

Chapter 31: Brother, You Are So Cruel

“Easier said than done, show me your tricks if you think you are so brilliant!” Jiang Lei groaned as he glared at Jiang Yao in irritation. Seeing her chirpy laugh, he snorted. “Who do you think I work so hard for? How can she laugh so heartlessly?”

Jiang Lei knew from the way she laughed so delightedly that there was nothing unpleasant hidden inside her. She was indeed as happy as she claimed she was in the Lu family.

At 5 o’clock in the evening, Jiang Jie, who was working in the supply and marketing cooperative in the town, also returned home. As soon as he entered the house, he could hear loud noises echoing across the house, especially the banter between Jiang Lei and Jiang Yao in the yard.

“Dad, Mom, I’m home.” Jiang Jie entered the house with a pack of hot food in his hand. He took it to the kitchen and turned to the yard. “Yaoyao, Xingzhi, you’re here too? Nice to see you, it’s been a while.”

Jiang Jie was the most decorous in the Jiang family. He donned a white shirt and trousers which made him look mature and smart.

“Brother!” As soon as she saw Jiang Jie, Jiang Yao ditched Jiang Lei and ran towards her eldest brother. She embraced Jiang Jie’s arm while grimacing at Jiang Lei. “Brother, Jiang Lei is such an idiot! He said that other doctors rescue the wounded and treat the sick, but I will only have casualties and injuries in my portfolio!”

“It’s okay. After you graduate, let him be your first patient and use his body as your training kit until you master your skills.” Jiang Jie laughed. “Let’s see if he’ll still say that you’re a bad doctor.”

“Brother, you’re so cruel,” Jiang Lei pouted and complained.

“Brother.” Lu Xingzhi called out. He and Jiang Jie were born only a few months apart but in different years. Lu Xingzhi was a smart student, hence he skipped a grade and they were classmates in high school for two years. Therefore, Lu Xingzhi was the closest to Jiang Jie in the Jiang family.

However, in the senior year, Lu Xingzhi was assigned to the honors class due to his excellent grades and thus, they were no longer classmates.

In Jiang Jie’s opinion, Lu Xingzhi had always been a maverick in the class. He was also very popular among teachers and female students. Before Jiang Yao married Lu Xingzhi, Jiang Jie had not expected at all that one day, his classmate would address him as a brother like his little sister.

Jiang Jie still remembered that before their wedding, Lu Xingzhi had met him and expressed his intention to marry Jiang Yao. He recoiled in shock and his first reaction was to disagree.

It was mainly because Lu Xingzhi was a boring and dull person, the exact opposite of his little sister’s lively and energetic characteristics. She would even get bored after being with her quiet big brother for a while. If she married Lu Xingzhi, wouldn’t she be bored for the rest of her life?

Jiang Jie thought that a man with the same character as Jiang Lei would be a more suitable match for his sister so that they could lead a bustling and entertaining life together.

“Is it busy at the base lately? How long will you stay this time?” Since Lu Xingzhi addressed him, Jiang Jie exchanged pleasantries politely.

“Two days. I’ll go back the day after tomorrow,” Lu Xingzhi answered.

Jiang Jie nodded and they stood there in the midst of awkward silence. Jiang Jie didn’t know what else to say to Lu Xingzhi. Although they were classmates, they didn’t have much in common among their peer groups. When they were still in school, they could talk about schoolwork and whatnot. Now that they had worked in respective fields for so many years, they lacked common topics to converse about.

Fortunately, after a while, Mrs. Jiang called everyone for dinner. Six people sitting around the square dining table of the Jiang family. Buoyant ambiance radiated across the house as it was bustled with chatter and laughter.

After dinner, Jiang Yao and Lu Xingzhi departed to town. Jiang Jie was to return to his dormitory in the town so they departed together. They brought along the fruits and vegetables for the Lu family.

Chapter 32: The Generous and Kind In-Laws

Back at the Lu family house, Mr. and Mrs. Lu rushed out to lend a hand as they saw Lu Xingzhi and Jiang Lei coming in while carrying a lot of things.

“The in-laws are so generous. It was just a short trip home and they’ve given us so many things.” Mrs. Lu looked at Jiang Jie and said, “Please thank your parents for us and send them our regards.”

“The in-laws’ watermelons are sweeter than the ones sold in town. The other day, when your father visited the town, he brought us two. They were so delicious and juicy!” Mr. Lu said with a chuckle. “Your watermelons are planted in the mountains with fertile soil, sufficient sunlight, clean water, and fresh air. They were very sweet and nice!”

Jiang Jie smiled and nodded without saying much. He turned around and talked to Jiang Yao, who had just parked the bicycle and walked in, before leaving.

After Jiang Jie left, Mrs. Lu went into the kitchen and started sorting the vegetables. They were all grown at the Jiang family’s farm. Although they were a dime a dozen, Mrs. Lu was happy to receive them. She said to Jiang Yao who came to help, “Your parents’ vegetables are very delicious! Not only they are fresh, but they are also free of pesticides. Look at these cucumbers, they have been plucked along with their flowers! Many of those sold in the town are wrinkled and old. I will make smashed cucumber tomorrow, Xingzhi loves it!”

“Shall we add in some chilies and peppers?” Jiang Yao glanced out of the kitchen and thought to herself. She didn’t know that he liked to eat smashed cucumber.

“Of course! Xingzhi loves spicy food,” Mrs. Lu nodded and said. She saw Jiang Yao with her sweaty forehead and ushered, “I’ll handle these myself. It must be very hot for you to go home and back, right? Oh yes, how’s your fever? Is it getting better? Hurry and go upstairs to take a warm bath, then rest early.”

“Okay.” Jiang Yao nodded. “The fever has subsided since this morning.”

“Good to hear that. If you feel uncomfortable, tell Xingzhi. He’s your husband. Since he’s at home, he should take good care of you. Oh yes, since he’s at home with you, let him take you shopping in the city tomorrow. You’ll need to buy some clothes before you head off to college. Attire is very important when you move to the big city. The college doesn’t have uniforms. You’ll be bullied and discriminated against if you don’t dress up,” Mrs. Lu remarked. “I’ll ask him to take you to the high-class mall for shopping. He can afford it, just buy whatever you like.”

Jiang Yao chuckled timidly. “Mom, I don’t think there would be any other mother-in-law who will say such things to their daughter-in-law. You are the one and only.”

Mrs. Lu was taken by shock at Jiang Yao’s remark. She glanced at Jiang Yao suspiciously, surprised that she had such a humorous side.

“Okay, enough with the chatter, go back to your room now.” Mrs. Lu didn’t comment on Jiang Yao’s unusual behavior. She assumed that Jiang Yao was happy after coming back from her own house and had thus become slightly more talkative.

Late teenhood was supposed to be a lively and energetic phase. It was normal for her to be talkative.

After exiting the kitchen, Jiang Yao saw Mr. Lu talking to Lu Xingzhi while patting the large watermelons. He was suggesting that his son bring one to Lu Haixing and Lu Xiaoxiao in the city tomorrow.

Sibling estrangement was a somewhat common occurrence among adults, especially after they build their careers and start their own families. However, the Lu brothers were different.

Lu Haixing’s wife had a heart problem and she passed away after giving birth to Lu Xiaoxiao. At that time, the Lu family was not as well off as they were now. Although Lu Haixing had a steady job, it came with a menial salary package. Lu Xiaoxiao was born with weak health and she was often sick. In order to look after his daughter, Lu Haixing often neglected his work and borrowed money for the treatment and hospital visits.

Chapter 33: Going to the City

Mr. and Mrs. Lu had always loved children. They treated Lu Xiaoxiao like their own daughter. After Lu Xiaoxiao came to her uncle’s house, she received unconditional love from her uncle and aunt, as well as the company of her cousins. Hence, she was raised in a healthy and harmonious environment and grew up to be cheerful and perky. Because of this, Lu Haixing was particularly grateful to his brother.

The Lu brothers had such a strong brotherhood bond. They would share the best that they had among themselves. The people in the town were envious of their great relationship, for they were the role model of good family relations that the people of the older generation often boasted about.

Lu Xingzhi, perhaps hearing her footsteps, looked up at Jiang Yao. Mr. Lu then looked up and smiled at her before saying, “Both of you will go to the city tomorrow, won’t you? I called your uncle earlier in the afternoon. He said that his driver will drive the car to the town in the morning. You can use the car to head to the city. Go to your uncle’s house for dinner when you’re back to the county and we will come home together after dinner.”

Jiang Yao nodded. "Okay." Every time Lu Xingzhi returned home, the two families would definitely find some time to get together. Regardless of how busy Lu Haixing was, he would make time to meet his nephew.

"I have something to discuss with Dad. Why don't you go upstairs to take a bath first?" Lu Xingzhi said gently as he saw Jiang Yao standing next to them with nothing to do. He intended to nudge her towards the stairs but retracted his hands before he did it.

All these tiny gestures went unnoticed. Jiang Yao nodded and greeted her father-in-law before heading to the stairs.

When the Lu family built this house, they specifically hired a feng shui master to assess the location, including the layout of the house. The entire house was exposed to the sun. Therefore, during the summer, one could still feel a heat wave blowing from the outside even in the evening.

Jiang Yao and Lu Xingzhi's room had an attached bathroom. She didn't have to walk out of her room to use a bathroom. After the bath, which washed off all her sticky sweat, she felt refreshed.

This morning, when she woke up, Lu Xingzhi came back before she had the time to look around the room. After that, all her attention was on Lu Xingzhi and they were occupied the whole day. Finally, she had the leisure to tour her own room.

In fact, now that she took a closer look at their room, the interior layout, and its decoration, it gradually revealed Lu Xingzhi's understanding of her preferences.

Before the wedding, the Lu family had asked her for her opinion on the renovation and design of their wedding room, even asking her to participate herself. However, she was so reluctant and resistant to the marriage that she treated herself like an outsider during the whole process.

Later, according to Lu Yuqing, Lu Xingzhi was in charge of the renovation and design himself, including selecting the furniture, the color and fabric of the curtains, and even the tiny ornaments on their desk and dresser. Every little item in the room had been bought by him from the city or county.

Although they had never sat down and discussed, every detail and feature in the room was in line with her preferences.

Jiang Yao was curious about what Lu Xingzhi was talking about with his father. However, she had always been taciturn in the house, locking herself in the room alone to read a book. So, even if she was curious and wanted to listen in on their conversation, she couldn't find an excuse to do it. It would be even more awkward if she were to go downstairs and have nothing to say.

There was a tiny piece of paper sticking out of her drawer. It was the letter of admission that she had stuffed into the drawer at noon. Jiang Yao pulled it out, looked at it, and smiled.

Chapter 34: She Can't Sleep

In terms of Nanjiang Medical School, the only predicament that she couldn't forgo was her best friend, Wen Xuehui. Not only were they classmates, but they were bunkmates too. They shared a wonderful friendship throughout their studies.

Thinking of Wen Xuehui's bad romance in her previous life, Jiang Yao decided that she would make sure Wen Xuehui wouldn't repeat the same mistake when she went to Nanjiang Medical School this time.

Although it was a summer holiday, the schools where her in-laws worked at were still conducting summer holiday classes, so they had to go to work. At around ten thirty, everyone returned to their respective rooms to rest.

When Lu Xingzhi opened the door and entered their room, he saw Jiang Yao holding a book. It was as if she was in a daze while reading the book.

"You've just recovered from your fever, so don't read too much and rest early. We'll leave for the city at about eight o'clock tomorrow morning." Lu Xingzhi waited but he didn't get any response from Jiang Yao. He walked over and took the book off her hand. It was only after seeing her gasp in surprise and looked back at him with her widened eyes that he was certain that she had just been in a daze.

He turned the alarm clock on the table to half-past seven and placed it in front of Jiang Yao, pointing to the time he had set. Without another word, he grabbed the clothes from the wardrobe and went into the bathroom.

After regaining her composure, Jiang Yao's gaze followed Lu Xingzhi until he entered the bathroom and closed the door behind him. Then, she turned to look at the clock on the table. She gaped and acknowledged his remark after her mind was in place.

Putting the book back on the shelf, Jiang Yao went to lay down on the bed. The bed in the Lu family was a European-style white wooden bed frame. The mattress was comfortable and sturdy. The bedsheet was all imported silk fabrics. The Lu family had always been willing to invest in high quality and functional home items.

Hearing the sound of the bathroom door opening, Jiang Yao quickly covered herself under the thin quilt and closed her eyes, pretending to sleep. Although her eyes were shut, her senses were exceptionally sensitive.

She could hear Lu Xingzhi's footsteps loud and clear in the quiet room. Following the sound of his footsteps, Jiang Yao imagined his pacing path in the room and created a map in her mind. He stepped out of the bathroom and pulled the curtains, and then stood in front of the wardrobe as if he was looking for something. After a while, the sound of his footsteps echoed again.

After that, she felt the other side of the mattress sinking slightly. The sound of the nightstand switch flicked and the light in the room dimmed.

After he lay down, he didn't reach over to take the quilt to cover himself. Instead, Jiang Yao could feel him rolling over and facing her. A faint lemon scent radiated from his freshly showered body—it was the usual smell of bath products used at home.

Within five minutes, Jiang Yao heard Lu Xingzhi's rhythmic breathing and light snoring. He had fallen asleep.

At this point, Jiang Yao quietly opened her eyes in the dark and turned over carefully like a thief. Eventually, she was facing him and staring at his face with her bold and wide-opened eyes.

Even when she was disregarding the marriage, Jiang Yao had to admit that she found Lu Xingzhi handsome and attractive when she first saw him.

He had sharp and captivating eyes, tall nose, and thin lips. It was the perfect combination of a good-looking man.

Probably because of his training at the base most of the time, Lu Xingzhi wasn't as fair as most of the male students around Jiang Yao. Instead, he sported a healthy tanned complexion and looked much better than most soldiers she'd ever seen.

He wore a black singlet and loose pants to sleep. As he was sleeping without a quilt, she could clearly see his chest undulating steadily.

"So, this is a living Lu Xingzhi," Jiang Yao whispered silently.

Gazing at Lu Xingzhi and feeling his consistent breathing, this sensation moved her to the point of tears.

Chapter 35: I Know You Well

She clearly remembered his face when he died. His bloodless face had been distorted in a horrifying way due to the excruciating pain he had suffered before death. His fists clenched tightly when he was found.

Jiang Yao couldn't even begin to imagine how painful it must have been to be buried alive. It was so petrifying that even a soldier who endured hardship and fatigue on a daily basis would die with such a ghastly look.

Jiang Yao discreetly wiggled toward Lu Xingzhi. She couldn't hold back and quietly raised her hand, brushing his eyebrows gently with her fingertips as if she was using her finger as a paintbrush.

"Can't sleep?"

"Argh!" Jiang Yao recoiled in shock.

Just when she was about to retract her hand, those eyes suddenly opened and he grabbed her hand firmly. Jiang Yao was caught by surprise, her eyes widened and her mouth agape. She looked like a thief caught red-handed.

"You pretended to be asleep!" Jiang Yao protested in a low voice. "You were only pretending to be asleep!"

Lu Xingzhi couldn't help but chuckled as he listened to Jiang Yao's anxious and angry whining. "You started it. With the way you touch me, I'd definitely wake up, unless I'm dead."

That's right, Lu Xingzhi was an active duty guard. It was impossible for him to not notice and wake up when Jiang Yao stroked his face over and over.

In actual fact, he had woken up as soon as she turned to face him. However, he did not expect her to touch him secretly after he had fallen asleep.

Her touch was very light and gentle, it almost felt like she was caressing his face.

“Having trouble sleeping?” Lu Xingzhi released Jiang Yao’s hand and asked, wondering if she couldn’t sleep due to the heat. “Do you want me to switch the fan on?”

“No thanks.” The ventilation design in the Lu family house was unique. Due to the large temperature difference, despite the warm day, the night breeze was cold and chilly. In addition, the balcony of their room faced a river and the evening breeze was so cool that there was hardly a chance to switch on the fan or air conditioner. In fact, in the middle of the night, it could be so cold that Jiang Yao would need a quilt.

The air conditioner installed in the house was mostly used as decoration all year long. It was only useful during the hottest time of the year.

“Lu Xingzhi, are you sleepy? If not, can we chat for a while?” Jiang Yao glanced at Lu Xingzhi when she spoke, her tone was a little tentative and hesitant. “It seems that after we got married, we’ve rarely sat down to talk.”

Lu Xingzhi’s expression froze instantly. He was stunned. However, he composed himself so quickly that even Jiang Yao, who had been staring at him, did not catch the change of expression on his face.

How could he not be shocked? Jiang Yao offered to talk to him!

In the past, Jiang Yao was unwilling to talk to him. Basically, she wouldn’t speak if she could. He was cold-shouldered by her to the point that she wasn’t willing to give him a glance or a hum.

And today, she suddenly hugged him twice and suggested talking to him voluntarily.

After a long silence, Lu Xingzhi said in a low and confused voice, “Jiang Yao, you...you are unlike the usual you today.”

If he couldn’t visually confirm that the lady in front of him was indeed his wife, he would have doubted that the current Jiang Yao was the same version as the previous Jiang Yao.

Yes, it was as if she had turned over a new leaf.

“You say that you know me well? So, do you know what kind of person I am?” Jiang Yao questioned, unconvinced.

“At least I know you better than you think,” Lu Xingzhi said with a satisfying grin, his voice exceptionally firm and tenacious.