

PAW 1721

Chapter 1721

Restaurant.

Inside the private room.

"Mr. Zhou."

"We're here."

"Where's the honored guest?"

The few women who came in were all smiling.

Mr. Zhou quickly stood up with a broad smile, motioning for them to come over. Then he pointed in Dong Xuebing's direction, "Over there, make sure to entertain him well."

Dong Xuebing was sitting at the head position, and they all saw him immediately. They were surprised that Mr. Zhou was so respectful to such a young man, as they had assumed it would be a middle-aged man with a big belly like before. Without asking any questions, they went up to Dong Xuebing, chirping like birds, squeezing out Yu Meixia as they tried to sit beside Dong Xuebing.

Yu Meixia was a bit unhappy, but with her soft personality, she couldn't say anything.

Though she didn't speak up, Dong Xuebing did. Before they could sit down, he waved his hand. "Don't sit here. I'm not used to it."

The women looked a bit embarrassed.

Mr. Zhou said, "Please ensure Mr. Dong is well taken care of."

Dong Xuebing immediately replied, "I don't need to be entertained. I can eat by myself."

The words were a bit blunt, but Mr. Zhou wasn't surprised. Seeing that Dong Xuebing was not receptive, he had no choice but to say, "Just sit wherever you like."

The young actresses blinked and found empty seats to sit down.

Only then did Yu Meixia feel better. Her expression improved a lot. She even sat up straighter as if wanting to compete with them, feeling jealous.

Dong Xuebing didn't think much of the young actresses, but Yu Meixia amused him. He nudged her foot under the table.

Seeing Dong Xuebing, Yu Meixia blushed and hurriedly whispered, "I didn't mean anything by it. You... you have a wife, so it's not appropriate."

Dong Xuebing said, "I know."

He did know. Despite his flirtatious nature, he was also very principled. Of course, it could also be said that Dong Xuebing was very picky. The ones he fancied were usually gorgeous. Everyone's beauty standards differ, but in Dong Xuebing's eyes, the young actresses who came in were not even half as pretty as Yu Meixia. This was why Dong Xuebing didn't even glance at them.

The meal began.

Everyone was cheerfully eating.

Mr. Zhou stood up first. "Mr. Dong and Ms. Yu, I propose a toast to both of you. I'm truly sorry about today. Deeply sorry. I'll drink first as an apology. You both can do as you please." He then gulped down a full glass. Seeing this, General Manager Wu and the other company executives also offered a toast.

Yu Meixia didn't know how to drink and didn't touch her glass.

Dong Xuebing also didn't drink, continuing to eat without acknowledging them.

The young actresses noticed the situation and, at Mr. Zhou's urging, also started offering toasts to Dong Xuebing to lighten the mood.

"Mr. Dong, have a drink."

"Handsome, I toast to you."

The young actresses also drank their alcohol.

Dong Xuebing continued eating and drinking, though he drank plain water. However, unlike his treatment of Mr. Zhou and the other company executives, Dong Xuebing was much more lenient with the young actresses. At least he didn't ignore them and said, "I drove here, so I can't drink."

Ring ring ring.

Someone's phone rang.

It was the young man from the company. He took the call, whispered a few words, then nodded twice and hung up, leaning over to whisper something to Mr. Zhou.

Mr. Zhou nodded, then turned around and said, "Excuse me, everyone, I need to use the restroom."

With that, he left the private room and walked down the hallway, looking around for someone.

Across the hall, there was a bit of commotion, some murmuring, and a few exclamations. It was pretty chaotic.

Following the noise, Mr. Zhou saw a woman around twenty-six or twenty-seven years old quickly taking sunglasses out of her bag and putting them on. The surrounding diners and restaurant staff had recognized her, pointing and whispering among themselves. A few bold individuals even approached her for an autograph. But before the woman could respond, Mr. Zhou hurriedly pushed away those seeking autographs and guided the woman inside.

"Is that Chen Ying?"

"It must be her."

"Didn't expect to see her here."

"I'm a fan of hers. I loved her previous movie."

"Yeah, she was amazing in it. I have to get her autograph later."

Amid the chatter, Mr. Zhou and Chen Ying walked further inside. She was dressed in a long trench coat, reasonably attractive but not overly stunning. She was only of average beauty in the entertainment industry, which is filled with beautiful women. However, those who had seen her films knew she was an excellent actress.

"Mr. Zhou, what's going on?" Chen Ying asked.

Mr. Zhou was exceptionally courteous to her. "Yingying, the company is in big trouble this time. We offended someone, and they stopped our film and TV show production."

Chen Ying was stunned. "Is it a leader of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television?"

"I don't know who he is, but he's not ordinary." Mr. Zhou sighed. "The person is in the private room now. I had a hard time inviting him here. Whether we succeed directly affects the company's survival. We've known each other for a long time, and I've always treated you well, haven't I?"

Chen Ying replied, "Without you, there wouldn't be me."

Mr. Zhou earnestly said, "I've never forced you to do anything you didn't want to, right?"

"Yes." Chen Ying nodded. "I've always been grateful for that. I remember it clearly."

"Although I've asked you to drink with people, that's normal socializing. But I've never asked you to do anything else because I value you. My daughter died in a car accident years ago, and you look a lot like her. I..." Mr. Zhou was genuinely emotional, his eyes turning red. He genuinely cared for Chen Ying because she resembled his deceased daughter. Despite significant opposition, he insisted on casting her as the lead in a TV series. After all, they were the investors, and the director had to listen to them. Otherwise, no one would have dared to cast a fresh graduate with no formal acting training as the lead. Chen Ying ultimately proved herself with that series, which brought her to the audience's attention and more lucrative roles. In the following years, many movies and TV shows produced by Mr. Zhou's company continued to feature Chen Ying in significant roles, even if the script or role wasn't the best fit for her.

Chen Ying was naturally aware of this and deeply grateful. In her few years in the industry, she had never experienced any unspoken rules. "Just tell me what you want me to do."

Mr. Zhou hesitated long before saying, "The honored guest inside..."

Chen Ying was silent for a moment. "I understand."

Chapter 1722

Outside the Private Room

The atmosphere was a bit tense.

Mr. Zhou looked at her and said to Chen Ying, "Today, we're counting on you. I wouldn't have asked if we had any other options. Xiao Yan and Xiao Lu came earlier, but he didn't even look at them. I don't know if it's because his standards are too high or... Yingying, you—"

"No need to say more, Brother Zhou," Chen Ying said calmly. "I know what to do."

Mr. Zhou, feeling a bit guilty, promised, "If things work out, rest assured, the company will definitely—"

Chen Ying shook her head. "You've always taken good care of me. You've always prioritized me in auditions, even going against the directors' objections. You've never mentioned these things, but I've always been aware of them. There's no need to make any promises. You've already done a lot for me."

Mr. Zhou gritted his teeth, "I'm counting on you."

"What's his name?" Chen Ying asked.

"His surname is Dong, but I didn't catch his full name," Mr. Zhou replied.

"Alright," Chen Ying said softly. "I'll handle him for you."

Mr. Zhou hesitated momentarily, "Don't blame me, Yingying. I—"

Chen Ying said quietly, "I should thank you, not blame you. I'm always grateful for what you've done for me."

Mr. Zhou sighed in relief, "Are you ready?"

"Yes, let's go in," Chen Ying straightened her coat.

Hearing this, Mr. Zhou opened the door for her, and they entered the private room together. As soon as the door opened, Chen Ying's previously expressionless face transformed into a gentle smile. She looked poised and graceful, demonstrating the quick adaptability of an actress.

"Oh?"

"Xiao Chen!"

"Yingying's here too."

The company executives noticed her arrival and were somewhat surprised. They knew Mr. Zhou had always valued Chen Ying and treated her with special care, almost like a daughter, because she resembled his late daughter. Except for the young secretary, who knew the situation, the other executives didn't expect Mr. Zhou to bring Chen Ying. This showed that he was desperate and willing to take a big risk. It was clear that he was at his wit's end. Otherwise, he wouldn't have asked Chen Ying to drink with them, possibly even more.

"Is that..."

"Chen Ying?"

"It must be her."

"Wow, it is Chen Ying."

Aside from one old policeman, the younger officers were excited to see a celebrity. The small-time actresses they had seen earlier were familiar but not well-known. However, they all recognized Chen Ying, indicating her high fame. She wasn't a top-tier star, but she was well-known.

Deputy Director Chang also seemed impressed, probably having seen Chen Ying's performances.

Dong Xuebing heard the commotion and looked up, recognizing her without giving it much thought.

Chen Ying had already figured out who the primary guest was today. Her gaze shifted to Dong Xuebing, and she hesitated momentarily, her expression showing a mix of curiosity and suspicion. Then she greeted, "Hello, everyone."

Mr. Zhou smiled and said, "Come, sit next to Mr. Dong. Mr. Dong hasn't eaten anything since he arrived. You should take good care of him."

Chen Ying smiled, "Okay."

She walked over and sat next to Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing didn't refuse this time because although she wasn't exceptionally beautiful, he found her quite pleasant to look at.

She looked so familiar.

What movies had she acted in?

Dong Xuebing thought about it for a long time but couldn't remember.

"Mr. Dong, your glass is empty. Let me pour you some wine," Chen Ying said with a smile, picking up the wine bottle and filling Dong Xuebing's glass. "I toast to you."

Dong Xuebing waved his hand, "I'm driving, so I can't drink."

"Then please have some food." Chen Ying picked up some food with her chopsticks and placed it in Dong Xuebing's bowl.

Dong Xuebing still didn't give in, "No need, I'll serve myself."

Chen Ying smiled slightly. "I just got here. You're not drinking the wine, and now you don't want to eat the food I serve? You're putting me on the spot."

Hearing this, Dong Xuebing reluctantly took a bite, "Alright."

"Thank you for being so considerate, Mr. Dong," Chen Ying continued serving him food and started making small talk with Dong Xuebing.

Dong Xuebing responded with a few words.

Seeing Dong Xuebing's attitude softened, Mr. Zhou was pleased, knowing there was hope. At least Dong Xuebing seemed to like Chen Ying, which was a good sign. So, Mr. Zhou and the other executives started discussing topics around Chen Ying, like the TV shows and movies she had acted in and the roles she had played, hoping to use Chen Ying as a way to break the ice.

Movies.

TV shows.

But after listening for a while, Dong Xuebing was puzzled. They mentioned all of Chen Ying's works, but he hadn't seen them. This was why he was so confused. He didn't follow entertainment news, so why did Chen Ying look so familiar?

Dong Xuebing looked at her and asked, "Have we met before?"

Mr. Zhou and the others broke into a sweat. What kind of old-fashioned pick-up line was that?

Surprisingly, Chen Ying blinked, "I was just thinking the same thing. You look very familiar to me, too."

"Me too," Dong Xuebing thought hard.

Suddenly, Chen Ying's expression froze, "Are you Dong... Dong Xuebing?"

Dong Xuebing blinked, "Yes, and you are?"

"I'm Chen Ying," she quickly replied. "We sat next to each other in elementary school."

Dong Xuebing slapped his forehead in realization, "It's you! Chen Ying, I remember now! What a coincidence!"

Mr. Zhou and the others were dumbfounded. Do they really know each other?

"Chen Ying, you became a star?" Dong Xuebing was extremely surprised.

Chen Ying smiled, "So, I've been in so many shows and movies, and you haven't seen any of them?"

Dong Xuebing smiled awkwardly, "I don't usually watch TV or movies, and then I don't have much time with work. I didn't expect this."

Chen Ying said, "You didn't expect someone as plain-looking as me to become an actress?"

"No, no, not at all," Dong Xuebing said. "You're being too modest. Just standing there with your aura would outshine anyone. Besides, you were one of the prettiest in our class in elementary school."

Chen Ying laughed, "That's because there weren't many girls in our class."

No wonder she looked familiar. They were classmates for six years. It would be strange if she didn't look familiar. Chen Ying was quite a beauty back in elementary school. Normally, Dong Xuebing shouldn't have had a hard time remembering her, but it's been over ten years, and people have changed a lot. That's why Dong Xuebing didn't recognize her right away. On the other hand, Chen Ying still remembered him, her former classmate who sat behind her, which surprised Dong Xuebing. Most people, especially those with poor memories, wouldn't have remembered him. During school, he kept a low profile—not by choice, but because he didn't do well academically, wasn't particularly good-looking, had a poor family background, and was quiet. Even if he wanted to stand out, he couldn't. Who would remember him?

Dong Xuebing asked, "How did you recognize me?"

Chen Ying smiled, "When I came in, you looked familiar. You have two moles near your eye; your last name is Dong. I remembered right away."

Dong Xuebing sighed, "It's impressive that you remembered."

"But you forgot about me," Chen Ying said, showing a hint of displeasure.

"No, I didn't. It's just that you've changed so much. You're much more beautiful now. I didn't dare to recognize you," Dong Xuebing said. He didn't mention that Chen Ying's name was common, so he didn't make the connection.

"How have you been recently?" Dong Xuebing asked.

"Same old. After graduating from college, I started acting. What about you?"

Dong Xuebing replied, "I joined a government office right after graduation."

Chen Ying remarked, "A government job is great. It's much better than what we do."

Dong Xuebing waved his hand, "No, we just work behind the scenes to serve the people. We can't compare to you celebrities."

"You're just being modest," Chen Ying laughed.

Dong Xuebing said, "Honestly if I had your looks, I would've tried to become a star too. Unfortunately, I'm not good-looking."

Chen Ying looked him up and down, "You're not bad. You've gotten more handsome."

The two of them started chatting, and it seemed like they had much to catch up on.

Seeing this, Mr. Zhou was the happiest in the room. He didn't expect such a coincidence—that Chen Ying and Dong Xuebing were elementary school classmates. This would make things easier. Classmate relationships are often the most genuine; with this connection, it would be easier to resolve the matter.

Mr. Zhou immediately said, "Chen Ying, Mr. Dong, was your classmate?"

Chen Ying nodded, "Yes, we sat next to each other for two years." She understood Mr. Zhou's intentions and used her words to close the gap between her and Dong Xuebing and, indirectly, between Dong Xuebing and Mr. Zhou. "Xuebing even copied my homework once, but we got caught by the teacher and had to stand for a whole class. Thinking back, it was quite amusing."

Dong Xuebing said awkwardly, "Oh, don't mention it. I felt bad about that. But didn't I bring you lunch for a whole week to make up for it?" He smiled warmly, recalling the incident. In elementary school, students had to bring their lunches because the school's food was terrible and expensive. Dong Xuebing used this opportunity to apologize to Chen Ying after getting her in trouble.

Chen Ying laughed, "I remember the food was quite good. Later, I wanted more, but you stopped bringing it."

Dong Xuebing coughed, "That was all my mom's cooking."

Memories came flooding back.

The youth had long passed.

Chapter 1723

Afternoon.

The meal continued.

However, after a few phone calls, many people began to leave individually.

The first group to leave included Deputy Director Chang and several police officers. They were full and had received a call from the station for an emergency, so they had to go.

"Mr. Dong, we'll head out first."

"Stay a bit longer? We haven't had much of a chance to chat."

"Next time. We've got an urgent call."

"Alright, I won't keep you from your work. Let's meet again next time."

"Mr. Zhou, we're leaving now. Thank you for the hospitality today."

After exchanging some polite words, Deputy Director Chang and the police officers left the restaurant.

Next to leave was Yu Meixia. She received a call from her daughter, Yu Qianqian. After the harrowing interview experience, Yu Meixia temporarily gave up on the idea of acting to earn money. She didn't want to stay in Beijing any longer, mainly because no one looked after her daughter. With no one else to care for her, Yu Meixia couldn't stop worrying about her daughter being alone in Fenzhou City. She had been away for a couple of days, and after taking the call, she told her daughter she would be home that evening.

"Xuebing, I'm leaving," Yu Meixia said, bidding farewell.

Dong Xuebing replied, "About your acting job, I'll..."

Yu Meixia whispered, "Let's forget about it for now. I... I'll think about it later."

Dong Xuebing didn't try to stop her because she was eager to go home. "Alright, can you manage on your own? Let me find a car to take you back."

Yu Meixia softly said, "No need, I can manage."

"Come on, I can't let you go alone," Dong Xuebing insisted. "I'll make the arrangements."

Despite her age, he couldn't help but worry about her because of her gentle and fragile nature.

Without further ado, Dong Xuebing took out his phone in the private room and made a call. "Hey, Xiao Han, it's me... Can you find a car and a driver to take someone to Fenzhou City?... Yes, right now... Have the driver come to the restaurant on the west side of Shuangjing... It's a lady in her forties... Tell the driver to look for the most beautiful woman on the street; that'll be her... Haha, I probably won't be coming back to the office today... Yes, I have some things to deal with. Make sure Director Luo handles things well there. If there are any issues, call me... Right, that's it." After hanging up, Dong Xuebing told Yu Meixia, "Wait outside; the driver will be here in ten minutes. He'll take you right to your doorstep."

Yu Meixia nodded, "Okay, thank you."

Dong Xuebing escorted her out and gave her the driver's phone number.

Seeing this, Chen Ying followed them outside. After Dong Xuebing sent Yu Meixia off, she walked back with him.

"How's everything going?" Dong Xuebing asked as they walked.

"It's going okay," Chen Ying replied. "Mainly because Mr. Zhou has been looking after me. Otherwise, I wouldn't have made it this far. I'm just an ordinary college graduate. Which film would dare cast me? Even most graduates from film academies struggle to find roles. Mr. Zhou has always

been good to me. It's quite sad; his daughter was about our age and looked much like me. But she passed away in a car accident... Sigh. Xuebing, can you do me a favor? Let's give them a pass this time, okay?"

Dong Xuebing pondered for a moment. "We'll see."

"Xuebing, I..." Chen Ying started to say.

But Dong Xuebing interrupted her, "Let's talk about something else. By the way, are you free this afternoon? Let's catch up. It's been long since we last met, and now you're a big star. Haha, I have a lot to talk about. My boss has already marked me absent for the day, so it doesn't matter if I return."

Chen Ying blinked, "Are you an official now?"

Dong Xuebing nodded, "Kind of. I'm with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection."

"Wow, that's a place with significant authority." Chen Ying didn't fully understand the intricacies of the government system, but she knew what the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection was.

"Are you... at the section chief level?" For someone Dong Xuebing's age, the section chief level was already a high rank, so Chen Ying guessed conservatively.

But Dong Xuebing replied, "Division Chief level."

Chen Ying was stunned, "...Deputy Division Chief?"

Dong Xuebing cleared his throat, "Division Chief."

"What? Division Chief?" Chen Ying exclaimed, "That's so high!"

Someone in their late twenties? At the Division Chief level? In the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection?

No wonder he could bring Mr. Zhou's company to such a state with just one phone call!

Dong Xuebing said, "I was lucky to have achieved a few merits, so I got promoted quickly. It's nothing. My wife's rank is much higher than mine; I can't compare."

"You're married? You'll have to introduce me to your wife someday," Chen Ying said.

Dong Xuebing laughed, "Of course. My wife has probably watched your TV shows."

"I got married early, too," Chen Ying whispered, "but please don't tell anyone. My agency has contracts that make this kind of news... problematic for us."

Dong Xuebing understood, "I get it. You're worried it might affect your popularity."

Chen Ying sighed, "It's what we rely on. It's quite difficult."

"By the way, I need to use the restroom," Dong Xuebing said and headed to the bathroom.

Chen Ying quickly returned to the private room where only Mr. Zhou and the company staff remained. Mr. Zhou had already settled the bill and was waiting for them.

"Yingying," Mr. Zhou said eagerly, "how did it go?"

Chen Ying shook her head, "I asked him, and he said, 'We'll see.' He disagreed."

Mr. Zhou smacked his lips, "Did your classmate mention any conditions?"

"No, he just said he wanted to chat with me this afternoon," Chen Ying replied.

"You're old classmates, so you must have a good relationship. That should help..." General Manager Wu, another company executive, interjected.

"Old classmates are just old classmates," Chen Ying said. "We were never particularly close in elementary school and didn't stay in touch afterward. There's not much of a relationship to speak of."

Mr. Zhou gestured for the company staff to leave and told the other young actresses who had come to entertain to go as well. He left Chen Ying alone in the private room, speaking earnestly, "Yingying, Brother Zhou is counting on you this time. You're his classmate. I hope you can talk to him. You have an advantage in this regard. You must help me out. If we can't get his support, our company is finished. He said he wanted to talk to you alone this afternoon. I think he might..."

Chen Ying remained silent.

"Did you learn anything else?" Zhou asked.

Chen Ying replied, "He's now a Division Chief level leader in the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection."

Zhou's eyes widened, "What? Division Chief level? No wonder! No wonder! He must have a significant background because he is so young at that level!" After a pause, he continued, "Yingying, what do you think..."

Chen Ying said quietly, "I already told you. I... know what to do."

Chapter 1724

Afternoon.

It's three o'clock.

In the restaurant's bathroom.

Ring ring ring, ring ring ring. Fang Wenping's phone number appeared on Dong Xuebing's phone. He zipped up his pants and answered it.

"Hello?" Fang Wenping said.

"Is there something?" Dong Xuebing asked.

Fang Wenping replied coldly, "Are you done with your business?"

"Almost, still have a bit to go. What's up, Director Fang?" Dong Xuebing replied casually. "Is there a task for us? You should first find Comrade Luo Haiting. I still have some things to handle and probably won't return to the office this afternoon. The work in the second office can be handed to Director Luo."

Fang Wenping said stiffly, "You're not taking care of Qianqian anymore?"

Dong Xuebing hesitated, "Almost forgot, sweat, how's Qianqian?"

At that moment, little Qianqian crying out, "Daddy! Daddy!" came through the phone.

Dong Xuebing hurriedly said, "Oh my sweet baby, miss Daddy? Daddy has a bit of a situation here and can't go back for now. A friend of Daddy's wants to enter the entertainment industry but gets bullied by some company. Daddy is handling it. Be good. Listen to Aunt Fang, and Daddy will pick you up before seven or eight tonight. Go with Aunt Fang to her house first, okay?"

Fang Wenping replied, "So you're abandoning her, right?"

Dong Xuebing awkwardly said, "But I have an urgent matter. Can you take care of Qianqian for me?"

"You think I'm free, right?" Fang Wenping said coldly. "You're a subordinate, and you're bossing me around?"

Dong Xuebing coughed, "Just this once, just this once, thank you. I have something urgent. If you don't want to look after the kid, let Comrade Luo Haiting take Qianqian. I'll find her to pick up the child tonight. Also, last time when you were drunk, I took care of you, washed your clothes, fetched water, cooked for you. You vomited all over me, and I didn't say anything, right? Qianqian likes you, can you watch her for me? Let's call it even."

Fang Wenping was silent momentarily, "When will you come?"

"Definitely before eight o'clock tonight," Dong Xuebing said. "So after work, take Qianqian home first. By the way, don't feed her too much meat. She's still young and shouldn't overeat. Breast milk is the main thing. Also, buy some diapers and stuff. You can use the money first, and I'll pay you back later."

Fang Wenping replied coldly, "Is it that complicated to deal with an entertainment company? Isn't Ci Lifan just a news and broadcasting bureau leader?" It turned out that Fang Wenping heard what Dong Xuebing said to his daughter and was aware of the feud between the families of the Xie and Fang.

"I'm handling it, but it's still not done."

"Alright, I can't be bothered to talk to you anymore!"

"Anyway, I'm counting on you. Qianqian is in your care."

After hanging up, Dong Xuebing snorted, thinking, "Seeing how much you like Qianqian, you'd rather I never pick her up. You're so hypocritical. I want to clear that favor you owe me. Forget it. If it's settled, it's settled. I won't bother with you. It's been a long time since I saw an old classmate from elementary school. I should reminisce about my youth. I don't have time to look after the kid, so I'll leave her with Fang Wenping. Despite her attitude, Dong Xuebing did not dislike or trust her much, but he still felt okay leaving Qianqian with her."

Outside.

At the entrance of the private room.

When Dong Xuebing approached, Mr. Zhou and the company's people also came out, all waiting for him there. Chen Ying stood aside smilingly.

"Mr. Dong," Mr. Zhou greeted warmly, "There aren't any high-class restaurants nearby, and we didn't have time to prepare. Please forgive the inadequate hospitality."

Dong Xuebing nodded indifferently without saying anything.

Mr. Zhou continued, "We are sorry about today."

Another senior from the company added, "It was our oversight."

"Mr. Dong, please don't hold it against us," another senior said.

How could Dong Xuebing be bothered? As far as he was concerned, the matter was resolved, and he had no interest in these formalities. Right now, he just wanted to chat with Chen Ying. Over the years, he met university and high school classmates but not elementary school classmates. Back then, Dong Xuebing had some good friends from elementary school and wondered what everyone was up to now. So, why bother with these people?

Mr. Zhou also sensed Dong Xuebing's lack of interest in conversation and said, "Then we won't disturb you. It's been a long time since you and Ying Ying met. You guys catch up."

"Mr. Dong, we'll take our leave," the company's people bid Dong Xuebing farewell one by one.

Dong Xuebing waved his hand absentmindedly and watched them leave with a sidelong glance.

At this point, only Dong Xuebing and Chen Ying were left in the hallway. Dong Xuebing smiled, "Chen Ying, shall we find a café to sit down and chat?"

Chen Ying paused, "Let's go to your place."

"My place?" Dong Xuebing was taken aback, but he didn't dwell on it. It was expected to chat at home with old classmates, and it wasn't their first meeting. "Sure."

Chen Ying said, "My car has a restricted license plate today. How about you?"

"No problem, I have my car. It's parked at their company's entrance. Let's go pick it up," Dong Xuebing replied without hesitation, walking out with her. As they walked, he asked, "How are our former classmates doing now? Do you still keep in touch with Da kai and Zhang Lei?"

Chen Ying smiled, "I don't know about Da Kai. I haven't been in touch. I did meet Zhang Lei a few years ago, though. It was right after I finished filming my first TV drama. He recognized me on TV and somehow got my husband's phone number. My husband and I even went out to dinner with him."

"What's he up to?" Dong Xuebing asked.

"He's in computer work, I think. I didn't ask for specifics," Chen Ying replied.

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "Zhang Lei had a crush on you in elementary school. Who in the class didn't know? Was that dinner invitation his attempt to woo you?"

Chen Ying chuckled, "I'm not sure, but I went with my husband."

"Ha, that poor Zhang Lei must have been heartbroken," Dong Xuebing found the conversation enjoyable. "Who else have you kept in touch with? I've lost contact with everyone. After all, we didn't have cell phones back then, so I couldn't even find people to have dinner with."

"Remember Xiao Pang?" Chen Ying asked.

"Xiao Pang? Oh, that nice girl you were close to?" Dong Xuebing recalled.

Chen Ying nodded, "Xiao Pang and I have stayed in touch. She now runs her clothing store."

Dong Xuebing exclaimed, "That's doing well. Xiao Pang wasn't particularly noticeable in our class. I even forgot her real name."

Chen Ying glanced at him. "But you've done well. Among our elementary school classmates, you've achieved the most. In your mid-twenties, you're already a Division Chief leader with such influence. People envy you. Who among us can compare?"

Dong Xuebing hurriedly replied, "Don't praise me. It's just luck. You, being a big star, are more at ease."

Shaking her head, Chen Ying said, "At ease? There's no such thing. Sigh, every industry is tough to break into."

As they spoke, they arrived at the entrance of Hongye Corporation. Dong Xuebing unlocked his Land Rover under Chen Ying's curious gaze.

"Is this your car?"

"Yeah, hop in."

"Do you guys get such high salaries there?"

"It's not salary. I won the lottery, so I'm a bit well-off."

"But this car... It costs several million, doesn't it?"

"I bought a ticket and hit several times. So..."

Chen Ying was speechless for a moment. After looking around, she bent down and got into the passenger seat. "You've got the position and the money now. It makes people envious."

"Come on, I'm not doing as well as you think. Like you said, every industry has challenges," Dong Xuebing said. "There are plenty of headaches."

"You're right."

"Heh, let's go."

"Have you been drinking? Should I drive?"

"No problem, I can handle it. I have a good tolerance."

Dong Xuebing drove towards his residential compound. However, as luck would have it when he turned onto a side road to make a turn, he noticed a police checkpoint ahead. Several officers parked there, stopping every passing car to test the drivers for alcohol.

Chen Ying urged, "Quick, let me drive!"

"You've been drinking too, haven't you?" Dong Xuebing replied.

"I've had less than you, and you're with the Discipline Inspection Commission. This kind of thing..." Chen Ying was genuinely concerned for Dong Xuebing.

But Dong Xuebing disagreed. "The police are watching. It's too late to change now. Don't worry, even if I've had a drink, it's as good as not having had one. They won't detect anything."

Chen Ying was still very nervous.

However, when the traffic police saw Dong Xuebing's car, mainly his license plate and the pass issued by the Beijing City Committee that Dong Xuebing had just put up on his car, they were slightly stunned. They didn't even stop their car, simply letting them pass.

As they passed by, one officer even saluted them.

Dong Xuebing lowered the window a bit, nodded at them, "Thanks," closed the window, and drove away.

Behind them, other drivers complained, asking why their cars had to be inspected while Dong Xuebing's was let through without checks, causing them to wait in line one by one.

The traffic police didn't reply. They thought that if you could get a Beijing license plate with all sixes and a pass from a City Committee family member, they wouldn't stop you either. These traffic police deal with this professionally every day. They can tell at a glance the status of the car, the license plate, and the pass. Even if they did stop the car and found alcohol in the driver's blood, they wouldn't be able to handle it because they could tell the person inside had an extraordinary background. So, they let them go.

The Land Rover continued forward.

Seeing this, Chen Ying looked at Dong Xuebing with even higher regard, knowing that her old classmate had risen to a new level.

Chapter 1725

Afternoon...

It was just before three o'clock.

At the Discipline Inspection Commission Family Compound.

Under the watchful eye of the saluting security guard, Dong Xuebing drove the Land Rover in and parked it under a building. As the car door opened, Dong Xuebing and Chen Ying exited and went upstairs.

Upstairs.

Inside the house.

Dong Xuebing used the key to open the door. "Please come in."

"This is your unit's dormitory?" Chen Ying looked around.

"Yeah," Dong Xuebing nodded. "It's a bit basic, but it's manageable."

"It's still better than the place I'm renting," Chen Ying said. She couldn't afford to buy a house with her fame not yet at its peak and not earning much. "Where's your spouse? Do you live alone?"

Chen Ying bent down and took off her high heels, slipping her feet, clad in sheer stockings, into a pair of pink cotton slippers on the shoe rack. She also took off her windbreaker and hung it aside. Chen Ying had never been a gorgeous female star, but her current popularity was undoubtedly

related to her appearance. Although her face wasn't stunning, her overall demeanor and attitude were comfortable and pleasing. Dong Xuebing might not fully understand it, but he felt this way. He knew that Chen Ying was not conventionally beautiful. Yet, there was a distinct charm about her, especially with her well-proportioned figure—perky chest, shapely hips—revealed under the sweater, which emitted an alluring fragrance, especially her slender waist beneath that sweater.

Dong Xuebing glanced at her, swallowed hard, and said, "My spouse works in the South. I live alone." He quickly averted his gaze, feeling disrespectful.

Chen Ying just nodded and looked at him deeply, her expression unreadable.

Not minding her reaction, Dong Xuebing took off his shoes and coat. The room had heating, much warmer than outside. "Please sit anywhere. Would you like some tea?"

"Just herbal tea," Chen Ying replied.

"Herbal tea? I don't have any good ones here," Dong Xuebing said. "But any will do. I don't know much about them. Just something to drink and quench your thirst."

"That's fine. I'll heat some water. Please wait," Dong Xuebing went to the kitchen and busied himself with the water.

Chen Ying said, "Let's have dinner here tonight."

"Sure," Dong Xuebing agreed.

Dong Xuebing reached for a tea box, sprinkled some tea leaves, and said, "By the way, from what you just said, the company with the surname Zhou has always treated you well."

Chen Ying nodded. "They've been very supportive of me. They invited me to film my first drama, even as the lead actress. As an ordinary college graduate, I never dared to dream of such an opportunity. Thanks to CEO Zhou and Hongye Corporation's help, they've continued to offer me many roles. My current fame is all thanks to CEO Zhou's support. Without him, Chen Ying wouldn't be where she is today. I've always been grateful to him."

"I see," Dong Xuebing nodded.

Chen Ying continued, "You may have misunderstood CEO Zhou, so..."

"Don't worry. It's just a misunderstanding," Dong Xuebing assured her. "I don't know how you see things, but from what I've seen of that company, there are serious issues from top to bottom. Chen Ying, we're old classmates. I know you're here to speak on their behalf, but you didn't see how they treated my friend. It's beyond words—arrogant and disdainful. You should know I have a good temper, but I couldn't tolerate their attitude. Imagine what kind of people they are. Even if they were more low-key, I wouldn't have sabotaged their films and TV shows."

Chen Ying paused, "I'm the lead actress in that movie."

Dong Xuebing was momentarily stunned. He glanced towards the living room but didn't see anyone. Nevertheless, he continued speaking outward, "You're the lead actress? I was wondering why you're here."

A woman's voice replied, "I need your help this time, Xuebing. Otherwise, let's forget about it. Just consider it a favor to this old classmate of mine."

Xuebing responded, "I'll do it for your sake, but this time, their handling of the matter was inadequate. It was too much. If not for you coming forward, I wouldn't have dealt with them like this. Maybe you don't know the whole story, but their behavior was appalling. And this is their company, yet they dared to harass women openly. How can they deny such a serious matter in the end? It's beyond tolerable."

Chen Ying's voice came from the kitchen, "It's that, Mr. Wu, right?"

"Yes, it's him," Dong Xuebing confirmed.

"This is like a small mistake causing a big problem. Mr. Zhou is a good person. They've also apologized to you," Chen Ying interjected on their behalf, "Can you..."

Dong Xuebing understood her implication. He had always understood but hesitated in his reply, still feeling aggrieved, "Let's discuss it later."

"Xuebing," Chen Ying called out.

"Tea's ready," Dong Xuebing said.

"Okay, great," Chen Ying replied.

Dong Xuebing changed the subject, avoiding further discussion. He still hadn't calmed down, so he couldn't respond to his old classmate.

The hot water was ready five minutes later, and the tea was brewed. Dong Xuebing didn't drink any himself; it was all prepared for Chen Ying. He carefully held the steaming teacup with both hands, blowing on it softly a few times. His hands were too hot, so he hurriedly walked to the living room, "Chen Ying, here you go. Have some tea while it's hot. Where did you go?"

The living room was empty. No one was there.

Dong Xuebing was puzzled, "Chen Ying?"

"Yeah," her voice unexpectedly came from the bedroom, "I'm here."

Dong Xuebing didn't think much of it. "Oh, why did you go to the bedroom? I'll bring it over."

"Okay," Chen Ying replied. The door was slightly ajar, revealing a narrow gap.

Dong Xuebing didn't think of anything else and cheerfully kicked the door open with his foot, stepping into the bedroom. But this time, as soon as he saw what was inside, he almost tripped and fell. His eyes went black for a moment.

"Oh my god, what's going on here?"

Chen Ying stood in the room. Strangely, she had taken off all her clothes. If it were just the outerwear, it would have been one thing, but she had even removed her inner garments, leaving her completely naked. Her pink bra and other items were all thrown onto the bed. It was a shocking sight that caught Dong Xuebing completely off guard. He almost dropped the tea he was holding.

Chen Ying looked directly at him with confidence, "Come here."

Dong Xuebing was stunned, nearly stumbling over his own feet. "What the hell are you doing, taking off your clothes in the dead of winter? What's gotten into you?"

Chapter 1726

Afternoon.

At home.

Inside the master bedroom.

A stark-naked celebrity standing there motionless startled Dong Xuebing. His heart almost jumped out of his chest, and he was so shocked that his vision went dark momentarily. How could his old classmate Chen Ying suddenly strip off her clothes like this? It's not just surprising in the dead of winter; even in summer, this would be unheard of. Dong Xuebing had never heard of such a tradition among old classmates, whether between opposite sexes or the same sex.

Too provocative.

Too stimulating.

What on earth is going on?

Dong Xuebing's heart was pounding uncontrollably. Even though he had no such intentions, it was purely a normal physiological reaction upon seeing such a completely naked beauty.

"Chen Ying."

"Yeah."

"What are you doing?"

Dong Xuebing even used a polite "you" when addressing his old classmate, showing his shock. This was completely unexpected.

Chen Ying leisurely sat down on the bed, still completely naked.

"Why did you take off your clothes?" Dong Xuebing quickly turned his head away, and his face flushed. He didn't know where the teacup he held went when he came in. "Oh my, I can't believe this. Please hurry up and put your clothes back on."

Chen Ying remained unmoved, still sitting bare on the bed.

Dong Xuebing glanced at her and quickly averted his gaze again. "Come on, what are you implying? Just tell me directly. My heart can't take this. I've had heart problems since my grassroots days. Rainy days always make it hard for me to breathe, and my heart feels uncomfortable. It's an old problem, you know. Please, don't stimulate me. What's going on? I just brought you some tea. How did we end up here? Is my home heating so hot?"

Chen Ying's calm voice came from beside him. "You are in a different position now. You are already a leader. I thought about it, and this seemed like the only way."

Dong Xuebing was speechless. "What does me being a leader have to do with you taking off your clothes? We haven't seen each other in so many years, almost ten. I wanted to catch up and chat. How did we end up like this? I'm slow-witted. You should know that. Just tell me directly, yes or no."

There was a pause in the woman's voice. "I've already said it. Mr. Zhou arranged the first film I starred in. I even got the lead role, which is rare for graduates from real film schools. Mr. Zhou chose me. Later, I collaborated with him on many films and TV shows, for which I greatly owe him. Naturally, I want to repay him. Xuebing, you might not know, but you stopped the last film I worked on at the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television. I was the leading actress. I can't bear to see my film not even get released."

Released.

Oh, so that's what this is about.

Dong Xuebing slapped his forehead. He finally understood the situation, and his face couldn't decide whether to laugh or cry. But when he moved his hand away, he saw Chen Ying's impressive figure again, from top to bottom. He quickly closed his eyes. "Oh my, you should have told me earlier. Is that what this is about?"

Chen Ying said, "I did tell you earlier. You kept changing the subject and didn't give me a straight answer."

"I was still angry at that company and wanted to teach them a lesson. Make them learn from their mistakes. It was only a few hours ago. When you said that, I had to change the subject," Dong Xuebing said, feeling both amused and irritated. He didn't know what to say. "So, you thought I was just procrastinating and not making a decision."

Chen Ying remained silent.

Dong Xuebing: "Is that really what you think?"

Chen Ying hesitated for a moment and said, "Not exactly. This matter with Mr. Zhou's company is too important. It's important to me, too. I don't want to make any mistakes."

Dong Xuebing sighed in frustration, "Am I that kind of person in your eyes? You're my old classmate. How could I not give you face?"

Chen Ying said, "I don't know either."

Dong Xuebing quickly waved his hand, "Put your clothes on first."

"What about the company's matter?" Chen Ying asked.

Dong Xuebing smiled wryly, "I'll make a call shortly. Don't worry, your company's films and TV shows will be released as planned. Is that okay? Hurry and get dressed." He was indeed at a loss and felt quite awkward. Dong Xuebing had never encountered such a situation before.

"Alright," Chen Ying said.

"Then I'll go out first. Hurry up and get dressed. We'll talk after you're dressed," Dong Xuebing said, covering his eyes and quickly pushing open the door before closing it behind him.

Phew.

Wow.

This is just too much.

Dong Xuebing immediately went to the bathroom to splash his face with cold water. This helped calm him down a bit. He took a few deep breaths. It had almost been too much for him. There was no way around it; Chen Ying's aura and figure were too captivating. Plus, she hadn't been wearing a stitch of clothing. It would be strange if he weren't nervous. The more Dong Xuebing thought about it, the stronger those unusual thoughts became. He was the kind of guy who couldn't keep his cool around women. How could he resist such temptation?

Stay calm.

Stay calm.

Deep breaths.

Dong Xuebing dried his face and walked out of the bathroom. Glancing at the still quiet bedroom door, he sat on the sofa and started drinking plain water.

One sip.

Two sips.

Creak, the door opened, and Chen Ying walked out.

At this moment, she was fully dressed again, wearing a sweater and pants.

Dong Xuebing sighed in relief, but when he looked at her, he still felt his heart racing. Even though she was now fully dressed, he couldn't forget that just moments ago, she had been completely naked. Every inch of her skin and certain essential parts were vividly etched in Dong Xuebing's mind. Despite the clothes, his mind's eye still lingered on the previous scene, almost able to imagine what lay beneath her clothes. Thus, no matter how he looked at it, Dong Xuebing's face remained slightly flushed.

Those breasts.

Those hips.

Those legs.

They were all imprinted in his mind, unforgettable.

"Alright," Chen Ying approached with light steps.

Dong Xuebing coughed, "You scared me earlier, Chen Ying. I completely felt misunderstood. I didn't mean anything like that. Why would you even think that? Of course, I don't think you're beautiful. But after working for so many years, I've maintained integrity and done things properly. I couldn't do it if you asked me to take a crooked path. We were classmates from elementary school. You should know what kind of person I am."

Chen Ying said, "You were quite straightforward in elementary school."

Dong Xuebing broke into a sweat, "So now you're saying I'm not straightforward anymore as an adult?"

Chen Ying chuckled at his remark, "That's not what I meant. But after all these years apart, with society being so materialistic and full of temptations, I didn't know how you..."

She paused momentarily, sighed, and continued, "I'm sorry, I misunderstood you."

Pretending to be annoyed, Dong Xuebing said, "You're insulting my character."

Chen Ying sat down next to him. "It's my fault. I made assumptions, having been in this industry for so long and seeing too many unsavory things."

Upon hearing this, Dong Xuebing glared, "Did that Mr. Zhou threaten you? If you have any difficulties, you should have told me. They threatened you to come and paralyze me, and I still gave them face? Tell me what's going on. Don't hold back. Although I'm not a big shot, I still have some say in Beijing. If they've bullied you, damn it, I'll make sure they never rise again. And as for movies and TV shows, I'll make them regret it if one doesn't get released."

Chen Ying immediately responded, "No, it's not like that."

"Then what's going on?" Dong Xuebing asked.

"I came here voluntarily," Chen Ying explained. "I've said it before: Brother Zhou and the company have been kind to me. Without them, you wouldn't see the Chen Ying today."

"What about those unspoken rules?" Dong Xuebing was genuinely concerned, especially since she was his old classmate.

Chen Ying smiled, "Most of my films are done in collaboration with Brother Zhou. I rarely even attend hostessing events, let alone unspoken rules. That's why I have a special respect for Brother Zhou. He has never asked me to do anything I dislike. It's because I remind him of his deceased daughter. He's always been very protective of me. I'm telling you this, not because my film got stuck. You can ask people in the company; everyone knows. As for what you said about the unspoken rules in the entertainment industry, although it's chaotic, it's not as bad as people think. I think the system is more chaotic. It's just that the entertainment industry gets more attention, so naturally, there's more gossip and speculation. This creates the impression that everyone is subjected to the 'unspoken rules,' which isn't entirely accurate. Most of the stories are rumors."

Dong Xuebing still seemed unconvinced, "But what about today?"

Chen Ying fell silent momentarily, then said, "Today was the first time I ever considered succumbing to the 'unspoken rules'. Even though I'm married and you're my old classmate, I felt awkward about it. But I'm the kind who repays kindness, and Brother Zhou has been very good to me. If doing this can help him, I'm willing to accept it."

Dong Xuebing sighed, "Just don't do this again in the future."

Facing Dong Xuebing, Chen Ying admitted, "I feel awkward talking to you about this. But because you're my old classmate and we know each other well, I can somewhat accept it. Well, let's not talk about this anymore. I feel a bit embarrassed. I'm sorry for showing you this side of me."

Chapter 1727

Living room.

The two sat on the sofa.

After all, they had just been together, and there was a bit of awkwardness in the air.

"Xuebing, I'm sorry about today." After a long silence, Chen Ying finally broke the ice: "It was my petty-mindedness that led to misunderstanding you."

Dong Xuebing waved his hand, "It's alright. Maybe I didn't express myself clearly, which caused you to misunderstand."

Chen Ying looked at him and said, "Then, they seem quite anxious about the situation with Mr. Zhou's company. I didn't fully understand the previous situation, but if there was any oversight on my part, I apologize on behalf of them. I'm sorry. But those several film and TV projects concern the company's lifeblood. Can you help them out so they don't have to wait in vain? Consider it as a favor to me."

Dong Xuebing nodded, "Okay."

With Chen Ying having taken off her clothes, Dong Xuebing's mind had already moved on. He no longer had the energy to confront Mr. Zhou's people. His anger had dissipated.

Chen Ying blinked, "So..."

Dong Xuebing immediately said, "I'll make a call."

"Okay, thank you," said Chen Ying.

Dong Xuebing picked up his phone and walked to the kitchen, calling Ci Lifen, "Hey, Auntie, it's me."

"Xiaobin ah." Ci Lifen answered, "Is everything settled? Did you vent your frustration?"

"Yeah, I let it out. Thank you," Dong Xuebing paused, "As for those TV dramas and movies, how about we let their company review them?"

Ci Lifen chuckled, "Oh, this isn't like you, haha."

Dong Xuebing sighed, "What do you mean?"

"Auntie thinks you should give them a hard time a few more times. Why let them off so easily?" Ci Lifen understood Dong Xuebing's personality well.

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "As for the film that was stuck, I later found out it's starring one of my elementary school classmates. She came to me about it. I owe her this favor. You know me, Auntie, I'm a man of face. I can't push it away, so what do you think?"

"Alright, you decide how to handle it," Ci Lifen said.

"Thanks, Auntie. I'll treat you and Uncle to dinner tonight," Dong Xuebing said.

Ci Lifen smiled, "Forget it, I have something to do tonight. Let's talk about it another day. It's not that big of a deal."

After hanging up the phone, Dong Xuebing returned to the living room. "It's done."

Chen Ying stood up solemnly, "Thank you. I owe you a favor. In the future, if you need anything, I won't hesitate to help. Well, hehe, maybe I'm exaggerating a bit now that you're a Division chief-level leader. There's nothing you can't handle. I'm sure I'll be helpless, too."

Dong Xuebing said, "It's not like that. You're overestimating me."

Chen Ying said, "It's not an overestimation. You've made it big now. Before, you were behind me. Now, I'm looking up to you."

Dong Xuebing modestly responded for a few sentences.

Suddenly, ring, ring, ring, Chen Ying's phone rang.

Chen Ying took it out and glanced at it. She stood up and said, "Let me take this call first." She walked to the bedroom and closed the door. Then she answered, "Hello, Brother Zhou."

Mr. Zhou seemed to have received the latest news. "Yingying, well, thanks a lot this time."

"Never mind. The company is facing difficulties, so it's only right for me to help," Chen Ying said, sitting on the bed.

"Oh." Zhou nodded, seeming to have misunderstood, "You've suffered this time. Don't worry. In the future, I'll find a script suitable for you and ensure it brings you fame. You can leave it to me. I'm sorry about this time." In his view, Chen Ying must have slept with Dong Xuebing as per his suggestion, which eased Dong Xuebing's stance. Otherwise, the matter couldn't have been resolved so quickly. Mr. Zhou felt quite hurt about it. He had always treated Chen Ying like his own daughter, but this time, he had inadvertently pushed Chen Ying into the other's bed, making Chen Ying accompany him. Zhou was feeling very uncomfortable.

Chen Ying immediately responded, "You've misunderstood."

"Misunderstood what?" Mr. Zhou blinked.

"We didn't do anything. Xuebing gave me face. After I talked to him again, he agreed, so it's not as you think."

Mr. Zhou was taken aback, "Really?"

"Yes, I misunderstood my classmate too." Chen Ying truthfully explained, "He was also quite upset just now. My classmate is a very nice and didn't intend to trouble the company indefinitely."

"Well, that's good." Mr. Zhou sighed with relief. "It's still that you, Yingying, have a face, hehe. Anyway, no matter what, I owe you a lot this time." Mr. Zhou finally smiled, although others were unclear whether he believed Chen Ying's words.

"Don't say that. I've always owed you." Chen Ying said, "I didn't do much this time. It was my classmate being reasonable."

Mr. Zhou pondered momentarily, "Are you coming back today?"

A wry smile crossed Chen Ying's lips, "Why wouldn't I come back if you need something?"

"No, I mean, if you're returning to the company later, let's have a meal." Mr. Zhou said.

"No, I haven't seen Xuebing for a long time. I might have dinner with his family tonight and chat." Chen Ying also sensed something from Mr. Zhou's tone. She wanted to explain that she hadn't slept with Dong Xuebing, but on second thought, it wasn't easy to explain such things. Anything she said

might be misunderstood, so she decided not to say anything. Whether there was anything or not, Chen Ying knew in her own heart that it was sufficient.

After hanging up the phone.

Dong Xuebing looked at her, "Regarding the company..."

Chen Ying nodded, "The film has passed the review. Thanks."

"We don't need to be so polite." Dong Xuebing smiled, "By the way, if you ever want to shoot a film, I can help you find some connections. I may not be able to help much, but at least I can make it less difficult for you. And if you have any issues in the entertainment circle, call me. I can't promise everything else, but I can guarantee no entertainment company will dare to hinder you."

"Will that be too much trouble for you?" Chen Ying glanced at him.

"Not at all. It's just a few phone calls." Dong Xuebing said.

"Well then, thank you in advance." Chen Ying smiled, "To show my appreciation, I'll cook for you tonight."

Dong Xuebing grinned, "That sounds great."

"It's still early," Chen Ying glanced at the clock, "Let's chat for a bit."

"Of course." Dong Xuebing poured tea for her again, "Let's talk while we drink."

Chen Ying looked into his eyes and shifted uncomfortably, "First, I want to say, please forget about what happened before with my body."

Dong Xuebing blushed, "Ahem, I've already forgotten. It was just a misunderstanding."

Chapter 1728

In the evening.

Around seven o'clock.

In the residential compound, dinner is ready.

"Come, Xuebing, try what I made." Chen Ying brought the dishes over.

"Sure." Dong Xuebing picked up his chopsticks. "Mmm, delicious, delicious."

Chen Ying smiled. "Really? Hehe, then try this dish."

Dong Xuebing took another bite. "Mmm, all of it is good. You cook well, Chen Ying."

"I didn't know how to cook before. I learned after I got married," Chen Ying said.

"By the way, I haven't asked what your husband does and how you two met," Dong Xuebing looked at her.

They chatted while eating, discussing everyday matters, gradually easing away the awkwardness from earlier, no longer feeling so awkward.

Chen Ying smiled, "We met back when I graduated from college. It was through a mutual acquaintance. He's a Ph.D. researcher in scientific research, a few years older than me. At that time, I hadn't started acting yet and hadn't found a job. My family wanted me to get married first,

considering that a woman can't compare to a man. At twenty-three or twenty-four, I wasn't young anymore. We dated for half a year and then got married. After that, I started acting in TV dramas. My husband, well, how should I put it? He's straightforward and a bit rigid, but that's what I value about him. The entertainment industry is chaotic, but he's trusted me these years and taken good care of me. He's a good person, good to me."

"Being a good person is what matters," Dong Xuebing said.

"That's exactly how I see it," Chen Ying smiled. "He's doing scientific research now at a research institute."

"At the Chinese Academy of Sciences," Chen Ying said. "But it's classified research, so I don't know exactly what he does. He doesn't tell me either."

Dong Xuebing was taken aback. "The Chinese Academy of Sciences, under whose authority?"

Chen Ying thought for a moment. "In a group led by an academic surnamed Zhong."

"Zhong Lizhen?" Dong Xuebing said speechlessly.

Chen Ying was surprised. "Seems like it. How do you know her name?"

"I know her. Professor Zhong is related to my wife's family. Strictly speaking, I should address her respectfully as Aunt Zhong if I see her."

"That's quite a coincidence," Chen Ying exclaimed.

"Yeah, the world is small," Dong Xuebing chuckled. "If that's the case, your husband might have seen me too. Some time ago, I negotiated a project with the Chinese Academy of Sciences to come to Zhenshui County. Quite a few researchers came with it. Although I can't remember the names."

Chen Ying was lost in thought. "My husband is in Zhenshui County now and comes home only once a week, sometimes once every half month. You're the one who got that project over there?"

"Yeah, it was me. Half a year ago, I was still the Deputy County Mayor of Zhenshui County," Dong Xuebing said.

Chen Ying smiled teasingly. "I was wondering who was so unethical. So it was you. That place is remote, with scorching sun and strong winds. Every time my husband comes back, he gets darker, and his skin gets worse day by day. So, you're the one who brought that research project there?"

Dong Xuebing chuckled awkwardly. "I didn't know your husband was involved."

Chen Ying complained, "It's not easy for us to meet each other now."

"Alright, blame me, blame me. I'll talk to Professor Zhong and ask her to let your husband come back," Dong Xuebing said. "It's no problem."

Chen Ying hesitated a bit. "It's not necessary to bother."

"Not a bother at all," Dong Xuebing insisted.

"Then, I'll ask my husband first," Chen Ying said.

After dinner, Chen Ying took her phone to the bedroom and made a call. Ringing... answered.
"Hello, honey, where are you? Are you coming back this week?"

The man on the other end said, "I probably won't be coming back."

Chen Ying frowned. "Why are you so busy?"

"Got a lot on my plate. I'll head back next week," her husband said.

"I see," Chen Ying paused. "Today, I met an old classmate from elementary school. It seems like he was the one who arranged the project you're involved with in Zhenshui County. Your team leader, Professor Zhong, is also related to his wife's family. Do you know about this?"

The man was stunned. "What's his name?"

"His name is Dong Xuebing," Chen Ying replied.

"Dong Xuebing, the former Deputy County Mayor of Zhenshui County," the man said. "We had dinner together when I first arrived."

"Yeah, we're talking about him now. My classmate said if you want to transfer back to Beijing, he can help you contact Professor Zhong," Chen Ying said.

"That's not appropriate," the man said.

"I feel it's nothing major," Chen Ying said.

"Returning would be ideal mainly because I can't contribute much here regarding research. I'm just handling some basic computing issues. Anyone could do it; my expertise isn't being utilized. In Beijing, Professor Zhong has several more suitable projects for me, and I prefer them too—things like electronic pulses, which align with my background," the man explained.

Chen Ying blinked. "I'll speak to him for you."

After pondering for a moment, the man said, "If it's not too much trouble, sure."

After the call, Chen Ying said, "Xuebing, I'm counting on you for this."

"Alright," Dong Xuebing asked, "What position does your husband hold now?"

"He's currently a deputy director," Chen Ying said. "His name is Zhang Bin."

Dong Xuebing nodded and picked up the phone and dialed Zhong Lizhen without further ado. She eventually picked up after a prolonged wait, and Dong Xuebing greeted, "Hello, Professor Zhong."

Zhong Lizhen responded flatly, "What's the matter?"

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "Just a little something. How are you?"

"Eating," Zhong Lizhen's tone was sharp, as always.

"Oh, what are you having? Busy with some socializing outside?" Dong Xuebing asked.

"At home, eating instant noodles. I never socialize. You've known me long enough to know that," Zhong Lizhen replied.

Dong Xuebing chuckled awkwardly, "You shouldn't always eat instant noodles. Find some time to have something nutritious. Research can wait; I don't want to see you exhausted." Knowing Zhong Lizhen's workaholic nature, Dong Xuebing knew better than to push further.

"I'm busy. Get to the point," Zhong Lizhen said curtly.

"Alright, I have a friend named Zhang Bin under your supervision. You should know him," Dong Xuebing said. "He's currently involved in research in Zhenshui County. Can you consider transferring him back to Beijing and arranging him in a research group? Zhang Bin recently got married; his wife is my elementary school classmate. Though Zhang Bin wants to stay put, his wife has complained to me a lot. They haven't even had children yet and barely see each other once in a month. Naturally, his wife is unhappy. What do you say?" Dong Xuebing subtly tailored his words. He knew when to say what and understood Zhong Lizhen's preferences, so he didn't mention that Zhang Bin wanted the transfer but instead implied that it was his wife's desire for the couple to reunite.

That's the art of language.

The same situation, expressed slightly differently, yields vastly different results.

Zhong Lizhen fell silent for a moment. "Why do you always complicate things? Last time, I helped you secure the site in Zhenshui County, and you just left after claiming credit. Now you're asking me to pull strings again. You know I hate these personal favors."

Dong Xuebing disapprovingly said, "Look at you, making it sound serious again. It's because Director Zhang's spouse came to me in tears, and he's my old classmate. I can't just ignore it. Besides, our institute should have a humane side, too. Keeping a couple separated long-term is just not humane. It also affects Director Zhang's work mentality. I suggest finding an unmarried comrade to replace Comrade Zhang Bin."

Silence followed.

"Professor Zhong?"

"This is the last time."

"Alright, alright, the last time."

"Before next week, I'll arrange for him to return. That's it, goodbye."

"Alright, thank you so much, Professor Zhong. I'll..." Before he could finish, Zhong Lizhen had already hung up. Dong Xuebing coughed awkwardly, seeing Chen Ying still watching. He couldn't afford to lose face, especially after boasting earlier. Being hung up on was embarrassing. Even though he heard the line disconnecting, he continued with a feigned casual tone, "Alright then, I'll treat you to dinner sometime. Well, alright, you're busy. I'll hang up now."

He finally put down his phone.

Men, sometimes had to save face.

Losing face before anyone was bad enough, let alone in front of a female comrade, especially an old classmate.

Chen Ying immediately asked, "How did it go? Did it work out?"

"It's done," Dong Xuebing flopped onto the sofa. "Professor Zhong said she'll arrange for your husband to return to Beijing before next week."

Chen Ying was delighted. "Oh, thank you so much!"

"It's nothing, really," Dong Xuebing waved it off.

"I'll call my husband right away and tell him," Chen Ying said happily, indicating their strong relationship.

When she returned, Chen Ying said, "I don't know how to thank you enough. It's been quite a day. I always need your help with company matters, and now my husband's affairs, sigh." Chen Ying ran her hand through her hair and looked at him. "Tell me, how can I help you in return?"

"No need, we're classmates. It's what I should do," Dong Xuebing said.

"I just feel it's not quite right. I owe you too much," Chen Ying sighed.

Dong Xuebing chuckled, "Then sign an autograph for me. You're a big star now."

Chen Ying smiled and asked, "Where should I sign?"

"Sign on my shirt. Hehe, from now on, I'll be your fan," Dong Xuebing pointed to his shirt. "After you sign, I won't wash it."

Chen Ying giggled as she happily signed his shirt collar. But after finishing, she unexpectedly kissed Dong Xuebing's collar, leaving a lipstick mark. "There."

Dong Xuebing felt his neck tickle as if his lips had touched his warm and tender skin.

Chapter 1729

"Eight o'clock.

It's already dark early.

Chen Ying also bid farewell and left. Because this is the residential compound with many colleagues, Dong Xuebing didn't accompany her downstairs to avoid suspicion. He only walked her to her doorstep. Listening to Chen Ying's high heels clacking down the stairs, he closed the door and walked back, sighing. He immediately took off the clothes that had just been kissed by the big star, picked them up, and glanced at them. Hmm, the signature is lovely, and the imprint of red lipstick is also undeniable and a bit tempting. He took a deep breath and could vaguely smell the faint fragrance of the lipstick.

This old classmate.

What does it mean exactly?

Still kissing his own clothes collar.

Dong Xuebing also felt ambiguous, coughed several times but still neatly folded the shirt flat and stored it in the closet. Hmm, he felt a bit itchy on his neck. Dong Xuebing looked in the mirror and touched the area near the collar of his clothes. It felt a bit slippery and greasy, obviously residue from the lipstick. In the mirror, he saw Chen Ying's kiss had landed on his neck, and he was sweating. This was almost deadly for a buddy.

Dong Xuebing felt highly restless. Suddenly feeling very itchy, he quickly washed his face in the bathroom before feeling slightly better. Damn.

Out of cigarettes."

Dong Xuebing returned to the bedroom to get it.

He usually kept his cigarettes in the drawer. But as soon as he opened the drawer and took out a Zhonghua cigarette, Dong Xuebing's eyes shifted to the bed in the bedroom.

Pink.

What's that?

Curiously, Dong Xuebing walked up and lifted a corner of the blanket. Under the spread-out blanket, there was a pink thermal autumn garment, without pants, just that one piece. Dong Xuebing was astonished. He couldn't understand how this garment ended up under his blanket. After thinking for a moment, he figured it out. Chen Ying must have left it on the bed and under the blanket after taking off all her clothes earlier. When he came in and clarified things, Chen Ying probably didn't have the nerve to reclaim it hastily, so she left it covered by the blanket. Her mind was elsewhere, and it was normal for her to put on other clothes.

Dong Xuebing bent down and pulled up the pink autumn garment. After a moment's thought, he even kissed it on the nose. Hmm, fragrant. At that moment, the image of Chen Ying standing naked in front of him a few hours ago flashed through Dong Xuebing's mind again. Too stimulating.

Sweat.

What am I doing?

Dong Xuebing quickly threw away the clothes. He didn't have any improper thoughts about Chen Ying, this old classmate, not even the slightest. That was impossible. She looked good, had a good figure and temperament, and was a well-known celebrity. Every aspect of her was attractive to Dong Xuebing. But he knew well that things couldn't go this way. She was married, after all. Men might be somewhat lustful by nature. Almost all men are. Very few are not. But Dong Xuebing believed that judging whether a man is lustful should not be based on his thoughts but on his actions. If he could control himself and resist impulses, then it didn't count. You couldn't condemn someone just because of their thoughts. That would be a spiritual cleanliness and an overreaction, um, of course, Dong Xuebing wasn't doing well in this regard. He didn't think he was a gentleman, but at least he considered himself principled. For example, if he had done something with Chen Ying in the afternoon, the nature of it would have changed. He never engaged in such shady dealings.

Immediately, Dong Xuebing called Chen Ying and said, "Hey, Chen Ying, um, have you left? Where are you now?"

Chen Ying replied, "I'm in a taxi."

Dong Xuebing hesitated, "Your autumn garment..."

"What autumn garment?" Chen Ying was slightly puzzled.

"‘Your autumn garment ended up under our bedspread,’ Dong Xuebing chuckled.

There was a brief pause on the other end, and it sounded like Chen Ying was feeling around for something. 'Oh? I forgot to put it on, hehe, sorry about that.'

Dong Xuebing asked, 'So what should I do with it?'

'Just throw it away. I have several more at home,' Chen Ying replied.

Dong Xuebing hesitated, 'I'll keep it for now. You can pick it up when you come next time, and if you don't want it, we'll discuss it then.'

Chen Ying laughed, 'Throw it away. I'm also afraid your wife might see it and misunderstand.'

'It's okay. She's working in the South and doesn't usually come back,' Dong Xuebing said, feeling this conversation was a bit intimate and blushing.

'That works too.'

'Okay, take care on your way.'

'Sure, let's meet up again when you're free. We should gather our classmates from our class, too; it's been so long since we've seen each other, and I miss them.'

'Alright, you can arrange it.'

'Okay, see you another day. Bye.'

'Bye.'

Dong Xuebing hung up and looked again at Chen Ying's tempting autumn garment. He picked it up and stuffed it into the bottom of the closet, which initially smelled of disinfectant balls. However, the closet suddenly smelled fragrant as soon as the autumn garment was put in. He wondered if it was just psychological.

Chen Ying.

Chen Ying.

Dong Xuebing immediately opened his computer, went online, and searched for the movies Chen Ying had acted in. He copied and pasted the titles and briefly checked them out. Surprisingly, Chen Ying's acting was excellent, and she had the style of a star. Although Dong Xuebing wasn't very interested in these TV dramas and movies, Chen Ying found them quite enjoyable and lost track of time.

Ring ring.

Ring ring.

The phone rang urgently.

Dong Xuebing casually answered, 'Hello, who's this?'

On the other end, Fang Wenping's voice came angrily, 'Do you know what time it is?'

‘Ah,’ Dong Xuebing checked the time and realized it was nearly ten o’clock. He slapped his forehead, remembering he was supposed to pick up his daughter from Fang Wenping’s before eight, but he forgot. ‘Um, I just finished something, um, cough, I’ll go right away.’

Fang Wenping said coldly, ‘If you can’t make it within five minutes, don’t bother coming today.’

‘Oh my, come on, everyone has things to deal with. I’m coming right away, is Qianqian alright?’ Dong Xuebing blinked.

‘With me, Qianqian is fine. Don’t make excuses. Come over immediately; I have something to discuss with you,’ Fang Wenping said coldly. ‘Stop talking nonsense. Come over quickly; there’s something I need you to handle.’

Dong Xuebing was puzzled. Was there something Fang Wenping couldn’t handle herself? Did she need to involve him? Could there be some conspiracy?"

Chapter 1730

In the evening...

Night had fallen.

After receiving Fang Ping’s call, Dong Xuebing left his own home, walked down the corridor, and suddenly felt a gust of cold wind that made him shiver involuntarily. He tightened his coat collar and quickly headed towards a neighboring unit door not far away, then went upstairs.

Upstairs.

Fang Ping’s home.

Dong Xuebing knocked on the door, but there was no response, so he knocked again.

With a creak, the door opened, revealing Fang Ping’s stern face. "Why knock so many times? Did you think I’m deaf or something?"

Dong Xuebing retorted, "It’s freezing outside, hurry up."

Fang Ping opened the security door and entered the house without acknowledging him.

Dong Xuebing closed the door behind him without taking off his shoes. He confidently walked inside, looked around, and finally heard giggling from the bedroom’s direction. Soon after, the bedroom door creaked open, and another girl, who seemed around twenty years old or perhaps even younger, emerged. She was quite pretty, but her beauty was somewhat ordinary—she had the kind of look that marked her as a beauty without any distinctive features. Her demeanor seemed a bit frail, and her clothes were not very well put together, leaving a forgettable impression. The girl held Xiao Qianqian’s hand, playing with her as they entered the living room. Upon seeing Dong Xuebing, the girl hesitated slightly, appearing somewhat reserved.

Dong Xuebing glanced at her, not recognizing who she was, but paid it no mind, squatting down with a smile, "My good little darling."

Xiao Qianqian exclaimed, "Daddy!"

Dong Xuebing beckoned, "Come here, come here, let Daddy hug you."

Xiao Qianqian clumsily ran towards her father, legs scurrying, and threw herself into his arms, giggling. "Daddy!"

Dong Xuebing adored his daughter, immediately lifting her and kissing her forehead. "Such a good girl, did you miss Daddy?"

"Yeah!"

"You did?"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah!"

"So obedient, let Daddy kiss you again."

Dong Xuebing and his daughter enjoyed each other's company for quite some time. Though it had only been hours since they last met, Xiao Qianqian remained clingy, calling out to him non-stop. Dong Xuebing knew she wanted to play, so he stood up, lifting and spinning her around. This had been her favorite since she was a few months old. She became ecstatic, waving her arms and legs around excitedly, her face lit up with joy. Dong Xuebing then let his daughter perch on his shoulders, a typical Beijing phrase called "he'rlou," and wandered around the room with her, laughing. Xiao Qianqian even mimicked the classic pose of the Titanic, spreading her arms wide, though it was unclear who had taught her that. Nonetheless, she did it with such charm and cuteness.

One minute passed.

Five minutes.

After playing for a while, Dong Xuebing also felt tired. He sat down on the sofa with his daughter in his arms.

The pretty girl silently observed from the side, saying nothing and seeming introverted.

At this time, Fang Ping had gone to the bathroom, only emerging after a while without preparing tea for Dong Xuebing. She sat down directly at the other end of the sofa.

"Ah yi!" Xiao Qianqian immediately stretched out her hands, "Ah yi!"

Fang Ping smiled warmly. She took the little one from Dong Xuebing's arms and kissed her chubby cheeks. "Auntie will hold you."

"Hehe." With so many people playing with her, Xiao Qianqian didn't know how to express her joy, her mouth continuously smiling.

Dong Xuebing felt a bit puzzled and snorted inwardly.

Fang Ping genuinely liked children, so she held Xiao Qianqian for a while.

Only then did Dong Xuebing turn to the young girl and ask, "Who is this?"

"Director Dong, hello," the girl promptly replied. "My name is Sun Jia."

"Oh, hello," Dong Xuebing shook hands with her when she approached, still unsure who she was.

"You're very polite. But are you related to Fang Ping? How come you're so courteous to me? Are you also from the Discipline Inspection Commission? No, it can't be. How come I haven't seen you

before?" Although Sun Jia had no distinctive features, she was at least a cute girl. Dong Xuebing had a sharp memory for beauties; he would remember if he had seen her around the office. Generally, he would remember such things.

Dong Xuebing turned to Fang Ping and said, "You said you had something to talk to me about. What's up?"

Fang Ping smiled as she teased the child and then turned to Dong Xuebing with an instant icy glare. She looked at Sun Jia and said, "Jia is a friend's daughter."

Dong Xuebing nodded, and then...

Fang Ping continued, "In the past, I could just make a phone call, no problem. But now, with the merger of the General Administration of Press and Publication with the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television, your second aunt has become a top leader, and the top leaders are also close to your Xie family. The entire media sector is now your Xie family's backyard. If I try to contact anyone, especially if it involves a phone call, it might harm Jia Jia. Everyone knows our families don't get along. Even if I inform the entertainment companies below, it's not impossible. But if it's found out later that I made the connection, your second aunt might cause trouble, even if there isn't any. I'm telling you, Jia Jia is the daughter of an old classmate of mine, and I need to make sure this goes off without a hitch."

Dong Xuebing scoffed, "I don't understand."

Fang Ping pointed at him, "Regardless, you make sure it's done for me."

"Why should I? What do I owe you?" Dong Xuebing stared.

"You think taking care of a child is that easy?" Fang Ping looked at him and said, "You owe me. Just forget about it. Get it done for me."

Dong Xuebing was speechless.

He could manage it. It wasn't a big deal anyway, but he couldn't stand Fang Ping's tone and expression. It was too frustrating.

At this moment, Sun Jia walked out of the bathroom.

Dong Xuebing and Fang Ping stopped arguing in front of her.

But Sun Jia had heard their conversation and couldn't help but lower her head. "Aunt Fang, I... I'd better not go tomorrow. I'll..."

Fang Ping didn't show any hesitation. "Forget about it. Don't mind him. I've given you his phone number. Call him tomorrow. If he doesn't handle it within this week, come to me, and I'll settle the score with him."

Sun Jia hesitated, feeling embarrassed and seeing Dong Xuebing's attitude.

"No buts," Fang Ping asserted confidently. "It's settled. When you decide which entertainment company you want to visit, just tell him."

Dong Xuebing was speechless.

Sun Jia glanced at Dong Xuebing and bit her lip.

Dong Xuebing was also a bit taken aback by her expression. He hesitated momentarily, then reluctantly shook his head and said to Fang Ping, "I'm not doing this to save face for you. I'm doing it for Sun Jia. I see how hard it is for a young girl." After finishing, he turned to her and said, "Alright, I'll check it out for you. Leave me your personal information and phone number. If it's done, I'll call you."

Sun Jia was pleasantly surprised. "Really?"

"Yes," Dong Xuebing replied reluctantly.

"Thank you, Brother Dong. Thank you, Aunt Fang," Sun Jia said joyfully.

Dong Xuebing glanced at Fang Ping and whispered, "This time, I'm helping you, but you owe me another favor."

"I'm your superior," Fang Ping said confidently. "You must help me out. Don't give me all that nonsense."

Dong Xuebing was truly exasperated with her and felt like giving her a piece of his mind.