

Chapter 101: Threats

Before Mu Chen could leave, Ning Zhe stood up and angrily said, "Don't change the topic! Zhuang Ji was left to Ning Xia by Zhuang Yi. No one can take it from her. I don't know what's your purpose of marrying her, but you better not have any thoughts about Zhuang Ji!"

Mu Chen looked at Ning Zhe and sighed inwardly. It seemed like Song Ning's father did not care about Song Ning at all; it seemed all her father cared about was Zhuang Ji. After a moment, he asked, "President Ning, why don't you tell me then what I should I do to prove I don't have any thoughts about Zhuang Ji?"

Ning Zhe shifted his gaze away from Mu Chen to the lounge of the second floor of Zhuang Ji before he slowly said, "Bring Ning Xia back to the Ning family. Until you prove to me that you're sincere about Ning Xia, let the Ning Group manage Zhuang Ji."

Mu Chen smiled sardonically. "President Ning, what you mean is to operate Zhuang Ji under the Ning Group?"

Ning Zhe nodded. "That's right! I'm Ning Xia's father. I'm responsible for her wellbeing."

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Mu Chen looked at the seemingly gentle middle-aged man in front of him and tried to suppress the anger in his heart. No matter how much of a jerk Ning Zhe was, he was Song Ning's father. He could not teach Ning Zhe a lesson no matter how much he wanted to. He inhaled deeply before he asked, "President Ning, what if Song Ning disagrees?"

Ning Zhe replied, "It doesn't matter. She doesn't know how to manage a business. In any case, the Mu Group has no business in this industry so it's useless even if you have control over Zhuang Ji. I'm sure you won't go so far as to let outsiders say you covet a small business such as this, right?"

Mu Chen laughed angrily before he replied, "President Ning, Song Ning is my wife. For her, I'm willing to bear any kind of infamy. So what if the Mu Group has no business in this industry? In that case, this is a good chance to expand our business to this industry. I don't mind sharing the burden with Song Ning. We're married after all."

Upon hearing Mu Chen's words, Ning Zhe's expression turned unsightly.

"You can stay and have a look if you want. All these works are by Ms. Zhuang Yi's work. However, I have guests to understand so I won't be accompanying you. Please excuse me," Mu Chen said. Following that, he left without even sparing Ning Zhe another glance.

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When Mu Chen returned in the evening, he did not mention Ning Zhe to Song Ning. He knew since Ning Zhe had come looking for him, Ning Zhe would not let this matter go so easily. In any case, the most important thing now was to help Song Ning get rid of the demons in her heart. He did not want her to

have such a strong reaction whenever she saw people from the Ning family. He could not bear to see her hurting.

During bedtime, Song Ning seemed uncharacteristically clingy.

Mu Chen knew she was nervous. He kissed her slightly damp hair as she reached out and wrapped her arms around his neck as she pressed herself to close his body. He gently stroked her bed as he said, "Ningning, Grandma is right. No matter what our parents are like, we should always strive to be happy. We have to be honest with each other, support each other and love each other, okay?"

Song Ning nodded slightly as she lay in Mu Chen's arms.

"Both of us don't have a lot of experiences with relationships, but let's just go with our feelings, okay? We're so happy now. Let's live the rest of our lives like this, okay?"

Song Ning raised her head slightly to look at Mu Chen. "Mu Chen, thank you!"

Mu Chen lowered his head and kissed her forehead. "Silly, what are you thanking me for?"

Song Ning said, "Thank you for not rejecting me. I... I have a lot of emotional baggage, but you're still willing to accept me."

Mu Chen leaned back and looked at her seriously as he asked, "So, did you give yourself to me out of gratitude?" At the same time, he moved his hand to her waist and gently stroked it.

Song Ning let out a soft moan immediately, igniting the fire in Mu Chen's heart.

Mu Chen leaned over as he said roguishly, "Alright, you can show me your gratitude with your body first. I believe I'll obtain your heart sooner or later as well..."

Song Ning panicked. "No, no. Mu Chen, please."

Mu Chen said, feigning anger. "No? Aren't you giving yourself to me to show your gratitude?"

"No, no. That's not what I meant," Song Ning hastily said. Mu Chen's was still pressed against her, and his hands left trails of flames on her bare skin, causing her breath to quicken. She pleaded weakly, "Wait, Mu Chen. Let's... Let's have a good talk..."

Mu Chen stopped moving as he said, "Alright, call my name..."

"Mu Chen," Song Ning called out softly as she held onto Mu Chen's hand that was causing mischief.

Mu Chen's lips curled up slightly as he said, "Try again. It sounds rather distant like we're strangers..."

Song Ning thought for a moment. "Brother Chen?"

Mu Chen glared at her. "Why did you learn from Cheng Che?"

Song Ning smiled. Mu Chen would always act like a child when Cheng Che was mentioned.

Chapter 102: A Heart-to-Heart Talk

Mu Chen pressed his body closer to Song Ning's body as he said, "You should address me in a more intimate manner..."

Song Ning hurriedly called out, "Husband!"

Mu Chen said, clearly satisfied, "Mm, that's more like it!" As he held onto her, he kissed her cheeks before he said, "From now on, you should address me as such. You're the only one who's allowed to call me husband..."

Song Ning let him hug her as she nuzzled against his chest. The tension from earlier had dissipated so she reached out and placed her hand on his waist before patting it gently like how one would pat a child. Then, she asked softly, "Mu Chen, do you still hate your father?"

Mu Chen did not reply for a long time.

Song Ning continued patting him gently. When she was young, her mother would pat her in this manner. Even when she had grown up, whenever she was unhappy, she would seek comfort in her mother's arms. She would get into her mother's bed, and her mother would pat her just like this to comfort her. At that time, she would fall asleep, and when she woke up, everything seemed better.

Just when Song Ning thought Mu Chen had fallen asleep, he suddenly said, "I don't want to hate him anymore.."

Startled, Song Ning stopped moving her hand for a moment before she continued patting him again.

Mu Chen sighed softly. He sat up and leaned against the headboard of the bed. He seemed to be sorting his thoughts as he held Song Ning's hand. After a few moments, he finally said, "The years following my mother's death, I really hated him to the bones. Whenever I saw him, I wished I could strangle him to death. That was how deep my hatred was. There was one time where we had a really bad argument. He and that woman were so frightened at that time because they could tell I really wanted to fight them to death. The stress took a toll on Grandma's body eventually. By the time I came to my senses, it was already too late..." His voice was laden with regret and sorrow when he spoke.

Song Ning continued to hold his hand to comfort him.

"At that time, I wanted to leave this house that made my mom sad and never come back. Grandma even agreed to it. However, the day before I left, Yu called me and said that Grandma fell ill. That's when I realized my father and that woman weren't home at all. Only Yu was left to take care of Grandma. For that reason, I decided to stay with Grandma."

"So they left?" Song Ning asked gently. She had heard from Yu that Mu Chen's father and stepmother were not in the country.

"Yes, I chased them out!" Mu Chen said indifferently. It could be seen that his father did not hold any place in his heart. His father was just someone he had blood ties with.

"Your relatives must be afraid of you since you even dared to chase your father away..." Song Ning said.

"Yes. During those two years, I was like an injured beast. None of them dared to provoke me. Moreover, I was able to expand the Mu Group, and they benefited from it as well. How could they have the guts to provoke me? They only care about themselves, how could they speak up for my father? I only listen to

Grandma. If she wanted me to kneel, I'd kneel. If she wanted me to stand, I'd stand. Grandma was the one who helped me stabilize my position in the Mu Group since there were many factions in the company. If it were not for her, I wouldn't be where I am today, and the Mu Group wouldn't be where it is today," Mu Chen said.

Although Mu Chen had spoken in a casual tone, Song Ning knew this matter had left a deep impression on him. During those years, he and his grandmother must have suffered a lot. When she thought about this, she could not help but feel distressed. She instinctively tightened her hold on him.

Mu Chen said softly, "I don't hate him anymore..."

Song Ning looked at him, puzzled.

He explained, "I realized that hating him not only caused me pain, but it caused Grandma pain as well. I stopped hating him because of Grandma. However, whether he lives or dies, it has nothing to do with me. If he had truly cared about me and my mother, he wouldn't have done such a shameless thing. In any case, it's not worth it for me to punish myself because of such a person. Moreover, the person who's in the most pain is Grandma who's forced to choose between her son and grandson. If I don't let go of the hate, she'd be in even more pain and blame herself for this. Therefore, I chose to let go of hate. I consider it as repayment for his part in giving birth to me."

Song Ning nodded. "Letting the hate go is like setting yourself and Grandma free from the pain..."

Mu Chen nodded. "That's right. I don't care about his well-being, but Grandma and I have to live well! I want Grandma to be happy for the rest of her life. However, it was not easy at all no matter how hard I tried to make her happy. It was not until you showed up that she became truly happy. Look at how energetic and happy she is every day. It's all because of you..."

Mu Chen smiled and gently stroked Song Ning's hair. He discovered that she liked small affectionate gestures such as this, and she would unconsciously mirror his gestures. This was a kind of comfort that calmed and soothed both of them. He said tenderly, "Ningning, you're truly a blessing for Grandma, me, and Cheng Che."

Song Ning smiled. "Cheng Che is truly filial to Grandma!"

Mu Chen nodded. "He's more filial than those people in the Mu family. Therefore, sometimes blood ties don't dictate love. Blood ties and love are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes, love has nothing to do with how long one knows each other. Our family is perfect now. Don't let those irrelevant people hurt what we have. You won't be alone anymore in the future. You have a husband, a grandmother, and even Cheng Che, a brother-in-law who's a hardcore fan of yours. Don't be afraid of anything. You'll always have our full support..."

Upon hearing these words, Song Ning's tears fell quietly onto Mu Chen's pajamas. She nodded slightly. "Alright."

Chapter 103: Treatment

On the third day, Mu Chen left the work in the studio to Cheng Che and stayed home with Song Ning to wait for the psychiatrist's arrival.

When Song Ning faced Bai Yang, the psychiatrist, she was very calm.

Bai Yang looked at Song Ning and said with a smile, "I feel like you're a little different today..."

Song Ning nodded. "I want to talk about the past. Perhaps, I can find a way to solve the problem."

Bai Yang smiled. "Alright, thank you for trusting me."

Song Ning asked, "Is it okay if I invite Mu Chen and Grandma here to listen as well?"

Bai Yang was stunned. "You want them to listen?"

Song Ning nodded slightly.. "Mu Chen and I promised to be honest with each other. We will advance and retreat together. As for Grandma, I'd rather she hear my story from me than hear about it from another person in the future. No matter what happens in the future, I want to be able to live up to their kindness to me."

Upon hearing these words, Bai Yang said gently, "Song Ning, if the past is painful for you, you don't have to cut yourself open for others to see. We can take it slow."

Song Ning shook her head, clearly determined. "Mu Chen spoke to me about his father. He said that he doesn't want to hate his father anymore because hate only causes him and Grandma to suffer. He wants to let go of the hate to free himself and Grandma. I... I want to be like him. I want to let the past go and free myself..."

"Alright, let's face this together then. Mu Chen and his grandmother will definitely face this with you."

Song Ning nodded.

Following that, Bai Yang left to look for Jiang Jin and Mu Chen.

Upon hearing Song Ning's request, Jiang Jin was stunned. She could not help but feel moved and distressed for Song Ning at the same time.

When they returned to the room, Bai Yang began to speak.

Song Ning gradually calmed down under Bai Yang's gentle voice. She glanced at Mu Chen and Jiang Jin before she slowly closed her eyes and recounted the past.

"Back then, I wasn't home for almost a year because I was filming 'Yi Yao'. In the beginning, my parents visited me often. However, as time passed, only my mother visited me. She told me that my father was busy and would only come home occasionally during the holidays. Since I didn't see my father for a long time, I'd speak to him on the phone. At that time, I didn't think too much of it. After all, the Ning family dabbles in a lot of businesses, and it's not unusual for my father to be busy. When I was finally done with filming, I didn't inform my family about it. I wanted to surprise them. However, when I arrived home, I discovered my mother was in the midst of negotiating with the Ning family and that woman."

Song Ning stopped speaking for a moment as her breathing quickened slightly. Her fingers fidgeted with the silk handkerchief in her hands. She folded it before she placed it over her eyes.

Upon seeing this, Mu Chen could not help but grow worried. He moved closer to her and held her hands.

Song Ning shook her head gently. She crossed her arms and leaned back on the sofa.

At the same time, Bai Yang gestured for Mu Chen not to interfere.

After taking a deep breath, Song Ning continued to calmly say, "At that time, I hadn't separated myself from the role I played in 'Yi Yao'... When faced with such a big matter without any warning, I immediately broke down. I begged my father to drive Su Tong and that child away and even threatened him with my life. I remember the unsightly expression on my father's face at that time. He said that no matter what I'd always be the Eldest Young Miss of the Ning family. Even if he and my mother are divorced, I would be his precious daughter no matter what. However, he said that Su Tong's son is my biological younger brother and that I had to accept him no matter what. At that time, he begged my mother to allow Su Tong and her son to move into the house at that time. He wanted to legitimize Su Tong's son, but he promised that Su Tong would not have a legitimate status in the family. However, my mother naturally did not agree to it. In her opinion, marriages are sacred and should not have a third party. She found it ridiculous that she was asked to give her blessing. Therefore, she was adamant about getting a divorce. She planned to take me away and take everything that belonged to her away, including the shares from the company and the common property that rightfully belonged to her..."

Song Ning paused for a moment before she continued to say, "Needless to say, my father didn't agree to her request. He didn't agree to divorce and didn't want to give my mother what was rightfully hers. At that time, Su Tong cried and begged my mother; she said she only wanted a place to settle down with her son and had no intentions of interfering with my mother and me or our family life. Su Tong cried so hard at that time that she really looked pitiful. Even the child was crying. In the end, my father could not endure it anymore and accused my mother of being stubborn. I remember he said that in Cloudy Peak Villa, there was no family that did not have illegitimate children or mistresses. He did not see anything wrong with his actions. He was furious he couldn't have his cake and eat it too."

"My mother said he could have everything he wanted as long as he allowed her to leave with me. Naturally, he didn't agree to let her bring me away. However, my mom insisted that since she was the one who gave birth to me, she had to take me away. Since he has a son, nothing is stopping him from having another daughter in the future. Therefore, she said that my father didn't have to care about me. Following that..."

At this moment, Song Ning stopped speaking, struggling to finish her words...

Chapter 104: The Knot in Her Heart

Bai Yang asked gently, "Do you want to take a break?"

Song Ning shook her head. She took a deep breath before she continued to say, "In the end, my father agreed to let me leave with my mom. However, his condition was that my mother had to give up the common property and her unique embroidery art. In his words, those things were the soul of the Ning family's clothing business."

“How shameless! Really too shameless!” Jiang Jin said angrily.

At this moment, tears had already soaked through the silk handkerchief that Song Ning placed on her eyes. Nevertheless, she did not stop speaking. “At that time, while my parents were arguing, I looked at Su Tong who was sitting at the side with a pitiful expression on her face. However, contrary to her expression, her eyes were clearly gleaming with delight. I couldn’t contain my anger when I saw this and rushed to slap her; I even called her a sl*t. Everyone, including Su Tong, was shocked by my actions. I remember that child rushed up to me and tried to kick me, but I pushed him away. When my father regained his senses, he slapped me so hard that I fell.. I remember the ringing noises in my ears after he slapped me; I couldn’t hear anything for a moment. When my mother saw this, she, naturally, rushed over to protect me. However, that child knocked into her stomach, causing her to fall next to me. I remember thinking wondering how or why my mother and I had fallen into such a state...”

After Song Ning finished speaking, Jiang Jin clutched Mu Chen’s hand for comfort. Both of them did not dare to speak at this moment.

After a long time, Bai Yan finally called out softly, “Song Ning...”

Mu Chen reached out to hold Song Ning’s hand to comfort her and found that her hand was cold to the touch. Nevertheless, her rapid breathing seemed to gradually slow down with his help.

After calming down, Song Ning said, “My eardrum was perforated, and for a long time, my hearing was impaired. I had a concussion; every movement made the world spin and I felt nauseous. During my time in the hospital, apart from the doctors and nurses, no one came to visit, not even my mother. I remember attempting to commit suicide time and time again, but I was saved again and again. One day, Ms. Yun Yao came to see me; it was our first meeting. She said she was a friend of my mother and brought me to see my mother. As it turned out, my mother didn’t come to visit me was because she had suffered a miscarriage. She was four months pregnant with a baby boy when Su Tong’s son bumped into her stomach. Just like that, my younger brother was gone before his life even started.”

“After that, my parents got divorced. She demanded custody of me and prohibited Su Tong from using the title ‘Madam Ning’ publicly for ten years. Apart from these two things, she didn’t ask for anything else. If my father didn’t acquiesce to her requests, she threatened to sue Su Tong for instigating her son to hurt her. It was then that she also applied for the trademark and patents for Zhuang Ji. I remember going back to the place my father slapped me on the day we moved out of the Ning family home. I was so nauseous and began to throw up. After that, I remember telling my father that I won’t ever return to the Ning family. I heard, after we left, he was so angered by my words that he was hospitalized.”

“Unfortunately, before my mother and I could settle into our new life, we received news of my grandfather’s illness. At that time, both of us returned to the countryside to stay by his side. We only returned when I had to take my college entrance exams. With my mother’s consent, I changed my name and started my life as Song Ning.”

Song Ning paused briefly before she said, “My mother experienced a miscarriage, a divorce, and the deaths of her parents all at once. It was not surprising that she was depressed for a long time. It gradually took a toll on her health, but she managed to hold on for a couple of years for my sake before she could no longer hold on. After her passing, Ms. Yun Yao began to manage Zhuang Ji. At the same time, my father came to look for me as well after he received news of my mother’s passing. He said that

he hoped I'd return to the Ning family. I remember scolding and cursing him at that time for wronging my mother and my stubborn brother. His expression was cold when he said my mother was selfish and did not consider his feelings. When Ms. Yun Yao asked him to leave, he accused her of trying to get close to me for selfish reasons. I was so angry that I actually grabbed a knife to chase him out. After he left, I vomited non-stop and was sick for three days... From then on, the Ning family became taboo to me. I'd feel sick whenever I think of them or see them. However, after such a long time, I thought I was cured since I didn't see them often. Who knew I still can't control my reaction when I meet them..."

Finally, Song Ning removed the silk handkerchief from her eyes.

Jiang Jin could no longer hold back and moved to hug Song Ning. She said, clearly distressed, "Song Ning, let's not see those people ever again..."

Song Ning returned the hug as she said resolutely, "Grandma, I can't hide from them forever. I must overcome and face this problem." Then, she looked at Bai Yang and said, "I know I must face this problem on my own. Only I can solve it. No matter what it takes, I'm willing to cooperate and listen to you in order to rid myself of this problem."

Mu Chen looked at Song Ning, deeply shaken. As it turned out, Song Ning had hidden such a deep pain in her heart. Song Ning was like him in the past.

Bai Yang said, delighted, "There's nothing more important than you being willing to overcome this problem. Song Ning, although your physical symptoms are severe, it's not difficult to solve this problem. Let's work hard together to cure you!"

Bai Yang's words were a great encouragement to Song Ning, Mu Chen, and Jiang Jin.

For Mu Chen and Jiang Jin, nothing mattered as long as Song Ning lived well.

Chapter 105: Facing the Problem

After the three-day exhibition, Zhuang Ji grew popular quickly. With a brand new look, it seemed to have appeared overnight.

Embroidery and Chinese clothing were originally very niche, but after the three-day exhibition, their popularity rose sharply.

In fact, there were many people to thank for Zhuang Ji's meteoric rise.

First, there were the old madams who were Jiang Jin's friends. They were all from prominent families. Although they were not fashion leaders, their words held weight. After returning from the exhibition, they had spoken about the embroidery and showed off the small gifts they received, attracting the attention of the younger generation and their peers.

Second, there were the famous figures from the fashion and entertainment circles whom Mu Chen and Cheng Che invited. Needless to say, these people were at the forefront of the fashion industry. They wielded great influence, especially over the younger generation.

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With this, Zhuang Ji received orders after orders.

Song Ning, who was unaware of Zhuang Ji's booming business, informed Mu Chen about her decision to meet Ning Zhe.

When Mu Chen learned about Song Ning's decision, he decided to tell her about Ning Zhe's visit to Zhuang Ji previously. This was because after he listened to Song Ning recounting the past, he had a feeling that Ning Zhe might have ulterior motives. Zhuang Ji was likely more than just a studio to the Ning family.

After listening to Mu Chen, Song Ning admitted that she did not know much about her parent's business. Before their divorce, she was too young and too carefree to understand those things. After the divorce, in order not to upset her, her mother did not disclose those things to her. Regardless, she was determined to face this problem directly. It did not matter if she was going to get hurt again; she did not want to avoid her problem any longer. After all, she had a family now.

On the other hand, Jiang Jin strongly opposed Song Ning's decision to meet Ning Zhe. After she heard about Song Ning's past experience, her dislike of the Ning family grew even stronger. She did not want Song Ning to meet anyone from the Ning family if it was possible; she did not want Song Ning to get hurt again.

Song Ning was incredibly moved. Jiang Jin's love and protection were more than what she had received from her blood relatives.

In the end, Mu Chen had to speak to Jiang Jin and persuade Jiang Jin to let Song Ning meet Ning Zhe. He promised that nothing would happen to Song Ning.

It was not that Jiang Jin did not understand how important it was for Song Ning to resolve this psychological problem. If it were Mu Chen, she would have pushed him out and forced him to face the problem directly. However, Song Ning was a girl, and her heart ached whenever she thought about Song Ning being hurt again.

When Mu Chen and Song Ning left the house, Jiang Jin sighed repeatedly. "Is the Ning family possessed? Why can't they differentiate good from bad? Is Ning Zhe really blind?"

Yu opened her mouth, about to speak, before she swallowed the words at the tip of her tongue.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Jin said, annoyed, "If you have something to say, just say it. Why are you hesitating? Am I someone who doesn't allow others to speak?"

Yu brought Jiang Jin a cup of tea before she said with a smile, "Let's not bother with other people. We only need to care about Young Master and Young Madam."

Although the expression on Jiang Jin's face was still dark, her tone softened considerably when she spoke. "Sometimes, people are so obsessed that they become blind to things. Ning Zhe... Is he any different from Mu Qing?"

Yu felt slightly regretful. It seemed like her words had somehow touched Jiang Jin's sore spot. However, she knew it was not good to avoid the topic as well. Sometimes, it was better to air things out so they

would not fester. Therefore, she said, "I wonder how they're doing. I don't think they'll come back for the Spring Festival..."

Jiang Jin said, "Ah Jiang said that Mu Qing bought a farm in Australia last month. Apparently, that place will help with Liang Zhou's lung disease. Let him do whatever he wants. If money can buy peace in the family, it's worth it."

Yu said in an attempt to comfort Jiang Jin, "Ever since Young Madam came along, Young Master has grown very calm. Now that so many years have passed, perhaps, things will get better in the future."

Jiang Jin nodded. "I hope so. I don't ask for them to have an affectionate father-and-son relationship; all I hope is for them to get along peacefully. This Spring Festival we'll have Song Ning with us. So be it if Mu Qing doesn't come back. It'll still be lively..."

Upon hearing these words, Yu smiled and said, "That's right! Young Madam has said that she'll be able to take time off as well! I'm really looking forward to the Spring Festival now!"

Jiang Jin who was infected by Yu's enthusiasm began to look forward to the Spring Festival as well. Soon after, they began to happily plan the activities for the Spring Festival.

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At this moment, Mu Chen held Song Ning's hand. He could feel her hand growing colder and sweatier. He tried to distract Song Ning and gently said, "Ningning, let's visit your grandparent's house when we have time, okay?"

Song Ning was slightly confused by the sudden change of topic. "Hmm?"

Mu Chen smiled and said, "I really want to see Jiangnan. I want to experience life in a small village."

Song Ning nodded and smiled. "Alright. We'll take time off and visit after the Spring Festival. You'll love it there."

"Alright, it's decided then." Mu Chen smiled. It seemed like he had successfully dispelled Song Ning's nervousness.

Chapter 106: Meeting

Mu Chen set the meeting place at the meeting room in Mu Corporation. Since the place was a neutral territory for both Song Ning and Ning Zhe, it would be better for Song Ning.

Ning Zhe came alone. It was obvious he was excited to see Song Ning. After he took a seat across from Mu Chen and Song Ning, he called out, "Ning Xia."

Song Ning remained silent. Her hand was still in Mu Chen's hand.

At the same time, Mu Chen could feel her hand growing colder and colder. He tightened his grip on her hands slightly as he cleared his throat and said, "Mr. Ning."

Ning Zhe finally shifted his gaze away from Song Ning to Mu Chen and said, "Very good, Mu Chen, Ning Xia. Welcome home, Ning Xia.. The door of the Ning family will always be open to you..."

Based on Ning Zhe's words, it was obvious he had assumed Mu Chen had invited him to meet Song Ning because Song Ning had agreed to return to the Ning family. With this thought in mind, he was rather patient. As long as Song Ning is willing to return, they could take things slow.

Mu Chen did not respond to Ning Zhe.

Instead, Song Ning inhaled deeply before she calmly asked, "How much do you remember from ten years ago?"

Ning Zhe was stunned.

Song Ning did not wait for Ning Zhe's reply as she continued to say, "I remember everything clearly. I swore that I'll never return to the Ning family and that I'll never have anything to do with the Ning family again. I remember everything."

Upon hearing these words, Ning Zhe's expression turned unsightly. Nevertheless, he softened his voice and said, "Ning Xia, that's all in the past. Now that your mother is no longer around, it's my responsibility to take care of you. I'm your father. Why don't you come home?"

Song Ning smiled. "I'm already married so my husband will take care of me. I invited you here today to talk about Zhuang Ji."

Ning Zhe's expression turned even more unsightly.

Song Ning lowered her eyes and bit her lips before she said in a slightly trembling voice, "Zhuang Ji is mother's hard work and the only thing she left for me. I won't give it to anyone. Even if I can't maintain it and have to close it down, it's still something my mother left me. I'll never hand it over to another person. Therefore, you don't have to waste your effort on me."

"Ning Xia, don't forget that Zhuang Ji used to be part of the Ning family. It was something your mother and I worked together to build," Ning Zhe said in a deep voice.

Song Ning sneered. "So you do remember that you and my mother worked together to build Zhuang Ji. In that case, do you also remember why my mother took me and Zhuang Ji away? Have you forgotten? Or do you want to pretend those things didn't happen? You might be able to forget them, but I can't."

Tears brimmed in Song Ning's eyes as she continued to say, "Do you remember your son whom you didn't get to meet? I bet you've forgotten all about him, right? He was really pitiful; he left before he could even take a look at this world? Have you ever felt distressed? Probably not since you already have a son. It doesn't matter to you if one of them died. However, it's different for my mother." She paused briefly before she continued to say, "Why do you think my mother left so early? After losing my brother, her body was already at the end of its tether. However, she still had to look after my ailing grandparents and me during my college entrance exams. During that time, I was so depressed that I hurt myself and almost died. It was my mother who exhausted herself to pull me out of the darkest period of my life. For all these reasons, I hate my father and the family I once belonged to, to the bones. Do you understand?"

Ning Zhe's face grew progressively paler as Song Ning spoke. He seemed uneasy as he clenched and unclenched his hands. Then, he said softly, "Ning Xia, I'm sorry. I was wrong. Can you forgive me?"

Song Ning shook her head. Her voice was gentle but firm as she said, "No. I'll never forgive you even if I die. You expect me to forgive you just because you apologize? Then, can you bring my mother, my grandfather, and my grandmother back? Unless you can do that, it's impossible for me to forgive you."

Song Ning pointed at her left ear and continued to say, "Do you remember when you slapped me back then? My eardrum was perforated because of that slap. For a very long time, I had trouble with my hearing. Due to that, I developed the habit of tilting my head to the right when I'm listening to others. Some habits, once they're formed, can never be changed. Just like those wounds in my heart that'll never recover."

At this time, the tears she held back began to stream down her face.

Upon seeing this, Mu Chen handed a piece of tissue before he gently wrapped his arm around her shoulders to console her. He could feel her trembling from her surging emotions. As distressed as he felt, he was relieved she did not vomit or faint.

Ning Zhe's face seemed to turn white to green, and to red. He finally lost his temper as he glared at Song Ning and said, "Ning Xia, how can you be so ungrateful?!"

Chapter 107: Threats

Mu Chen was about to speak when Song Ning placed her hand on his leg to stop him. She looked at Ning Zhe and said, "Mr. Ning, why don't we be honest with each other? You're putting on such an affectionate act for Zhuang Ji, right?"

Ning Zhe was at a loss for words. He did not expect his daughter to be so blunt.

Song Ning said icily, "Don't even think about Zhuang Ji; it's mine. I will never hand it over nor will I trade it for anything. For better or for worse, Zhuang Ji is mine, and it has nothing to do with anyone else."

"You! How can you say this?" Ning Zhe looked at Song Ning with a pained expression on his face.

Song Ning met Ning Zhe's gaze without any fear.

"Ning Xia, I know that what happened back then hurt you a lot. At that time, I made a mistake that most men would make.. Do you think I don't feel sorry? I've always wanted to make it up to you and your mother, but you've never given me a chance. You have to believe that I love you and your mother. I hope that we can mend our relationship so that I can take care of you for the rest of your life. Do you understand?" Ning Zhe said. After a beat, he continued to say, "As for Zhuang Ji, Ning Xia, you don't have a head for business. Like you said, Zhuang Ji is your mother's hard work. I know your mother's thoughts and intentions the best so I can definitely bring Zhuang Ji to greater heights. Do you think there's anyone more suitable than me for this job?"

"There is," Song Ning replied as she leaned against Mu Chen, "I'd like to formally introduce you to my husband, Mu Chen. I've already entrusted Zhuang Ji to him. Whether it makes a profit or not, I really don't care."

Ning Zhe suppressed his anger before he said, "Fine. Let's put the matter of you not informing me of your marriage aside. Do you even understand the Mu family's business? The Mu Group has no experience in this industry at all. Do you understand?"

Song Ning shook her head. "I only need to understand Mu Chen, and I trust his decisions unconditionally. Please don't point fingers at others. This is my decision."

Ning Zhe was livid when he saw Song Ning's unyielding attitude. He looked at Mu Chen and said with a sneer, "President Mu, I really underestimated you. You actually managed to make this silly girl fall in love with you to this extent!"

Mu Chen calmly replied, "President Ning, you're mistaken. It's not that she's in love with me; I'm the one who's in love with her. Therefore, whatever she wants to do, I'll do my best to support her. Whatever she wants, I'll give it to her. It's not just me, even my grandmother and younger brother feel the same way. My family cherishes her and treats her the way she deserves to be treated. It's true that my company has no experience in this industry, but that's not important. For Song Ning, I'm willing to learn."

Ning Zhe was rendered speechless by Mu Chen's words. He looked at Song Ning for a long time without saying anything. When he finally calmed down, he said, "Ning Xia, I've said everything I wanted to say. My feelings for you and your mother have never changed. If you insist on being stubborn, then don't blame. I'll let everyone know about my feelings in my own way." Then, he shifted his eyes to Mu Chen and said, "Mu Chen, since you're her husband, it means you're my son-in-law. I won't stop from getting involved in this mess. After all, the Ning family has nothing to be ashamed of with a son-in-law like you...."

After Ning Zhe finished speaking, he rose to his feet and left.

Meanwhile, Song Ning felt a chill in her heart. Despite her calm expression, her heart was in turmoil. She endured the waves of dizziness and nausea that assaulted her, trying her best not to break down.

Mu Chen could see she was suffering so he gently stroked her back and consoled her, "Ningning, don't take his words to heart. He only said those words to threaten us because he didn't know what else to do."

Song Ning smiled bitterly as she leaned into Mu Chen's embrace. She regulated her breathing using the technique Bai Yang had taught her, but she could not stop her heart from racing.

Mu Chen brought a cup of warm water to Song Ning's lips and said tenderly, "Drink some water."

Song Ning did not refuse and quickly drained the cup of water in a go.

Mu Chen asked carefully, "Do you feel unwell?"

Song Ning nodded. "I feel dizzy and nauseous, and my ears are buzzing as well. However, I think I have it under control."

Mu Chen felt relieved upon hearing these words. "That's good, Ningning. Let's take it slow. Bai Yang said we have to take it one step at a time. Don't be anxious."

Song Ning closed her eyes and nodded.

Mu Chen reached out and gently held her as he stroked her back.

When Song Ning finally calmed down, she pulled away from Mu Chen's embrace and solemnly said, "Mu Chen, we can't underestimate him. I'm sure he already has a plan in mind. It's clear that Zhuang Ji is very important to him. He's someone who will stop at nothing to achieve his goals..."

Mu Chen tucked a lock of Song Ning's hair behind her ear as he gently said, "Don't worry. We can't guess his thoughts. What we can do is just deal with whatever comes our way. Don't let what has yet to happen affect our lives..."

Chapter 108: Giving Up

Song Ning's eyes brimmed with tears again.

Mu Chen gently caressed her cheeks as he said, "Ningning, your problem is you worry too much about things that have yet to happen. You try to plan for every eventuality, but life's unpredictable. It's impossible to plan for everything. What can you do by worrying needlessly?"

When he saw that Song Ning was listening to him attentively, he smiled and added, "Learn from Grandma and live in the present. Whatever will come, will come. We just need to face it calmly at that time. I only hope that you won't be too sad and too hard on yourself if something unexpected happens..."

Song Ning understood Mu Chen's meaning. She said, "Don't worry. He thoroughly broke my heart back then. No matter what he does in the future, I won't be sad anymore. I only have anger left for him."

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Mu Chen remained silent even though he thought there was little to no difference between sadness and anger. They were both emotionally exhausting.

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Ning Zhe paced back in his study, trying to suppress the anger that threatened to overflow in his heart.

Ning Chun stood at the side, too afraid to speak.

Ning Zhe finally came to a stop next to his table with a determined expression on his face as though he had finally made up his mind. He said to Ning Chun, "On the opening day of Zhuang Ji, send ten baskets of flowers to congratulate my daughter in my name."

Ning Chun was stunned. "You're going to make the Young Miss's identity public?"

Ning Zhe nodded.

"But..." Ning Chun said.

Ning Zhe raised his hand and interjected, "Since she's unwilling to return, I can only force her to admit she's the Eldest Young Miss of the Ning family. Her mother raised her to be so stubborn. As her father, I have to teach her a lesson."

Ning Chun asked worriedly, "What if Young Miss reveals what happened in the past?"

Ning Zhe fell silent. After a moment, he looked up and said with a sigh, "Is this retribution? Ning Chun, do you think the Ning family will be affected by what happened back then?"

Ning Chun mulled over Ning Zhe's words before he replied, "I don't think it's a big deal. Most influential and wealthy families are no strangers to this kind of incident. It's not even sensational enough to become a dinner conversation. However, on the off chance that it develops in a different direction, I'm afraid Madam and Young Master will become targets of public criticism."

Ning Zhe nodded. "There will always be gains and losses to everything. There's nothing I can do if things develop in that direction. I've never mistreated the pair of mother and son. If Ning Dong does well, I'll naturally make the best arrangements for him." He sighed before he continued to say, "Back then, if it weren't for Ning Dong's recklessness, I'd have another son. If Su Tong didn't anger Ning Xia, would things turn out this way? It's really retribution. An eye for an eye. It's fine if Ning Xia wants revenge. It's only right that I let her vent her anger, right? After all, she's my flesh and blood. Moreover, she's now married into the Mu family."

Ning Chun had nothing to say to these words, and so, the two men fell silent.

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Outside the door of Ning Zhe's study, a figure quietly retreated, dragging his bag on the floor as he left.

Ning Dong locked the door after he entered his room and slumped against the door dejectedly. He pressed his hand against his forehead, trying his best to hold back his tears, but it was futile.

When he closed his eyes, he saw a woman lying in a pool of blood with a pained expression on her face.

At that time, they had said that the woman's child, his half-brother, was gone. The fact that he had robbed his half-brother of his life was a nightmare that would plague him for the rest of his life.

He truly did not do it on purpose, but no one would listen to a child's explanation. No one cared about his lingering nightmare.

After so many years, he thought that the matter had passed. At the very least, on the surface, no one mentioned the matter anymore. However, he was wrong.

This matter had always been a thorn in his father's heart. Moreover, his father was using the matter as a reason to let his sister do whatever she wanted. In order to let his sister vent her anger, his father was willing to go all out to the extent of sacrificing him. It was clear to him that between him and his sister who was more important to their father.

After so many years, no matter how obedient he was, he still failed to meet his father's expectations. It was similar for his mother as well. It seemed like in his father's eyes, no matter what he and his mother did, they would not be able to satisfy him.

How could one compare to someone who had passed? One would always cherish those they could not have and take what they already had for granted. That scheming woman and his beautiful and gentle sister would forever live in his father's heart.

Chapter 109: Flower Baskets

Zhuang Ji's exhibition was as unique as a pearl; it was dazzling. Hence, when Zhuang Ji finally opened for business, it was bustling with activity.

In order to ensure customer satisfaction, Cheng Che and An Ran made sure the first batch of orders was completed before they opened for business. The customers who received their orders were naturally delighted while those who had yet to receive their orders were filled with anticipation.

Even without much publicity, Zhuang Ji's business was good.

Just the congratulatory flower baskets that Zhuang Ji received were enough to line the entrance of the shop to the street.

At this time, Jiang Jin, who was on the second floor of Zhuang Ji accompanying her friends who came to show support, was incredibly happy. Perhaps, she had spent her entire life building the Mu Group, she had grown indifferent to it. In comparison, her granddaughter-in-law's small business filled her with happiness. She was filled with satisfaction when she looked at her friends' smiling faces. Being able to sit and chat with her friends filled her with vigor as well.

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In fact, Jiang Jin felt her health had improved tremendously these days. Apart from her improved mood, she attributed the improvement of her health to her granddaughter-in-law's medical skills.

Jiang Jin sighed in contentment. 'All my friends are envious of me for having such an amazing granddaughter-in-law. I wonder how many more people are envious of me?'

At this moment, while Jiang Jin was busy entertaining her friends, a shop assistant hurriedly ran over and said in a hushed tone, "Old Madam, Assistant Cheng would like to speak to you for a moment..."

Jiang Jin did think much of it and grumbled slightly, "What happened? That brat really can't let me rest..."

Upon hearing these words, one of Jiang Jin's friends chuckled and said teasingly, "Jiang Jin, are you showing off? Is there anyone who doesn't know that apart from your grandson, Mu Chen, you have Cheng Che who's equally as capable and filial? Hurry up, go and see what he wants..."

Jiang Jin went downstairs with an expression of pride on her face. However, when she saw Cheng Che's solemn expression, she asked, "What's going on?"

"Grandma, the Ning Group sent ten flower baskets," Cheng Che said in a low voice.

Jiang Jin was slightly taken aback upon hearing this.

Cheng Che continued to say, "The message on the flower baskets reads: Congratulations! I hope my daughter's business will prosper. It's signed by Ning Zhe. Coincidentally, these flower baskets were sent late so they're placed right in front where our customers can see them."

Anger rose in Jiang Jin's heart immediately. "Is Ning Zhe crazy? He actually used such a method to provoke Song Ning? Where's your brother and sister-in-law?"

Cheng Che looked at his watch and replied, "They should be here in less than ten minutes."

Jiang Jin said anxiously, "Get someone to move those flower baskets to the warehouse."

Cheng Che hesitated for a moment before he said, "Many guests are arriving at this moment. If we move them now, I'm afraid we'll attract even more attention."

"Then, take down the messages!" Jiang Jin said.

"This won't do as well. The more we try to cover this up, the worse this matter will become. Moreover, I don't know if Ning Zhe has any other tricks up his sleeve," Cheng Che said solemnly.

"Then what should we do? Won't Song Ning be upset when she sees the flower baskets?" Jiang Jin felt distressed for Song Ning. After learning about Song Ning and her mother's sufferings, her heart ached even more for Song Ning. She wished she could protect Song Ning from now on.

Cheng Che brought his phone out as he said to Jiang Jin, "Grandma, I'll speak to brother about this matter first. Perhaps, I can tell them not to come over?"

Jiang Jin looked at Cheng Che worriedly as Cheng Che waited for the call to connect.

It did not take long before Mu Chen answered the call.

"Brother," Cheng Che called out.

"I know. We've seen the flower baskets," Mu Chen said in a calm voice.

Cheng Che disconnected the call and rushed to meet the couple.

Meanwhile, Song Ning's face was pale as Mu Chen helped her into the shop.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Jin grew even more distressed. She hurriedly pulled Song Ning into a hug; she could feel Song Ning's body trembling. She patted Song Ning's back to comfort her as she said in a soft voice, "Ningning, don't be sad. We won't let ourselves fall into a disadvantageous position. Don't worry."

Mu Chen asked in a deep voice, "Grandma, do you have any suggestions on how we should deal with this matter?"

Jiang Jin only smiled as she said, "Ningning, my grandson still owes you a grand wedding..."

The trio was baffled by Jiang Jin's seemingly random words. They did not understand what she meant.

Jiang Jin shifted her gaze to Mu Chen and said, "Mu Chen, we'll host a wedding banquet once Ningning graduates. However, we can announce it now. You've always been plagued with rumors; this shouldn't be a problem, right?"

Chapter 110: Planning

Mu Chen seemed to understand Jiang Jin's intention slightly. "Grandma, you want me to announce my marriage to Song Ning publicly?"

Jiang Jin nodded. "That's right. Today is so festive; I think it's a good chance to announce your marriage. It'll be like a double celebration. Since both of you are husband and wife, it's only natural for you to help Song Ning manage Zhuang Ji. It's obvious Ning Zhe wants to send a message that Zhuang Ji belongs to Song Ning and not the Mu Group..."

A faint smile appeared on Mu Chen's lips upon hearing these words. "Grandma, you're wise..."

Cheng Che and Song Ning grew even more confused listening to the pair of grandmother and grandson's conversation.

Jiang Jin patted Song Ning's hand and said to Cheng Che, "Cheng Che, why are you confused? You should know what I'm thinking. How can your brother keep his marriage a secret? We should let everyone know that Song Ning's husband is Mu Chen, and her brother-in-law is Cheng Che. In the future, let's see who dares to bully her!"

Upon hearing these words, Cheng Che instinctively straightened his back.. "You're right, Grandma!"

Jiang Jin smiled as she turned to Song Ning and asked, "Ningning, if someone asks you if Ning Zhe is your father, what will your answer be?"

"No!" Song Ning said without any hesitation.

Jiang Jin's smile widened. "Why do I like your stubbornness so much?"

Song Ning felt slightly embarrassed when she heard Jiang Jin's words.

Meanwhile, Jiang Jin said, "Song Ning, if anyone asks, just be honest and tell them you're no longer a member of the Ning family. Tell them you've severed all ties with them and even changed your surname. However, you must remember to be magnanimous and thank President Ning for his past kindness. Do you understand?"

At this moment, Song Ning's expression was a little unnatural.

Upon seeing this, Jiang Jin knew Song Ning still had not figured out her intention. "Ningning, think about it. If we dispose of the flower baskets, hide them, or destroy them, the more it'll arouse people's interest. At that time, they'll definitely dig into this matter. This will only play into your father's plan. What happened between you and him recently? Did he look for you and ask you to return to the Ning family? I'm guessing you refused him?"

Song Ning nodded.

Realization dawned on Jiang Jin. "So he wants to use this method to force you back home. If you act excessively today, there's no doubt the public opinion will favor the Ning family. You'll be labeled as an ungrateful and unfilial daughter. Your father knows you. Public opinion can put unprecedented pressure on a person; in the end, you might even be forced to compromise."

Upon hearing these words, Song Ning realized Jiang Jin was right. She felt relieved she did not let her emotions get the better of her and act recklessly earlier.

Cheng Che chimed in, "That's right. Grandma wants Brother Chen to announce his marriage today so everyone will know that sister-in-law is now a member of the Mu family. With that, even if there are rumors or whatever, people will trust and listen to the Mu family's statement. Grandma, you're really amazing! You're our pillar of support. You saw through Ning Zhe's scheme so easily."

Jiang Jin was very pleased with Cheng Che's flattery.

At this moment, Song Ning asked hesitantly, "But, Grandma, won't this affect the Mu family?"

Jiang Jin feigned anger and said, "What are you saying? What do you mean by this matter affecting the Mu family? Aren't you a member of the Mu family?"

Song Ning blushed. However, she was still unwilling to involve the Mu family.

Upon seeing Song Ning's reaction, Jiang Jin turned to Mu Chen before she sighed dramatically and said, "I'm so sad. I treat her as my granddaughter, but it seems like she still treats us as outsiders!"

Mu Chen turned away to hide the amused expression on his face. His grandmother was the most skilled in acting. If his grandmother claimed the second place, no one would dare to claim the first place.

As expected, Song Ning quickly said, "Grandmother, that's not what I meant. I just feel the Mu family is innocent, and I don't want the family to be negatively impacted for no reason..."

Upon hearing this, Mu Chen stroked her head and said, "Your words are getting more and more outrageous. Aren't you afraid of making Grandma sad? The Mu family is your family. You're my wife. As a family, it's only natural that we go through thick and thin together. What need is there to talk about negative impact?"

Cheng Che chimed in with a smile on his face, "That's right. Sister-in-law, stop overthinking. We're a family! Since President Ning left a bomb at our door, we'll dismantle the bomb. Maybe we can even turn the fire powder into firecrackers! Moreover, there's no need to worry about the public opinion. With Grandma and her friends, news of Grandma's satisfaction with you will spread like a wildfire!"

Jiang Jin hit Cheng Che playfully. "Hey, are you saying me and friends like to gossip?"

Cheng Che said with a straight face, "Of course not. What I mean is Grandma and her friends are righteous people who can seek justice for sister-in-law!"

Song Ning could not help but laugh as she watched Jiang Jin and Cheng Che's interaction.

Jiang Jin smiled and said, "Alright then. Children, remember to play your parts. Song Ning, you just have to be yourself. Leave the rest to Mu Chen!"