

Weak B 1721

Chapter 1721: Do You Really Have to Ignore Me Like This?

Xu Chunxia acted like she didn't hear a thing and just kept walking forward.

"What's going on with the Xu family now? Chunxia finally makes it home and the whole family is at each other's throats?"

"It's all because those two and their precious son and daughter-in-law have no shame. Waited until Chunxia wasn't home to break open the two big suitcases she brought back, split up all her stuff between themselves."

"Tsk tsk, that really is shameless!"

Someone piped up, "But isn't it right for Chunxia to bring things home for her family?"

"Yeah! Chunxia's been gone for years, comes home once and brings some gifts for her folks, isn't that the proper thing to do?"

"Proper my ass. I've been standing here a while. It's not like Chunxia didn't bring presents for her family. They started fighting because her so-called family divvied up all her personal stuff. Didn't leave her a damn thing."

"If you ask me, Chunxia can't hold a candle to Kang Li. Every time Kang Li comes home, she loads up the car with gifts for her family—and you guys have all seen it. This time, she hauled a whole car's worth. Even when she can't make it back, she still mails a bunch of stuff. Not just to her own parents, but to her uncle's and little uncle's family too!"

"Oh please, how can you compare Chunxia to Kang Li? Kang Li's a college grad, word is she's a professor now, makes a ton every month, and her husband rakes it in too. Chunxia's got no big skills, probably can't make much out there, so the fact she's back and even brought home some gifts, that's already pretty damn considerate!"

"Yes, considerate! If Chunxia held grudges, I bet she wouldn't even buy them a single piece of yarn."

"True that. Remember back in the day, Xu's pair of old bastards tried to sell Chunxia off for a fat price. When she refused, they even drugged her food. That's some real evil right there, never really treated Chunxia like a daughter at all."

"Shh! That's enough—they're coming back!"

The crowd, gossiping in the yard about the Xu family, instantly hushed at someone's warning that Father Xu, Mrs. Xu, and Xu Chunxia were on their way, their eyes all turning to watch them approach.

"We're all neighbors here, everyone's got their own dirty laundry, so what are you all blocking my front gate for?"

Mrs. Xu walked over and snapped at the rubberneckers.

"If you didn't want people gawking, maybe you and your darling son and daughter-in-law shouldn't do things that beg for an audience."

Xu Chunxia's face dripped with mockery: "I only came back with you because you and my dad said you'd make your son and daughter-in-law put my things back to how they were. Since all the neighbors are here, let's use them as witnesses. If my stuff isn't all back in my suitcase soon, I'm not going to just let this slide like before!"

"You—"

Mrs. Xu was livid, shooting Xu Chunxia a death glare—thinking her own daughter's turned her back on the family, siding with outsiders and using the busybodies against her. Ungrateful wretch, she was fit to explode!

"Listen Xu family, not that I'm getting nosy, but after all the crap you pulled on Chunxia, she never held it against you—never held it against her family. She even came back bearing gifts for you all. But you folks, you were greedy, waited until she stepped out, then looted all your own daughter's belongings! For a mother, you're truly heartless!"

"Bah! Mind your own damn business, Blabbermouth Cui. Stop sticking your nose where it doesn't belong!"

Sure enough, the one who'd spoken up at Mrs. Xu was Blabbermouth Cui, but Mrs. Xu was never going to take it lying down—she fired right back, and the two started trading barbs on the spot.

"Xu's woman, who are you calling a dog?"

Blabbermouth Cui pushed out from the crowd, stood three steps from Mrs. Xu, eyes full of derision: "So am I wrong? Didn't you try to sell Chunxia off before? Didn't you drug her?"

She spat on the ground, then kept on: "You're a black-hearted shrew, always wishing you could bleed your girls dry, eat their flesh, grind their bones, just to fatten up yourself, your old man, and those two useless sons. Like the whole village doesn't know what you're like? Besides, you've even been a guest at the police station—real piece of work you are. Otherwise, why would the cops have hauled you in back then?"

"Oh, so I'm black-hearted but you're not? Cui, don't be the pot calling the kettle black. Folks here know what you are just as well!"

Mrs. Xu said that, then glared at Xu Chunxia: "Why are you still standing here?"

"Why are you yelling at me? It's Aunt Cui who's calling you out, and I think she's got a point. Don't try to take it out on me just because you can't win against her!"

Xu Chunxia stood her ground, her tone making it obvious there wasn't a shred of respect left for Mrs. Xu.

"All of you, get inside now!"

Father Xu stood with his hands behind his back, glaring at Mrs. Xu and Xu Chunxia, then marched into the yard first.

"Didn't you hear your father?"

Seeing Xu Chunxia unmoved, Mrs. Xu's face was so dark it might as well drip ink.

But out of the blue, Xu Chunxia snapped in another direction: "Kang Li, you really love gawking at my family's mess, don't you?"

Her voice was loud, immediately drawing all eyes to Kang Li.

Kang Li kept her cool, but inside she silently cursed: Fuck this shit!

She was just passing by, how did she become a rubbernecker?

"Kang Li, you're a college grad, word is you're a professor now. That means you can be my witness, right? Watch and see if my parents and their darling son and daughter-in-law put my things back! After all, there's nothing fun about this show; you owe me a hand, don't you think?"

Kang Li rolled her eyes, said nothing, and headed home.

"You seriously gonna ignore me?"

Xu Chunxia blocked Kang Li: "I'm only asking you to witness, is that so hard?"

Kang Li: "If you're crazy, take your meds. Your brain is a fine thing—if you'd use it."

Xu Chunxia: "Are you calling me stupid?"

Kang Li: "Xu Chunxia, you really have issues. Wasn't that obvious enough? You need to hear it straight?"

"Kang Li, you really are calling me stupid!"

Xu Chunxia's face twisted, "All I did was ask you to be a witness, did you have to insult me like that?"

Chapter 1722: Amazed by Kang Li

"Why should I be your witness?"

Kang Li raised her pretty eyebrows ever so slightly: "Every time you see me, you try to stick to me, and you actually do it too. Xu Chunxia, haven't I told you before? Nothing's gonna come from you falling for me. Did you forget what I said?"

Xu Chunxia's face turned red: "Don't talk nonsense here!"

"How am I talking nonsense, huh?"

Kang Li put on an innocent face: "If you don't have feelings for me, then why is it that I was just walking by minding my own business, and you said I was watching the drama at your house? Xu Chunxia, it sounds to me like you just want my attention. Plus, you stopped me, which only goes to show how deep your feelings are for me. But I'm a married woman, so you better stop making yourself seen in front of me, stop these silly attempts to catch my eye!"

"Could you have some shame?"

Xu Chunxia was so furious her lips trembled: "If I didn't need something from you, do you think I'd want to show up in front of you? Kang Libao, trees rely on their bark, people need their face. You've stomped all over my dignity time and again, that's just going too far!"

"Am I the one making a fool of you?"

Kang Li's face turned cold: "You sure it's not you, who has no shame and insists on throwing yourself at my feet?"

"You..."

Pointing at Kang Li, Xu Chunxia's face turned dark. She was so angry she couldn't get another word out for a moment.

"Fine, you go do what you need to do. I don't have time to bicker with you here. In the future, just to avoid any more run-ins, I suggest you pretend not to see me whenever I'm around. After all, to me, you're nothing more than a familiar stranger."

With that, Kang Li didn't bother about Xu Chunxia's face at all, brushing past her and heading home.

What Kang Li said to Xu Chunxia made Mrs. Xu feel so embarrassed her face looked like a patchwork quilt. If she could, she'd dig a hole right there to climb into—anything to keep from losing face with the no-good daughter she raised.

Thinking this, she forced herself to keep calm and shouted at Xu Chunxia: "Why are you still standing there? Aren't you embarrassed enough already?"

"And how exactly am I embarrassing myself?"

After swallowing so much anger in front of Kang Li, hearing Mrs. Xu's furious voice now made Xu Chunxia snap right back: "You tell me, how am I embarrassing myself? If it weren't for you and Dad and your precious son and perfect daughter-in-law always making trouble, would folks be crowding around our family for a show? Would Kang Libao be humiliating me the second she opens her mouth?"

"Do whatever you want!"

Mrs. Xu didn't want to keep making a spectacle in front of the neighbors. She clenched her teeth, looking black-faced as she marched into the yard.

Just then, someone watching the show, never content until things got rowdy, suddenly piped up and teased Xu Chunxia: "Chunxia, Chunxia, could it be you really do like Li Bao, like she said? Even love her? If you do, auntie's telling you, better quit while you're ahead, otherwise around these parts you'll have no reputation left!"

"You're the one who likes Kang Libao, maybe you even love her!"

Xu Chunxia didn't even see who it was making fun of her, just shot back coldly, face like stone.

"Chunxia, what's up with your mouth? Wasn't me who said you liked Li Bao, loved Li Bao—it's Li Bao herself said it! If you really don't, how come when Li Bao called you out, you couldn't even explain yourself?"

Having been snapped at by Xu Chunxia, the woman was pissed now too: "Far as I'm concerned, Li Bao's a great kid, she would never lie. Maybe she's telling the truth—you always popping up in front of her for no good reason 'cause you got some shady little thoughts, trying to get noticed—that's exactly what she said, trying to get her attention, am I right?"

"Right, my ass! I'm a woman, not a pervert, like there's no men left in the world, why would I like her, Kang Libao?"

Xu Chunxia was about to explode. She stared a hole through the woman who was mocking and disrespecting her, teeth gritted: "Auntie Chunhua, if you weren't an elder, do you think I wouldn't tear your mouth apart?"

"Come on then! I'd like to see you try!"

The Auntie Chunhua that Xu Chunxia mentioned was Wang Chunhua, best pals with Li Daniu in the village. The two could really talk. This moment, seeing the argument flare up between Wang Chunhua and Xu Chunxia, Li Daniu couldn't help but chime in on Wang Chunhua's side:

"Chunxia girl, you shout at your Auntie Chunhua like that, but if you're so tough, how come you don't show off in front of Li Bao? Seems to me, you only pick on those weaker than you. Just 'cause you worked outta town for a couple years, you think us aunties from the village are all bumpkins, easy targets—is that it?"

"Did I ever say that?"

Xu Chunxia's eyes were icy: "If Auntie Chunhua didn't talk crap first, do you think I'd waste my spit here arguing with her?"

Chapter 1723: Amazed by Jiang Li (Part 2)

Li Daniu curled her lip: "I think you're just bullying the weak and fearing the strong, thinking we're all country bumpkins, letting you put on airs! If you're so tough, how come you never stand up to Li Bao? Instead, Li Bao just says a couple of words and you don't even know how to answer back. Chunxia girl, you're scared of Li Bao, aren't you? Well, Li Bao is a big shot after all, so next to her, you're like a mouse facing a cat. That's why Li Bao can shut you up with a few words."

"Say whatever you want!"

Xu Chunxia snorted coldly, ignoring the crowd watching the drama, then headed into the yard and straight for the main room.

"Don't be mad, that girl only acts tough in front of us. In front of Li Bao, she's just a little mouse!"

Li Daniu comforted Wang Chunhua, who shook her head when she heard this: "I don't need to bother getting upset over some little girl."

"You just won't admit it!"

Li Daniu laughed and shook her head, then said, "Want to come sit at my place?"

"Wait a sec."

Wang Chunhua felt there was more drama yet to come at the Xu family.

"You're waiting for that bunch to start fighting again?"

Li Daniu asked.

Wang Chunhua gave her a look that said, "Don't ask what you already know."

But whether it was Wang Chunhua or any of the other people watching, they all waited for nothing.

Because after ten minutes or so, there was still no shouting coming from the Xu family's main room.

A lot of folks, seeing there was no more excitement to watch, started to leave, heading back to their homes.

Li Daniu and Wang Chunhua were no exception. Walking toward Li Daniu's house, Wang Chunhua said, "Why do you think Li Bao doesn't like that Xu family girl?"

Li Daniu's eyes looked a bit complicated as she heard this: "Li Bao doesn't like Chunxia. Are you sure you don't know the reason?"

"Am I supposed to know?"

Wang Chunhua was puzzled.

"Looks like you really forgot."

Li Daniu shook her head and said, "After that Zhou family boy and Li Bao broke off their engagement, think carefully—what did Chunxia do?"

"..."

Wang Chunhua thought for a moment, then suddenly clapped her hand: "I remember!"

Li Daniu was startled, glaring at Wang Chunhua: "Can you stop jumping out of your skin like that?"

Wang Chunhua smiled awkwardly when she heard this, saying, "That's my bad, didn't mean to scare you."

After a pause, she went on, "After the Zhou family boy and Li Bao broke off their engagement, Chunxia didn't care about her relationship with Li Bao and went sneaking into the woods with that Zhou family boy. Seems like the Xu family girl had her eye on him for a long time, but kept pretending to be friends with Li Bao. Tsk... Why do I get the feeling that Xu family girl is really sly?!"

"Now you know why Li Bao doesn't like that Chunxia girl, right? Li Bao treated her like a friend. Because of Li Bao, the Team Leader always gave that girl easy jobs, but she still got high work points. And Chunxia didn't appreciate any of it—instead, she was busy stealing Li Bao's man. If it were you, could you stand her?"

After Li Daniu finished, Wang Chunhua spoke: "Why drag me into Li Bao and Xu family girl's mess?"

"I just want you to imagine yourself in Li Bao's shoes, so you'll remember why Li Bao treats Chunxia the way she does."

Not hearing Wang Chunhua reply, Li Daniu spoke up again: "Li Bao said that Chunxia girl has no brain, and I think that's right. Did something to hurt Li Bao, but still shamelessly tries to get close to her. No wonder Li Bao can't stand her."

...

No one really knew what Father Xu and Mrs. Xu said to their son and daughters-in-law. All Xu Chunxia knew when she walked into the main room was that her stuff had been put back in the suitcase.

To make sure nothing was missing, she checked everything, and found that her red wool coat and a pale yellow dress were gone.

Knowing exactly who took them, Xu Chunxia went straight to Mrs. Xu and pointed out what was missing.

Immediately Mrs. Xu started cussing out Wang Xinger and Du Juan, then stormed into Xu Chunlai's room and Xu Chunwang's house one after another, pulling out the stuff Wang Xinger and Du Juan had hidden, cursing them both for being so greedy.

Wang Xinger was pissed, so was Du Juan. The two sisters-in-law just lay on the kang pretending to be dead, refusing to go out to the fields to weed the corn.

Facing her two daughters-in-law slacking off, Mrs. Xu was stomping mad but didn't want outsiders to see their family drama, so she forced herself to calm down and called her two sons to follow her and Father Xu out to the fields.

As for Xu Chunxia, Mrs. Xu wanted to take her along too, but Xu Chunxia completely ignored her mother, dragged her two big suitcases back to the room they'd fixed up for her, and, copying Wang Xinger and Du Juan, lay down on the kang and did nothing as well.

Once things quieted down, with nothing better to do, she couldn't help but let her mind wander.

Chapter 1724: Amazed by Kang Li (Part 3)

And that's exactly how Xu Chunxia was, especially whenever she thought of that line from Kang Li: "Don't love me, there's no future." The frustration in her chest surged up uncontrollably.

"Kang Libao, it's not like you to humiliate people like this. I'm a woman, not a man. Even if you looked like a fairy, I wouldn't be perverted enough to fall for you."

Mouthing the words silently, Xu Chunxia's eyes brimmed with anger and malice: "You've always flaunted yourself in front of me since we were kids, making me look like some orphan with no parents and no one to love me. Do you know how awful I felt, how much I wanted to rip off your fake mask? Kang Libao, just you wait. As soon as I get the chance, I'll make sure you know what it means to cry to the heavens and have no one answer, to call to the earth and get nothing back!"

In those years in G City and Shen City, Xu Chunxia not only realized the importance of power and influence, but also learned what it meant to enjoy life, and at the same time, discovered some of the darker sides of society.

For example, Xu Chunxia once saw women and children being trafficked with her own eyes. Back then, the woman being trafficked looked at her for help, but Xu Chunxia pretended to know nothing just to protect herself.

Another time, while out shopping, she caught sight of a two-or-three-year-old kid squatting outside a shop, playing by the street, when all of a sudden someone grabbed the child and carried them into a car parked nearby.

She'd been so startled that her eyes went wide. She wanted to call the shop owner, but someone in the car gave her a pointed look, and suddenly all her courage vanished—she just wanted to get away from that street as fast as possible.

And there was also how Xu Chunxia herself was tricked by Jack, deceived in love, then conned into going abroad to suffer through all sorts of hardship—it all taught her that this world was far from sunshine at every turn.

Because of this, she let her dark side grow bold—and now she was plotting against Kang Li.

A cold glint flashed in her eyes. Xu Chunxia decided that until she found a chance to strike at Kang Li, she had to put up with everything. She absolutely couldn't let anger and hatred cloud her mind, and before she'd made all her preparations, she wouldn't act foolishly or make a move against Kang Li.

"Did you catch a chill last night?"

Kang Li sat in the main room chatting with Cai Xiufen. All of a sudden she sneezed three times in a row, so Cai Xiufen couldn't help but ask.

"No."

Kang Li shook her head, then joked, "Maybe someone's thinking about me—or maybe someone's plotting against me."

"Thinking and plotting, huh? Sounds like there are quite a few people with their minds on you."

Cai Xiufen looked helpless.

Kang Li gave a little laugh. "Your daughter's this outstanding—of course there's plenty of people keeping an eye on me."

Cai Xiufen: "Then tell me, what did you do to make someone want to scheme against you?"

"When you're too outstanding, you just inevitably become an eyesore for some people. And then, who knows, maybe right now they're scheming about how to trip me up..."

As she spoke, Kang Li let out an exaggerated sigh and pulled a face of woe. "Looks like being too good isn't always great either. But honestly, I'd rather be outstanding than mediocre—after all, only those with no enemies have no worth!"

"You! Since when did you get so fond of bragging?"

Cai Xiufen shook her head, smiling.

Kang Li: "Mom, you think I'm bragging?"

Kang Li's beautiful brows arched slightly as she feigned being wronged: "Don't tell me Mom thinks I'm not good enough? That your precious darling's nothing special?"

"I never said that, and I've never thought so."

The look on Cai Xiufen's face was fond but helpless.

"Then that settles it! I'm the genius raised by you and Dad!"

Kang Li cocked her head and fluttered her eyelashes at Cai Xiufen, playing cute: "Isn't that right, Your Majesty?"

Cai Xiufen couldn't help but burst out laughing, pointing at Kang Li: "You're always such a clown!"

"I just want to make you happy, Mom!"

Kang Li's bright eyes curved into crescent moons as she smiled. "They say a smile takes off ten years. The more you smile every day, Mom, the younger you'll get."

"Wouldn't that make me some kind of old monster!"

Cai Xiufen shook her head. "Your dad and I will live as long as we live. If we can be with you for a few more years, that would be more than enough."

On hearing this, Kang Li responded immediately: "You and Dad are going to live to a hundred!"

"Alright, I'll try to live to a hundred with your dad!"

Cai Xiufen laughed, then changed the topic: "There was a fight over at Chunxia's place. You just got back from Grandpa's—do you know what happened?"

Kang Li: "I didn't go out of my way to listen, but I did overhear a bit when I passed by. Sounded like Xu Chunxia's personal things got divided up by her family, and she got mad and quarreled with them."

Cai Xiufen: "That's all?"

"Yeah."

Kang Li nodded, then added: "But Xu Chunxia must have something wrong with her brain. She bites out at me every time she sees me. I was just passing by outside her family's gate, and she lunged at me, asking if I loved watching her family's drama, then hinted all snarky that I should bear witness for her or something. Absolutely ridiculous!"

Chapter 1725: Astonished by Kang Li (Part 4)

"That girl Chunxia really is something, why does she always like to mess with you?"

Cai Xiufen frowned, "You've been nice to her since you were little. Your dad saw you playing together, so every time you worked, he always assigned her easy tasks, but she still earned lots of work points. She's got a deep mind, pretending to be your friend in public, while secretly trying to undermine you. I think she's definitely jealous, can't stand seeing you do well, so every time she sees you, she tries to cause you trouble."

"Her intentions aren't right, she can't stand that I made it here today. I can see through her in an instant. If I'm guessing correctly, Xu Chunxia is not just jealous, she downright hates me. I bet she's spent plenty of time scheming how to hurt me!"

Upon hearing Kang Li's words, Cai Xiufen grew tense, "Then you need to be careful, don't let her get to you."

"Don't worry, all those schemes and tricks are nothing but paper tigers in front of real strength. I'm not afraid of her plotting against me."

Kang Li spoke calmly and unbothered, not paying attention to someone like Xu Chunxia, a clown jumping around.

Cai Xiufen still felt uneasy. She looked serious and urged, "Don't get careless."

"Alright."

Kang Li nodded, just as Cai Xiufen asked about the factory opening, "It's only ten days or so till the factory opens. Is everything ready?"

Kang Li made a light "Mm" sound, then said, "We finished recruitment earlier, and the management team has already been trained. Starting tomorrow, we'll begin pre-job training for the ordinary workers. The channels for raw materials are all lined up, so on the opening day we can jump straight into production."

Cai Xiufen: "What about the ecological circular park over there? Is everything arranged?"

"I've gone to see it. It'll take till the end of October to finish building it according to my plans. Everything else should be ready by the end of the year. But I've already assigned all the tasks—before the New Year we need to finish recruitment and pre-job training, and by spring it'll be up and running."

"Isn't your ecological circular park a bit too ambitious?"

"Not all that big."

But not small, either.

The eco-circular parks in later years were on a whole other level, but the one she's building now has room for expansion. Once the profits increase, she could just keep extending outward.

"With your scale, you'll probably need a lot of workers."

"Mm."

"Recruit our villagers first?"

"Absolutely. But people with bad character, slackers, cheaters—those will never get hired. One rotten apple spoils the whole barrel."

"You're right. Later, have your dad screen the candidates for you."

"Sure! My dad used to be Team Leader, so he knows everyone in our village, and knows what kind of people they are. With him vetting, I'll feel completely at ease."

"He knows plenty of folks from the surrounding villages too. If he asks around a bit, he'll know their character. Oh, by the way, your dad said he wants to stay home for a while longer, so later he won't go with us to North City."

"If my dad stays home, how's he going to eat?"

Kang Li frowned, "Third brother and sister-in-law, fourth brother and sister-in-law are all busy, probably won't be back home even once in half a month. Who's going to cook for my dad, do his laundry? And what if he gets sick?"

"That is a problem."

Cai Xiufen frowned too.

Kang Li: "Let's have my dad come with us. Then during National Day, I'll drive you and my dad back."

"If your dad and I go back home, what about Ruier and the others? They can't have all three meals at your godmother's. And there's no adults at the compound—do you really feel safe with Ruier, Hanhan, and Weiwei left at home?"

"It's fine. Ruier's school has a cafeteria, so they eat right there for lunch. I'll cook breakfast and dinner for them."

"So you'll go back and forth between the two places?"

"No need. My dad has a pretty big courtyard house near Shuimu University. It's renovated, everything's ready—just move in with our bags. From there, Ruier's school is right on the direct bus line. In the morning, I'll send Ruier and the others to school, then send the little ones, and in the afternoon, Ruier and the others can take the bus home."

"You'll take the three big kids to school, but are you really okay leaving the three little ones at home?"

"..."

Kang Li was silent for a moment, then suddenly thought of something and smiled, "That's no big deal. I'll talk to Grandpa or to my dad, and have them assign me a few people."

Jiang Hongfa and Jiang Boya brought back a bunch of people from their overseas estate, and those folks are all very reliable. Some were raised by the Jiang family from a young age and are extremely loyal. Even those who were hired are all very well trained, and before coming to work for the Jiang family, they all signed strict labor contracts, so there's no need to worry about betrayal.

"Let's do it that way then."

Cai Xiufen trusts Jiang Hongfa and Jiang Boya completely. With those two arranging people to help Kang Li watch the kids, their safety is a sure thing.

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Sunrise and sunset—the days flew by, and before long, Kang Li's factory opened its doors.

Provincial, city, and county leaders, as well as town officials, all showed up.

With drums beating and a lively ribbon-cutting ceremony, Kang Li led officials of every level around the factory, accompanied by the management team, and the entire factory got a tour, earning unanimous praise from all the leaders.

Whether it was the cleanliness, employees' mental outlook, hardware facilities, or security, everything was flawless.

And the security team recruited for the factory were all retired soldiers, brought in by Kang Li specifically through official channels—essentially helping the state find placement for retired servicemen.

Further, all Kang Li's other businesses hired retired veterans in their security departments.

High pay, all meals and lodging included.

"Brother, Li Li really is impressive!"

Old Master Xi also attended the factory opening, and along with Jiang Hongfa, and the other officials, followed Kang Li on a tour. Seeing the spirit and uniforms of the employees, and the almost militarized management, to be honest, Old Master Xi was quite dazzled—he'd gained a new appreciation for Kang Li's capabilities.

At that moment, he and Jiang Hongfa returned to the villa, chatting in the living room, unable to hold back from praising Kang Li.

"I agree, I was genuinely amazed by my Li Li today too. The management model at her factory is really advanced—better even than many big foreign firms. Not that I want to brag, but if Li Li keeps running things this way, in a few years that factory's bound to become one of the top enterprises in the country."

After hearing Jiang Hongfa, Old Master Xi nodded repeatedly, "There's a bright future ahead! I bet that integrated eco-circular park Li Li is building will be just as impressive."

"Should we go take a look some other day?"

Chapter 1726: Missed Out on a Good Deal

Jiang Hongfa suggested.

"Lili says the construction is still underway, won't be finished until at least around the National Day. If we go now, we won't see much. Later, when Lili's Ecological Recycling Park officially opens, we can come over to support the kids. What do you think, old brother?"

Hearing Old Master Xi's words, Jiang Hongfa immediately agreed, "Let's do it just like that!"

At this time, Old Master Xi asked, "Are we heading back to North City in a couple of days?"

"Yeah."

Jiang Hongfa nodded, saying, "It's less than half a month before school starts. Lili said we'll leave in two days so the kids can go back and get themselves ready, so their minds won't still be wandering when school begins."

Old Master Xi smiled and nodded, "That makes sense."

...

Two days passed quickly, and now it's approaching evening. Tomorrow morning, Kang Li and her group will be setting off for North City.

"Li Bao, are you really sure about this?"

In the main hall, Cai Xiufen stared intently at Kang Li.

"Yeah."

Kang Li nodded. She glanced at Captain Kang, then looked back at Cai Xiufen, her expression serious and voice soft: "Now that I have the ability, and there's a place to live in North City, I want to bring Grandpa and Grandma over to stay for a while. Show them around North City, let them have a good look. It's just a little bit of filial piety from me to them."

After a brief pause, Kang Li continued: "Dad, Mom, Grandpa and Grandma have worked hard their whole lives. Let them enjoy themselves in the days ahead, be happy—there's nothing better than that."

With their age, they're considered long-lived in the village, they've seen and been through a lot, suffered even more. In her memory, Old Kang's Home was never the poorest in the village, but definitely not wealthy either.

Of course, that's before the 1970s.

After the 1970s, thanks to her second and fourth brothers—one thriving in the army, one working at the County Transport Team—their family's life clearly got better than most in the village. Even her uncle's and younger uncle's families did well, because her family helped them out, their days improved too.

Now, both her uncle's and younger uncle's families are like hers, they've sent several kids to college, and the future will only get better.

But, to be honest, with Grandpa and Grandma's age, how many more good years can they still have?

Plus, she suspects they've never even been to the county seat, so as their granddaughter, she'd like to take them to North City, to see the heart of the country before it's too late. She believes both Grandpa and Grandma would be absolutely delighted.

"But will Grandpa and Grandma agree?"

Cai Xiufen said, "Don't let their age fool you. They're still sharp, know everything going on. You'll just finish saying it, and they'll refuse right after."

Kang Li smiled, "I know what you mean, Mom."

Before Kang Li could explain, Captain Kang spoke up: "Your Grandpa and Grandma are principled. They wouldn't let themselves become a burden to their children and grandchildren."

"Dad, what burden? They're not a burden."

Kang Li said, "Grandpa and Grandma are getting old, but they're still lively and take care of themselves—they won't give me any trouble, so they're definitely not a burden. Even if one day, because of their health, they need me to look after them, as their granddaughter, I won't see that as a burden, won't think they're some kind of hassle."

As the saying goes, 'An elder in the family is a treasure.' You and Mom raised me, taught me how to be a decent person—I always remember that. I know filial piety is the first virtue, and I know 'you raised me when I was young, I'll care for you when you're old.'

Captain Kang was stunned, unable to speak for a good while.

Cai Xiufen muttered, "You raised me when I was young, I'll care for you when you're old."

"Exactly! Mom, you and Dad raised me, so I'll be with you as you grow old. When I was little, you were my support; when I grow up, I am yours. No matter how old you get, I'll hold your hands tight and repay you for your care and love! Grandpa and Grandma are Dad's parents, and I'm Dad's child. Now that I have the ability, I'll help Dad be filial to Grandpa and Grandma, too."

After Kang Li finished speaking, Captain Kang, who's always kept his emotions hidden, was clearly moved this time. He said, "Dad will go with you to talk to Grandpa and Grandma."

"Okay."

Kang Li beamed, answering right away. Then she noticed Cai Xiufen's face clouded with nostalgia and asked, "Mom, are you thinking about Grandma and Grandpa?"

"Yeah. Your Grandma and Grandpa never got to enjoy much. In the end, to save food for the family, the two of them actually starved themselves to death."

Chapter 1727: Didn't Get a Good Deal_2

Cai Xiufen spoke, her eyes slowly growing wet at the corners. She wiped them casually: "Alright, let's not talk about those old stories anymore. It's getting late, you two should head over and get things sorted out—so they can get ready in advance."

No doubt, by "over there" Cai Xiufen meant Big Uncle Kang's house.

"Mom, if the dead really know things underground, then Grandma and Grandpa would be so happy to know you had their graves redone, and that every time you come back home, you pay respects at their grave. They'd be really glad."

About Grandma and Grandpa from the Cai Family, the original owner left Kang Li with almost no memories.

Back then, the original owner was only five years old. There were disasters sweeping the country—rural folk went hungry, but even city folks weren't much better off.

With that in mind, it wasn't hard for Kang Li to understand what Cai Xiufen was saying—her late grandma and grandpa went without food just to save a little bit more for their kids.

And things like that, Kang Li knew, happened in lots of places without even needing to think about it.

"You really know how to talk."

Cai Xiufen felt a little better after hearing Kang Li's words.

"I'm not just making things up."

Kang Li smiled, but deep down she knew—that was all just to comfort her mom.

Because when people die, it's all over, and the living have to keep going. In times like these, a little comfort from the ones around you—it's needed, at least Kang Li thought so.

But truthfully, Kang Li believed: real filial piety means being good to folks while they're alive!

Of course, her mom and her grandma and grandpa had a special case.

...

Big Uncle Kang's House.

"Li Bao, are you sure you want to take your grandparents to North City?"

Big Uncle Kang asked Kang Li, but his eyes went to Captain Kang. When Captain Kang nodded, Big Uncle Kang said, "Is this really okay? You've got work, so many kids at home—will your grandparents be alright living with you?"

"Uncle, don't worry. My kids don't need looking after—Ruirui, Hanhan, and Vivi all go to and from school on their own. I just drop Bun and the little ones at kindergarten. And with my parents there too, not a bit of it will mess with my work."

No smile in Kang Li's eyes, she spoke gently: "Plus, my place is nice and roomy, lots of bedrooms, for sure my grandparents will be comfortable and have fun. When the National Day holidays come around, if they don't want to stay in North City, I'll drive them and my parents back home."

"You and your wife coming home during National Day?"

Big Uncle Kang asked Captain Kang.

"Yeah."

Captain Kang nodded.

"Uncle, next time, I'll take you and Aunt to North City too. We'll all have a good time."

Hearing Kang Li say this, Big Uncle Kang waved his hand, smiling: "No need, no need. Uncle and Aunt won't give you extra trouble."

Kang Li: "What trouble would you bring? If I said I'll do it, I will."

"Closing my eyes in this life and getting a chance to stroll through North City—Aunt feels she hasn't lived in vain."

Sun Fengzhu said, cheerful as always. Kang Li replied, "Aunt, your wish is way too small. Wait and see—I'll take you and Uncle to North City for sure, and if we get the chance, I'll take you, my parents, and my other uncle and aunt overseas for a trip."

Kang Li wasn't just bragging. If the kids were settled, she could book a whole plane and fly the whole Kang Family's elders abroad for a vacation.

Sun Fengzhu: "Our Li Bao is so filial, not like your brother Guozhu and the others—just know how to give me and Uncle a headache."

"Mom, don't blame me. When did I ever upset you?"

Kang Guozhu grumbled in his thick voice.

"If I say you did, then you did. What, you want to argue with me?"

Sun Fengzhu glared at her eldest son. Immediately, Kang Guozhu changed his tune: "Whatever Mom says is right. It's my fault—not as thoughtful as Li Bao, not as filial either!"

"Glad you know!"

She shot her eldest son a look, then Sun Fengzhu held Kang Li's hand and told Grandpa Kang and Grandma Kang: "Dad, Mom, Li Bao's got a good heart. And now his second uncle has come, and together they want you to go visit North City. You should just go with them. I'll pack you a couple of changes of clothes, put them in Li Bao's car first thing in the morning."

"Your dad and I, we're too old now—can't handle all that. We're better off at home, not causing trouble for Li Bao with a long trip. Wouldn't want to mess up her work, that'd be a sin."

Grandma Kang shook her head.

"Your mom's right, we're both in our seventies and eighties, staying home is best."

Grandpa Kang agreed.

"Grandpa, Grandma, I drive real steady, and besides, it's all big roads the whole way. No way you'll be bumped around."

Chapter 1728: Failed to Get a Good Deal (Part 3)

Kang Li smiled as she tried to persuade the two elders, "Don't you want to see Tiananmen? Watch the flag-raising ceremony over there..."

She kept talking, and Kang Li could see the two elders were starting to get interested, so she pushed a little harder, until finally Grandpa Kang nodded, "Alright, your grandma and I will go have a look, then we'll come back with your parents."

"So that's settled then?"

Kang Li grinned.

Grandma Kang looked at her lovingly and said with a smile, "You, the youngest of our generation, worry more than any of them. Your grandpa and I haven't lived in vain—we have a granddaughter as filial as you!"

"Brother Guozhu and the others are all great too!"

No one in the Kang Family neglects their elders.

...

The next morning.

After breakfast, Kang Li helped Cai Xiufen tidy up the house, then walked over to Jiang Hongfa's villa, where Ah Xiang and Ah Lan, led by Aunt Fu, were finishing up cleaning inside and out.

So, half an hour later, the cars rolled out of Aoli Village one by one.

"Li Bao is really something, now she's taking her grandparents to North City for a stroll. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't jealous."

On the village road, Cui the Loudspeaker and a few women stood together at the entrance, gossiping.

"What good does jealousy do? Let me tell you, Loudspeaker, if you want to go to North City, let your son or daughter take you."

The one speaking was Wang Chunhua, who was standing with Li Daniu.

Hearing this, Cui the Loudspeaker rolled her eyes, "If my son or daughter gets some money in their pocket, they'd naturally take me to North City. You won't need to flap your lips then."

Wang Chunhua's face changed ever so slightly. She snorted and said with a pout, "Who doesn't know you, Cui the Loudspeaker, are stingy? If your son or daughter ever had money, you'd keep it locked up tighter than anyone!"

"You're the stingy one! Your whole family is stingy!"

She really is stingy, can't bear to waste money, but honestly, who in this village isn't a penny-pincher?

Of course, knowing it yourself is one thing; being called out by others is a blow to your pride.

"Yeah, yeah, my family's all stingy, and you're not."

Wang Chunhua said this, but the smile she gave was full of sarcasm in Cui the Loudspeaker's eyes.

Stingy means being cheap, and in this village, folks don't like dealing with cheap people.

Cui the Loudspeaker is brash and outspoken, but that doesn't mean she doesn't care about reputation. If this stingy label gets out, it'll be trouble for the kids in the family when it's time to talk marriage.

"Wang Chunhua, are you just looking for trouble?"

Cui the Loudspeaker looked sour, glaring at Wang Chunhua, but Wang Chunhua brushed it off easily: "Say whatever you want."

She didn't look at all like someone who'd just argued with Cui the Loudspeaker.

This really got Cui the Loudspeaker riled up.

"Come on, Aunt Cui, we're all neighbors here, no need to take it so seriously. Besides, Chunhua didn't say anything bad—she just heard you envy Li Bao for taking her grandparents to North City, and was suggesting your own kids..."

"Li Daniu, what are you making a fuss about? Did I ask you?"

Cui the Loudspeaker cut Li Daniu off, her face even darker than before.

"Alright, alright, I'm too chatty, I'll shut up now."

Li Daniu saw how steamed Cui the Loudspeaker was, and to avoid saying one more word that might totally piss her off, or even spark a fight in front of everyone, she quickly stepped away, putting some distance between them.

Just then, someone asked Xu's mother, "Xu's family, when is your Chunxia leaving?"

"Why do you want to know?"

Xu's mother wasn't playing by the rules, she replied flatly and disinterestedly.

The woman who'd asked was put in an awkward spot, a bit embarrassed, "I was just asking, that's all."

Xu's mother said nothing. She gave her a look and turned to walk back toward her gate.

Once she'd walked a ways off, the women gathered started gossiping about the Xu family.

"Anyone know what Chunxia does for work out there?"

"No idea."

"I've run into Chunxia and asked; she said she's done all kinds of jobs."

"Did she say anything more specific?"

"I asked, but she wouldn't say."

"Could be she's up to something shady, huh?"

That was Cui the Loudspeaker, and her words immediately drew the rest of the women's attention. Even Wang Chunhua and Li Daniu looked at her.

"Erhua, what are you implying?"

Erhua was Cui the Loudspeaker's real name.

"Don't you think Chunxia's way too flashy? Think about how the women and girls here walk, then think about how Chunxia walks."

Cui the Loudspeaker eyed the women around her, "Figure anything out?"

Chapter 1729: Missed Opportunity

Li Daniu: "Chunxia walks with her waist swinging like a water snake."

"She even swings her ass!"

Another woman added to Li Daniu's comment.

"That girl Chunxia talks like she's squeezing her throat, sounds weird."

Another woman chipped in.

"Now you know, eh? That Chunxia girl probably isn't doing honest work out there."

Cui Big Mouth said meaningfully, "If you ask me, she's probably someone's mistress."

"What?"

Li Daniu widened her eyes: "Aunt Cui, you're just guessing, right?"

"Yeah, I am, but Chunxia's way of walking and talking, not a bit like she's working a proper city job."

Cui Big Mouth continued, paused for a second, then said, "Think about how Li Bao talks and walks with us, you'll see if what I'm saying makes sense."

Wang Chunhua: "Li Bao hasn't changed all these years. When she sees us aunties, she always greets us with a smile, and her voice is still as gentle and sweet as before, so pleasant to hear!"

Li Daniu: "Li Bao walks like a fairy, dignified and proper, never swings around."

"I just thought of a word—right now Chunxia is like a fox spirit, totally different from how she used to be in the village!"

A woman suddenly clapped her hands, lowered her voice, and said mysteriously.

"Yeah, Chunxia really is like a fox spirit."

"Do you think Chunxia's mom knows what Chunxia is doing out there?"

"We'd have to ask to find out."

As for who to ask, it's obviously Chunxia's mother.

"Birds of a feather flock together—Chunwang and Chunlai both married wives, one more seductive than the next, and those from the Xu Family, they were just as flirty when young."

"Now that I think about it, it's true!"

"Tsk! If Chunxia is really someone's mistress out there, their family's reputation will be ruined again!"

"If you ask me, Chunyu, Chunmei, and Chunxiang are all decent, those three sisters are totally different from the rest of the Xu Family."

Chunyu, full name Xu Chunyu, is the eldest daughter of the Xu Family.

Chunmei and Chunxiang are the fourth and sixth daughters.

"Speaking of which, Chunyu is the most pitiful among her four sisters!"

A woman sighed.

"They treat their daughters like nothing, only care about money. That husband and wife from the Xu Family are heartless—after Chunyu got married, her life is more bitter than yellow lotus. Sigh! It's fate! She just happened to be born to those parents."

"Who says otherwise?!"

"Chunmei and Chunxiang help out their big sister."

"I've heard about that too."

"Oh right, my daughter Cai Xiu said that Chunmei, Chunxiang, and their big sister Chunyu all got jobs in Li Bao's factory—looks like Chunyu's days will only get better from here!"

"How come my daughter-in-law never mentioned that?"

"Your daughter-in-law's only been in your family a couple years. She probably doesn't even know Chunyu, and isn't close with Chunmei and Chunxiang. It's no surprise she doesn't know a thing."

Just then another woman said, "Those two daughters-in-law from the Xu Family went to the job recruitment—neither got picked. Lately, when the sisters-in-law walk around the village, it's like everyone owes them a hundred eighty bucks."

...

The Xu mother and the Xu Family naturally don't know about all this gossip.

Right now, Xu mother just walked into the yard and saw Xu Chunxia dragging her two big suitcases out of the main house. She couldn't help but ask, "You're leaving?"

"If I don't go work, who'll give me money?"

Xu Chunxia tossed back at Xu mother casually.

"Can't you talk nicely?"

Xu mother frowned, her face gloomy.

"Oh, I'd like to, but tell me, how have you all treated me since I came home?"

Xu Chunxia stopped three steps away from Xu mother and said, "One after another, all sticking out their hands begging for money from me, making me feel like a bank. If you can't get money, all I eat is sweet potato corn porridge and pickled greens every day. Look at my face, what's it turned into?"

She pointed at her own face, disgusted, and said, "When I first came back, my skin was great. Now it's dull and rough. Enough, not gonna argue more, I have to hurry to Kang Li Bao's house."

Xu mother: "You planning to hitch a ride with Li Bao?"

"Only a fool would turn down a freebie."

Xu Chunxia ignored Xu mother, dragged her big suitcase and kept going.

"Li Bao's already left, probably at the town by now."

Watching Xu Chunxia about to reach the gate, Xu mother said. On hearing this, Xu Chunxia stopped, turned around: "Gone?"

"Gone."

Xu mother was expressionless, she said: "You're not young anymore. Why not listen to your mom—stop running around, I'll get a matchmaker to find you a marriage, you get married and have kids, live a good life."

"Get married and have kids, live a good life? Looks to me you just want to sell me for a big price!"

Xu Chunxia sneered: "You still don't get it, I'm not who I used to be. You can't boss me around. Want me to listen and get married? You keep dreaming!"

With that, Xu Chunxia stepped on her heels, dragging the suitcase, walked out the gate without looking back.

No free ride? She can just buy her own train ticket.

"Gone?"

Xu mother entered the main room, and bumped right into a question from Xu father.

"Mm."

Sitting down on a little stool, Xu mother said, "I told her not to go out again, but that damn girl won't listen."

"Wings have grown, let her be!"

Xu father said, pointing at fifty yuan on the table: "Take it."

"That damn girl gave it?"

Xu mother asked.

Xu father nodded, didn't say much.

"That damn girl's a heartless wolf. I carried her to term, raised her with all that shit and piss, and now she won't listen to us and marry properly—instead she sent us to the police and ran off.

She doesn't come back for years. When she does, she acts all high and mighty. Tell me, what kind of sin did we commit to have a kid like that?!"

Xu mother was so angry her eyes went red. She turned away, wiped her eyes, and continued, "I favored Chunwang and Chunlai, but I never starved or froze the girls. And now, every one of them looks at me like I'm their enemy—as if they wish I wasn't their mother. What family has daughters with such cold hearts?"

Xu father listened to her rant, head down, smoking his pipe, saying nothing.

...

"Chunxia, you're going to the city to keep working?"

Seeing Xu Chunxia drag two big suitcases over, the women who were talking went silent right away. Cui Big Mouth smiled, raised her voice and asked her.

"Mm."

Xu Chunxia nodded.

Cui Big Mouth: "Easy to find work in the city?"

"It's okay."

Xu Chunxia replied, but did not stop walking, clearly with no intention to chit-chat with Cui Big Mouth or the others.

"I bet that girl's trying to hitch a ride with Li Bao, but Li Bao already left. She'll have to buy her own ticket to the city, otherwise her face wouldn't look so sullen!"

Chapter 1730: Stirring Up Trouble

With her gaze lingering on Xu Chunxia's retreating back, Cui the Loudspeaker began sharing her opinions with the women around her.

"It must be like that."

"I think so too. Otherwise, why would she, of all people, also leave today, at exactly this hour?"

"That family is not just stingy, they also love to take advantage of others."

"Well, it's not the whole family that's stingy. Chunyue, Chunmei, and Chunxiang are all good. I've never seen those three sisters being stingy or keen on taking advantage."

One woman said that, and the others paused at her words, then all nodded in agreement.

"Those three, Chunyue, Chunmei, and Chunxiang, don't really seem like Xu family folk."

"That's true. Chunyue is quiet and earnest, Chunmei is clever, and Chunxiang is big-hearted and easygoing. They're not like Chunxia, always scheming in her mind."

"Chunxia and her two brothers are the ones who take after their parents!"

"That's for sure."

...

Xu Chunxia had no idea that Cui the Loudspeaker and the other women were gossiping about her, but it wasn't hard to guess. After all, instead of leaving earlier or later, she just happened to wheel her suitcase out on the same day Kang Li's people left. Out of ten in the village, probably more than half would suspect why.

But Xu Chunxia didn't care.

Every villager likes a bit of a free ride—who doesn't?

Because of that, even if Xu Chunxia knew she was being talked about, she wouldn't show a trace of it on her face.

Still, she couldn't help but feel uneasy inside. That's for sure.

She took the town shuttle to the county, then transferred to a bus bound for the provincial city.

Arriving at the train station, Xu Chunxia hesitated for a long time before finally buying a ticket to North City.

Her reputation was already shot in G City and Shen City. If she went back to either, it'd be hard to do what she used to.

The main problem was, those bosses would see her and instantly remember which boss she'd been with before. She knew it well enough—even if they met up, the other side would just feel awkward.

It wasn't that she had too many bosses, just that all the ones she'd followed brought her along to plenty of business dinners.

The circles those bosses ran in were small. Even if they didn't recognize her right away, after a few looks, odds were someone would place her.

Thinking of this, Xu Chunxia gritted her teeth and bought the ticket to North City.

As for why she didn't pick some city besides G City, Shen City, or North City? Simple—she didn't know anyone there.

But North City was different.

First: the case where she'd been swindled out of all her money was still up in the air.

Second: she hadn't gotten herself into the sort of mess she had in G City.

Sitting on the green train, listening to the rhythmic "clack-clack, clack-clack" of the wheels on the tracks, Xu Chunxia looked out the window at fields of bright-green corn, her mind wandering far away.

...

Three days later, North City.

Kang Li drove into North City. In front of her car was Jiang Hongfa's, and ahead of that, Old Master Xi's vehicle, with a mid-size van leading the way at the very front.

"So we're here?"

Grandpa Kang looked out the window at the city shops and couldn't help but ask Kang Li.

"Yeah, we're in the city now. Another forty minutes or so and we'll be home."

Watching the road ahead, Kang Li gripped the steering wheel, and responded to Grandpa Kang with a smile.

"So many people in North City!"

Grandma Kang blurted out suddenly.

"It's the weekend. Folks finally get a break and head out to stroll the streets!"

Kang Li's tone was gentle and soft. Suddenly, she slowed the car and said, "Looks like there's an accident up ahead."

Seeing Grandpa Kang's car stop, Kang Li hit the brakes too. Once she brought the car to a halt, Jiang Hongfa's driver got out and came over.

Kang Li asked, "What's happened?"

The driver responded, "There was a car accident at the fork ahead. We'll probably have to wait a bit."

"Got it."

Kang Li nodded lightly. After the driver returned to Jiang Hongfa's car, she glanced at the passenger seat and smiled, "Woke up?"

"Not yet, Mama. Can I sleep a little longer?"

Guoguo was being carried on Min Rui's lap in the passenger seat. She opened her eyes drowsily, heard Kang Li's tender, smiling voice, rubbed her eyes, and replied in her childish voice.

Kang Li: "We'll be home soon. Sure you want to sleep more?"

Before Guoguo could answer, Tangyuan's voice came from the back: "Mama, I'm awake."

Tangyuan was with Ming Wei, Grandpa Kang, and Grandma Kang in the backseat. He'd opened his eyes the moment the car stopped, so hearing Kang Li and Guoguo's exchange, couldn't help chiming in.

Kang Li turned to look at little Tangyuan, a bright smile across her eyes. She spoke gently, "Mama knows. Want some water?"

Tangyuan: "I'm not thirsty."

"Mama, I don't want to sleep anymore. I want to talk to Great-Grandpa and Great-Grandma."

The moment she heard Tangyuan, Guoguo's sleepiness vanished. She blinked and, turning around in Min Rui's arms, called out sweetly to Grandpa Kang and Grandma Kang, "Great-Grandpa! Great-Grandma!"

Grandpa Kang and Grandma Kang beamed, both replying together.

"Mom, I'll get out and take a look up front."

Min Rui glanced at Kang Li. When Kang Li nodded, he opened the door, got out and closed it behind him, then walked up ahead.

After about four or five minutes, Min Rui came back.

"A small car ran a red light and hit an old man. There's a patch of blood on the ground, but the old man's already been taken to the hospital."

