

Weak B 1691

Chapter 1691

Kang Li blinked and said, "Could it be that you and Mom just forgot?" Captain Kang and Cai Xiufen looked at her, neither one saying a word. Kang Li cleared her throat, smiling, "If I didn't mention it to you both, then I'm guessing I just forgot myself."

"Li Bao... your health wasn't good to begin with. Mom doesn't want you neglecting it for anyone," Cai Xiufen said. "You know, your dad and I only have one daughter, and that's you."

"Mom, that's the old me you're talking about. Ever since I had Bun and the other two, my health has been fantastic. Honestly, I think that's all thanks to them. They're little lucky babies, brought good fortunes to their mom, too. So, the moment I got pregnant, all my health issues disappeared overnight."

Truth be told, it was only after getting pregnant with the three Buns that she bought a body strengthening pill from Dwen Dwen on credit. If not for that, with her temperament, she wouldn't have just borrowed willy-nilly.

But she didn't regret it at all.

After all, those three Buns were more precious than anything.

Besides, thanks to them, she got that pill, took it, and traded it for a strong and healthy body.

Clearly, the three little ones were a bundle of luck, and it rubbed off on her, too.

Cai Xiufen was quiet for a moment, then shook her head helplessly and said, "You do feel much better, but let's still be careful and play it safe."

"Okay, okay, I'll listen to you, Mom."

Kang Li replied with a bright smile, sounding completely sincere.

...

After the semester finals, when Min Rui, Ming Han, and Ming Wei handed their report cards to Kang Li, honestly? Looking at her three oldest kids' grades, Kang Li couldn't help but feel proud.

Min Rui ranked first in eleventh grade.

Ming Han ranked first in eighth grade.

Ming Wei was third in eighth grade.

As for second place in eighth grade, that still went to Xi Jingyu, which made the boy feel seriously aggrieved. It was all Ming Han's fault—such a wicked friend, making him hold onto his "forever number two" championship yet again.

He didn't cry, but his mood was downright sour. When he learned Ming Han was heading back to their home in the Northwest for summer vacation, he immediately insisted on tagging along—or else, he'd threaten to end their friendship.

Ming Han almost laughed out loud at Xi Jingyu's shamelessness, but after Xi Jingyu's endless sweet-talking and pestering, Ming Han finally agreed to ask his mom first before giving a final answer.

Xi Jingyu was delighted; he figured this meant things were as good as settled.

The reason?

Simple! To Xi Jingyu, Kang Li was an exceptionally good parent—there's no way she'd refuse him, such an enthusiastic, earnest, hardworking kid, his tiny request.

"Amazing!"

Kang Li finished reading the report cards and gave a big thumbs up: "Mom is so happy—and so proud of you all!"

"Getting good grades is just our duty as students, but I'm really glad to hear your praise, Mom." That was Min Rui speaking, and just as he finished, Ming Han piped up, "Big brother, how could you steal what I was about to say?"

"Yeah, big brother, you stole my words too!"

Ming Wei joined in, equally put out.

"Hey, it's not like I stopped you from talking."

Min Rui gave Ming Han and Ming Wei a look, then turned to Kang Li, "Mom, I'll take care of lunch today. You just relax."

Before Kang Li could reply, Min Rui was already heading outside the living room. Ming Wei hurried after him, "Big brother, I'll help you out!"

"Not feeling wronged anymore?"

Min Rui asked offhandedly.

"I was just messing with you!"

Ming Wei grinned, blinking playfully.

Now it was only Ming Han and Kang Li left in the living room. Ming Han moved his lips but didn't say anything for a while. Kang Li watched him and found it funny, "Just spit it out—look how awkward you're being."

"Mom..."

Ming Han rubbed his nose and saw the smile in Kang Li's eyes. He gave himself a silent pep talk, then said, "Xi Jingyu wants to come home with us for the holidays. He's so annoyingly persistent, I just couldn't say no outright, so I told him I'd check with you."

"Mom has no problem with it, but only if his family agrees." As soon as Kang Li said that, Ming Han broke into a big grin, flashing bright teeth—clearly thrilled. He said, "I'll call Xi Jingyu right now and tell him to ask his folks."

Then, Ming Han turned to Kang Li, "Mom, Xi Jingyu got beat by me again in the finals this time. You didn't see it, but when he showed up with his report card, he almost started bawling—seriously, it was pretty painful to watch."

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Kang Li smiled, "Don't get cocky now. Even great horses stumble sometimes, and your life is still very long. Just because you topped your grade during your school years doesn't mean you'll always be the best at work or in other things in the future."

"Of course, I'm not saying this to discourage you. There's only one goal: we must guard against arrogance and impetuosity, always look for our shortcomings, and enrich ourselves. We also have to humbly accept others' advice and treat people with tolerance. Never get smug just because you've achieved something and think you're all that."

"Mom, I'm not proud, and I definitely don't think I'm great or look down on anyone." Ming Han felt a little aggrieved. He knew his mother wasn't criticizing him, he understood she was just teaching him how to behave. Still, he couldn't help feeling a tiny bit sour inside—just a little bit wronged.

"Alright, don't pretend nothing's wrong, Mom can see it in your eyes. Our Ming Han is feeling a bit hurt!" Kang Li gently rubbed her son's head as she spoke softly, "What I just said wasn't about you doing anything wrong, I was just casually reminding you, sweetheart, no need to feel bad!"

Ming Han hugged Kang Li's waist and buried his head in her shoulder, shaking it gently. He mumbled, "I'm not feeling hurt, Mom... I know you're only saying all this for my sake, so I'll have more solid footing and go farther down the road."

Kang Li hugged her son back, patting his back lightly and chuckling softly, "You're halfway a grown boy now, even taller than me—can't keep acting all cute with Mom like this."

Ming Han's height had been shooting up these past two years—he was already around 175cm, and in another year or two, he'd definitely be over 180cm. By the time he finished high school, he'd surely be past 180cm.

To say nothing of others, Min Rui, Ming Han's real brother, was already 183cm tall now.

No matter where he stood, he was like a javelin—tall and straight, full of charm. In ancient times, he'd be the epitome of a refined young gentleman.

"I wasn't being cute."

A little embarrassed, Ming Han slipped out of Kang Li's arms, turned his head like it wasn't a big deal, wiped the corner of his eye, and didn't look at Kang Li. He said, "Mom, Xi Jingyu is waiting for my call. I'll call him now."

While talking, Ming Han still avoided Kang Li's gaze. He bent down and pulled out the phone book from the coffee table drawer, casually flipping through it to look for the Xi Family's landline number.

"Page five, third line."

Kang Li knew her son was feeling awkward. Her clear eyes were full of amusement; she gently shook her head and spoke softly, then stepped out of the living room to spare him more embarrassment.

Since Shuimu University had started summer break yesterday, Bun and his two siblings' kindergarten was also off. So Captain Kang and Cai Xiufen had gone to stay at the courtyard house for the past two days, and Bun and his siblings had been picked up by Jiang Boya to study with private tutors at the old house.

Which meant, at the family house in the compound, it was only Kang Li, Min Rui, Ming Han, and Ming Wei—the three big kids—these past two days.

Xi Family.

"Luo Minghan, what did you say? Aunt Kang agreed? What? Oh, got it, I'll go tell Grandpa right away... My parents? Don't worry, they're busy with work every day and hardly have time for me. Wait for my call. Okay, that's settled. Grandpa's in his study; I'll go find him as soon as I hang up. Alright, bye!"

On getting Ming Han's call, Xi Jingyu was obviously super happy. The call had just ended, and he was about to head to Old Master Xi's study, but spotted his little brother, Xi Chenyu, staring at him without blinking. Seeing this, he tilted his chin a bit and asked, "What's up? If you have something to say, say it." Before Xi Jingyu picked up the phone, the little guy had been quietly reading on the sofa. Now, why was he so fixated on Xi Jingyu, and those eyes were kind of creepy?

"Aunt Kang agreed to what with you?"

Little Xi Chenyu wasn't beating around the bush either. He tensed his face, looking way too serious: "Brother, are you not going to tell me?"

"I never said I wouldn't. But what good is it if I tell you? Are you planning to tag along with me to visit my best friend's hometown?" Hearing Xi Jingyu's words, Xi Chenyu was stunned for a second, then asked, "Is it to visit Little Sister Guoguo's hometown?"

"That's right."

Xi Jingyu nodded proudly, then marched off toward Old Master Xi's study with a swagger: "Except for Uncle Luo who can't go back to his hometown because of work, Aunt Kang's family will be heading off in a couple of days for summer vacation. I've already gotten Aunt Kang's okay thanks to my best friend. Now I just need to tell Grandpa and I can go along."

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However, Xi Chenyu didn't say a word.

When Xi Jingyu knocked on the study door, he followed his older brother in.

"Grandpa, in a couple of days I'm going to visit Aunt Kang's hometown with her family for a while, you're not going to say no, right?" Old Master Xi put down his newspaper when he heard this, looked up at Xi Jingyu, and asked, "Where are you going?"

Xi Jingyu replied, "The Great Northwest, Aunt Kang's hometown."

Xi Chenyu said, "Grandpa, I want to go too."

Old Master Xi took off his reading glasses from the bridge of his nose and placed them on the desk. He leaned back in his chair and said unhurriedly, "Do you know how far the Northwest is? Are you sure you're not just going along to be a bother?"

"I'm old enough now to take care of myself, and Luo Minghan already said it's basically a road trip for them when Aunt Kang goes back to her hometown."

"Will one car fit everyone?"

"Not just one car. Luo Minghan said there'll be three cars in total, two sedans and a mid-sized van." To stop Old Master Xi from doubting, Xi Jingyu added, "Luo Minghan said his great-grandpa is going too. Grandpa, Luo Minghan's great-grandpa is Grandpa Jiang. Don't worry, as the younger generation, I'll definitely take good care of Grandpa Jiang."

"Your Grandpa Jiang's coming too?"

Old Master Xi was a little surprised.

"Is that so strange? Grandpa Jiang is Aunt Kang's grandfather. Not long after the New Year, Grandpa Jiang and Uncle Jiang even went back to her hometown with Aunt Kang. Now Grandpa Jiang and Uncle Jiang have even built a house in Aunt Kang's hometown. I heard from Luo Minghan it's a villa, and the plans were drawn by Aunt Kang!" Xi Jingyu rambled on, while Old Master Xi was already picking up the landline phone and dialing his old friend Jiang Hongfa.

When the other end picked up and he heard Jiang Hongfa's voice, he immediately asked the question he'd heard from Xi Jingyu. After getting confirmation, he thought for a bit and said, "Old buddy, would you mind having one more person keep you company while you escape the summer heat over there?"

No one knows what Jiang Hongfa said on the phone, but Old Master Xi just laughed and said, "I'm more or less retired now, there's nothing much I'm needed for these days... Staying home is boring anyway, so I might as well go with you for a change of pace. When the time comes, I'll stay at your place—the villa—and the two of us can admire the mountains and rivers every day, sit and play chess and drink tea together. Just thinking about it gets me excited. What do you think, old buddy?"

He must have got Jiang Hongfa's agreement, because Old Master Xi laughed heartily and said, "I'll have the family help me pack in the next couple days. By the way, I'll bring my wife along too. Over the years she hasn't really been out much because of her health problems. You said that place has beautiful mountains and water—it's perfect for recuperating—so I'll bring her with me,

maybe it'll do her good... Don't worry, she can move around. Her illness just means she has to stay in bed in the winter, but at other times she can go out in her wheelchair for a bit of sun, no problem at all... All right, thanks, old buddy. Call me the day before we leave. Okay, I got it, I'll talk to my boys about it. Mm, that's it then, goodbye."

"Grandpa, you... you're going to Aunt Kang's hometown too?"

Xi Jingyu's eyes were wide, his expression a bit shocked.

"What's there to be so surprised about? Your Grandpa Jiang is going there to escape the summer heat, and since I'm his good friend, of course I'm invited too! Isn't that perfectly normal?!" If there's ever such a thing as lying with your eyes wide open, Xi Jingyu thought he'd witnessed it today. Clearly, it was his grandpa who got the idea from him and insisted on going together with Grandpa Jiang, yet now it turned into Grandpa Jiang doing the inviting.

Eye-opening, truly eye-opening!

But if Grandpa's going, doesn't that mean he can go too as a matter of course?

Thinking of this, Xi Jingyu broke into a huge grin.

"Grandpa, what about me?"

Xi Chenyu asked Old Master Xi.

"You can come, too."

With both the young and the old, the journey surely wouldn't be too quick.

Old Master Xi stood up. "I'm going upstairs to check on your grandma."

"I'll go with you, Grandpa."

Xi Chenyu followed Old Master Xi out of the study.

Xi Jingyu, meanwhile, went to the living room to call Ming Han back.

...

The next day.

Just after ten in the morning, Kang Li picked up a bulging travel bag and was about to head out. She said to Min Rui, Ming Han, and Ming Wei, "Check around the house to see if there's anything else you want to bring to our hometown. I'll be back no later than three or four this afternoon."

Min Rui nodded and said, "Mom, say hi to Dad for me."

Ming Han said, "Mom, don't forget to tell Dad my final exam results. And say hi for me too—tell him I really miss him!"

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"And me too, Mom! Please help me say hi to Dad," Vivi said, looping her arm through Kang Li's. Vivi's bright eyes and dazzling smile shone as she added, "Mom, make sure Dad takes care of himself, okay!"

"Alright!"

Kang Li nodded with a smile, then said, "Mom will pass on everything you want to say."

The four walked to the courtyard gate. Kang Li opened the car door and settled into the driver's seat. Looking out the window, she waved to Min Rui and the other two, "Go home now, I'll come back early."

"Mom, drive slowly, be careful on the road!"

Vivi waved and called out.

Kang Li heard her and smiled, nodding in response.

She started the car, and before long, drove away under the gaze of Min Rui and the others.

All the way to the research institute, where work had just finished for the day.

"Greetings, Comrade Kang."

"Hello."

"Comrade Kang, are you here to visit Director Luo?"

"Yes."

"Comrade Kang, Director Luo should still be busy. You might need to wait for him in his dormitory."

"That's fine."

...

After locking the car, Kang Li picked up her travel bag and walked toward Luo Yanqing's dorm. On the way, whenever people greeted her, she always responded politely with a smile.

"Knock knock knock!"

Kang Li had a key to Luo Yanqing's dorm room, so even though Luo Yanqing was still in the lab, she could let herself in. Kang Li hadn't been in the dorm very long when she suddenly heard a knock on the door outside.

"Someone told you I was here, right?"

She opened the door and saw Luo Yanqing standing outside. Kang Li raised her beautiful eyebrows and smiled as she asked.

Luo Yanqing's eyes couldn't hide his longing. With a smile at the corner of his lips, he nodded lightly, "Yeah."

"Hurry on in, I brought you something tasty," Kang Li said, grabbing his hand and pulling him inside.

Luo Yanqing closed the door behind him, and in the next moment, he pulled Kang Li into his arms and kissed her hard on the lips.

"Mm..."

Who knew how much time passed, until the kiss finally ended. Luo Yanqing lifted Kang Li in his arms and sat by the bed, letting Kang Li sit on his lap.

"I missed you. So much!"

With his head buried in Kang Li's neck, Luo Yanqing's voice was low and hoarse, "The moment I heard you were here, my heart was so happy!"

"I missed you too. The kids miss you just as much as I do. They wanted me to say hi to you. By the way, Ruirui was top of her grade in the end-of-term exams, Hanhan was first in their eighth-grade class, and Vivi came third. Aren't you proud?"

"Yeah."

"Bun and the others are doing great at home and in kindergarten, not causing me any trouble at all. Every night before bed, they say, 'Mommy, I miss Daddy.'"

"I'm sorry I'm so busy with work, that I can't be with you all."

"Silly, what's there to be sorry for? It's not like I don't know how busy you are, and the kids know too! It's just that Bun and the little ones are still young, so they say it out loud when they miss you. Unlike Min Rui and the older kids, who know how to keep it to themselves."

"Do you regret marrying me?"

Luo Yanqing suddenly asked.

At his words, Kang Li lifted her eyebrows, "Why, are you thinking of finding someone else?"

"Never!"

Luo Yanqing tightened his arms around her, his dark phoenix eyes filled with certainty.

"Since you're not looking for someone else, why ask me that?" Kang Li pretended to be angry, "Tell the truth, are you hiding something..." Before Kang Li could finish, Luo Yanqing sealed her lips with another kiss, and soon, the two of them tumbled onto the bed...

After their passionate lovemaking, Luo Yanqing tidied up for both of them and held Kang Li close, saying, "You came all of a sudden, visiting me is one thing, but is there something you wanted to tell me?"

"That's my man—so smart!"

Kang Li pinched his handsome nose and whispered, "The day after tomorrow, I'll be taking the kids and our parents, Grandpa too, back home."

"How long will you be gone?"

Luo Yanqing asked.

"Until around August twentieth." As soon as Kang Li said that, Luo Yanqing replied, "You're going to be gone that long?"

"You're working, so whether I go back or not, and how long I stay, shouldn't have much impact on you, right?!"

Kang Li glanced at him with a laugh, "The kids told you to take care of yourself, so I won't nag you about it anymore. I've told you plenty of times. If you care about us, then look after yourself."

"I will."

Luo Yanqing gently kissed Kang Li's forehead, his dark eyes full of tenderness and longing, "I wish I could hold you like this forever!"

"Don't talk nonsense!"

Kang Li laughed softly, "You're such a rational guy; don't start saying sentimental things, or it'll break your image."

"Sentimental or rational, I only know I mean what I say."

Luo Yanqing stroked Kang Li's back gently, the warmth in his eyes almost drowning her, "Whenever I think that I can't be with you all the time, can't help you take care of the kids, I just feel so sorry, so guilty... At the same time, I'm really grateful to Dad and Mom, grateful they can stay by your side. Xiao Li, you really have worked so hard these years!"

"Silly!"

Kang Li hugged him tight, "We're husband and wife, we're family. Don't talk about who's sorry or who's worked hard. Compared to what you do for the country, what I do at home is nothing. How could I even call it hard work?"

Luo Yanqing: "It's not the same."

"How is it not the same?" Kang Li said, "Are you worried I'll piggyback off your achievements?"

"..."

Luo Yanqing stammered, "Piggyback off me?"

"Isn't there a saying, 'The medal of honor is half yours and half mine'? You've given yourself to national scientific research, so your achievements naturally include my efforts. Do you agree?"

"Yeah."

"So don't go on about me working hard, or being sorry, or feeling guilty toward me. I'm the woman who quietly supports you from behind, and I'm so proud of it!"

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"Yeah."

"So don't go on about me working hard, or being sorry, or feeling guilty toward me. I'm the woman who quietly supports you from behind, and I'm so proud of it!"

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Kang Li spoke, giving a proud little huff, then said the funniest thing in the most serious tone: "I walked right into the trap, you get it?" The original owner chose to marry this person—wasn't that just walking into a trap?

All because of his looks—just a glance at a photo and she agreed to the marriage. Sure, that was only part of the reason, but it still counts as "walking right into the trap," and Kang Li felt she wasn't wrong.

Luo Yanqing tried not to laugh: "How can marrying me be called 'walking right into the trap'? I put in effort too, you know."

"Like what?"

Kang Li looked at Luo Yanqing with leisure, ready to hear him make something up.

"I provided the photo."

Luo Yanqing was way too serious about it.

Kang Li: "The photo was from you? You sure it wasn't Godfather who snipped a random ID pic for you somewhere?"

"..."

Luo Yanqing was completely stumped by Kang Li's words.

"Why're you quiet now?"

Kang Li's beautiful eyes sparkled with mischief.

"Without me going for the photo, there wouldn't be that picture at all."

After a while, Luo Yanqing finally squeezed out this line.

"Oh, so then maybe I'd be someone else's wife by now." Kang Li chuckled, "Who knows, maybe the guy I married would look even better than you..."

Luo Yanqing cut her off: "You can only marry me! And besides, good looks are just skin deep."

"But what can I do? I just love nice packaging. People like that are a feast for the eyes." Kang Li was obviously teasing Luo Yanqing, though who knows if he realized it. He said, "Xiao Li, you can't be so shallow. You have to look at what's inside."

Kang Li gave an "Oh," and said, "But inner beauty isn't so easy to spot."

"You don't have to find it yourself, I'll tell you right now," Luo Yanqing leaned close to Kang Li's ear, voice soft and low, "My heart is full of you—this lifetime, only you!"

Kang Li didn't respond.

Luo Yanqing murmured, "I love you!"

"..." Even though they'd been a couple for ages—even though she'd heard "I love you" from him countless times—when Kang Li heard it just then, she still blushed and her heart fluttered. She sat up: "If you don't get to the cafeteria soon, you're gonna starve."

Luo Yanqing hugged her from behind: "Xiao Li, your Mr. Luo says he loves you—did you hear that?" Seeing Kang Li's face flushed all over, pink climbing down her neck to her ears, Luo Yanqing couldn't help but chuckle low in his throat.

But to avoid embarrassing his wife, Luo Yanqing quickly suppressed his laugh and said, "The cafeteria always saves my meal for me." That was standard for him, since his work hours were never predictable.

"Luo Yanqing!"

Kang Li stood up, smoothing out her skirt with a casual hand. She turned to look at Luo Yanqing, and seeing the smile in his eyes, couldn't help but recall what he'd just said—another wave of blush and a racing heart hit her.

She shifted her gaze, forcibly calmed herself, then said, "Your face really has been toughened up by you—so thick!"

"It's still thin, honestly! Don't believe me? Pinch it."

Luo Yanqing's lips curled, as he grabbed Kang Li's hand and pressed it to his handsome face, "Go ahead." The smile in his Phoenix Eyes grew even deeper. Kang Li stared at him and who knows what popped into her mind—her expression suddenly got a bit odd, then she burst out laughing, boldly kneading his good-looking face.

Go ahead?

This guy's unbelievable. People who don't know would think she's some bandit about to do God knows what to him!

Luo Yanqing's eyes turned gentle: "Are you waiting here, or will you come with me to the cafeteria?"

"Let's go together."

Kang Li said, helping to straighten his shirt collar, then casually asked, "I'll wash your clothes for you. Once you head to the lab, I'll go home."

"I'll do it tonight."

Luo Yanqing didn't want his wife to tire herself out.

"It's just one set—easy to wash and won't take long." Kang Li said as she told Luo Yanqing to grab his lunchbox; they left the dorm room together.

One stood tall and straight in a crisp white shirt and black slacks, the other graceful in a sky-blue dress, simple design but high-quality fabric, exquisite workmanship.

Walking side by side, they gave off a vibe that was pure and clean, and their aura was nothing short of outstanding.

The spacious staff cafeteria still had a few people eating scattered here and there. Kang Li and Luo Yanqing walked in, and before Kang Li could say a word, Luo Yanqing led her right to a table and had her sit.

"I'll go get the food, just wait a bit."

Lunchbox in hand, Luo Yanqing headed for the canteen window.

"Director Luo, you're here! This is specially kept for you." The cafeteria chef, a slightly chubby middle-aged uncle, took Luo Yanqing's lunchbox and quickly filled it with food.

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"Thank you!"

The brimming lunchbox returned to Luo Yanqing's hands. He thanked the canteen worker, whose attitude was enthusiastic and whose eyes brimmed with laughter, then turned and carried the lunchbox toward the table where Kang Li was sitting.

"Eat."

Luo Yanqing handed chopsticks to Kang Li.

"I'm not hungry."

Kang Li shook her head.

"Eat a little anyway." Luo Yanqing's jet-black phoenix eyes overflowed with tenderness. "Otherwise, your body will feel unwell."

"Alright." Kang Li nodded and said, "Together." She didn't take the chopsticks, but instead took the small spoon from Luo Yanqing's hand.

Luo Yanqing smiled at the corners of his mouth. "Okay."

The couple sat together. Kang Li took a few symbolic bites, then, very naturally, used the spoon to feed Luo Yanqing a mouthful. For a moment, Luo Yanqing was caught off guard by her gesture, staring blankly, then opened his mouth. The smile in his eyes rippled out like waves on a lake.

Being looked at so intently by him, Kang Li snapped back to reality and felt her cheeks flush hotly.

"I'm done eating." Kang Li put down the spoon and avoided the man's gaze. But just then, Luo Yanqing let out a low laugh and said, "Delicious." Even though it was just one word, Kang Li instantly caught his meaning and gave him a playful, coquettish glare.

Seeing this, the smile in Luo Yanqing's phoenix eyes deepened even more.

More than ten minutes later, the two of them left the canteen.

"Do you remember that Xu Chunxia from our village?" On their way back to the dorm, Kang Li idly chatted with Luo Yanqing, casually bringing up Xu Chunxia. Hearing this, Luo Yanqing replied with an "Mm" and said, "You used to be friends."

"Yeah, that's her." Kang Li said, "She's turned up in North City again and found me, claiming she'd been swindled out of all her money and asking me to lend her some—five thousand, ten thousand right off the bat, like I owe her. Her attitude was as if it were only natural I should help."

Luo Yanqing frowned. "Don't bother with people like that."

"I didn't want to, but Xu Chunxia really has a thick skin. She acted like she couldn't see my expression, had to come right up to me, even blocked my car. In a fit of anger, I slapped her twice. Then when she saw my dad, she dragged up some old story, saying I replaced her, became my dad's daughter, claimed she was actually Lady Fang's biological child. Her brain must be fried, every word a complaint against me."

Luo Yanqing asked, "And then?"

"I smacked her down with evidence, of course!" Kang Li sounded like she was talking about someone else's problems, her voice betraying not a hint of emotion. "But Xu Chunxia is stubborn as hell. She kept going on and on about how all the suffering and pain she endured abroad was my fault and nearly dying there was because of me. I only needed a sentence or two to make her fall apart. In the end, out of pity since she was from our village, I gave her twenty yuan."

"She doesn't deserve any sympathy," Luo Yanqing said. "Her mind isn't right—never grateful, only knows how to hold grudges."

"I know."

Kang Li smiled. "I never expected her to be grateful, either. After all, what goes around comes around." If Xu Chunxia didn't get rid of those rotten habits, she'd trip herself up sooner or later.

But while Kang Li and Luo Yanqing chatted about Xu Chunxia, neither knew that just a couple days after getting her twenty yuan, Xu Chunxia was up to her old tricks again, cozying up to a small-time boss.

And if that small boss ever appeared in front of Kang Li, she might have some sense of recognition.

Because the man wasn't a stranger—he was none other than Su Man's former lover, Xu Wei.

"You're ending things with me so quickly—is it because your wife found out about us?"

In the rented room, Xu Chunxia's eyes glistened with tears as she forced herself to appear strong. She looked at the man sitting across from her and said, "Fine, I get it. We haven't known each other that long, so I can understand you don't have feelings for me. Besides, your wife gave you a son and a daughter—of course I can't compare to her in your heart. Don't worry, I won't come looking for you, and I certainly won't try to ruin your family. From now on, we'll just act like strangers."

The words sounded sincere, but only Xu Chunxia knew she was really pressing forward by feigning retreat.

She just didn't know if the man in front of her would fall for it.

All for him to divorce that old hag at home because of her.

But Xu Chunxia's self-importance was quickly dashed—she'd soon realize that in this man's eyes, she was nothing but a way to kill time.

"You really can't compare to my wife."

Xu Wei stared straight at Xu Chunxia. His voice was low. "Not only did my wife give me a son and daughter—she's the woman I chose to marry. Besides, she's educated, has a good job. What do you have? If we're being honest, sure, you have a face that's not bad to look at, but my wife is no uglier. The only reason I was involved with you these days was just to have a little fun on the side."

If it weren't for some trouble in his business, that day he was in a bad mood, drank a little at the club, got a bit tipsy, and then this woman came up to hit on him. Somehow, the two of them ended up at a hotel, and then the affair started.

To him, it was nothing but a minor episode in his life—just fooling around, throw her some cash, and that's that. Who would have thought this woman in front of him, so fake and pretentious, would actually fantasize about having feelings for him, always bringing up his wife, hinting that the one at home was just an old hag.

Ha! Who does she think she is? Where does she get the nerve to compare herself to his wife?

Xu Wei sneered to himself.

The last year, he barely had any feelings left for his wife, and she probably felt the same about him. But they're married; until they divorce, they're a family.

Who the hell does this whore think she is to judge?

"What did you say? So I'm just a fling to you?" Chunxia acted as if she'd suffered a huge blow, staring at the man in disbelief. "But you said I was great, said I was the most gentle, caring, and genuine woman you'd ever met."

Stupid bastard! If she wasn't so broke, she wouldn't even look at a wannabe big shot like him, who actually didn't have much money.

If he wanted to sleep with her, he wouldn't even pay for a hotel, insisting on coming to her crappy rental, saying it felt cozier, more like home.

Cozy?

Home?

Looking for coziness and a home here—was he really not just treating her like an idiot? Cracking jokes right in her face.

Chunxia wasn't exactly lacking self-awareness. She knew what she was doing, knew that a man's sincerity was pure bullshit. All she wanted was money, a life where she didn't have to work her ass off, someone to just take care of her.

Considering she wasn't young anymore, and in a few years it would get tough to keep hustling, she lowered her standards, played a few tricks, tried to push this guy, dissatisfied with his old hag at home, toward divorce—so he'd marry her.

But looking at how things are, he's pure trash and doesn't want to give her that chance.

A flash of thought, and Chunxia's tears flooded out.

Xu Wei frowned. "Is this supposed to mean something? Those words were just something I said offhand. You really think you don't know your own worth?"

"But my feelings for you are real!"

Chunxia sobbed. "I never thought you'd just treat me as some fling."

Xu Wei: "Real feelings? You think women like you have real feelings?"

"Women like me? Say it clearly—what kind of woman am I?" Chunxia's tearful eyes were full of misery and pain. "Is it so wrong to like you? Besides, you're the one who took me out that day..."

"If you hadn't thrown yourself at me, would I have taken you anywhere?" Xu Wei said, waving his hand. "Enough, let's not dwell on the past. I came here today to shut things down between us. Take this One Thousand Yuan—don't show up in front of me again. If we bump into each other by accident, just act like you don't know me. Otherwise, I'm not afraid to show you what I'm capable of."

He stood up, walked to the door, leaving one last line: "A woman ought to have some self-respect, some dignity. You're not young anymore, so find yourself an honest man and settle down." Consider that his last bit of kindness.

Whatever you say, the past days with this woman helped him relax, and the business trouble was pretty much sorted out.

"My business is none of Mr. Xu's concern!"

Staring at Xu Wei's disappearing silhouette, Chunxia spat out her words, laced with resentment.

Not that it made any difference to Xu Wei.

In a blink, he'd walked out the door.

"Stupid man! If he looks down on me, that's his own blindness!" At that moment, Chunxia's eyes weren't wet at all. She picked up the One Thousand Yuan Xu Wei left on the table, counted it, a hint of a smile in her eyes, but she grumbled, "Cheap bastard!"

A thousand in just a few days—not too bad for her.

That was more than an ordinary worker earned in a year or two fresh out of school.

Humming a tuneless pop song, Chunxia freshened up and decided to deposit the money, thinking she'd better land a real big shot someday—then she could go back to the good life.

As for Xu Wei's parting words, Chunxia scoffed.

Find an honest man and settle down?

If he's got money, sure, but besides being honest, those guys have nothing else. Is she really supposed to starve in the Northwest?

Chapter 1698

From Xu Chunxia's attitude, it's clear she doesn't care for honest people at all.

If Kang Li found out, she'd definitely say: Honest people thank you very much!

At the same time, Kang Li might even tease Xu Wei: Honest folks owe you something, so now you're keeping tabs on them?

Research Institute.

"Take care of yourself, don't make me worry."

After washing the bedsheets, quilt cover, and the clothes together, Kang Li checked the time. It was about right, so she helped Luo Yanqing tidy up the clothes in the closet and then said goodbye gently.

Unexpectedly, Luo Yanqing's eyes were full of reluctance: "You're leaving already?"

"There's just ten minutes left before work starts. If you don't get to the lab soon, you might be late!" Kang Li's bright and gentle eyes sparkled with laughter as she tiptoed and kissed him on the lips: "Okay, be good. I'll miss you!"

Luo Yanqing stared in a daze. When he came to, he wrapped his long arms around her, pulling her into his embrace: "I don't want you to go."

"Be good, I'd love to stay with you too, but you have to work. I'm your family, so I shouldn't drag you down." Kang Li patted his back and laughed: "You've got my photos anyway, if you miss me, just take them out and look."

"I'd much rather see you in front of me."

Luo Yanqing lowered his eyes, meeting Kang Li's gaze. His eyes were exceptionally gentle.

Slowly, he kissed her lips.

The kiss lasted quite a while.

"I almost couldn't breathe." When the kiss was over, Kang Li threw him a playful glare: "You're such a rascal!"

Luo Yanqing curved his lips into a smile: "Yeah, it's totally my fault, but I couldn't help it. You're just too sweet."

"Smooth talker."

Kang Li playfully glared at him again, then said: "Goodbye."

"I'll walk you out."

Carrying Kang Li's empty travel bag, Luo Yanqing held her hand as they walked out of the dormitory...

Downstairs.

"I'll call you when I get back from my hometown."

Sitting in the driver's seat, Kang Li glanced through the open car window, smiling at the man full of tenderness and reluctance, and heard him say: "I'll be waiting for you at the institute."

Kang Li blinked and smiled: "Okay then." Looks like he wants her to visit him! Who knew her Mr. Luo could be so secretly clingy.

"Drive safe."

Luo Yanqing reminded her.

"Alright."

Kang Li nodded and waved: "I'm off!"

"Bye."

Luo Yanqing also waved, watching Kang Li's car drive off before he slowly retracted his gaze.

...

Once the date to return home was set, Kang Li didn't make any changes.

So on the day of departure, three black sedans and a matching medium-sized business van headed out of North City, around 9 a.m., calm and steady, keeping a constant speed.

Worth mentioning, one of the black cars was Old Master Xi's personal vehicle, but he wasn't riding in it this time. He and Jiang Hongfa were together in one.

The two chatted and laughed, recalling past stories.

Meanwhile, Xi Jingyu and Xi Chenyu were surely keeping Old Lady Xi company, seated in Old Master Xi's car.

Also, to help look after Old Lady Xi, the family arranged to bring a caregiver along.

This time, Jiang Boya stayed behind in North City due to work.

In other words, he wasn't able to join the trip to Kang Li's hometown in Aoli Village.

Thinking about why he stayed, Jiang Boya felt a bit resentful, plotting to find a good excuse to hand the family business over to Kang Li so he could finally live freely.

...

Cai Xiufen: "Why are we driving slower this time?"

Kang Li: "If we go too fast, I worry you and Dad won't feel well. Besides, Grandpa, Old Master Xi, and Old Lady Xi are all quite elderly, and Old Lady Xi isn't in great health, so I figured as long as we get home safely, spending an extra couple of days on the road doesn't matter."

Cai Xiufen nodded: "You're right, getting home safely matters more than anything."

Looking ahead, Kang Li gripped the steering wheel and smiled: "Safety is more important than anything when you're outside—both you and Dad have told me that a million times."

"And was there anything wrong with us reminding you?"

Cai Xiufen glanced at Kang Li.

"Of course not."

Kang Li smiled: "In my heart, whatever you and Dad say is right—it's all for my own good."

"As long as you understand." Cai Xiufen looked at the sleeping Xiao Guoguo in her arms, then said: "Ruirui is starting senior year soon; you really need to make time to focus on his studies."

"Grandma, Mom is already so hardworking, she doesn't need to worry about my schoolwork. Plus, the study plan my Mom made for me before was awesome, and I've been following it for more than half a year now. My grades have really improved."

Chapter 1699

Min Rui sat in the passenger seat holding Bun. After hearing Cai Xiufen's words, he replied before Kang Li could speak.

"Don't worry about it, your mom is your parent, what she should do, she must do."

The college entrance exam is no joke—parents have to take it seriously. As Cai Xiufen thought about this, she suddenly said, "I wonder how Linlin and Haohao did on their exams?"

"Didn't they both call and say they performed as usual?" Both Second Brother Kang's and Third Brother Kang's families have kids taking the college entrance exam this year. Right after the exam ended, their kids called Kang Li one after the other. Judging by their tones, Kang Li thought her nephews were in good spirits and probably did perform normally, just as they'd said. At that moment, Kang Li was undoubtedly happy for them and promised that once the results came out, as their aunt, she'd reward them.

"Why worry so much? Whether they did well or not depends on what they actually learned at school."

Captain Kang sat beside Cai Xiufen, holding Tangyuan. Glancing at Cai Xiufen, he added casually.

"That's true, but can't I care a bit about my grandson?" Cai Xiufen glared at Captain Kang, annoyed. "If our family gets two more college students this year, you'll be happier than anyone."

Captain Kang's mouth twitched, but he remained silent.

His family already had plenty of college students, but for anyone, there can never be too many!

"I think the two brothers will be fine."

Kang Li knew her nephews' academic strengths. Based on that, she had a pretty good idea of who among them would clear the college entrance exam smoothly.

Suddenly, as if something occurred to her, Cai Xiufen said, "We just went back like this, didn't even tell your second brother. If Haohao and his brothers find out, won't each of them feel left out?"

"It's fine." Kang Li shook her head with a smile and reassured Cai Xiufen. "My big brother and little brother are all there. If Haohao and them want to play, they can just go to the courtyard and play with Xiao Heng all they want."

Cai Xiufen: "Xiao Heng goes to help out at the hot-pot restaurant every holiday. He doesn't have time to play with Haohao and the others."

"Haohao and them can totally go to my big brother and sister-in-law's hot-pot restaurant to get some experience, too."

Kang Li replied offhand and added, "Next year after Ruirui sits the college entrance exam, I'll tell my big brother, have Ruirui help out for a bit—let him get a taste of social life early."

"No objection from me."

Min Rui responded immediately.

"Don't pay attention to your mom, she just likes to worry for nothing." Captain Kang was speaking to Kang Li. Hearing this, Kang Li smiled, "My mom doesn't worry for nothing; she just cares deeply about the kids in our family."

"Mom, Bun, Tangyuan, and Guoguo sure can sleep."

Barely lifting his eyelids, Min Rui glanced at the sleeping Bun in his arms, smiling as he spoke.

"Kids are like that." Kang Li replied, then laughed and asked Min Rui, "Do you remember when you, Hanhan, and Vivi were little?"

Min Rui nodded, "I remember a bit."

Kang Li: "Back then, except for eating and playing, you spent most of your time sleeping—even more so for Hanhan. She'd lie down on the bed and fall asleep almost instantly, mumbling about 'sleeping more to grow taller'."

Min Rui said with a bit of disgust, "Luo Minghan is always being weird."

"I think Hanhan has a great personality. Don't make yourself too boring, or when you get to college, it'll probably be harder for you to find a girlfriend than Hanhan." Kang Li teased. Min Rui's cheeks turned red and he replied, "I won't think about relationships too early."

"Are you trying to copy your big cousin and Little Uncle?" The Little Uncle Kang Li was talking about here is Kang Guoan.

"Not exactly copying anyone. I just think when you're young you should focus your energy on studying and work."

Min Rui spoke his mind.

"That's a good outlook, but let's go with the flow. If you meet the right girl at university or at work, mom supports you dating her. As for marriage, anytime before thirty is fine."

Hearing Kang Li's words, Min Rui thought for a moment, then replied, "Okay."

Ming Han and Ming Wei sat in the car with Jiang Hongfa, their great-grandfather, while Old Master Xi had already returned to his own transfer car.

"Tell your great-grandpa how you did on your finals this time."

Jiang Hongfa, full of loving affection, looked at Ming Han in the passenger seat, then at Ming Wei beside him, smiling as he asked the siblings.

Ming Han turned back, smiling, "I was first in the year."

Ming Wei: "I didn't do as well as my second brother; I got third in the year, second in the class."

"Great, you're both excellent!" Jiang Hongfa beamed. "What were your scores in Chinese, Math, and English?"

"I got 100 in Math and English. In Chinese, I lost two points on the essay and one on reading comprehension."

That was Ming Han speaking.

Ming Wei: "I lost one in Chinese—on reading comprehension. Math was full marks, English was full marks." She lost more points in physics, while her second brother also scored full marks in physics.

"You both got full marks in Math and English! And your Chinese is just as good. But I have to say, you getting a perfect score in English really surprised me!"

Jiang Hongfa's smiling eyes were full of admiration.

"When we were in kindergarten, my mom started teaching us foreign languages. Now, Vivi and I can use three languages fluently, and my big brother can do five. Oh, great-grandpa, my big brother was also ranked first in the year—since kindergarten, he's always been a top student."

Ming Han was radiant, full of pride when talking about her older brother Min Rui.

Jiang Hongfa: "Your big brother and you two are all amazing!"

Ming Han: "It's because my mom and dad taught us well!"

Chapter 1700 Kang Li's Teaching by Example

Ming Wei nodded in agreement, "When it comes to studying, my mom and dad have never gone easy on us."

"Your mom and dad are model parents. Later, when you grow up and start your own families, don't forget to honor them properly." His precious granddaughter wasn't just smart, she knew how to teach kids, too. Jiang Hongfa felt genuinely gratified, believing this granddaughter was truly a blessing.

But whenever Jiang Hongfa thought about having someone like Fang Su as a mother, he couldn't help feeling uneasy inside. Of course, this discomfort wasn't aimed at Kang Li, it was just that Jiang Hongfa plain disliked Fang Su, disliked that scheming woman with her mind always spinning calculations!

Yet almost immediately, Jiang Hongfa remembered that Jiang Boya no longer had the same deep-rooted affection for Fang Su as when he was young. Now he hardly even wanted to see her, and just hearing her name made him show obvious distaste. Even Kang Li flat-out refused to acknowledge Fang Su as her mother. Jiang Hongfa's mood instantly brightened.

...

The main road from Aoli Village to the county town was already finished. Nowadays, saplings were being planted along both sides of the road, and all roads inside Aoli Village had been paved with cement according to Kang Li's plans, complete with flower trees and running water.

Still, not many villagers could access tap water yet, since the water pipes were only connected to the new homestead plots along the cement roads. Once villagers built houses on these new sites, they'd be able to use the convenient tap water.

After all, the villagers weren't living in perfect order yet. Some households were scattered more remotely, and you obviously couldn't pave cement roads and connect water pipes in front of every isolated house. Besides, those locations weren't ideal for living, so the village had drawn up new homestead plots. Whenever the families have money to build new houses there, tap water would come naturally.

"This road is really well built!"

The car passed through the county town, cruising down the wide, smooth avenue. Cai Xiufen's smile never left her face as she looked out the half-open window.

"A good road just means Li Bao spent a pretty penny on it."

As soon as Captain Kang said this, Cai Xiufen's smile vanished in an instant. She said, "I just hope the folks walking on this road remember all the good things our Li Bao has done for them."

"Mom, I really don't want anyone remembering what I've done. Having a good road means our factory's products and the output from the Ecological Recycling Park can be shipped smoothly and sold all over the country. Honestly, building roads isn't just helping the villagers—it's helping myself too."

If every good deed had to be remembered by the people who benefited, Kang Li felt it would be too exhausting, and truthfully unnecessary. She was simply doing what she wanted to do, and as for what others said about it, she honestly didn't care at all.

Anyway, fairness lies in the hearts of people; there's no need to go everywhere and brag about it.

"But no matter how you look at it, you and your dad building this road—and that other one from the county to the provincial city—you're both doing good things. People ought to remember your kindness."

Cai Xiufen said seriously, "I think the village should put up a Merit Monument for you and your dad at the roadside."

Hearing this, Kang Li couldn't help laughing. "There's really no need for that."

"Old man, do you think it's necessary or not?"

Cai Xiufen turned to Captain Kang.

"Don't worry, the officials will think about it."

This wasn't just any ordinary road—it was a broad, smooth avenue that obviously cost a lot, with saplings planted along both sides and streetlights installed,

Whether the county, city, or province would do anything, Captain Kang figured that at least the village and the town would probably put up a Merit Monument for Kang Li along the road, so passersby would know who built this wide and smooth road, who did good deeds for everyone.

Cai Xiufen said, "I'll ask about it when we get back to the village."

"Mom, who are you going to ask? My eldest cousin?"

Kang Li shook her head in mild exasperation. "People always say to do good deeds without leaving your name—now that's a noble virtue. Don't you want me to carry that on, Mom? Besides, I've built roads, schools, factories, and the Ecological Recycling Park,

what I've done is anything but low-key. Whether folks want to know or not, they must already know my name, know there's someone called Kang Li in Aoli Village, and know exactly who Kang Li's parents are. Maybe they've dug up everything about our family from top to bottom."

"Will you calm down already? Originally the child was just doing good deeds, but if you make a fuss about it, people might start gossiping behind our backs, saying our family is showing off too much."