbye."

Without waiting for Murong Yumeng's response, Ye Leng'an left the homestay with Huangfu Ruiling.

Murong Yumeng, left behind in her spot, wore a smile that seemed particularly strained, her eyes clouded with gloom. If it weren't for the presence of so many people, perhaps she would have lost her composure long ago.

Observing Murong Yumeng's demeanor, Xiao Lingling dared not speak.

Being Murong Yumeng's follower, she understood her temperament well. Thus, she knew Murong Yumeng's outward kindness belied her true nature.

After a while, Murong Yumeng remained stationary, prompting Xiao Lingling to cautiously ask, "Senior Sister Murong, what should we do now?"

The others didn't step forward to speak to Murong Yumeng, so she had no choice but to approach her herself. After all, she was the one with the lowest status here. If she further upset anyone, she genuinely feared being sent back.

Murong Yumeng cast a cold glance at Xiao Lingling before speaking, "What do you think? Should we not secure a room yet? Do you expect us to spend the night in the lobby?"

Without hesitation, Xiao Lingling promptly responded, "Senior Sister, I'll book a room right away."

With that, she hurried to the counter to arrange for accommodations.

"Yumeng, do you know Ye Leng'an?" Xiao Xueqing, another member of their group, and the young lady of the Xiao family from the capital, approached Murong Yumeng with a hint of discontent. It was directed at Ye Leng'an, not Murong Yumeng.

"She's a junior from our school."

Murong Yumeng's demeanor softened compared to her earlier interaction with Xiao Lingling. She appeared somewhat melancholic. "Though we've never met, she probably doesn't hold a favorable impression of me."

"Is it because of the school belle competition?"

Having gleaned some information from their conversation, Xiao Xueqing's tone was tinged with disdain. "Judging by her demeanor, she's likely not from a prominent family in the capital. Coming from a humble background, her vision is indeed limited. I wonder what kind of benefactor she's found to secure the most luxurious suite here."

As Xiao Xueqing spoke, many couldn't help but think of the distinguished man who stood beside Ye Leng'an earlier, eliciting fluttering hearts from the girls present.

"Xueqing, refrain from baseless remarks."

Murong Yumeng shook her head gently, cautioning Xiao Xueqing. "Without knowing the truth, we shouldn't tarnish someone's reputation."

Chapter 782: Sweet Talk

"Yumeng, you really have a big heart!" Xiao Xueqing said with a half-smile. "Even though Ye Leng'an embarrassed you like that, you're not even a bit angry."

Although her words were complimentary, her ambiguous expression made people wonder.

"Yumeng has always had a good nature." Zi Zhijie stepped forward, his gaze towards Murong Yumeng filled with admiration. It was as if he didn't catch the hidden meaning in Xiao Xueqing's words at all. He smiled and said, "She's always been like this since childhood."

Among those present today were all children from prominent families in the capital. Zi Zhijie's family had a long history of political involvement, and many members of the Zi family held high positions in the government. Zi Zhijie's future also lay in this direction. He had harbored feelings for Murong Yumeng since childhood, and both families had already agreed that there was a high chance of them marrying in the future.

Hearing Zi Zhijie's words, Xiao Xueqing's expression visibly darkened. However, she wouldn't blame Zi Zhijie, she just shot Murong Yumeng a fierce glare.

"Alright." Cong Haodong stepped forward, laughing. "We've been here for quite some time. Let's quickly book rooms and freshen up before heading out to play! Didn't we hear that there's a large gathering tonight?"

"It's a rare occasion, and it would be a shame to miss it."

The other two girls, Gu Lerong and Zhong Hanyun, also stepped forward to smooth things over.

They had seen this situation many times before. Everyone knew that Zi Zhijie liked Murong Yumeng and Xiao Xueqing liked Zi Zhijie. It was because of this dynamic that Xiao Xueqing had always found Murong Yumeng displeasing. Usually, she would make sarcastic remarks.

However, Murong Yumeng was still the young lady of the Murong family and a legitimate one at that. Although her father wasn't the head of the Murong family, his status couldn't be underestimated. So, Xiao Xueqing could only resort to making a few snide remarks without taking any substantial action.

On the other hand, Murong Yumeng, despite being from the Murong family, had always had a good temperament since childhood. Therefore, whenever faced with Xiao Xueqing's snide remarks, she remained silent and never got angry.

However, because of this, everyone felt that Xiao Xueqing was truly immature.

Meanwhile, Ye Leng'an and Huangfu Ruiling left the homestay and headed towards the large gathering. It was already evening, and although the gathering hadn't officially started, many stalls were already open for business. So, it was quite appropriate for them to go now.

The two held hands and strolled down the street like any other couple. But their outstanding looks and demeanor still attracted many onlookers.

Ye Leng'an occasionally glanced at Huangfu Ruiling with an unknown glint in her eyes.

Huangfu Ruiling felt a bit helpless. He turned to Ye Leng'an and asked with a smile, "Are you satisfied with what you see?"

"Of course." Ye Leng'an nodded earnestly. She even reached out and touched his face. "How could I not be satisfied with such a beautiful face!"

It was a rather forward gesture, but Ye Leng'an executed it smoothly, almost flirtatiously.

Huangfu Ruiling indulged her actions and didn't feel any dissatisfaction. Instead, he smiled and said, "Then take your time to admire. You have a lifetime to do so."

"Yes, indeed!" Ye Leng'an wasn't shy at all. She smiled and nodded. "How good-looking! You are mine and no one can covet you."

Hearing Ye Leng'an's possessive words, Huangfu Ruiling didn't feel displeased. Instead, he felt secretly pleased. He liked her possessiveness because it showed how much she valued him.

"Just now, Murong Yumeng was staring at your face!" Ye Leng'an raised her eyebrows. "Do you think she recognized you?"

"She couldn't have recognized us," Huangfu Ruiling said lightly. "She hasn't seen us before, so she couldn't know who we are."

Although Murong Yumeng was from the Murong family, she wasn't qualified to attend their engagement ceremony. So, even if she heard familiar names, she wouldn't be able to guess their identities immediately.

“Then it seems she only likes your face.” Ye Leng’an chuckled. “But it’s understandable. You’re so good-looking that it’s normal for Murong Yumeng to admire your beauty.”

If someone else had said that, Huangfu Ruiling would have been furious. After all, no man liked to be described as beautiful. However, since it was Ye Leng’an, Huangfu Ruiling didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

“Is that considered a compliment?”

“Of course.” Ye Leng’an nodded earnestly. “I’m complimenting your good looks!”

“Then I have to thank you for your praise!” Huangfu Ruiling shook his head helplessly, then rubbed her hair with his other hand.

“Don’t mess with my hair,” Ye Leng’an pulled his hand away and said angrily. “You’ve messed up my hair. I still need to take photos later!”

Seeing her rare childishness, a trace of tenderness flashed in Huangfu Ruiling’s eyes. “Okay, I’ll help you take photos later.”

“You know how to take photos?” Ye Leng’an raised her head and looked at Huangfu Ruiling with a charming smile. “I didn’t know you had this skill!”

“I don’t,” Huangfu Ruiling said without guilt, “but I can learn!”

Hearing that, Ye Leng’an felt a little speechless. “So, you’re using me as a guinea pig.”

“How could that be!” Huangfu Ruiling looked at her and said with a smile, “You’re pretty, so you’ll always be good-looking in the photos.”

Hearing Huangfu Ruiling’s words, Ye Leng’an was a little surprised. “I didn’t expect you to sweet-talk! That’s really rare!

She thought that given Huangfu Ruiling’s personality, he would never say such things!

“Alright, let’s hurry up and go!” Huangfu Ruiling held her hand and continued walking forward. “If we delay any longer, the gathering will start soon.”

Chapter 783: The Mask

As the two arrived at the grand gathering, it was on the verge of commencing.

Night had descended, yet the street hosting the event was aglow with lights, resembling daylight. Most stalls were open, offering various snacks, accessories, crafts, and game booths, creating a lively atmosphere.

Ye Leng’an held Huangfu Ruiling’s hand, strolling through the gathering and conversing, “Ling, this place is truly vibrant! It’s rare to find such down-to-earth spots in the capital!”

Though the capital boasted lively streets, being the nation's capital meant incomparable grandeur. Ye Leng'an's excitement made Huangfu Ruiling feel this trip was indeed worthwhile.

Unaware of Huangfu Ruiling's thoughts, Ye Leng'an's attention was captivated by the gathering's festivities, neglecting Huangfu Ruiling's presence.

Here, a young couple enjoyed a romantic stroll, contrasting Murong Yumeng's less-than-ideal mood.

At this moment, Murong Yumeng had returned to her room.

It was still a luxurious suite, but compared to the most luxurious one, it paled in comparison.

However, while this luxurious suite wasn't the best, its price tag was still steep. It would be unaffordable for the average person. However, all those who came this time were young ladies and masters from the top aristocratic families of the capital, so naturally, each of them had reserved a room.

After surveying the decorations in the room, a hint of dissatisfaction flashed in Murong Yumeng's eyes. When she came this time, she had already planned to stay in the most luxurious suite. However, she hadn't expected Ye Leng'an to beat her to it.

Murong Yumeng removed her mask, revealing her true self.

At that moment, thoughts of Ye Leng'an's arrogance stirred bitterness on her face. She had heard of Ye Leng'an before. Merely based on a bare-faced photo, Ye Leng'an dared to compare herself to her.

However, at that time, she didn't pay much attention to Ye Leng'an. She had already investigated and found her to be nothing more than an impostor of a wealthy family. Of course, she had looked into Ye Leng'an because anyone who dared to compare themselves to her deserved scrutiny.

Unaware of the circumstances, she harbored disdain towards Ye Leng'an. Yet, she never imagined their paths would cross in this manner.

Perplexed by Ye Leng'an's courage, Murong Yumeng speculated if she relied on the mysterious man by her side.

Thoughts of the man caused her eyes to narrow, pondering his identity and their relationship. His remarkable presence and their intimacy piqued her curiosity.

As Murong Yumeng mused, a knock interrupted her thoughts. Opening the door, she found Zi Zhijie outside.

"Zhijie, what's the matter?" Murong Yumeng smiled. "Are we ready? I seem to be the last one."

"Not yet," Zi Zhijie replied. "We just finished. Everyone's downstairs. Let's go! The gathering must have started."

"Alright."

They walked side by side, and Murong Yumeng brought up another topic. "By the way, Zhijie, did you see that man earlier?"

Zi Zhijie's expression darkened at the mention of another man. Lightening the mood, he joked, "Is it appropriate to mention another man in front of me?"

Though not directly named, he understood whom Murong Yumeng referred to. The man had unsettled him.

If it were any other man, perhaps he wouldn't be so concerned. But merely standing there, that man was enough to make every man feel inferior. Such a man sparked a sense of crisis within him.

Murong Yumeng clarified, "I'm just curious. He seems like someone from a prominent family, but I don't recognize him. Moreover, considering today's events, do you think we might have offended someone?"

Observing Murong Yumeng's earnestness, Zi Zhijie regretted his earlier thoughts. He reassured her, "Don't overthink. He doesn't seem petty. We might have already been forgotten."

Murong Yumeng nodded with a smile. "You're right. It seems I've indeed been overthinking. But I believe we should still be cautious when we're out like this. We wouldn't want to make enemies for our family or disgrace them."

Zi Zhijie turned his head and looked at Murong Yumeng, his gaze softening even further. "Yumeng, you really don't seem like those arrogant young ladies from prominent families. Your demeanor is genuinely gentle. Sometimes, I worry that you might be taken advantage of when you're out like this!"

Chapter 784: Strolling Through the Gathering

"Are you praising me, or teasing me?" Murong Yumeng smirked playfully. "And don't be fooled by my appearance. If I were to truly lose my temper, you wouldn't be able to handle it!"

Observing Murong Yumeng's charming demeanor, Zi Zhijie couldn't help but show a hint of infatuation on his face. "Well, I must admit, I'm quite curious now!"

Murong Yumeng chuckled lightly, a hint of pride gleaming in her eyes.

Evidently, she found Zi Zhijie's admiration rather gratifying. However, whereas she once considered Zi Zhijie her best choice and was aware of the familial intentions behind their union, her heart now wavered. Especially after encountering the man earlier that day, she couldn't help but feel there might be better options for her. Of course, everything remained uncertain. She wasn't naive and wouldn't act solely on her impulses. She would only settle for the best, believing she deserved nothing less.

"Let's drop the subject. You haven't answered my question yet!" Murong Yumeng smiled, resuming the conversation. "Have you seen that man before?"

After a moment of recollection, Zi Zhijie responded, "I haven't. Perhaps he's not even part of our social circle. Don't dwell on it too much. We didn't do anything significant today; it was merely a civil discussion. Besides, with your temperament, how could you possibly offend anyone?"

This aspect of Murong Yumeng was what Zi Zhijie admired most. Unlike other young ladies from affluent families, she was amiable and never looked down upon the less fortunate. In her spare time, she often volunteered for charitable causes. A woman of such gentleness was undoubtedly universally admired!

Zi Zhijie also felt fortunate that he and Murong Yumeng were childhood friends and that their families had agreed upon their future marriage. Otherwise, he believed he would have faced stiff competition.

Seeing Zi Zhijie's apparent lack of recognition, Murong Yumeng smiled and decided not to press further.

As the two conversed, they soon reached the lobby of the homestay, where the rest of their party awaited them.

Without delay, they set off towards the bustling main gathering area.

The event was already in full swing, with the streets bustling with activity and chatter.

Huangfu Ruiling held tightly onto Ye Leng'an's hand, fearing they might get separated in the crowd. His other hand already held numerous snack bags, the spoils of their journey.

Looking at the array of bags, he couldn't help but feel resigned. He had suggested having something to eat before embarking on their excursion from the inn, but Ye Leng'an insisted on sampling specialty snacks directly. Unable to persuade her otherwise, he acquiesced.

However, he hadn't expected Ye Leng'an to purchase so many snacks along the way, most of which were considered junk food.

After strolling for a while, they finally settled at a noodle stall.

Although not a proper noodle restaurant, the stall seemed popular, likely due to the large gathering. Judging by the crowd, the food was probably quite delicious.

Once seated, they opted for a single bowl of wonton noodles. With their plethora of snacks, ordering two bowls would likely result in leftovers.

Ye Leng'an began sampling the snacks on the table, offering Huangfu Ruiling the ones she enjoyed and discarding the ones she didn't.

Though Huangfu Ruiling felt somewhat exasperated, he accepted everything Ye Leng'an offered.

Their bowl of wonton noodles arrived promptly, and they began sharing it intimately, exemplifying a close bond to onlookers.

After a taste, Ye Leng'an's eyes lit up. "Delicious!"

Scooping up another wonton, she fed it to Huangfu Ruiling.

Taking a bite, Huangfu Ruiling found the wonton tasty but not exceptional. Yet, seeing Ye Leng'an's satisfied expression, he couldn't help but appreciate the flavor.

Observing their intimate exchange, the stall's owner couldn't help but chuckle. "You two make such a sweet couple!"

“We’re not a couple,” Huangfu Ruiling interjected, momentarily surprising the owner. However, his subsequent words elicited a mix of laughter and bewilderment. “We’re engaged. We’re fiancés.”

Ye Leng’an sighed internally at Huangfu Ruiling’s emphasis.

The owner, however, smiled knowingly upon hearing Huangfu Ruiling’s words. Glancing at Ye Leng’an, she remarked with a smile, “Ah, I see! Your fiancé seems quite fond of you! Ah, to be young again!”

“You’re still quite young yourself!” Ye Leng’an chimed in with a smile. “And judging by the rapport between you and your husband, your relationship must be strong!”

“What’s there to say? It’s just life,” the owner replied nonchalantly.

With a touch of nostalgia, she added, “We’re just an old married couple. Once a young girl, now a mother of two.”

Ye Leng’an chuckled and praised, “Your wontons are truly delicious! Knowing that, I’ll stick with wontons next time, no more wonton noodles.”

“As long as you enjoy them,” the owner responded with genuine pleasure. “The wonton recipe is a family heirloom, our means of livelihood. If you like them, you can visit Yuan Ji Noodle Shop down the street during the day. We operate there.”

“Ah, so you have a regular shop! That’s wonderful.” Ye Leng’an nodded in agreement. “I’ll drop by in a couple of days. Madam, please add two extra wontons for me then!”

“Hehe, if such an outstanding couple graces our doorstep, it’s like free advertising for us,” the owner chuckled. “Rest assured, we’ll make sure you’re satisfied.”

Chapter 785: Quarrel

As Murong Yumeng and her companions approached, the first person to catch their attention was the charming Ye Leng’an.

Among the crowd, only Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng’an stood out. Even amidst the bustling atmosphere, their striking appearances and unique demeanor were enough to captivate attention.

Even Zi Zhijie, deeply infatuated with Murong Yumeng, momentarily lost focus upon seeing Ye Leng’an’s smiling face.

“Meeting again, it seems fate has its own plans,” Xiao Lingling spoke up, her face filled with resentment. “If we had known, we wouldn’t have come.”

Her words snapped everyone back to reality, their earlier distraction now remembered with a tinge of complexity.

“Since we’ve encountered each other, let’s greet them,” Murong Yumeng suggested warmly. “It’s only polite since we know each other. Ignoring them would be rude.”

“Empty courtesy,” Xiao Xueqing retorted sharply upon hearing Murong Yumeng’s suggestion. “Let’s not forget the unpleasant encounter we just had. Going over now would only make both parties uncomfortable, wouldn’t it?”

Murong Yumeng’s smile faded at Xiao Xueqing’s words, her demeanor turning anxious and somewhat sad. “I didn’t mean that. I just wanted to ease the tension. Besides, we haven’t soured our relationship irreparably!”

Seeing Murong Yumeng’s distress, Zi Zhijie’s displeasure surfaced. He stepped forward, blocking her path, and addressed Xiao Xueqing with hostility. “Xueqing, why are you targeting Yumeng? She’s just trying to be kind. There’s no need for harsh words!”

Xiao Xueqing felt deeply wronged by Zi Zhijie’s accusation. “What did I say wrong? Wasn’t our recent encounter unpleasant? Are we now supposed to eagerly seek out more discomfort?”

“Yumeng simply wants to avoid conflict. What’s wrong with that?” Zi Zhijie’s tone remained stern. “Why do you always assume the worst about others, Xueqing? You’re being unreasonable.”

Zi Zhijie’s accusation, like a knife, stabbed at her heart. Yet, she didn’t blame him. Instead, she directed her resentment toward Murong Yumeng, believing her actions provoked Zi Zhijie’s reproach.

Glaring at Murong Yumeng, she snapped, “Happy now?”

“I didn’t mean to…” Murong Yumeng’s expression turned pained. She turned to Zi Zhijie, pleading, “Your words were too harsh, Zhijie. Xueqing didn’t intend any harm. She was just worried I’d face rejection if I approached. You shouldn’t blame her.”

Zi Zhijie frowned. “Yumeng, you’re too soft.”

Xiao Xueqing was livid.

“Enough, let’s stop arguing.” Gu Lerong intervened, attempting to diffuse the tension. “Both Yumeng and Xueqing have valid points. We just want to resolve the issue. Why rush it? Besides, aren’t we here to have fun?”

“Exactly!” Cong Haodong chimed in. “No need to ruin our own mood over outsiders!”

Murong Yumeng remained silent, but Xiao Xueqing seemed ungrateful for the sentiment.

She stomped her foot, glaring fiercely at Murong Yumeng. “Fine, if you want to embarrass yourself, go ahead. But don’t expect us to cover for you.”

With that, Xiao Xueqing found a seat, her demeanor indicating she had no intention of further communication.

“Shall we…” Zhong Hanyun suggested, glancing around. “Sit down first? We haven’t eaten anything yet.”

Though she found Xiao Xueqing's attitude distasteful, Zhong Hanyun acknowledged the validity of her point. They were all from prominent families in the capital and saw no need to curry favor with anyone.

Of course, she didn't fault Murong Yumeng's actions. Given her kind and easygoing nature, it was understandable that she sought to mend relations after the recent incident.

The others shared similar sentiments as Zhong Hanyun.

In the end, only Murong Yumeng, Zi Zhijie, and Xiao Lingling remained standing. The rest had taken their seats.

While Murong Yumeng's expression remained unchanged, a shadow flickered in her eyes as she glanced at Xiao Xueqing, devoid of warmth.

Turning to Zi Zhijie, she smiled. "Zhijie, please, take a seat. I'll go say hello and be right back."

"I'll go with you!" Zi Zhijie frowned. "I'm worried they'll be hostile."

Having experienced the sharp tongue of the girl at the homestay, he doubted Murong Yumeng's solo approach would end well.

"No need." Murong Yumeng declined with a smile. "Lingling will come with me. We're both students from Capital University. She won't embarrass me. Besides, I'm only going to greet them, not start a fight."

Though Zi Zhijie remained unconvinced, he couldn't dissuade Murong Yumeng. He could only ask Xiao Lingling to keep watch. If the other party failed to appreciate their kindness, she would pull Murong Yumeng back.

Meanwhile, Ye Leng'an, still eating, observed Murong Yumeng's approach with interest. With her poised demeanor and wealthy aura, it was inevitable she'd attract attention.

She hadn't expected Murong Yumeng to approach them.

Chapter 786: Greeting

Ye Leng'an raised her eyebrows but remained seated, not even glancing in Murong Yumeng's direction as if she didn't recognize her at all.

"Junior Sister Ye." Murong Yumeng stopped in front of Ye Leng'an with a smile. "What a coincidence! Didn't expect to run into you here."

Before Ye Leng'an could respond, Huangfu Ruiling looked up with icy eyes towards Murong Yumeng. It was evident he disliked being interrupted during his private time with Ye Leng'an.

His cold stare sent shivers down the spines of Murong Yumeng and her companion as they approached. They even felt the urge to flee under his gaze.

Despite the temptation to flee, Murong Yumeng suppressed it and tried to maintain her composure. "Seems like we've disturbed you, right?"

"Yes." Unexpectedly, Ye Leng'an nodded seriously. "You have indeed disrupted us."

Murong Yumeng didn't anticipate such a response from Ye Leng'an. Typically, people would deny it in such situations to save face. But Ye Leng'an's candid reply was embarrassing.

Zi Zhijie's expression visibly darkened. Born into privilege, he'd never experienced such treatment. Being openly humiliated like this was infuriating.

Even more irksome was Ye Leng'an's disregard. Zi Zhijie seized Murong Yumeng's hand, eager to leave rather than endure the disdainful glances.

However, to Zi Zhijie's surprise, Murong Yumeng showed no signs of leaving. Despite his efforts, she remained rooted, leaving him feeling powerless.

Seeing Ye Leng'an's attitude, Xiao Lingling was angry, but Murong Yumeng signaled her to stay quiet. She reluctantly held back her frustration.

"You sure love jokes." Murong Yumeng quickly adjusted her tone with a smile, trying to diffuse the tension. "What a coincidence indeed! Although we've never met in school, I'm sure we've heard of each other. Now, here we are, coincidentally holidaying in the same town. If this isn't fate, then what is?"

Ye Leng'an watched Murong Yumeng talk to herself quietly, blinking but saying nothing, as if watching a solo performance.

No matter how composed Murong Yumeng usually was, under Ye Leng'an's gaze, her smile froze, and her words stuck in her throat.

"Yumeng, let's go!" Zi Zhijie's expression soured as he addressed Ye Leng'an and Huangfu Ruiling, his eyes full of hostility. "You might treat the other as a junior, but she doesn't acknowledge you as her senior. We don't need to endure this."

"Exactly," Xiao Lingling added. "Senior Sister Murong, people like them don't deserve our attention."

She resolved to expose Ye Leng'an's true nature once they returned to school. She wanted everyone to see who Ye Leng'an really was, especially considering her standing compared to Murong Yumeng, and question her eligibility for the school belle competition.

"Zhijie, Lingling." Murong Yumeng looked conflicted but glanced at Ye Leng'an and spoke firmly, "You've misunderstood. Junior Sister Ye is not like that."

"No, that's exactly what I am," Ye Leng'an interjected with a smile, though it didn't reach her eyes. "So, Murong Yumeng, if you have nothing to do, stay away from me. Otherwise, you'll make me angry, understood?"

Murong Yumeng turned pale at Ye Leng'an's blunt words, struggling to maintain her facade.

"I apologize for disturbing you sincerely," Murong Yumeng apologized. "I just felt that our encounter at the homestay wasn't pleasant. So, when we coincidentally met here, I wanted to greet you and improve our relationship."

“Murong Yumeng, perhaps only you believe those words!” Ye Leng’an’s smirk hinted at sarcasm. “Only you know what you’re truly thinking. Regardless, your thoughts are your own, and I won’t interfere. Just don’t approach me casually in the future. Can’t you see my fiancé and I want to enjoy our time together?”

Murong Yumeng never expected Ye Leng’an to repeatedly humiliate her. Even her usual facade began to crack under the pressure.

What shocked her most was discovering that the mysterious man was Ye Leng’an’s fiancé.

“Yumeng, let’s go!”

As Zi Zhijie pulled Murong Yumeng away, he expected resistance, but she followed without protest.

Murong Yumeng wasn’t naive; she sensed Ye Leng’an’s rejection and knew she wouldn’t gain anything by staying. Zi Zhijie’s actions provided her with a way out, so she took it

Seeing Murong Yumeng leave so easily surprised Ye Leng’an. She expected a confrontation.

Huangfu Ruiling chuckled at Ye Leng’an’s expression. “Still attached, huh?”

Chapter 787: Schadenfreude

Ye Leng’an shot Huangfu Ruiling a disdainful glance. “What are you saying? I’m glad she’s leaving! But she seems to have some sense, she can tell I don’t care for her.”

“If she had any sense, she wouldn’t have approached us earlier,” Huangfu Ruiling remarked casually. “From start to finish, we could have made it clear we didn’t welcome her.”

Upon hearing Huangfu Ruiling’s blunt words, Ye Leng’an couldn’t help but chuckle. “Actually, I’m curious. Isn’t Murong Yumeng supposed to be the young lady of the Murong family? And isn’t she from the main lineage? How come she doesn’t have any trace of the pride typical in prominent families?”

Huangfu Ruiling raised an eyebrow, indifferent. “Probably because she’s not valued within her family, she developed this kind of personality.”

“Not valued?” Ye Leng’an arched an eyebrow. “But didn’t you say she’s the daughter of the younger brother of Master Murong? That should count for something! How can she be undervalued?”

“It’s precisely because she’s a daughter that she’s undervalued,” Huangfu Ruiling explained matter-of-factly. “The Murong family favors sons over daughters. Her father doesn’t pay much attention to her. But outsiders are oblivious to these family dynamics.”

Ye Leng’an nodded in understanding. “No wonder she doesn’t recognize you! And she seems unaware of our engagement!”

During their engagement, representatives from the four major families were present. Even if she didn't attend, she should have heard about it. Yet, Murong Yumeng acted as if she knew nothing.

Or perhaps she did know but didn't care.

Huangfu Ruiling continued, "Although Murong Yumeng is from the main lineage, her father's lack of attention and her distant relationship with her mother have resulted in her low status within the Murong family. She's unaware of many things."

Ye Leng'an nodded again, devoid of sympathy. Despite Murong Yumeng's lack of favor within her family, she still lived a luxurious life, unworthy of pity. Others struggled to eat; they were the ones deserving sympathy.

"Let's finish eating and then go for a stroll," Ye Leng'an suggested, changing the subject. "There are quite a few mini-games that seem fun."

"Sure," Huangfu Ruiling agreed, his eyes filled with affection as he looked at Ye Leng'an.

Meanwhile, Zi Zhijie led Murong Yumeng back to their table, where the others were waiting for their meals.

Seeing them return disheartened, Xiao Xueqing couldn't help but gloat, her criticism directed at Murong Yumeng. "I really don't understand what you're thinking. You know they don't like you, yet you insist on approaching them. Now you've bitten off more than you can chew!"

She had always disliked Murong Yumeng. Although her Xiao family wasn't as powerful as the Murong family, she never sought to gain favors from Murong Yumeng. Her pride as an aristocratic young lady prevented her from stooping so low.

Her dislike for Murong Yumeng stemmed not just from Zi Zhijie but also from Murong Yumeng's personality. Aristocratic young ladies had their pride, but Murong Yumeng appeared too accommodating, which Xiao Xueqing found repulsive.

As soon as Murong Yumeng heard Xiao Xueqing's words, she immediately felt aggrieved. She quickly spoke up, "Xueqing, I just..."

Before Murong Yumeng could defend herself, Zi Zhijie intervened, standing up for her. "Xueqing, how could you say that? Yumeng meant well, but Ye Leng'an is the one at fault. Criticizing Yumeng like this is uncalled for!"

Hearing this, Xiao Xueqing's expression soured. Her gaze turned fiercer as she looked at Murong Yumeng. "What did I say wrong? I warned her not to disturb them, but she insisted. Now that she's facing backlash, why should I care? I didn't ask her to suffer."

"Let's not dwell on the past," Zi Zhijie said, his tone tinged with disgust as he looked at Xiao Xueqing. "Now that Yumeng is being mistreated, instead of consoling her, you're kicking her while she's down. Do you think your actions are justified?"

Zi Zhijie had always thought Xiao Xueqing was just spoiled, but now he saw she couldn't differentiate right from wrong.

Xiao Xueqing felt like her heart was being torn as she was scrutinized by Zi Zhijie, the person she liked. She stood up, pointing at Murong Yumeng. "Why do you always blame me? Just because I can't act as well as Murong Yumeng, you think everything I do is wrong?"

"Why drag Yumeng into our issues?" Zi Zhijie's impatience seeped into his tone. "You're not a child anymore. Why are you so immature?"

Each accusation caused Xiao Xueqing, usually proud and aloof, to flush with embarrassment.

"Alright, Zhijie, that's enough," Cong Haodong intervened, seeing Xiao Xueqing's distress. He pulled Zi Zhijie aside and said, "Although Xueqing's words are harsh, she means well."

"Xueqing, Zhijie's just overreacting. Don't take it to heart," Gu Lerong added, urging Xiao Xueqing to sit down. "We're here to have fun, not to quarrel over trivial matters."

Seeing Xiao Xueqing's reddened eyes, Zi Zhijie realized he had misspoken. Although he disliked Xiao Xueqing, he didn't want things to escalate.

So, he followed Cong Haodong's lead and stopped talking. As for Xiao Xueqing, despite her discomfort, she remained silent.

Chapter 788: Saving the Ye Family

Originally, if things had settled down like this, then there would have been nothing to worry about.

However, after everyone had taken their seats, Murong Yumeng spoke up once again. She looked at Xiao Xueqing with a hint of apology on her face. "Xueqing, I'm truly sorry. Zhijie didn't mean to say those things earlier. He only spoke out of line to defend me, so please don't take it to heart."

With just those words, Xiao Xueqing's recently improved mood was instantly overshadowed by a layer of gloom. She narrowed her eyes, glaring fiercely at Murong Yumeng, indicating another potential argument.

On the sidelines, Zhong Hanyun immediately restrained Xiao Xueqing and gently shook his head at her.

Xiao Xueqing, who had previously been full of anger, also came to her senses. She realized that continuing to quarrel with Murong Yumeng at this moment would only make her appear in the wrong, regardless of the actual circumstances.

As Xiao Xueqing chose to remain silent, the matter was considered closed.

Soon, the stall owner brought out their ordered dishes. For a while, everyone ate quietly.

The silent ambiance clashed with the bustling chatter around them, yet everyone's expressions remained composed, preventing the silence from becoming awkward.

While enjoying her noodles, Murong Yumeng subtly cast a glance at Xiao Xueqing, her eyes reflecting an unknown gleam.

On the other hand, after finishing their noodles, Ye Leng'an led Huangfu Ruiling outside. She intended to continue enjoying herself outdoors!

Since Murong Yumeng and her group arrived late, they hadn't eaten yet.

Upon seeing Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng'an leaving, Murong Yumeng glanced up. She then redirected her attention back to her noodles.

Meanwhile, Ye Leng'an and Huangfu Ruiling roamed through the gathering, clearly having a delightful time.

In contrast, the atmosphere of the Ye family in the capital was far from pleasant.

The situation at the Ye Group was deteriorating rapidly. Previously, due to Ye Xiyuan's plagiarism scandal, the Ye Group had already suffered a severe blow. Later, taking advantage of the Li family's misfortune, the Ye family attempted to gain benefits. They had never anticipated that the Li family not only survive but also regain its former glory. With their strength restored, the Li family wouldn't easily forgive the Ye family.

Due to this series of setbacks, the Ye Group was almost on the verge of collapse. Initially, after Ye Xiyuan and Nangong Riming got engaged, it provided the Ye Group with a glimmer of hope. People, out of respect for Nangong Riming's reputation, also offered some concessions to the Ye Group. However, who could have predicted that later, when Ye Li sought Nangong Riming's assistance, he would be met with a refusal from Ye Xiyuan.

Because of these various reasons, the Ye Group was now on the brink of bankruptcy.

Inside the spacious Ye family's villa, only Ye Li and Lin Wanqin were present. Ye Anyun was still at school, aware of the family's situation but not fully informed.

As for Ye Xiyuan, she had moved out to live with Nangong Riming after their engagement and hadn't returned home in a while.

Currently, only Ye Li and Lin Wanqin occupied the living room, both wearing solemn expressions as if discussing a serious matter.

"Is it wise for us to proceed like this?" Lin Wanqin looked at Ye Li, a hint of worry creasing her face. "We have no idea what that person intends to do with those items. Should we simply hand them over? What if something goes wrong?"

"What concern is it of ours?" Ye Li's expression turned cold. "Have you forgotten? We've already swallowed our pride and sought Ye Leng'an's help. And what did we get? Not only did she refuse to assist us, but she also humiliated us. Have you forgotten all of that?"

"I haven't forgotten," Lin Wanqin responded promptly. "But even though I detest her, I don't wish her harm."

"Are we the ones causing harm?" Ye Li snorted disdainfully. "What have we done? We've done nothing. Merely handing those things over to that person. Even if harm befalls someone, it won't be our doing."

“But...” Lin Wanqin hesitated. “Why would an ordinary person desire such items? Handing them over like this surely can’t lead to anything good. If something were to happen to Ye Leng’an, wouldn’t we be accomplices?”

“Are you still worried about others at a time like this?” Ye Li cast a cold glance at Lin Wanqin. “Do you think I should stand by and watch the Ye Group go bankrupt? This is our only chance. If we miss it, the Ye Group will have no future.”

Lin Wanqin pursed her lips tightly, eventually murmuring after a pause, “Then should we try reaching out to Xiyuan again? Maybe...”

“Do you really believe we can depend on that wicked daughter now?”

At the mention of Ye Xiyuan, Ye Li’s expression soured further. “With the Ye Group in its current state, she’s truly ‘indispensable’! Causing so much trouble, yet refusing to help in the end. If we had known, we wouldn’t have welcomed her back.”

The thought pained him deeply, especially now that he saw Ye Leng’an was engaged to the head of the Huangfu family. His regret intensified.

If they hadn’t welcomed Ye Xiyuan back initially, the Ye Group wouldn’t have faced its current predicament due to her meddling.

If Ye Xiyuan hadn’t returned, Ye Leng’an wouldn’t have left either. Now, they were about to form a marriage alliance with the Huangfu family, with Huangfu Ruiling becoming their family head. With just this relationship, the Ye Group could have soared to new heights.

Hearing her husband’s dissatisfaction with Ye Xiyuan, Lin Wanqin opened her mouth but refrained from speaking up in Ye Xiyuan’s defense. “Must we really hand over those items?”

“Yes, we must,” Ye Li replied without hesitation. “As long as I can save the Ye Group, I’ll do anything. Moreover, by handing over those items, we’ll receive a significant sum of money. With that capital, the Ye Group can be saved. There’s no room for hesitation now.”

Seeing Ye Li’s resolute demeanor, Lin Wanqin could only sigh and say nothing more.

After all, she had already made all the arguments she could to persuade him, but her husband refused to listen. There was nothing more she could do. Moreover, her actions weren’t morally objectionable.

As for what that person would do afterward, it was beyond her control.

Chapter 789: Back to the Hidden World

In the days that followed, Huangfu Ruiling took Ye Leng’an around the town, and they indulged in carefree play, oblivious to everything else.

During these days, Ye Leng’an encountered Murong Yumeng’s group several times. Each time, Murong Yumeng would nod in greeting, and Ye Leng’an would reciprocate naturally, without

engaging in any unnecessary conversation. She simply bid farewell whenever Murong Yumeng attempted to engage her further.

Consequently, despite Murong Yumeng's efforts to suppress her emotions, it was evident that each glance she cast at Ye Leng'an seemed to carry a hint of hostility.

The National Day holiday soon drew to a close. However, instead of returning to school, Ye Leng'an took leave. With Ye Yikun's birthday approaching, she and Huangfu Ruiling returned to the Hidden World.

Upon seeing Ye Leng'an leaving the homestay, Murong Yumeng couldn't help but wonder whether Ye Leng'an knew something that prompted her to maintain a distance from her.

However, Murong Yumeng never expected that her typically flawless acting would falter in front of Ye Leng'an.

During this period, she failed not only to uncover the identity of Ye Leng'an's supposed fiancé but also to gather any information about Ye Leng'an herself.

While she hadn't completely set her sights on Ye Leng'an's fiancé, she couldn't deny her attraction to him. His appearance and demeanor surpassed Zi Zhijie by far, sparking a sense of allure within her. If his social status indeed exceeded Zi Zhijie's, she would undoubtedly consider replacing him.

Having grown up in the Murong family, she knew precisely what she desired. Especially in selecting her future husband, she aimed for nothing but the best. Only a partner with a high status could solidify her position in the family and earn her parents' reliance.

Naturally, if the man turned out to be a facade, she wouldn't hesitate to stick with Zi Zhijie. Hence, despite her feelings for the man, she maintained an outwardly composed demeanor, ensuring no one detected her true intentions.

As for Ye Leng'an, she posed no threat in Murong Yumeng's eyes. Despite her captivating beauty, her background was a major setback. If the man's status exceeded Zi Zhijie's, he should understand what qualities his future partner should possess.

Though Murong Yumeng was undervalued within the Murong family, outsiders remained oblivious to her situation. Thus, she remained the esteemed Miss Murong in the eyes of others.

Murong Yumeng had already devised a plan. Since she couldn't gather information here, she would find a way once she returned to school.

To her, Ye Leng'an was merely an inexperienced girl. As long as she continued to display friendliness, Ye Leng'an would realize the benefits of befriending her at school.

On the other hand, Ye Leng'an was unaware of Murong Yumeng's audacious intentions. After leaving the homestay, they returned to the Hidden World.

However, they didn't anticipate encountering Huangfu Ruixiang and Zhong Yating upon their return to the Huangfu family. It seemed that the two had just hurried back from the mortal world.

Seeing them, Ye Leng'an couldn't help but be taken aback. Clearly, she hadn't expected to encounter them at the entrance.

“Brother.” Huangfu Ruixiang greeted Huangfu Ruiling enthusiastically. “I didn’t expect you and Sister-in-law to return today! We should have traveled back together if we had known earlier.”

Traveling back with Huangfu Ruiling would have been much more convenient. After all, as the head of the Huangfu family, he could effortlessly navigate the Hidden World. Unlike him, who faced numerous procedural obstacles.

Initially, he had only heard that Huangfu Ruiling had accompanied Ye Leng’an on a vacation. He hadn’t expected them to return to the Hidden World!

Unlike Huangfu Ruixiang’s excitement, Huangfu Ruiling remained cold and unresponsive.

Observing Huangfu Ruixiang and Zhong Yating, Ye Leng’an couldn’t help but find their situation somewhat amusing.

Despite being surrounded by women, Huangfu Ruixiang didn’t seem to relish the attention. He appeared somewhat worn out, likely exhausted from juggling two women!

As for Zhong Yating, she didn’t exude the joy of a newlywed. Dark circles under her eyes were nearly impossible to conceal, despite the makeup caked on her face. Yet, her eyes gleamed with a sense of satisfaction.

Returning to the Hidden World provided her with a strategic advantage. After all, Li Yiran couldn’t possibly infiltrate this realm. If she could win over Huangfu Ruixiang during this period and perhaps even bear his child, Li Yiran would be sidelined.

The aloofness of Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng’an left Huangfu Ruixiang’s cheerful demeanor frozen.

However, he wasn’t surprised by their reaction. Nevertheless, he couldn’t help but feel awkward. Standing before Huangfu Ruiling, he felt like a student awaiting a reprimand from the dean.

After an uncertain pause, Huangfu Ruiling’s icy voice finally pierced the silence. “Now that you’re back in the Hidden World, focus on your cultivation. Avoid unnecessary actions. The family assessment is imminent. If you fail, you’ll be sent back to the mortal world.”

Her cold expression and merciless words drained the color from Huangfu Ruixiang’s face, leaving him breathless.

Clearly lacking confidence in the impending family assessment, he knew Huangfu Ruiling wouldn’t offer him any shortcuts. Could it be that he would truly be banished back to the mortal world?

Chapter 790: Taking It out on Her

“Brother, I...” Huangfu Ruixiang began, gathering his courage and lifting his head to look at Huangfu Ruiling, intending to speak up.

However, before he could even start, he was promptly cut off.

“I won’t show favoritism,” Huangfu Ruiling interjected directly, halting Huangfu Ruixiang’s words. “After spending so much time cultivating within the family, if you

can't even pass such a simple assessment, then there's no point in staying and wasting resources."

"But," Huangfu Ruixiang persisted, "I'm your younger brother. Can't you help me just this once?"

Regardless, they were blood brothers. He didn't desire treasures or lofty positions within the Huangfu family. He simply wished to stay and cultivate within the family. Even being just a humble inner sect disciple would suffice.

Was such a modest wish too much to ask for?

"It's already generous of you to remain within the Huangfu family as an inner disciple," Huangfu Ruiling stated indifferently. "This is the Hidden World, where cultivation resources are scarce. If you lack the talent for cultivation and the drive to improve, there's no need for you to stay here. There are many other disciples in the family who also require these resources."

These words left Huangfu Ruixiang speechless, unable to retort.

Ignoring both Huangfu Ruixiang and Zhong Yating, Huangfu Ruiling took Ye Leng'an's hand and walked away.

Watching Huangfu Ruiling depart, Huangfu Ruixiang's heart brimmed with discontent. He knew encountering Huangfu Ruiling here today was purely luck.

Huangfu Ruiling was the head of the Huangfu family, while he was just a simple inner disciple – there was a stark difference in their statuses. He rarely even had the opportunity to meet Huangfu Ruiling. Allowing Huangfu Ruiling to leave today would make it even less likely to encounter him in the future.

Yet, Huangfu Ruiling had made his stance clear, even ruthlessly so. Continuing to press on would be undignified.

As Huangfu Ruixiang hesitated, Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng'an disappeared down the corridor.

Seeing Huangfu Ruixiang's sour mood, Zhong Yating quickly offered comfort. "Ruixiang, don't dwell on it too much. There's still time before the family's assessment. With proper training, you'll surely pass."

After a comfortable period in the mortal world as a member of the Huangfu family, Zhong Yating had lost her motivation to cultivate diligently. She even thought it would be fine if Huangfu Ruixiang failed the assessment and returned home. The only downside was dealing with Li Yiran and the illegitimate child in the mortal world.

"You know nothing!" Huangfu Ruixiang's eyes flared as he glared at Zhong Yating. "What right do you have to say such things? If not for me, you wouldn't even qualify as an inner sect disciple."

He unloaded all the frustration he received from Huangfu Ruiling onto Zhong Yating. He even felt that if he had married another woman who could help his future instead of Zhong Yating, he wouldn't be in this predicament now.

With these thoughts, Huangfu Ruixiang left abruptly.

Left behind, Zhong Yating felt unfairly treated. She had done nothing wrong, merely offering solace to Huangfu Ruixiang, yet she faced his disdain.

Nevertheless, she didn't regret marrying Huangfu Ruixiang. She knew what she wanted. Only by marrying him could she live the life she dreamt of.

After gathering her thoughts, Zhong Yating quickly followed.

She and Huangfu Ruixiang were now married. Even if she wasn't an inner sect disciple, she could still reside with him in the inner sect.

Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng'an returned to the main courtyard.

Having instructed not to be disturbed upon their return, no elders came to bother them, showing tactfulness.

Upon entering, Ye Leng'an noticed an exquisite invitation on the main courtyard's table.

"Is this from the Ye family?" Ye Leng'an asked.

Approaching, she picked up the invitation and opened it. "We didn't even invite the Ye family to our engagement banquet. I didn't expect Ye Yikun to send us an invitation to his supposed birthday celebration!"

"It's likely to show outsiders that the relationship between the Ye family and the Huangfu family isn't strained," Huangfu Ruiling remarked casually. "Because we didn't invite the Ye family to our engagement ceremony, many are speculating about our relationship."

Ye Leng'an examined the date of the birthday celebration. "It's in two days. Seems we're on a tight schedule!"

"We still have two days, plenty of time," Huangfu Ruiling said nonchalantly. "Besides, even if we can't make it, the Grand Elder will arrange it. Someone will investigate then."

"Even if the Grand Elder sends someone, it's uncertain if they'll find anything," Ye Leng'an remarked casually, placing the invitation back. "It's better if we go ourselves. At least we'll know what's happening."

Regarding the matter of visiting the Ye family, she didn't have any particular feelings. Of course, even though she knew her own background and had gone through so much, she couldn't possibly feel any sense of belonging to the Ye family.

Huangfu Ruiling nodded. "After the Ye family's celebration, I need to visit the enforcement team."

“Any progress on the matter of the evil cultivator?” Ye Leng’an asked, understandingly. “Have they found anything?”

“They might have found something, but progress seems limited.” Huangfu Ruiling shook his head gently. “If there were any significant breakthroughs, they would’ve reported immediately. They’ve only found some minor details, so it shouldn’t be anything critical.”

Hearing this, Ye Leng’an felt a bit disappointed. “I thought we’d soon find out who’s behind all this!”