

Chapter 61: Surveillance

Meanwhile, when Mu Chen was hurrying back to his office, he ran into his secretary who was just about to leave. He asked, "Is she awake?"

The secretary shook her head. "There's no movement inside."

"Alright, you can return to your work." Mu Chen nodded. He walked into the lounge quietly to have a look. Sure enough, Song Ning was still sleeping. Upon seeing this, he sighed in relief.

After returning to his office, he fell deep into his thoughts. After a moment, he decided to have a look at the surveillance footage.

Initially, he had planned to introduce Song Ning to Ye Cheng in the afternoon so that the Ye family would give up on their ideas. He did not expect her to be in such a state when she came over.

If Song Ning had not been feeling well since the beginning, she would not have come over at all. Moreover, based on her reaction earlier, it was obvious to him that she did not want him to see her in such a state. Therefore, he deduced that something must have happened when she arrived and before she came up to the office.

Mu Chen rewound the surveillance footage until he saw Song Ning. Soon enough, he saw her talking to Ning Zhe. He was taken aback by this. They were familiar with each other?

'Ning Zhe... Ning Xia?' It did not take long before an idea appeared in Mu Chen's mind.

He picked up his phone and dialed a string of numbers. When the call connected, he said, "Cheng Che, find out the name of Ning Zhe's daughter..."

"What's wrong, brother? Why did you suddenly take an interest in Ning Zhe? I saw him in our restaurant in the afternoon," Cheng Che said.

Mu Chen asked curiously, "Who was he meeting in our restaurant?"

"That's right. I was rather curious as well. He was meeting a middle-aged man. Wait, I'll send a picture to you," Cheng Che said before he sent the picture he had taken earlier to Mu Chen.

Mu Chen's heart sank when he saw the middle-aged man in question. He had seen the middle-aged man before; he was an employee in Song Ning's studio.

Song Ning had previously said that many of the outstanding employees from the studio had left. Those who remained were mostly those who had a good and long-standing relationship with her mother.

Where did those excellent employees go? The answer was obvious.

After a beat, Mu Chen said in a low voice, "Cheng Che, investigate the Ning group's textile and clothing businesses. I want all the information you can find."

"Alright. Can you tell me what you're trying to do?" Cheng Che asked tentatively.

“There’s nothing concrete yet. Anyway, get ready. I’m bringing you somewhere tonight; I have a new challenge for you,” Mu Chen said.

“Are you going to reward me for it?” Cheng Che asked.

Mu Chen asked patiently, “What do you want?”

“Ask sister-in-law to introduce me to the girl who looks like a grape,” Cheng Che said without beating around the bush.

“A girl who looks like a grape?” Mu Chen was confused as the images of a bunch grapes flashed in his mind.

Cheng Che explained, “You know, the one who’s really fierce!”

After a moment, realization dawned on Mu Chen, and he could not help but smile when he realized Cheng Che was talking about An Jiahui. “That girl is indeed rather fierce.”

Cheng Che said, defending Jiahui, “Yes, yes, she’s quite fierce, but she’s quite cute as well...”

Mu Chen said nonchalantly, “If you like her, you should pursue her on your own...”

“You still have to provide me with a chance before I can start doing that. Are you bringing sister-in-law tonight? If you’re bringing her, why don’t you ask her to invite Little Grape along?” Cheng Che said excitedly.

“We’ll see.” Mu Chen did not give Cheng Che a definite answer before he disconnected the call.

At this moment, the door to the lounge clicked open.

Upon hearing this, Mu Chen rose to his feet immediately. He asked worriedly, “You’re awake? How do you feel? Do you feel uncomfortable anywhere?”

He held Song Ning’s shoulders as he leaned closer to have a look at her. A hint of exhaustion could be seen on her slightly pale face.

Song Ning nodded. “I’m fine.”

Mu Chen helped Song Ning to the sofa before he squatted down in front of her. Then, he continued to ask, still worried, “Are you sure you don’t want to see a doctor?”

Song Ning looked at Mu Chen who was squatting in front of her and smiled. “Mu Chen, have you forgotten I’m a doctor as well?”

Mu Chen waved his hand and said, “Doctors can’t treat themselves. Let’s have the doctor come over and take a look at you.”

Song Ning shook her head before she swiftly changed the topic. “I’m hungry. I want to eat.”

Mu Chen sighed in relief. At least, she still had the appetite to eat. It seemed like she was fine now. “Alright, let’s go eat.”

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In the end, Song Ning chose a small and cozy congee shop close to her studio.

The lady boss was a chubby and friendly woman in her forties. She seemed rather happy when she saw Song Ning. "Little Song, it's been a long time!"

When the lady boss' eyes shifted to Mu Chen, they lit up immediately. "You found yourself such a handsome boyfriend! Not bad, not bad! Today, I'll give you a special promotion; buy one, get one free! I'll have to feed you well; look at how skinny you've gotten."

Then, the lady boss looked at Mu Chen and continued to say, "Young man, Little Song is a good girl. You must cherish her. If you marry her, you'll have good luck for the rest of your life! Little Song will definitely be a good wife!"

Song Ning was embarrassed when she heard the lady boss' words.

On the other hand, Mu Chen nodded and said with a smile, "Yes, of course..."

Song Ning pinched him gently and said, "Don't talk nonsense..."

Following that, the duo found a table at the corner and sat down to wait for their food to arrive.

Mu Chen looked around as he asked, "Do you come here often?"

Song Ning nodded. "This place is close to the studio, after all. Sometimes I'd have supper here.. Moreover, the lady boss is really nice; she'd give me a bigger portion when I came here in the past."

Chapter 62: Father

Mu Chen reached out and held Song Ning's hand. "It must've been hard on you. In the future, I'll share the burden with you. All you need to do is focus on your studies."

Song Ning smiled. "Then I'll have to thank you properly!"

"I've arranged for Cheng Che to come over tonight. You can give the employees a few days off. We'll have to do a thorough cleaning, from the studio to the accounts," Mu Chen said.

Song Ning was surprised that Mu Chen was so quick to act. When she regained her senses, she quickly said, "Alright, I'll make the arrangement immediately."

Mu Chen did not object. There were some matters that could not be delayed.

While Song Ning spoke to her employees to make arrangements, their food was served.

The bowls of congee were warm and looked very appetizing.

At this moment, Mu Chen recalled Song Ning had thrown up earlier so he asked, "Are you still feeling nauseous?"

Song Ning shook her head. Then, she sighed softly before she asked, "Did I scare you?"

Mu Chen nodded honestly. "Yes, I was afraid that something would happen to you."

Song Ning ate in small bites and only gently set the spoon down after she had eaten more than half of the bowl of congee.

Upon seeing this, Mu Chen asked, "Are you full? You ate so little; you should eat more."

Song Ning shook her head. "I'm full. Are we going to the studio now?"

Mu Chen nodded as he set his spoon down. Following that, he ordered takeaway from the lady boss. After placing his order for the takeaway, he explained to Song Ning, "Cheng Che has a video conference after work so he'll only come over later. It's best I prepare food for him so he doesn't complain later..."

After that, the duo held hands as they walked to the studio.

When they arrived, Song Ning looked at the sign at the entrance and felt slightly emotional.

Upon seeing this, Mu Chen gently patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry. Cheng Che and I will definitely work hard!"

When they entered the studio, they found that the employees had already left.

Song Ning turned to look at Mu Chen and said with a small smile on her face, "In fact, I only want to preserve my mother's legacy. However, similar to my mother, I'm not skilled in managing businesses. That's why the business is in such a state now. If my father were around to manage the business, my mother would've probably become famous inside and outside of the country."

Mu Chen's heart skipped a beat. This was the first time Song Ning had mentioned her father to him.

The duo went to the small balcony on the second floor before taking a seat on the rattan chairs.

Then, Song Ning looked at the streetlamps and said in a soft voice, "Mu Chen, I met father this afternoon..."

Mu Chen leaned closer to her, listening attentively.

"My father is the Chairman of the Ning Group, Ning Zhe." Song Ning continued to speak in a soft voice.

Although Mu Chen had suspected this when he asked Cheng Che to investigate the matter, he was still shocked when he heard Song Ning's words.

Everyone knew about the divorce in the Ning family. The former Mrs. Ning had given up everything to bring her daughter, Song Ning, away. Song Ning was Ning Xia, the Young Miss of the Ning family. She was also Ning Xia the award-winning actress.

Song Ning's identity was really not simple!

Song Ning turned to look at Mu Chen and said, "Previously, you asked me if I was hiding my identity from you, and I said no. That's because I've never considered myself part of the Ning family. However, I saw Mr. Ning this afternoon and felt that I should tell you about this. After all, you might have business dealings with him. Moreover, he lives in Cloudy Peak Villas as well. Since I could even run into him in Mu Group, it's inevitable that I'd run into him in Cloud Peak Villa at some point. Therefore, I decided to tell you this to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings over this matter." She spoke calmly and articulated her thoughts clearly.

“Were you in such a state earlier because of him?” Mu Chen was more concerned about Song Ning’s wellbeing.

Song Ning nodded slightly. She was disappointed in herself for having such a big reaction to Ning Zhe. “I couldn’t help it. Over the past ten years, I’ve met him three times by chance. Every time I met him, I’d be in that state. Perhaps, it’s due to the hatred in my heart...”

When Mu Chen reached out to hold Song Ning’s hand, he discovered it was cold to the touch. He felt distressed for her. “Song Ning, don’t think about him anymore, okay?”

Song Ning raised her head to look at Mu Chen before she said, “I don’t want to think about him either. If it’s possible, I don’t want to see him at all! I want to forget about him, and I want to pretend that he doesn’t exist. The first time you brought me back to meet Grandma, I thought there were some things one could never escape from. I didn’t expect to return to Cloud Peak Villa ever again in this lifetime. Who knew after ten years, I’d return with a different identity?” After a quick pause, she continued to say, “I didn’t expect to meet him today. This world is really too small. I can’t avoid him no matter how hard I try.”

Song Ning fisted her hands as she spoke faster and faster. “Do you know how much I hate him? I’ve even developed that kind of reaction to him!”

Mu Chen held her fisted hand in an attempt to soothe her. He could tell she was agitated at this moment. Then, he gently patted her back as he said, “I know. Let’s not think about him, okay? We can leave Cloudy Peak Villa and move to another place...”

Song Ning grabbed Mu Chen’s hand and shook her head.. “No, I can’t hide from him forever, and I can’t keep torturing myself like this.”

Chapter 63: The Past

Mu Chen rose to his feet and gently hugged Song Ning. “Ning, you’re no longer Ning Xia. You’re now Song Ning, the medical student. You’re also Mrs. Mu. We have our own home now. I love you and so does Grandma. The others are irrelevant. Don’t torture yourself and be sad anymore, okay? My heart aches when I see you like this.”

Song Ning lifted her hands and wrapped them around Mu Chen’s waist as tears streamed down her face.

Mu Chen gently stroked her head, letting her vent her emotions to her heart’s content. He did not dare to imagine how she had gotten through those years. Her calmness and independence were all gained from her hardships. Although she had erected a wall around her heart, she was not as strong as people imagined her to be. When faced with the core issue, she would collapse completely.

After calming down, Song Ning told him the story of her parents.

“My father spent a lot of effort pursuing my mother. My grandparents were reluctant to let their daughter marry so far away. When my mother got married, my grandparents had sent her off with ten miles of dowry; it was rather sensational at that time. Alas, their ten miles of dowry was nothing to the Ning family. After becoming part of the Ning family when she moved to M City, she helped my father

with his business. At that time, my father still hadn't taken control of the Ning Group. With my mother's help, my father's business was relatively smooth-sailing."

She continued to say, "After a while, my mother founded her own clothing business with my father. That was also when the Ning Group began its foray into the textile industry. For these reasons, my father stood out among his uncles. My paternal grandparents were filled with praise for my mother as well. It did not take long before my father was made the heir of the Ning Group. It was also because of that that I'd lived in Cloudy Peak Villa since birth."

"As the business continued to grow, my father became busier as well. In order to care for me, my mother gradually stopped paying attention to the business and left it to my father. She focused all her attention on caring for me. She wanted me to be well-rounded so she did not slack in any aspect at all in regard to my education. Since I was young, I had to learn chess, zither, calligraphy, painting, dancing, and even embroidery. In fact, Aunt Liang Zhen discovered me when she watched my award-winning folk dance performance."

"I used to be the pride of the Ning family. At that time, I really felt I was the happiest person on earth. My mother and Aunt Liang Zhen hit it off as soon as they met. My mother did hesitate when she agreed to let me act in 'Yi Yao'. She felt that life was short so I shouldn't let go of any opportunity that would allow me to challenge myself. Therefore, I took a break from school to film with Aunt Liang Zhen and Director Pan. After the filming wrapped up, I received news that my maternal grandfather was critically ill. At that time, my mother and I rushed back to her hometown and accompanied my grandfather during his final days. Unfortunately, half a month after my grandfather passed, my grandmother passed away as well. They'd supported each other for a lifetime, and they even left hand in hand."

"When my mother and I returned to M City, the Ning family had changed. No, to be precise, my father's heart had changed." Song Ning stopped speaking after saying this.

Mu Chen gently caressed her hand as though to soothe her.

Song Ning took a deep breath before she said, "A woman and a five-year-old child were living at the house." It seemed to have taken a lot out of her to utter these words. "At that time, my world and my mother's world seemed to have collapsed. Before my mother could recover from her grief over my grandparents' deaths, she was hit with her husband's betrayal. Everyone hoped my mother would be accepting of this matter. No matter what, that child was the flesh and blood of the Ning family, after all."

"At the same time, 'Yi Yao' became a huge hit, and I became a famous celebrity. At that time, someone suggested I become the face of the Ning Group. They reasoned that I would boost the group's textile and clothing businesses," Song Ning dug her nails into her palms as she said, "The person who suggested this was Su Tong, Ning Zhe's lover. She was also the general manager of the Ning Group's clothing company."

"So, at that time, your mother agreed to leave the Ning family under the condition that she would have custody of you?" Mu Chen asked even though this fact was well-known back then.

Song Ning sneered. "Well, yes. However, that's the result. The process was not easy. My mother had treated the Ning family sincerely, but in the end, she was alone and helpless. No one was willing to speak up for her at all."

She held back her tears as she continued to say, "At that time, my mother asked me if I wanted to stay in the Ning family or if I wanted to stay with her. She told me that if I decided to follow her, I'd no longer be the young miss of a wealthy family and that our lives might be incredibly difficult in the future. She said if I stayed with the Ning family, I'll retain my identity as the Young Miss of the Ning family.. No one would dare to slight me, and my life would be easy."

Chapter 64: Betrayal

"I asked my mother how difficult it would be. Would I starve to death? As long as I wouldn't starve to death, I'd follow my mother. I didn't want to be the Eldest Young Miss of the Ning family, and I didn't want to stay in the Ning family. At that time, I thought if my mother didn't take me with her, I'd look for Aunt Liang Zhen or Director Pan; they'd definitely take me in. After filming 'Yi Yao', I understood the hardships of the world. I was confident I'd find ways to support myself. I'm stubborn like my mother. Deep down, both of us would rather sacrifice ourselves for a just cause than to lose our integrity just to survive."

"Su Tong is an extremely smart woman. She understood my mother better than anyone in the Ning family did. Slowly but surely, she used my custody rights to make my mother give up on her rights. As for my mother, in order to prevent any unforeseen circumstances, she made my father think that she only wanted money in the beginning. Coupled with Su Tong's instigation, he hated my mother to the core. With that, their relationship of more than ten years was slowly used up."

"During this tug of war, my mother and Su Tong reached an agreement. As long as my mother left the house, she would get my father to give up his custody of me. Both of them held up their ends of the bargain. At that time, my mother took the patent that she had applied for beforehand. From then on, the Ning Group could no longer use my mother's designs and embroideries. This was also something Su Tong helped my mother obtain. In order to chase us out, Su Tong was willing to do anything."

"When I became popular and won the award for best actress, the Ning family began to regret their actions and wanted me to return. At some point, they discovered the important role Su Tong played in this matter. They tried to coax me, coerce me, and bribed me; they did everything they could think of to get me to return to the family. Therefore, I announced my withdrawal from the entertainment industry. With the help from Ms. Yun Yao, Fu Le's mother, I managed to settle down. At that time, there was only half a year left until my college entrance exam. Ms. Yun Yao and my mother founded this small studio for embroidery. It was an unpopular and niche market, but with Ms. Yun Yao's management, our lives were not difficult. However, my mother was exhausted."

"In a span of slightly more than a year, my mother had to go through so many hardships. She had long exhausted herself, but since I've yet to settle down, she continued to endure. When I finally entered university, she could no longer hold on. She was really happy when I chose to study Chinese medicine. Although she had experienced and seen the dark sides of humans, she was still delighted that I would

become a doctor who could save people in the future. She had always said I should live a meaningful life and not be like her.”

“She arranged a marriage between Fu Le and me because she thought Ms. Yun Yao would be able to take care of me in the future. If she were to leave, I would be an orphan. I don’t think she believed in love anymore. At that time, she probably thought it would be enough as long as Fu Le and his mother treated me well. In the end, she only wanted me to have someone to rely on. However, I think she knew that apart from herself, there wouldn’t be anyone I could rely on.”

Song Ning wiped the tears off her face when she finished recounting the past.

Mu Chen pulled her into his arms and said, “Ning, I know it’s difficult for you to believe that you’ll be able to rely on me for the rest of your life. However, if you ever encounter hardships, I hope to be the first person you think of. Let me stay by your side and prove myself to you, alright?”

Upon hearing these words, Song Ning looked at Mu Chen with tears in her eyes.

Mu Chen grabbed Song Ning’s hand and placed it against his face before he tenderly said, “It’s fine if you want to guard your heart to avoid getting hurt, but please give me a chance to prove myself, okay?”

Song Ning nodded slowly. “Okay. I’ll try.”

Under the moonlight, a warm and reassuring smile appeared on Mu Chen’s face.

Upon seeing this, Song Ning’s heart could not help but soften.

Mu Chen reached out and caressed Song Ning’s face; his fingers traced her delicate eyebrows that framed her eyes.

This girl whom he wanted to pamper and had been raised like a princess was forced to sacrifice herself due to her parents’ relationship. She had gone through unexpected changes and hardships, and yet, she remained strong like a blade of grass standing in the wind.

He could not deny that he had fallen in love with her.

At this moment, Mu Chen traced her lips with his finger. The lips under his fingertips were soft and warm. His emotions took over, and he leaned forward to kiss her.

Song Ning closed her eyes when his lips touched her lips.

At this moment...

“Is anyone here?”

A voice rang from downstairs.

Mu Chen cursed under his breath, “B*stard!”

Cheng Che was a Jinx!

Cheng Che’s voice rang out again. “Brother Chen? President Mu? Is anyone here?”

“I’ll strangle him sooner or later,” Mu Chen said through gritted teeth.

Chapter 65: Cheng Che

Song Ning chuckled before she gently pushed Mu Chen away. "Hurry up and reply to him!"

"Come up here!" Mu Chen roared angrily.

Song Ning lowered her head and smiled. It was rare to see Mu Chen so flustered and exasperated.

When Cheng Che came upstairs, he was confused by the dark expression on Mu Chen's face. "What's wrong? Why is your expression like this? I don't owe you money!"

"Cut the crap!" Mu Chen said impatiently.

Cheng Che's eyes darted between Mu Chen and Song Ning as realization dawned on him. "Ah, did I ruin a moment? Why don't both of you continue whatever you were doing, and I'll come back later?"

Song Ning's face flushed red.

"Don't talk nonsense!" Mu Chen lifted his leg to kick Cheng Che.

Cheng Che hurriedly moved away as he said, "Sister-in-law, you have to control him. He bullies me so often that it has become a habit."

Mu Chen was pleased by the words 'sister-in-law'. He pulled Song Ning to his side and put his arm around her shoulders before he lifted his chin and said, "Have a look around..."

Cheng Che's eyes moved around the studio as he said, "This place is really nice..."

Following that, Song Ning led the two men on a tour as she explained the studio's works to Cheng Che.

Cheng Che stared at Song Ning with his mouth agape. His eyes were wide open and he could not help but gulp when he saw the double-sided embroidery in front of him. "Sister-in-law, aren't you studying Chinese medicine?"

Song Ning nodded. "My mother left this studio behind. I don't want her hard work to disappear."

Cheng Che nodded in agreement. "Indeed. This is part of our nation's culture. It would be a pity if the studio closes down."

At this moment, Cheng Che recalled the challenge that Mu Chen spoke of in the afternoon. He looked at Mu Chen and asked, "Brother Chen, you want me to manage the studio?"

Mu Chen nodded. "Song Ning is still in school and will only graduate a year later. Moreover, with Professor Li Sen's high regard for her, I'm afraid he has already made arrangements for her. Therefore, she doesn't have time to look after this place."

Song Ning hurriedly added, "The main thing is I'm not very good at managing a business. Moreover, my embroidery skills can't compare to my mother at all. Over the years, it's due to the support from my mother's old employees that I managed to keep this place afloat. However, if this goes on, I'm afraid the situation would get worse. I can't let those who supported me down."

“Sister-in-law, don’t worry! I’m here. Ah, no, I mean, Brother Chen is here for you. Right, Brother Chen?” Cheng Che looked at Mu Chen with an ingratiating expression.

Mu Chen did not reply to Cheng Che, but he did not rebuke Cheng Che. In the end, he only said, “The staff, the accounts... We need to check everything. After that, we have to make sure the business gets back on the right track as soon as possible.”

Cheng Che nodded. “That’s not a big deal. However, sister-in-law, have you thought about what direction you want your business to take? Do you want to trademark your work and mass-market it? Or do you want to market it as a high-end product and only produce premium products?”

Song Ning quickly said, “My mother has trademarked her works. I don’t want to industrialize and mass-market the products. Embroidery requires one to be meticulous. A good embroidery takes months or even a year or two to complete. The complete work represents the painstaking efforts of the craftsman. I only hope the buyer would cherish the work they buy.”

Cheng Che snapped his fingers. “I understand. All embroidery pieces have artistic values and should be sold as such...”

Song Ning nodded.

“However, we still have to make money. This is a major matter since it concerns the livelihood of the people and the country’s economy,” Cheng Che added.

Song Ning nodded again.

“If we don’t make money, we won’t be able to keep the staff. Moreover, if the business generates profit, the staff would be more inclined to stay. The success of the business would also fill the staff with pride and satisfaction...”

Song Ning smiled and nodded in agreement again.

Upon seeing this, Mu Chen stroked her hair before he pointed at Cheng Che and asked, “What do you think? Is the person I found reliable?”

The answer to these questions could be seen in Song Ning’s joyful expressions.

After a moment, Song Ning asked Cheng Che, “Then, what do I need to do?”

Cheng Che pushed his glasses up as he said with a straight face, “Have a good relationship with Brother Chen. Tell him to stop scolding me and to spend more time with Grandma. I’ll be happy as long as she’s happy.”

Song Ning’s face flushed red upon hearing Cheng Che’s words.

Mu Chen smiled and asked, “Aren’t you to ask for rewards for yourself?”

Cheng Che scratched his head, looking slightly embarrassed, as he said, “Sister-in-law, it’d be great if you can introduce a good friend of yours to me. I don’t have a girlfriend yet.”

Song Ning was taken aback. She did not expect Cheng Che to make such a request.

Cheng Che hurriedly added, "There's no need to think too much. That Little Grape by your side will do..."

"Little Grape?" Song Ning looked at Mu Chen in confusion.

Mu Chen smiled and said, "He said Miss An's eyes are like grapes."

Upon hearing this, Song Ning could not help but smile. "Jiahui? Now that you mentioned it, she really does have grape-like eyes. Alright, I'll introduce her to you. However, it's not up to me if she becomes your girlfriend or not..."

Cheng Che was overjoyed upon hearing Song Ning's reply. "Alright, I understand! Sister-in-law, why don't you invite her out for dinner another day? Just as a simple introduction will do. Don't make it seem like a blind date. Otherwise, it might be awkward."

Song Ning nodded. "Alright, I'll make the introductions soon.. I'll do it in a way where Jiahui won't feel pressured."

Chapter 66: Touched

It was already rather late when Song Ning and Mu Chen got home, but Jiang Jin was still waiting for them.

Upon seeing this, Song Ning could not help but feel guilty.

Mu Chen said, "Grandma, it's so late now, why aren't you resting? We had work to do earlier. We tend to lose track of time when we're busy. Don't wait up for us next time, okay?"

Jiang Jin held Song Ning's hand and replied to Mu Chen, "It's fine. Elderly people don't need much sleep anyway. I just want to see both of you so I feel at ease." Then, she asked Song Ning, "Ning, have you had dinner? Mu Chen is made from iron so it's not difficult for him to stay up for a few nights in a row. However, you're a girl. You have to make sure you don't tire yourself out by overworking, understand?"

Song Ning's heart was warmed by Jiang Jin's concern.

Mu Chen looked at the duo with a smile. He was very happy to see their harmonious relationship.

At this moment, Song Ning bit her lower lip as though she had made up her mind. Following that, she looked at Jiang Jin and said, "Grandma, there's something I want to tell you..."

Although Jiang Jin was slightly taken aback, she was filled with joy. "What is it? Tell me! I'll do anything for you. I only have one precious granddaughter-in-law, after all. Even if you want the stars and the moon, I'll try to get them for you!"

Song Ning was both amused and touched by Jiang Jin's words. "Grandma, there's something I want to tell you; it's about me. I didn't say anything before this because I didn't think it was important."

Song Ning told Jiang Jin she was Ning Xia and briefly recounted the past to Jiang Jin.

Jiang Jin and Yu could not stop sighing as they listened to Song Ning.

After Song Ning finished speaking, Jiang Jin hugged Song Ning and patted Song Ning's back. "Poor child. You must have suffered a lot in the past years. If only we'd known about you earlier."

After pulling away from the hug, Jiang Jin wiped away the tears from her eyes and held Song Ning's hand as she solemnly promised, "Song Ning, forget those unhappy things. Grandma won't let you suffer anymore. No one's allowed to bully my granddaughter-in-law!"

After saying that, Jiang Jin turned to look at Mu Chen who was sitting across from her. "Not even my grandson is allowed to bully you! Remember this; from now on, you'll always have my support!"

Mu Chen smiled with a hint of helplessness and amusement as he said, "Song Ning, you have to be like Grandma. When she was your age, she was very fierce. No one dared to provoke her at all."

Song Ning felt that Jiang Jin did not understand the reason she had said all these words. Jiang Jin was more focused on the hardships she had been through and did not think of anything else. Therefore, she reminded Jiang Jin, "Grandma, if the relatives find out about this matter and use them to anger you in the future, please don't be angry. I didn't mean to hide it from you."

Song Ning had met the relatives of the Mu family, after all. It was not impossible for them to do such things.

Jiang Jin said angrily, "Silly child, you and your mother are so outstanding. I'm very proud of you. Don't worry, I won't be angered by those irrelevant people." Then, she glanced at her grandson and said, "Mu Chen, you have to work hard! Once you have enough power, no one will dare to bully us!"

Mu Chen moved to sit next to Jiang Jin and said, "Alright, I'll definitely work hard. Both of you are the two women I love most in my life. It's late now. Let's rest, alright?"

After saying that, Mu Chen used an arm to hug his grandmother while his other hand rested on Song Ning's shoulder.

Yu who was standing at the side was so moved when she saw this loving scene that tears began to brim in her eyes.

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When Yu helped Jiang Jin into bed, Jiang Jin could not help but sigh. "Those two children... They really had a hard life..."

Yu said, "Although Young Lady had suffered a lot in the past, her future will only be filled with blessings now that she entered our Mu family."

Jiang Jin shook her head and said, "It's not so simple. As long as I'm around, those in the Mu family won't be able to stir up much trouble. However, Mu Chen still has a knot in his heart. Is he really not going to see his father again? I'm afraid something will happen sooner or later. Moreover, Ning's background is, indeed, a little complicated. I'm worried the Ning family won't let this matter rest. Those two children are too honest. With Ning Zhe's character, I'm afraid they'd be schemed against..."

Upon hearing Jiang Jin's words, Yu could not help but worry as well. "Then, what should we do? Young Master and Young Lady are smart, but, it's like you said, they're too honest. It'd be easy to scheme against them."

Jiang Jin nodded. "That's right! Therefore, I have to persevere with my old bones! Only when they're settled will I be able to close my eyes in peace!"

Sister Yu hurriedly said, "Bah! How can you say such unlucky words! Young Lady has already said that as long as you listen to her and look after yourself well, it won't be a problem for you to live a long life."

Jiang Jin smiled in satisfaction. "I have to say, I'm really satisfied with Ning. I really like her from the bottom of my heart. I just don't know when my grandson will be able to enter her heart..."

A small smile appeared on Yu's face as she said, "I don't think you need to worry about that. Young Master is still rather intelligent."

Jiang Jin pursed her lips. "I'm afraid his intelligence will backfire on him.. Moreover, will intelligence help in this sort of matter? It looks like I'll have to create more opportunities for him!" After she finished speaking, she could not help but laugh.

Chapter 67: First Kiss

After taking a shower, Mu Chen dried his hair as he walked out of the bathroom. When he saw Song Ning sitting on the sofa in her pajamas in a daze, he took a seat next to her and asked, "What's wrong?"

Song Ning sighed softly. "Grandma is really good to me. I thought she'd be angry that I hid my identity and disdained my past. However, she only felt sorry for the pain I suffered." She lowered her gaze as she continued to say, "Both of you are really good to me..."

Mu Chen placed the towel down and cupped her chin before he gently said, "Silly girl, you're Grandma's granddaughter-in-law; you're just like her granddaughter. It's only normal that she treats you well. As for me, you're my lawfully wedded wife. How can I not treat you well?"

Song Ning's face turned red. She moved her head slightly, avoiding Mu Chen's touch.

Mu Chen moved closer to her on the sofa before he said, "By the way, we're a legitimate couple. Shouldn't we do what a couple should do?"

Song Ning was taken aback by Mu Chen's words. She instinctively moved aside, and her face turned even redder.

Mu Chen reached out with his long arm and pulled her closer. "Don't hide. We agreed to be in a relationship. It's only normal for us to do things that couples do..."

Song Ning's body stiffened. Even her neck was red at this moment.

Mu Chen wavered for a moment before he lowered his head to kiss her. Her lips were soft and sweet; they carried the coolness and taste of the peppermint mouthwash.

Due to her nervousness, Song Ning's body was frozen stiff. She could only grab onto Mu Chen's pajama top tightly.

Mu Chen reached out and held the back of her head, pulling her into his embrace. He was not satisfied with just kissing her; he wanted her, her being, and her heart.

Song Ning struggled slightly as she cried out softly.

He swallowed her cry between his lips and teeth and took the opportunity to invade her mouth.

Both of them were inexperienced. While Song Ning was frozen stiff, Mu Chen let his instincts guide him. Only Song Ning could awaken the desires in the depths of his heart.

Song Ning went through a huge change during her most beautiful years, resulting in her calm and indifferent demeanor. During the time she dated Fu Le, they would hold hands, at most, while they watched a movie. They had never been particularly close.

As for Mu Chen, Ye Cheng's concern was not without reason. Mu Chen had never been interested in watching any adult movies with their former roommates. Even if he watched them, he did not have any reaction at all. As a result, their roommates even questioned his sexual orientation and ability.

At that time, Mu Chen had said the women did not pique his interest. Whether it was the women in the movies or the women around him, none of them piqued his interest. However, Song Ning did.

At this moment, Mu Chen was filled with the urge to make Song Ning his. His hand slowly reached up the hem of her pajama top; he felt her tremble slightly when his hand grazed her skin.

Song Ning nervously grabbed his hand and pushed him away with all her strength before she said in a low voice, "No..."

"Okay." Mu Chen's voice was hoarse. He was having a difficult time trying to restrain himself.

"Don't move. Let me hug you. Be good." Mu Chen continued to hold Song Ning in his arms. He was so greedy for her that he could not bear to let her go. However, he knew the time was not right, and he did not want to scare Song Ning.

Song Ning obediently let him hug her as her heartbeat slowly returned to normal.

Mu Chen suddenly stood up and carried her horizontally, causing her to cry out in surprise. After placing her on the bed, he planted a soft kiss on her forehead and hurriedly said, "Good night."

Following that, he turned around and shut himself in the bathroom.

Song Ning covered herself with the blanket. Her body was warm, and she was red like a cooked shrimp.

...

At the breakfast table.

Jiang Jin's eyes darted back and forth between Mu Chen and Song Ning's faces.

Jiang Jin's gaze made Song Ning uncomfortable; even Mu Chen felt uneasy.

Mu Chen put his chopsticks down and asked Song Ning, "Is there something on my face?"

Song Ning shook her head in confusion.

Mu Chen looked at Jiang Jin. "Grandma, if you have something to say, just say it. Don't stare at me like that. I won't understand what you're trying to say."

Jiang Jin raised her chopsticks as if she wanted to stab him. Then, she paused for a moment before she laughed evilly and said in a hushed voice to him, “Kid, is it possible for me to have a great-grandson soon?”

Mu Chen was stunned for a moment. When he regained his senses, he chuckled and shook his head. “You’ll have to wait a little longer.”

Jiang Jin patted him. “Then, you’ll have to work harder!”

Mu Chen only smiled and nodded.

Although Song Ning could not hear the pair of grandmother and grandson’s hushed conversation, she had a feeling it had something to do with her. She looked at Mu Chen quizzically, but he only handed her a glass of milk and said, “Finish your food. I’ll send you to work.”

Jiang Jin and Yu exchanged a smile when they saw the couple’s interaction; both of them were delighted.

...

When Song Ning arrived at the hospital, she threw herself into her work and study.

At times like this, she was usually silent. When her classmates were chatting and laughing with the professor, she would organize the information she needed and send it to everyone in the group.

Her classmate smiled and said with a sigh, “How fortunate for us to have a classmate like Song Ning. We don’t even need to take notes.. The notes she shares with us are so detailed.”

Chapter 68: Meeting

Jiahui said with a straight face, “That’s why we have to treat Song Ning better. She’s our treasure.”

Even the professor could not help but say, “This group of yours is really rare. There’s no such thing as scheming against each other and undermining each other. I don’t have to worry about any of you at all. Everyone’s just focused on studying. This is really nice.”

Jiahui said, “It’s all because of Song Ning. Her aura is so strong that all of us unconsciously follow her lead.”

Song Ning continued typing on the keyboard as she said without lifting her head, “Jiahui, did you have honey for breakfast today?”

Everyone laughed upon hearing Song Ning’s words.

Jiahui stood up and playfully hit Song Ning as she stifled her laughter and said. “You’re really heartless! I was praising you!”

At this moment, Song Ning’s phone suddenly started ringing. When she saw the caller, she was briefly stunned. It was Fu Le.

After picking up the phone, Fu Le hemmed and hawed as he asked to meet her. She calmly replied to him, agreeing to his request.

After the call disconnected, she organized her notes and sent them to everyone in the group. It was only after she had completed her tasks that she asked the professor for a leave of absence.

The professor waved his hand, letting her have the afternoon off.

When Jiahui asked her to bring her along, she deliberately sped and ran away, causing the others to laugh at Jiahui.

...

Song Ning had agreed to meet Fu Le at the common area on the third floor. This would be the first time she had seen him since they had broken up.

Song Ning put her hands in the pockets of her white coat as she slowly strode over. She had no feelings for Fu Le; she did not know him at all. She did not know what his favorite food was or his hobbies; she never tried to understand him at all. Mu Chen was right; she never loved him. Therefore, she did not see Fu Le's action as an act of betrayal. With this thought in mind, she grew even calmer.

If she and Fu Le got married, she knew she would not change as well. Fu Le would just be like a tool, occupying the position of her husband. It was inevitable that he would betray her sooner or later.

Their mothers' wishes were not enough for them to love each other. They were only together because they listened to their mothers, not because they loved each other.

As a man, Fu Le's sense of responsibility was not very strong. Everything had been handed to him on a silver platter since he was born. He did not encounter any difficulties or setbacks; everything was neatly arranged for him by his family. Perhaps, someone like Feng Man would be able to help Fu Le grow as a man.

When Song Ning finally arrived in front of Fu Le, she faced him calmly.

Fu Le was slightly taken aback. He had prepared himself for a barrage of questions from her, after all. How could he not be surprised by her composure? However, after a moment, he thought it was to be expected. Song Ning was not like Feng Man; Song Ning was like a pool of still lukewarm water.

Song Ning calmly asked, "Is there a reason you're looking for me?"

Fu Le's eyes flashed. He wanted to speak, but he did not know what to say.

Song Ning said, "I know about you and Feng Man. I wish you both the best. I know you're not here to explain this matter to me so if there's anything, you can just tell me."

If Fu Le wanted to explain, he would have done so a long time ago. Why would he suddenly look for her after such a long time had passed just to explain things to her? Moreover, she was familiar with the way Fu Le handled things.

Fu Le sighed in relief before he said, "Ningning, Grandma is not feeling well. I'd like to invite you over to the house to take a look at her."

“Where is she feeling unwell? Why didn’t you bring her to the hospital for a check-up?” Song Ning asked.

Fu Le answered truthfully, “Grandma insisted it’s nothing serious so she refuses to go to the hospital. If it’s okay, can you come over and have a look?”

Song Ning was puzzled. Fu Le’s grandmother was nowhere near as kind and amiable as Mu Chen’s grandmother. In fact, his grandmother had always hoped Fu Le would marry a young miss from a wealthy family instead of marrying someone from a common family like her. Moreover, in his grandmother’s eyes, she was a doctor who would be in contact with people from all walks of life every day, hence, she was not noble at all.

Feng Man had said Fu Le’s grandmother liked her very much. Moreover, Song Ning had already broken up with Fu Le. She could not figure out why his grandmother would want her to go over to have a look instead of going to the hospital.

“Are you free now? Let’s go now,” Fu Le said.

Song Ning calmly took a step back before she said, “I have a class in the afternoon so I can’t leave. Moreover, my skills are limited. It’s best for you to bring your grandmother to the hospital for a check-up.”

Fu Le opened his mouth as though he wanted to say something before he stopped himself.

Song Ning continued to say, “Let me know if you need me to introduce you to an expert. I can help you make an appointment.”

After she finished speaking, Song Ning did not wait for his reply before she turned to leave.

However, Fu Le stopped her. “Song Ning, Grandma and Dad want you to come over to discuss our matters.”

Song Ning slowly turned around, alarm bells ringing in her heart.

“Our matters? What matters do we have?”

Fu Le stammered, “M-my... M-my dad hopes that we can get married.”

Song Ning looked at Fu Le, stunned. “What about Feng Man?”

Chapter 69: Zhuang Ji

Fu Le did not dare to meet Song Ning’s eyes at all. He stood there with his head lowered as though he was a child who was caught misbehaving.

Song Ning sighed inwardly before she patiently said, “Fu Le, Feng man said both of you have been together for a long time. From the day you decided to be with her, our relationship has ended.”

Fu Le looked up and took two steps forward. “I... I can break up with Feng Man...”

Song Ning took two steps back before she said, "Fu Le, can you be more responsible? What you and Feng Man do has nothing to do with me. I'm married. I got married on the date my mother and Aunt Yao selected."

Fu Le said anxiously, "Song Ning, I know you're angry because I didn't keep my promise. I know I'm wrong. Let's start over. We can register our marriage whenever you want. We can even do it now."

Song Ning shook her head. "Fu Le, I said I'm already married. Do you understand? It's over between both of us. We're adults; we're not playing house."

After she finished speaking, she hurried down the stairs, ignoring Fu Le who was calling out to her. She shook her head. He was just like a child who had yet to grow up.

...

Since Song Ning had the afternoon off, she decided to head to the studio.

After she changed out of her work clothes, she suddenly recalled something. She hurriedly brought her phone out and called Jiahui. "Hey, where are you? Didn't you say you want to follow me?"

Jiahui perked up immediately. "Where are we going?"

"I'm going to sell you off. Are you afraid?" Song Ning asked playfully.

"I'm not afraid! I think they'll pay you to take me off their hands," Jiahui replied without thinking.

Song Ning chuckled. She really liked Jiahui's personality.

Perhaps, due to growing up in a normal family, Jiahui was bright and cheerful. However, she was not an ignorant fool.

Song Ning said, "I'll give you five minutes to meet me at the entrance of the hospital. I'm taking you to meet a handsome man!"

"Alright! All I need is three minutes!" Jiahui replied happily.

Song Ning smiled. She fell deep into her thoughts as she waited for Jiahui.

The four seasons in M City were very distinct. Song Ning thought Jiahui was like the sun during an autumn afternoon.

Recently, she was rather happy. She had Mu Chen, Jiang Jin, Yu, her professor, Jiahui, and her classmates. Being surrounded by people who were good to her gave her a clearer goal and direction.

Just as she had said, Jiahui arrived in three minutes. She hugged Song Ning before she held Song Ning's arm and said, "Before you sell me off, let's think about what to eat. I'm hungry."

Song Ning patted Jiahui's arm and said, "I'll have to trouble you to starve yourself for a while."

As soon as Song Ning finished speaking, the car she had called arrived so the young women entered the car immediately.

As Jiahui looked out of the car window, she asked curiously, “My love, are you really going to sell me off? Where are we going? I’m not familiar with the direction we’re going...”

Song Ning said ambiguously, “I’m planning to trade you for lunch...”

Jiahui leaned back, clearly relaxed, as she said, “Sure, you’re my idol. If you want to trade me for a meal, I’m willing.”

Song Ning looked at Jiahui and laughed.

Jiahui immediately asked, “Are you touched? Are you touched? Are you touched?”

Song Ning nodded. “Yes, yes, I’m touched”

Jiahui leaned over to tickle Song Ning.

In just a moment, the car was filled with the sound of joyful laughter.

Even the driver was infected by their joy.

...

When they finally arrived at their destination, Jiahui looked around curiously.

Song Ning made a stop at a cafe nearby to pick up the food she had ordered in advance. Then, they went to the supermarket to get some things. When they left, they were both carrying two heavy bags each.

Jiahui followed Song Ning and asked curiously, “Why are we buying so much food, Song Ning? What are we going to do? Is this food that I’m being exchanged for?”

Song Ning smiled. “Yes! I’ll hand you over to the buyer in a while.”

Jiahui did not press for answers. She liked surprises anyway.

All of a sudden, Song Ning stopped in her tracks.

Jiahui followed suit. When she looked up, she saw she had arrived in front of a shop.

From the door to the window lattice, they were all decorated with antique decorations. The color of the storefront was a classic stone blue. There were two elegant red lanterns hanging at the side as well.

Jiahui could not help but exclaim, “Song Ning, look at how beautiful these lanterns are!”

Jiahui walked closer to one of the red lanterns and craned her neck to have a better look. She wished she could touch it.

On the other hand, Song Ning’s eyes were fixed on the oval sign next to the door. The words ‘Zhuang Ji’ were written in gold against a black background.

‘Zhuang Ji...’ Song Ning’s visions grew blurry as she looked at the oval sign. ‘Mom, are you watching? This is your ‘Zhuang Ji’!’

The design of the door was so beautiful that before she even entered the door, her heart was already won over.

She was right in entrusting Zhuang Ji to Mu Chen and Cheng Che. They were really the best people to help her with Zhuang Ji!

Chapter 70: A Small Gathering

“Sister-in-law!” Cheng Che leaned out from the second floor and waved at them.

Song Ning looked up. Since her hands were full, she could not wave to him. Instead, she shouted, “I brought food.”

Cheng Che immediately went in and ran downstairs like a whirlwind as he shouted, “Brother Chen, sister-in-law is here!”

When Cheng Che arrived on the first floor, he discovered Mu Chen had already taken the bags from Song Ning as Song Ning massaged her sore hands.

Jiahui pouted as she stood at the side with a resentful expression. “Hey, aren’t both of you too cruel to torture the eyes of single people like me?”

Cheng Che hurriedly stepped forward and took the bags from Jiahui’s hands as he said, “Please understand. They can’t help themselves. My brother wishes he could turn himself into a necklace around sister-in-law’s neck so he can be with her all the time.”

Jiahui shook her hands and nodded in agreement. “I agree. There’s no one in his eyes but Song Ning. He doesn’t even see me when I’m standing here!”

Cheng Che said with a smile, “Forgive him, you must forgive him!”

Jiahui glanced at the duo who was talking intimately. “I’ll forgive him only because Song Ning’s the only one in his eyes.”

After putting the bags on the table, Cheng Che reached out to shake Jiahui’s hands. “Hello, I’m Cheng Che, Mu Chen’s assistant. I’m his childhood friend as well.”

Jiahui looked at Cheng Che solemnly and shook his hand. “My name is An Jiahui. I’m Song Ning’s classmate and her fan. She’s my idol so I’ll always protect her!” She looked rather proud as though she was declaring sovereignty over Song Ning.

Cheng Che seemed slightly taken aback by Jiahui’s words. He glanced at Mu Chen and Song Ning before he said, “But my sister-in-law has my brother now. My brother will protect her.”

Jiahui crossed her arms. “He’s still in the trial period; I’m observing him closely! If he doesn’t treat Song Ning well, he’ll be out with three strikes. I won’t allow anyone to bully Song Ning. She’s the treasure of our class!”

Cheng Che gave Jiahui a thumbs up. “Awesome!”

Cheng Che suddenly realized Mu Chen seemed to have golden hands. Mu Chen randomly selected a girl by the roadside, but the girl had so many identities, each one more explosive than the other. Not only were her identities mind-blowing, but she was also very popular.

When Song Ning saw Cheng Che and Jiahui talking, she walked over to the table and opened up the bag that contained the food. "Both of you must be hungry, right? We brought a lot of food."

Upon seeing this, Jiahui hurried over to help Song Ning.

Cheng Che leaned over and grabbed a sausage from the container before giving Song Ning a thumbs-up. "Sister-in-law, you're really considerate and kind. My brother is inhumane. Originally, I wanted to order takeaway, but he insisted on waiting for you to bring food."

Mu Chen threw a bun at Cheng Che. "You can't stop talking even when you're eating!"

Song Ning and Jiahui brought food and drinks out before placing them on the table before Song Ning said apologetically, "Let's eat something simple for now. When we have the weekend off, I'll cook for everyone."

Cheng Che's eyes widened in excitement as he said, "Really? Sister-in-law, I heard from Sister Yu that your cooking is especially delicious. She said that Grandma can't live without eating the food you cook now."

Song Ning replied with a smile, "Come over during the weekend and you can try it for yourself."

"Alright! Brother Chen, you better not make me work overtime during the weekend. If you do that, I'll complain to Grandma!" Cheng Che hurriedly said before Mu Chen could object.

"I want to go as well!" Jiahui chimed in. Seeing her idol about to be snatched away, she could not stay idle.

Song Ning glanced at Cheng Che briefly before she smiled at Jiahui and said, "Can you be more reserved? Wait for me to invite you first. At that time, you can decline or accept the invitation."

Jiahui blinked her big eyes in confusion. "Why?"

Song Ning smiled but did not say anything.

Therefore, Jiahui turned around to look at Cheng Che with her big and round eyes and asked, "Why?"

Cheng Che's mind went blank when he saw those big eyes. He was at loss for words.

Song Ning could not help but chuckle softly; she found it funny. She patted Jiahui's head and said, "Because you're a girl. Being reserved can make the boy who likes you work harder to pursue you..."

Jiahui did not take Song Ning's words to heart. She said, "Let's talk about this when someone actually likes me. Moreover, what if that person likes my unrestrained behavior? At that time, wouldn't my being reserved cause me to miss out on him?"

Cheng Che hurriedly chimed in, "That's right. You're right!"

Song Ning laughed so hard that she leaned on Mu Chen's body.

Mu Chen could not help but smile as well.

“Did I say something wrong? Ning Ning, what’s wrong with you?” Jiahui asked in confusion. A displeased expression appeared soon after on her face; she felt like the butt of the joke for some reason.

Song Ning hurriedly stopped laughing and tried to placate Jiahui. “Alright, alright, I won’t laugh anymore.” Then, she turned to Cheng Che and said, “Cheng Che, the road ahead of you is a long one...”

Cheng Che handed Song Ning a bottle of drink as he said, “It’s not a problem at all. Thank you, sister-in-law!”