

Superstar 1531

Chapter 1531: The highest spot of the international entertainment circle!

The next day.

In the morning.

Zhang Ye was still fast asleep.

His entire family was already up and was having breakfast in the villa's living room.

Sisi kept turning around to look behind her with every bite. "Mommy, when will Daddy wake up?"

Wu Zeqing smiled and said, "Daddy is tired. Let him sleep for a little longer."

Sisi gave an OK.

Zhang Ye's mother nagged, "Eat the egg. Don't be picky."

Sisi widened her eyes and looked back again. "Nana, when will Daddy wake up?"

His mother rolled her eyes. "Why do you only know how to look for your daddy?"

His father doted on his granddaughter. He immediately shouted to the bedroom, "Little Ye, your daughter is looking for you."

After a while, Zhang Ye came out in his pajamas, yawning.

Sisi jumped off Wu Zeqing's lap and ran straight for Zhang Ye. "Daddy!"

Zhang Ye's sleepiness immediately disappeared. He smiled and bent down to pick his daughter up and gave her a kiss. "Hey, why are you looking for Daddy? Little one, you're quite clingy, aren't ya?"

Sisi got prickled by his stubble and started giggling.

Suddenly, the doorbell rang.

His mother said, "Who's that so early in the morning?"

Zhang Ye said, "It must be Little Tian and the others again, right?"

When the door opened, everyone in the house was startled.

They saw Wu Changhe and Li Qinqin standing right outside the door.

Zhang Ye was shocked. "Dad, Mom, what are you two doing here?"

Li Qinqin hurriedly said, "How could we not come over knowing that you're back? Your dad and I rushed over on a red-eye flight to get here. Quick, let me take a look at you. You didn't lose weight, did you? Did you have a hard time?" Then, after checking out Zhang Ye for a long time and squeezing his shoulders, she said, "Eh, why does it seem like you've put on weight instead?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I was treated well in there and ate well too."

Meanwhile, Wu Changhe was glaring at Zhang Ye the moment he stepped in. He said angrily, "Rascal, get over here!"

Zhang Ye refused to go over to him. He played dumb and said, "Dad, what is it?"

Wu Changhe pointed at him angrily and said, "Why didn't you tell me about something as important as you coming back?"

Zhang Ye immediately diverted the blame. "It wasn't me. Old Wu said not to tell you about it."

Wu Zeqing said with a chuckle, "Dad, it was me who told Little Ye not to tell you."

When Zhang Ye's mother heard that, she smirked.

His father was also amused.

When Wu Changhe heard that it was his own daughter who didn't want him to be informed, his anger lessened. "Why would you hide such an important matter from me?"

Li Qinqin looked at her husband. "You've been nagging about Little Ye every day for the past few years, so would anyone dare to inform you about something like that?" She then smiled and looked at Zhang Ye. "It's good that you're back, it's good that you're back."

Sisi said in a childish voice, "Grandpa, Grandma."

Li Qinqin said happily, "Aye."

When Wu Changhe saw Sisi, his expression instantaneously became one of joy. "Sisi, come here. Did you miss Grandpa? Does your daddy treat you well? If he doesn't, tell Grandpa about it. Grandpa will punish him for you."

Sisi replied, "Daddy is very good. Daddy even taught me how to play Go."

Wu Changhe harrumphed, "Didn't Grandpa teach you as well?"

Sisi said innocently, "Grandpa isn't as good as Daddy."

Wu Changhe got furious. "Who did you hear that from? Huh? I'm not as good as him? I can win against three of him in one go. Do you believe that?"

Zhang Ye seethed. "Hur hur."

Wu Changhe said, "What are you hurhur'ing about?"

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Dad, don't say that I'm trying to talk back. But if you insist that you can take on three of me and still win, I'm having none of that. It's more like I'll be the one taking on three of you and winning."

Wu Changhe was irritated. "You? Take on three of me? I'll take on four of you!"

"I'll take on five of you!"

“I’ll take on six of you!”

Li Qinqin said in a speechless manner, “You two are grown men. Why are you arguing the moment you meet? It’s been so long, yet the both of you are still the same.”

Everyone laughed.

Li Qinqin whispered to her son-in-law with a smile, “Don’t listen to your dad. When you won against PeterGo yesterday, he was showing off at the Qiyuan and being all proud.”

Zhang Ye laughed.

Wu Changhe said, “What are you two talking about?”

Li Qinqin turned around. “Good things about you.”

Wu Changhe thought of something and said to Zhang Ye, “Oh yes, there’s a batch of newcomers that came to Sanya as well. You met them yesterday, right? Afterwards, train them a little for me.”

Zhang Ye exclaimed, “I’m on vacation here. We’ll talk about it again when we get back to Beijing.”

Wu Changhe clearly knew what he was thinking. “Can I find you when we get back to Beijing?”

Zhang Ye said perfunctorily, “Alright, alright, I’ll do it.”

Wu Changhe said with a stern face, “Take this seriously. They’re all good saplings!”

Zhang Ye said, “I got it, Dad, I’ll teach them well.”

Wu Changhe said, “Oh yes, there’s a consultant role available at China Qiyuan. I’ve already accepted the appointment on your behalf.”

Zhang Ye said, “Why would I want to be a consultant?”

Wu Changhe said, “Don’t talk nonsense. It wasn’t easy for someone to beat PeterGo, so we can’t allow this honor to go to someplace else. It would definitely have to come to the Qiyuan.”

Zhang Ye did not argue back. “Alright, alright, handle it however you like.”

Li Qinqin smiled and said, “You’ve really done us proud this time. In fact, your dad and quite a few people at the Qiyuan were very worried. They were afraid that your skill level would drop and that you wouldn’t be able to defeat PeterGo since you haven’t touched Go in so long.”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “You’re thinking too much. My skill will never drop. It can only go up.”

Zhang Ye caught a glimpse of a huge stack of newspapers on the table. He picked them up and flipped through them. Looking at the reports, he broke into a smile.

It was his news all over the papers.

“PeterGo suffers a terrible defeat.”

“HEOR’s identity turns out to be Zhang Ye.”

“China Qiyuan has confirmed this news.”

“A former Heavenly King gets an early release from prison.”

“A long-forgotten name.”

“Heated discussions are set off across Asia.”

“PeterGo’s development team expresses: It is not a shame to have lost to Zhang Ye.”

Zhang Ye asked, “Where did all these newspapers come from?”

Wu Zeqing smiled and said, “We got them from the front desk of the hotel.”

His father said, “When we were watching the morning news, several of the TV stations were discussing you. You’ve come back too suddenly this time and left everyone in shock.”

Li Qinqin looked at him. “Now that everyone knows you’re back, what are your plans from here?”

Zhang Ye picked up a mango and started eating it. “I’ll rest for a bit first and think about it after getting back to Beijing.”

A delivery person arrived.

Wu Zeqing went to receive the package and handed it to Zhang Ye. “I bought you a new cell phone. Have a look.”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “It’s still my wife who is the meticulous one. What brand is it?”

Wu Zeqing said, “Ruihe, made in China.”

His mother said, “This is the best domestic cell phone brand in China right now.”

Zhang Ye spread his hands. “Whatever, I’ve never heard of it before.”

“But your SIM card is no longer usable.” Wu Zeqing said gently, “They’ve switched the card type. If you still want to use your original number, you’ll have to get the card replaced.”

Zhang Ye exclaimed, “Eh? They’ve switched to a new generation of SIM cards so quickly?”

Wu Changhe said, “Quick?” Do you know how many years it has been?”

Wu Zeqing said, “Many things are no longer the same.”

Zhang Ye said, “Alright, I’ll slowly get accustomed to it.”

Li Qinqin said with a hint of pain. “How have you been spending the past few years?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “About that, I won’t be able to finish telling you all about it even if I spoke for three whole days and nights. I’ll explain it in detail in the future when I have more time.”

Zhang Ye already knew that it would be very difficult for him to continue his journey in the entertainment circle after being away for close to four years. Actually, even before he was released, he had a premonition of how things had become. Although he hadn’t watched the Spring Festival Gala during the years of his sentence, and the restrictions on communications were rather strict, and it was all the more so for Zhang Ye, he still occasionally heard some news and developments from the people

around him. He could clearly tell that the world had changed. As such, Zhang Ye was already mentally prepared for this. Now that he was back, he would have to slowly get used to the environment again.

How should he proceed from here?

What direction should he take?

What was going to be the focus of his work?

How was he going to build a team?

All of this needed re-examining.

However, there was one thing that he had already decided on. Zhang Ye's return this time was not going to be for trivial reasons. He wasn't just going to do this to make a living. He had never forgotten about his goal and ambition. Until the day he rose to the top of the international entertainment circle, he would never stop in his tracks. This was the one and only thing that he was stubborn about. No matter what happened, no matter how bad the circumstances, he had never wavered on his path.

Chapter 1532: The most popular Internet celebrity currently?

On the same day.

In the afternoon.

In the shade on the beach.

Zhang Ye and Tian Weiwei were playing a game of Go. A group of China Qiyuan's newcomers had surrounded them and were watching the game, fixated. Even though Zhang Ye had given Little Tian a two-stone handicap, it was still very hard to distinguish who had the upper hand. The newcomers were watching this game with dropped jaws and gasps. Master Tian was the current world number one Go player, the person who was regarded as the most highly skilled of the active professional players. Who here had ever seen Tian Weiwei receive a handicap when playing against others? And it was even a handicap of two stones? And he still got pushed around? Only then did they understand the level of skill that Zhang Ye possessed!

A game was completed.

After accounting for compensation, Zhang Ye won by two and a half points.

Tian Weiwei had lost convincingly. "I've never been able to beat you since last time. I thought that my skill had improved by a lot in these few years and had really looked forward to playing against you after you were released. It looks like I've thought too highly of myself. At the level you're at, I won't be able to win against you no matter how many years have passed. We're at completely different levels."

Chen Qiqi shouted, "Lord Zhang is almighty. You're still as good as ever!"

Zhang Ye said in amusement, "Didn't you say that I was already a thing of the past?"

Chen Qiqi played dumb. "Ah? Did I ever say that?"

A newcomer exposed her. "Yes, you said that before."

Chen Niannian added, "You said it when we were traveling here on the bus."

Chen Qiqi raised her hand to hit them. "Do you all want to die!"

Everyone laughed. "Hahahaha."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "But you were right. The Go world and the entertainment circle are two entirely different places. After all, this bro hasn't shown his face in too long, so how many people still remember me? And how many people still like me? I don't even have an idea of that. The entertainment circle isn't as simple as the Go world."

Tian Weiwei said with a sigh, "Too much has changed in recent years."

Zhang Ye asked, "How's Old Yao doing?"

Chen Qiqi said, "You mean Yao Jiancai?"

Zhang Ye said, "Yes."

Chen Qiqi said, "I don't think there's a lot of news about him."

Chen Niannian said, "What do you mean by not a lot of news about him? He's still acting. But it's just that he's always been playing the antagonists these days and doesn't have any particularly well-known shows that he's in, so his popularity has dropped as a result."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "That fellow, has he not been doing any crosstalks?"

Tian Weiwei said, "Without you partnering with him, Teacher Yao isn't able to do it."

Zhang Ye asked further, "How has Shanshan been doing?"

Tian Weiwei replied, "That old classmate of yours?"

Zhang Ye said, "Yes."

"Teacher Shanshan is still very popular. In the past two years, she went to study the performing arts. Now, she rarely takes on host roles and is usually acting."

Zhang Ye exclaimed, "Wow, she's turned to acting now?"

Chen Qiqi giggled, "Teacher Shanshan's acting pay is very high too, so most productions are unable to afford bringing her on board."

Tian Weiwei said, "But compared to those popular young studs, her salary is still way off from theirs."

Chen Niannian said, "That's right."

Zhang Ye said, "Has Old Zhang really retired?"

Tian Weiwei answered, "Yeah, she's retired from the entertainment circle."

Zhang Ye said, "What about Sister Lan?"

“You mean Heavenly Queen Xu Meilan?”

Zhang Ye said, “Is she still a Heavenly Queen?”

Tian Weiwei: “Yes, she is. But I think she’s only hanging on because of her past status. The rise of the young studs has had a really big impact on your generation of celebrities. Heavenly Queen Xu’s popularity in recent years has dropped by quite a bit. If it goes on like that, she probably won’t be able to keep her status as a domestic S-lister for much longer.”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “Even Old Xu can’t fend them off?”

Tian Weiwei gave a wry laugh. “All of the veteran celebrities from back then have been hit. You still remember Jiang Hanwei, right? The martial arts superstar who was an A-lister? I heard that he even had a few disagreements with you in the past? Jiang Hanwei has now become a C-list artist in China. When that scandal broke, his popularity took a big hit and he plummeted down the rankings.”

Zhang Ye continued asking, “How is Spring Garden doing?”

A teenage girl blinked and said, “Who is Spring Garden?”

Zhang Ye exclaimed, “You don’t even know Spring Garden?”

Tian Weiwei explained, “She’s young and wouldn’t have paid attention to such matters at that time. For us, we haven’t heard the name of Spring Garden in a long time. They disbanded a few years ago.”

Zhang Ye said in disbelief, “Disbanded?”

Tian Weiwei scratched his head, “I think it had something to do with the talent agency? They didn’t disband of their own accord, but they went solo afterwards. With the group disbanded, their popularity would of course not be as high as before.”

Zhang Ye asked, “What about Grandma Zhang Xia?”

Tian Weiwei shook his head. “We haven’t heard much from her these few years, nor do we see her appearing on the Spring Festival Gala anymore. I suppose she has also retired from the scene? It’s really difficult for the older generation of artists to make a living. There’s hardly any events for them to take, and many of the older artists that I like have retired, which is quite a pity. The feeling that we get from the entertainment industry these days is that there is an ongoing generational change. The only thing that no one expected is how this generational change is happening so quickly.”

Old Zhang had retired?

Old Yao had been left in the dust?

Spring Garden was disbanded?

Old Xu was unable to hang on for much longer?

After asking all those questions for a long time, Zhang Ye’s expression was one of lament.

He said, “Then who’s popular now?”

Chen Qiqi said, “Lord Zhang, you wouldn’t know even if we told you.”

Chen Niannian giggled, "You definitely wouldn't know any them."

All of a sudden, a shout rang out from a distance away.

"Wow!"

"It's a celebrity!"

"Oh my God!"

"It's Dandan!"

"It's her in person!"

Several young tourists reacted in a crazed manner!

A young man swimming in the sea nearly choked on water. Then he started swimming in a hurry to the shore and didn't even stop to catch his breath before running over!

The people from the Qiyuan were also dumbfounded!

Tian Weiwei looked very surprised!

Chen Qiqi kept screaming, "It's Dandan! I love her to death!"

When Zhang Ye saw that person, he was startled.

The people from the Qiyuan all jumped to their feet and looked over.

Chen Niannian pointed and said, "Lord Zhang, weren't you just asking about who the current hottest celebrities are? She's one of them. That's the most popular Internet celebrity in recent years!"

Zhang Ye was taken aback. "The most popular Internet celebrity?"

Tian Weiwei said, "Yeah! In recent years, other than the young studs sweeping the entertainment circle, there's another group of people who have risen up, the Internet stars! The kind of popularity they enjoy is entirely different from the Internet celebrities of your time. The ones now are really, really popular. Their popularity can even be said to rival the mainstream entertainment circle's celebrities."

A newcomer Go player shouted, "What's she doing here?"

Another Go player said, "Did Dandan come to Sanya on vacation too? We're so lucky! We managed to bump into her here! Did she come here to shoot her videos?"

Chen Qiqi cried out, "No, we can't let the chance slip. I'm going to get her signature!"

Chen Niannian shouted, "I'm going too, I'm going too!"

Tian Weiwei fell silent. Then he called out to Chen Qiqi, "Qiqi, get one for me too."

Chen Qiqi exclaimed, "Why don't you go over yourself?"

Chen Niannian glanced at her sister. "What's Master Tian's status? Would it be appropriate for him to go over himself?"

Zhang Ye was amused. "Little Tian, you're chasing after idols too?"

Tian Weiwei coughed in embarrassment. "No, I just like her a little."

Chen Qiqi said, "Lord Zhang, when Dandan became popular, you were still not out of jail yet. You haven't seen her videos, but they're especially funny and a large portion of the younger people in the country are her fans!"

A distance away.

That female celebrity was surrounded by a few people.

Nobody didn't know if they were her agents or her assistants, but they started shielding her from the crowd.

The female celebrity was looking around when she suddenly saw the Qiyuan's people. Her eyes reddened and she ran over without caring about her image!

When the other two girls saw this, they also ran over, screaming!

Tian Weiwei was dumbfounded. "Ah?"

Chen Qiqi said in surprise, "They're running towards us?"

Chen Niannian was at a loss. "Damn, what's going on?"

Twenty meters.

Ten meters.

Five meters.

Zhang Ye broke into a smile and stood up.

The next moment, under the dumbfounded gazes of everyone, the female celebrity jumped right into Zhang Ye's embrace and started crying. "Bro! You're finally back!"

Zhang Ye patted Cao Dan on her back. "Yes, I'm back, I'm back."

Behind her, the other two girls rushed up one after another!

His third sister wailed loudly, "Bro! I missed you so much!"

Zhang Ye said, "I also missed you guys."

When his second sister saw them crying so hard, she pretended to rub her eyes. "Bro, why didn't you come back on Lunar New Year's Eve? Are you still going to give us the New Year money?"

Zhang Ye rapped his second sister on the head. "Girl, you're always thinking about money!"

His second sister giggled.

His three cousins kept hugging Zhang Ye and did not let go of him.

Zhang Ye said, sounding relieved, "You've all grown up."

His third sister said in tears, "Bro, you've become an old uncle. Look at your wrinkles!"

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "I'm past 30 now, so how could I not have wrinkles?" Then, he patted his eldest younger sister on the head and said, "Stop crying. You're all grown up and a big star now, so why are you still acting like a child?"

His eldest younger sister said in a spoiled manner, "So what if I'm a child!"

Zhang Ye asked, "Where's Grandpa and Grandma?"

His second sister said, "They're all here. They're in the villa at the moment."

Zhang Ye said, "Aiyo, but I'll be going back in a few more days."

His eldest younger sister said, rubbing her eyes, "Grandma and Grandpa said they couldn't wait and insisted on coming with us."

"Let's go, let's go. Go inside quickly." Zhang Ye hurriedly pulled his sisters towards the villa.

The people from the Qiyuan were left standing there with dropped jaws!

They had only just found out that Cao Dan, the most popular Internet icon in recent years and an idol of the new generation, was actually Zhang Ye's younger sister!

What is with this?

Isn't this news huge?!

Chapter 1533: The team returns!

By the beach.

The villa was crowded with people.

Zhang Ye's first uncle, his first aunt, grandpa, and grandma were all here.

Zhang Ye pushed open the door and went in. "Grandpa, Grandma!"

His grandma immediately looked over. "Little Ye! Come and let your grandma have a look at you!"

Zhang Ye jogged up to her and said in pain, "Aiyo, why has all of your hair grayed?"

"I'm old, so of course my hair has grayed." His grandma touched his face and said, "Did you suffer?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "No."

His grandpa said, "How could you not have suffered? Look at how tan you've become."

Zhang Ye said guiltily, "I was going to go back in a few days to pay you two a visit. You're so old, so why did you fly over here?"

His grandma said matter-of-factly, "My grandson has returned home. How could I not come?"

His grandpa laughed and said, "Don't you know how your grandma is? No one could dissuade her."

The entire family was thrilled to see Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye also felt the same. "It's all my fault that I couldn't be by your sides for these past few years. There were quite a bit of restrictions, and I wasn't even allowed to have a phone call. I've been so worried about your health. Is everything alright at home?"

His grandma smiled and said, "It's all good, it's all good, everything is fine. When you weren't around, Zeqing often came to visit us."

His grandpa said happily, "Yes, we're still in good health. The children have all grown up too."

His grandma said, "Your eldest younger sister has become a big star."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I just heard about it."

His eldest younger sister said in embarrassment, "Grandma, what big star are you talking about? How big a star can I be in the presence of my brother?"

"Well, that's not true." Zhang Ye chuckled. "You're now more popular than me."

Zhang Ye's mother said in amusement, "Right, you're much more popular than him."

His eldest young sister blushed. "No, I'm not."

His first aunt was excited the moment they talked about this. "Little Ye, your sister is in this position because of your guidance. Then there's the ideas for the videos you wrote for her. They have been very useful for Dandan in these few years, and the reception to them were all great. She even has her own team and has bought an apartment by herself too."

Zhang Ye smiled. "Impressive. I saw that a lot of the people from China Qiyuan are also fans of hers. But why do they not know that you're my sister?"

His first uncle said, "Dandan did not ride on your name in these past few years, so a majority of the people still do not know about it."

Zhang Ye lightly nodded. "Our little lady is all grown up."

His second sister giggled, "Bro, the main reason was that your reputation had already gone down the drain. The incident that happened back then was so major that no one dared to mention your name, so who would dare to ride on it?"

Zhang Ye laughed and pretended to raise a hand against her to scare her.

His second sister immediately admitted defeat. "Bro, I was in the wrong."

The entire family laughed.

Zhang Ye joked, "Looks like I'll have to rely on my sister to guide me then."

His eldest younger sister exclaimed, "Aiya, don't tease me like that."

Zhang Ye asked, "Where are you on the domestic celebrity rankings?"

His eldest younger sister said with a smile, "I'm at the bottom of the B-list."

Zhang Ye said in surprise, “You’re that highly ranked? Then aren’t you even further ahead than Jiang Hanwei?”

His mother smiled and said, “Your eldest younger sister is not a normal person anymore. Her social relations in the entertainment circle are much better than yours, so she’s a genuinely big star.”

His third sister asked, “Who in the industry wouldn’t have better social relations than my brother, though?”

His mother was amused. “That’s true.”

Zhang Ye was speechless.

His eldest younger sister asked, “Are you thinking of making a comeback to the entertainment industry?”

Zhang Ye said, “That’s right.”

His eldest younger sister said, “That’s great. I can finally fight alongside with my brother.”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “I’m all alone. I don’t have any money or anyone working for me, so how can I fight any battles? I’m still unsure of what I should do after I come back. When I was popular back then, I had a greater say in things, and my past performances had helped me a lot as well, so everything that I did was relatively easy for me. But that isn’t going to work anymore. I have to start all over from nothing. The industry is dominated by young guns these days, so even if I were to send out a message that I’m coming back, I won’t be able to make much of an impact.”

His eldest younger sister said, “I can’t compare to those hunks either. They’re too popular to compete against.”

Zhang Ye said, “When I get back, I’ll have to build my team up again before I think about what to do next. I just wonder if my old friends still want to join me in wading into these muddy waters again.”

At this moment, Cao Dan’s cell phone rang.

She answered and spoke softly on the phone. Then, after hanging up, she looked at Zhang Ye and said, “Bro, I have a surprise for you.”

Zhang Ye blinked. “What surprise?”

His eldest younger sister smiled mysteriously. “Come outside with me.”

She pushed open the villa’s door.

Outside in the yard were over a dozen people standing in a crowd.

Zhang Ye looked astounded!

When the group of people saw him, some of them became very excited and others started crying!

“Director Zhang!”

“Boss!”

“Sob sob sob!”

“You’re really back?”

All of them rushed up!

Some were screaming!

Some were crying tears of joy!

Looking at all those familiar faces, Zhang Ye also got very excited!

Ha Qiqi!

Zhang Zuo!

Wu Yi!

Tong Fu!

Little Wang!

They were all here!

The people from Zhang Ye’s Studio were all here!

Zhang Ye said in disbelief, “Why are you all here?”

His eldest younger sister smiled and said, “Director Ha came to me to find out where you were, so I told her. As for the rest, I know nothing.”

Zhang Ye looked at the almost unrecognizable Ha Qiqi. “Sister Ha, when did you start keeping your hair short?”

Ha Qiqi smiled and said, “I cut it short the year you left. Later on, I got used to having short hair and didn’t bother growing it out anymore.”

Zhang Ye looked at Zhang Zuo. “Brother Zuo, you are sporting a beard now?”

Zhang Zuo dried the tears at the corners of his eyes and smiled. “Yeah, thought I should change styles.”

“Little Tong, how’s your girlfriend doing?” Zhang Ye asked.

Tong Fu said, scratching his head, “In reply to my boss’s question, she’s no longer my girlfriend. We held our wedding ceremony last summer, so she’s my wife now, and she’s recovered well too.”

Zhang Ye said happily, “Great, I’ll give you your wedding gift money at a later date.”

His eldest younger sister said at this moment, “My brother was just talking about you all a moment ago.”

Ha Qiqi asked, “What about us?”

Zhang Ye said, “I was just wondering if you all were willing to join me in wading into these muddy waters again. After so many years, all of you must have sought out better opportunities elsewhere, and

everyone should probably be doing quite well in their current jobs. Meanwhile, I'm broke with nothing to my name. Honestly, I would like for everyone to come back, but I find it difficult to ask."

Ha Qiqi smiled and said, "Who says we're doing well? We've been struggling these few years and were thinking of changing jobs when you came back."

But Little Wang exposed her. "Don't believe her, Director Zhang. Sister Ha is a very famous director and can independently take on her own productions. Be it documentaries or variety shows, she has helmed them all. Central TV even wanted to get Sister Ha to join them as the assistant director for this year's Spring Festival Gala, but she turned them down. The moment she learned you had come back yesterday, Sister Ha submitted her resignation notice. Then she called us one by one to ask if we were willing to come back and work with you."

Ha Qiqi shot her a look. "Girl, you talk too much!"

Little Wang stuck out her tongue. "I'm just telling the truth, that's all."

Zhang Ye was very touched. "Old Ha, why would you do that?"

Ha Qiqi was just about to answer.

But Little Wang cut in again and said, "Sister Ha says that you have just returned and surely lack some people and ammo, so this is the time that you need us the most. With the return of the Heavenly King, if the Heavenly King's original team did not get back together with him, the story would somehow feel a little less wonderful."

Ha Qiqi opened her mouth, wanting to speak.

Little Wang said, "Sister Ha also said—"

Ha Qiqi was angry and amused. "Do you want to continue talking or can I talk?"

Little Wang said, "Ah, please go ahead, please go ahead."

Actually, there wasn't anything more to say.

The moment Zhang Ye saw them again, he understood everything.

Zhang Ye asked, "So all of you have already resigned?"

Zhang Zuo laughed. "Yes."

Tong Fu said in high spirits, "We still want to follow you!"

Wu Yi belly laughed and said, "Without us in the entertainment circle, it won't be lively at all!"

Ha Qiqi smiled. "It's time we cause some trouble for them again."

Zhang Ye laughed. "You guys, you're all really brave, huh? Haven't you suffered enough? How much trouble did we used to get into? How much scolding did we used to attract? How many people have we offended? After all these years, all of you are still willing to follow me? Alright then, since you're not afraid of death, I don't have anything to fear either. Let's start from the beginning again!"

Zhang Ye's family members all looked at one another.

His mother was shocked.

His grandma was relieved.

His first uncle was impressed.

His sisters were clapping and cheering.

A mass resignation!

And a collective return!

Not a single person was missing!

In all of China and all over the world, there would absolutely not be another celebrity team who could do this! How much trust did this require? Everyone was certain about this!

Ha Qiqi laughed and said, "Director Zhang, you didn't lose your skill, right?"

Zhang Zuo also laughed. "Can you still direct? Can you still fight? Can you still sing?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "What do you think?"

He turned around and slowly walked into the living room, then towards the piano where he sat.

Everyone followed him.

Zhang Ye's fingers gently touched the keys as he played a melody.

He closed his eyes and then opened them again. There was a smile and a tinge of lament in his gaze.

He sang.

"All of yesterday's glory

"has turned into a distant mem'ry.

"I've toiled and labored for half my life,

"Tonight, I again enter the struggle stormy.

"I cannot just go with the flow,

"for the sake of my loved ones.

"I must stand firm no matter how hard or tough it grows,

"all for the sake of those hopeful eyes aglow.

"As long as there's faith, the dream lasts!

"There's still love between Heaven and Earth.

"Look beyond the ups and downs in life!

“All it takes is to start over again!”

Several years ago, Zhang Ye sang this song.

Several years later, he was singing it again, albeit with a very different mood.

Chapter 1534: Does Old Lian Po still enjoy his food?

Several days later.

Several photographs were published in the news.

“Zhang Ye arrives back at Beijing!”

“Zhang Ye and his team show up together at the capital’s airport!”

“The Heavenly King’s team regrouped?”

“Sending out a clear signal: Zhang Ye to take a shot again at the entertainment circle!”

“In the entertainment circle now, could there still be a place for Zhang Ye?”

“Has this Heavenly King become a thing of the past? Can he still take on the industry?”

Some media outlets and television stations even did man-on-the-street interviews on this topic.

A reporter asked, “Do you know who Zhang Ye is?”

A girl around the age of thirteen said, “Zhang Ye? I don’t know who that is, but I think I’ve heard my parents mention that name before.”

The same reporter asked, “What’s your opinion of Zhang Ye’s return to the entertainment circle?”

A young man in his 20s said, “I’m not optimistic of his chances. Zhang Ye, Zhang Yuanqi, Ning Lan, Jiang Hanwei, everyone’s memories of that era’s stars are becoming fuzzier and fuzzier these days. The Heavenly Kings and Queens from back then are all old now. The only person left from that generation who’s still active in the public eye is Xu Meilan, right? But even Sister Lan can’t compare to her former glory days.”

The reporter asked, “Are you optimistic about Zhang Ye’s return?”

An auntie in her 60s said, “Zhang Ye? I liked him a lot in the past. If he were to make a comeback, I would surely pay attention to it. I just wonder if he is still as capable as before after so many years away. After all, he should probably be quite affected having been locked up in jail for so many long. Hai, everyone prefers the young, hot stars these days. They are young and beautiful, with an innocent outlook and are untainted by the industry, so I think most people wouldn’t really care about Zhang Ye’s return. The world’s most dangerous hacker in a hundred years, the entertainment industry’s hooligan of the yesteryears, none of his nicknames portray a positive image, so why would anyone still acknowledge him? I don’t know, I suppose we’ll have to see what kind of work he comes up with.”

...

Beijing.

In a sedan that was traveling on the highway back from the airport.

Zhang Ye gazed at the city from the inside like he was a country bumpkin.

He asked, "Eh, where has the shopping mall gone?"

Ha Qiqi replied, "They tore it down long ago."

Zhang Ye asked, "Wasn't there a movie theater here in the past?"

Zhang Zuo said, "It's moved away. They shifted to Dongcheng ¹."

Zhang Ye said, "Whoa, the changes are so big? I can't even recognize the roads anymore."

Ha Qiqi said, "Yeah, the changes that happened over the past few years are indeed not small."

Little Wang said, "Director Zhang, you have to call us along the next time you go out. Otherwise, you're gonna lose your way, and we won't be able to locate you."

Everyone had a laugh.

Zhang Zuo asked, "So when do we start work?"

Zhang Ye thought about it. "Tomorrow, I guess?"

Zhang Zuo said, "Alright, we'll go and make the necessary arrangements then."

Zhang Ye said, "Is our studio still around?"

Ha Qiqi shook her head. "That's something I really don't know about. We haven't been in contact with Sister Rao these three years. After your incident, the studio staff disbanded."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "How much money do we have left?"

Little Wang gave a bitter smile. "You're out of your mind. There's not even a single cent left."

Zhang Ye exclaimed, "Ah? We're that poor?"

Ha Qiqi laughed as she explained, "We didn't pocket the money for ourselves, just to be clear. After your court sentence, quite a few advertisers and business partners came over to request compensation due to your breaking of the contract. Whether it was for your previous endorsements or the other projects that you had taken, the terms were not up yet, so there was no way for us to argue with them on that. After all, we didn't fulfill our part of the contract, so we could only dip into the studio's funds to pay them off. When we realized that there wasn't enough money left, all of us planned to split the debt among ourselves and were prepared to fork out 200,000 RMB. However, your wife did not agree to it. Chief Wu said that this was your family's own matter and that we shouldn't have to dip into our own pockets for it. In the end, we didn't really end up helping much at all."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "There shouldn't be any reason for you guys to do that anyway."

Zhang Zuo complained, "That's why money is a problem for us right now."

Zhang Ye smiled. "Take it slow. We'll slowly come up with a way to solve that. As long as everyone is around, nothing will be too difficult to handle."

Ha Qiqi also smiled and said, "Right, we also started with nothing back then, and we still managed to turn the entertainment circle upside down. What we are going through is just a matter of starting from scratch again. There will surely be difficulties along the way, and the road ahead will be tough, but as long as we people are around, there's nothing that can't be solved. On the day we found out that you were back, we thought this through. The first shot that we make with your return will definitely have to be well-taken. It will have to be with a bang and executed as beautifully as we can pull it off. This is of the utmost priority for us!"

Zhang Ye said, "That's what I think too."

Ha Qiqi said, "Many netizens are saying that this is now the era of the young stud celebrities, and that someone like you is a thing of the past. But I don't think that's true. Our popularity back then was really high, so it's impossible that it would just disappear like that. There's just no reason for that. The only problem is that we've been away for too long, so a lot of people have started forgetting about your glory days. The thing that we have to do right now is to invoke the memories of everyone and to gather former fans. If we can really find an entry point and have something to propel us back in, I believe that it won't take much effort at all. All we might need is a new work from you for us to regain our past glory. At that time, we can tell the world that we're back, that the Heavenly King has returned, and that he is still the same Heavenly King he was before!"

Zhang Ye mumbled to himself, "Heavenly King?" Then he said, "An employee called me yesterday to ask if I wanted to renew my popularity rank. What do you guys think?"

Ha Qiqi immediately said, "I don't suggest that we renew your rank at this time."

Zhang Zuo agreed, "Right, we must not renew the rank at this time. It's been close to four years, so no one knows what position you might be at right now. No, I should say that your rank is probably very low. Since that's the case, why don't we ignore the international and Asian celebrity rankings for now? We should recharge and regain our popularity before we think about this matter again."

Zhang Ye nodded. "Alright."

Zhang Zuo said, "Starting tomorrow, we will begin reaching out for partnerships and seeking cooperation."

Wu Yi said, "Right, let's pull off another big one!"

Little Wang said, "Long live Zhang Ye's Studio!"

Everyone was full of fighting spirit.

...

Up ahead.

They had reached Zhang Ye's place.

Ha Qiqi and the others bade them farewell and drove off. Wu Zeqing had gotten her secretary to send Zhang Ye's grandparents, her parents, and the others back to their respective homes, while Zhang Ye's parents and Wu Zeqing took another vehicle back here. They had arrived first and were already out in the yard unloading their luggage.

Zhang Ye went forward to help them.

The house was still the same old house, but once on the inside, the interior couldn't be more beautiful.

Zhang Ye was taken aback. "Whoa, did you renovate the place?"

Wu Zeqing smiled. "I got it renovated last year. You like it?"

Zhang Ye said, "It's grand; it's really beautiful."

Sisi ran up and reached out to him. "Daddy, carry me."

Zhang Ye dotingly picked her up. "What is it?"

Sisi pointed upstairs. "I wanna show you my room. It's really pretty."

Zhang Ye kissed her. "Alright, bring Daddy to have a look around."

Once upstairs, he stuck his head into every room to have a look.

Zhang Ye felt an indescribable warmth in his soul. Coming home again after so long was very difficult to put into words. Everything looked great to him, and all of it made him very happy.

Wu Zeqing came over at this time.

"This is your study. I refurbished it for you, and you can draw in here if you like. It's also soundproofed with new panels that I got added in. You won't hear anything on the outside when you're inside. In the future, you can have more peace while you're working."

"That's good."

"And here's the master bedroom. I think you'd like the decor, so I got people to do it up that way. Look, how's this table? If you're tired, you can also lie down in bed to work. The table is adjustable and can be pulled in or out. It's pretty convenient."

"Yes, that's really good."

"We actually have a basement at home as well, but I've never used it before. It's not a big area though, so I've never furnished the interior. I thought that you'd find it useful after you got back, so I renovated it as well. It's been turned into a recording studio, so you can sing and record at home. But it's just that I haven't been able to get the equipment in time. I thought you'd be back after another few years, so I didn't get around to buying them. You can tell me what kind of equipment you need. I can get my secretary to handle it."

Everything that could be thought of was already planned for him by his wife.

Zhang Ye had a fuzzy feeling in his heart. "The studio will be announcing the news of my comeback tomorrow. Old Wu, do you think I've become old?"

Wu Zeqing smiled and rubbed the corners of his eyes. “Do you think you’ve become old just because you have a few more wrinkles? Rest easy and go do what needs to be done. Let everyone judge for themselves whether you’re old or not.”

Chapter 1535: Zhang Ye announces his comeback!

The next day.

It was the seventh day of the Lunar New Year.

The holidays had ended, but the students had not returned to school yet. Meanwhile, the adults were starting to return to work.

At around 8 in the morning, a major incident occurred in the entertainment circle. After being silent for close to four years, the Weibo account of Zhang Ye’s Studio reactivated.

Original text source from Weibo:

—Teacher Zhang Ye is officially making his comeback.

The entire post consisted of only one sentence.

It was simple, clear, and direct.

There were no unnecessary words.

...

Somewhere.

A female assistant came over quickly. “Teacher Shanshan, Teacher Zhang has announced his comeback!”

Dong Shanshan grinned. “Got it.”

...

Somewhere.

Yao Mi shouted, “I knew it!”

Yao Jiancai smiled and said, “This kid, it looks like he’s really incapable of staying idle for longer than a day.”

Yao Mi yelled, “Watch out for my Uncle Zhang as he commands nature at his beck and call again!”

...

In a house.

Zhang Xia said helplessly, “He’s making a comeback so soon after returning?”

Her daughter covered her mouth in laughter. “Teacher Zhang is still as impatient as ever.”

Zhang Xia laughed and said, "It's a good thing that he hasn't changed."

...

In another house.

Ning Lan was humming a song as she walked down the stairs in a villa.

Her husband was very surprised. "Lan, why are you in such a good mood?"

Ning Lan smiled and said, "Well, an old friend of mine has come back."

...

Meanwhile.

Jiaomen East.

In the vicinity of Rao Aimin's place, Zhang Ye was carrying his daughter in his arms when he and his team got surrounded by a group of uncles and aunties.

The crowd was visibly excited.

"You're finally back, Little Zhang!"

"Uncle Li, how has your health been?"

"Me? I'm doing great! Yo, is this your daughter?"

"Yes. Sisi, greet grandpa."

"Grandpa."

"Ai, she's so adorable."

"Little Zhang, all of us have missed you so much!"

"Thank you, thank you, my dear neighbors."

"Now that you're back, do you intend to return to your old business?"

"Haha, that's right."

"You can do it, Little Zhang. All of us will support you!"

"Thank you. Is everyone still into plaza dancing?"

"Yes, of course. We're dancing every day."

"It's a good activity to keep yourselves strong and healthy. That's pretty good. All of you have to persist, OK?"

"Everyone, did you hear that? Our ancestral founder has spoken. All of you must keep persisting!"

"Damn, what ancestral founder? How long has it been?"

They were all familiar faces and old friends. Seeing them, Zhang Ye felt overjoyed and stayed around for a long time, standing there and chatting with his old neighbors.

They talked about everything.

They babbled nonstop.

At times, the uncles and aunties would utter some trending buzzword, making Zhang Ye stumble and not know how to react. He couldn't understand those words at all.

He had fallen behind the times.

He was out of touch with this era.

It looked as though he would have to do some catching up afterwards on all that had happened.

After chatting for half an hour, Zhang Ye finally took the elevator up. It was still the same building as before, but it was obvious from many of the other places that the buildings in the neighborhood had become quite decrepit.

Upstairs.

At the door to Rao Aimin's apartment.

Sisi had already jumped down from Zhang Ye's arms in excitement. She reached out and knocked on the door. "Sister Chenchen! Sister Chenchen! Sisi is here!"

A moment later, the door opened.

Zhang Ye habitually glanced downward. In the past, he had always known the kid to be at that height. But when the door opened and the figure of a girl was revealed, he was taken aback. He could not help but look up higher from where he originally had his gaze to renew his mental image of the child.

Sisi said happily, "Sister Chenchen!"

Chenchen nodded and put her hand out.

Sisi obediently put her hand into Chenchen's hand.

Chenchen pulled Sisi to her and looked up at Zhang Ye. Then she reached out with her other hand to pinch Zhang Ye's face.

Zhang Ye did not shrink away and said with a sigh, "Kid, when did you become so tall?"

Chenchen curled her lips. "I'm already in the first year of middle school."

Zhang Ye lightly smacked her hand aside and said, "Enough, don't pinch me anymore."

Chenchen asked, "Zhang Ye, you have wrinkles now?"

Zhang Ye rolled his eyes. "You'll have them too when you grow up."

Chenchen said, "I won't have them."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Alright, watch and see then."

Chenchen smirked. "Hur hur!"

Hur hur, your sister!

This kid, she was still as beautiful and annoying as ever.

Zhang Ye asked, "Where's your aunt?"

Chenchen replied, "She went traveling."

Zhang Ye said in a speechless manner, "She left you alone at home? Then who's taking care of your meals?"

Chenchen said boldly, "I go to your house every day for my meals."

"Sister Chenchen can eat so well." Sisi giggled.

Zhang Ye was at a bit lost for words. "No wonder my parents insisted on hurrying back home. So it was because they had to cook for you? You've been freeloading off my family?"

Chenchen seethed, "I've been taking care of your child for you."

Zhang Ye said happily, "Alright then, thank you for that."

Then Chenchen behaved like a little adult and adjusted Sisi's crooked pigtail. She said to Sisi, "Now that your daddy is back, you mustn't listen to everything that he tells you. He is a very childish person and also very stupid at doing things."

But Sisi said, "My daddy is the greatest."

Chenchen sighed. "You must've been deceived by his appearance. Eh, why didn't you wear your scarf? Didn't I tell you? Winter hasn't passed yet."

Sisi stuck her tongue out. "I forgot."

Chenchen went back into the apartment and grabbed a scarf. "You can have mine."

Sisi joyfully took it from her. "It's very pretty."

Looking at Chenchen taking care of Sisi like a true elder sister, Zhang Ye felt very pleased. He couldn't help but caress Chenchen's hair and say, "Alright, you're all grown up now. So did you miss your Uncle Zhang during these few years?"

Chenchen nodded. "Yes."

Zhang Ye broke into a smile. "I suppose you still have a conscience."

But this rascal's next sentence made Zhang Ye hop in anger.

He heard Chenchen let out a sigh. "There's finally someone who can help me do my homework again!"

Zhang Ye shouted, "Get lost!"

Upstairs.

At the doorstep of the former Zhang Ye's Studio.

The sign had not been removed, and a lot of dust had accumulated on it.

Ha Qiqi, Zhang Zuo, and the others were all waiting here. When they saw Chenchen, all of them rushed up and surrounded her. They had missed her greatly.

"Chenchen!"

"You're this tall already?"

"Do you still remember Auntie?"

Chenchen was pulling Sisi with one hand and holding a key in her other hand. She listlessly greeted them, "Old Ha, Old Zuo, Old Wu, Little Wang, you're all here?" She then turned the key a few times and opened the door. She turned around and handed the key to Zhang Ye, saying, "My aunt knew that you got back a few days ago, so she called me. She told me to hand the key to you and wait until she got back to discuss the rent."

Everything in the apartment was fully intact. It was kept in almost the exact same state as Zhang Ye had remembered before he left.

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "This place hasn't been rented out all this while?"

Chenchen said, "No."

Zhang Ye felt a warmth in his heart. "Old Rao is still as reliable as ever. Knowing that this bro would be back, she actually left the place empty for me. I won't call Old Rao a moneygrubber anymore."

Chenchen suddenly said, "Oh, right. After the studio disbanded, my aunt opened up the place as the original site of Zhang Ye's Studio for the public to visit and sold tickets at 10 RMB per person, so she made quite a bit of money off it. But there hasn't been much business in recent years. I suppose it's because you're washed up."

Zhang Ye did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Ha Qiqi and the others started laughing.

Selling tickets?

To the original site of Zhang Ye's Studio?

Only a miser like Big Sis Rao would think of a rotten idea like that!

However, that did not matter to anyone anymore. Because, when they walked through the main door of the studio again after three years, when they saw this familiar environment once more, most of them got lost in their reminiscence of the place. There was once a time when this was the place they fought their battles. How many storms had they weathered in this place? How many storms did they create in this place? This was where Zhang Ye had gone, step by step, from an ordinary celebrity to become a top celebrity in Asia. It was also in this place that they had gone from being an unknown celebrity studio to one of the most prestigious studios in China, or even Asia. This place encapsulated so many of their memories.

And today, they were back.

Today, they would start all over again from here.

Looking at the tables and chairs in here, looking at the accumulated dust on them.

Memories kept flooding into their minds.

Some of them were excited, some were reminiscing, and some were sad. It was a gush of different emotions for every one of them.

Zhang Ye smiled and clapped his hands. "Come on then! Now that our studio has been reestablished, we cannot leave it in such a dirty state. Our first task will be to clean up the place!"

Zhang Zuo laughed and said, "Alright!"

Ha Qiqi rolled up her sleeves. "It's time for some spring cleaning!"

Little Wang laughed loudly, "Haha, watch out! The most notorious team in showbiz is back in the game!"

Chapter 1536: The Heavenly King forgotten by the world!

In the morning.

Zhang Ye's Studio, which had been silent for over three years, was back in action.

On Weibo, quite a few people were discussing this topic.

"Zhang Ye has actually returned!"

"I've really missed Face-smacking Zhang."

"Could this fellow be trying to start something again?"

"But he's probably not going to be able to call the shots in this day and age, right?"

"Yeah, any random young, hot celebrity is more popular than him these days."

"Let's wait and see what kind of projects he'll be taking."

"Right, I wonder what Teacher Zhang's market value is like these days."

"If I were Teacher Zhang, I wouldn't have made a comeback. Back then, he was so popular, and so many people loved him like crazy. But it's completely different now. Too many years have passed. If Zhang Ye makes his return and can't even command one-third of the endorsement fees of a B-list hunk, that would be so embarrassing. I'd rather he leave us with the memory of his good times and just retire. The entertainment circle is being rejuvenated with young blood, with an emphasis on good looks and idol values. Teacher Zhang doesn't fit in with any of that. He's never been an idol since the start, so he'll definitely find it even harder to get ahead now."

"I'm not too optimistic either."

"Hai, Face-smacking Zhang has really gotten old."

There were all kinds of talk.

Most people held a skeptical stance regarding this matter.

...

At the studio.

Everyone got busy.

Ha Qiqi was making some phone calls:

“Boss Yan.”

“Director Ha, has Teacher Zhang really made his comeback?”

“Yes, he’ll be returning to the entertainment circle starting today.”

“Then we’d like to arrange an endorsement deal with Teacher Zhang.”

“Sure.”

“We have a new beverage that will be released to the market soon. It’s a new product for the brand name that Teacher Zhang used to endorse for us several years ago. Will you be interested in working together on it?”

“Of course, we can always discuss about it. What is the endorsement pay?”

“Why don’t we do it this way? We’ll sign a year’s contract at three million RMB first, how about that?”

“Three million RMB?”

“Director Ha, that’s already quite a big sum of money.”

“If you aren’t sincere in your offer, I’m afraid we won’t be able to discuss this further.”

“I am sincere, but that’s the market rate these days. Director Ha, I know that you find this amount to be somewhat little, but times have changed. We were able to accept Teacher Zhang’s rate of 30 million RMB a year for his endorsement back then and would never have bargained with it. But it’s not the same anymore. I’m sure you know Teacher Zhang’s situation clearer than I do. It’s also a big risk for us to get Teacher Zhang to endorse us. Surely you can’t let us lose money, right? And besides, the amount that we’re offering to Teacher Zhang is still very high. I believe that, after some time, when the news of his return as a Heavenly King fades away, and when the news of humans winning against PeterGo has cooled, his value will drop even further.”

Nearby.

Zhang Zuo was also in contact with a company.

“A commercial appearance?”

“Right, is Teacher Zhang willing to take the job?”

“What’s the price?”

“Why don’t you quote us?”

“If it’s a large ribbon cutting ceremony, that will be 3 million RMB per engagement.”

“Come again?”

“Three million RMB, that’s not asking for much. Teacher Zhang has never taken any commercial appearances before, but we’re willing to make an exception since our studio has just reopened and we’re in need of money.”

“That’s too expensive. Even if we were to invite a male idol for this event, it would only cost three to four million RMB. That won’t do. We can only offer up to 600,000 RMB, not any higher than that. Brother Zuo, you worked with us at your previous company, right? You’ve also been in the entertainment business for the past few years, so surely you should know the market rates better than us, right? If this were four years ago, we’d surely grab the offer even if Teacher Zhang was asking for five million RMB, much less three million RMB. How many companies in the industry were able to invite Zhang Ye for a commercial appearance, after all? But now? You must be joking, right? Teacher Zhang’s name isn’t even in the popularity rankings anymore, so how could it cost that much?”

On the other side of the office.

Little Wang was also making calls on her cell phone.

The entire office could hear Little Wang screaming.

“What did you just say? 500,000?”

“Yeah, that’s right.”

“Director Chen, you’re offering 500,000 RMB for Teacher Zhang to act in a show? Are you alright?”

“Little Wang, Teacher Zhang isn’t going to be the main lead in the show. It will only be a guest appearance. There are only two scenes and a line for him, so surely 500,000 RMB isn’t little, right?”

“We don’t intend to take a guest appearance!”

“You want to take the leading role?”

“Yeah, and there’s also a requirement to vet the script first.”

“Hur hur, then I think you better check with the others. There isn’t such an opportunity in our production crew. Little Wang, don’t mind me saying this, but go ask around in the industry about which big productions for a TV drama or film are not hiring young, hot male celebs to be their leading roles. Without them, where would the box office earnings come from? Where would the viewership come from?”

An hour later.

None of the studio’s staff could get any leads.

Zhang Ye was busy humoring and playing with his daughter.

Ha Qiqi came over and said, “The ads and endorsements these days are paying too little!”

Zhang Zuo sighed. "I couldn't get anything either. All of the offers were basically insincere."

Little Wang said angrily, "Don't even mention the production crews that I had to contact. What are they even thinking! Trying to get Director Zhang to act in a supporting role? No, it's not even a supporting role; it's just a guest star! And they're only paying 500,000 RMB too!"

Zhang Ye asked, "How much are the others getting?"

Ha Qiqi hesitated.

Zhang Ye smiled. "You can speak the truth."

Only then did Ha Qiqi say, "Two months ago, young gun Guan Zhaohua was reported to have received 50 million RMB a year for an advertising endorsement deal."

Zhang Ye asked, "And what are they offering to me?"

Ha Qiqi said in anger, "They're offering three million."

Three million?

50 million?

This was a difference of more than just one zero!

Zhang Ye smiled. "This is normal."

Little Wang said, "What's normal? It's not normal at all!"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Do you guys remember that I said four or five years ago that the entertainment circle would be taken over by young, hot men? That's why I told everyone at that time that we'd have to get to the top within a year, or it would get very difficult after that to advance. Look at this. The entertainment industry has become the entertainment industry I predicted, so this isn't surprising to me at all."

Zhang Ye had already experienced a similar situation in his previous world, so he did not find this to be a strange phenomenon and was in fact mentally prepared for it.

Zhang Ye took out his cell phone and said, "Let me make a call."

He had just changed his SIM card today, and his cell phone number was back in use.

He still had telephone numbers stored in his SIM, but he wondered if any of his old friends had changed their numbers. If they did, he would really be unable to get in contact with them.

Du du du.

The call connected.

Famous film director Li Ke answered: "Zhang'er?"

Zhang Ye laughed and said: "Director Li, you still have my number saved?"

Li Ke said in surprise: “You haven’t changed your number either. I was trying to call you yesterday, but I couldn’t get through.”

“I just got a new SIM card today. The old card couldn’t be used anymore, but the numbers were still saved on it.” Then Zhang Ye said: “I heard that you were preparing for a new movie recently? I’ve just come back, so would you like to offer your old friend a job?”

Li Ke said: “I was looking for you regarding this matter as well. Did you think that I didn’t think of you? When I learned that you were back, my guess was that you’d definitely have nothing much to do. At that time, the second male lead was not selected yet. Therefore, I suggested to the investors to get you, but—” he sighed. “They were not willing to.”

Zhang Ye asked: “Was it a matter of the salary?”

Li Ke said: “It’s not that. They were just worried that you’d affect the screening of the movie. After all, your case caused a huge impact. You were taken off the popularity rankings because you had become a banned artist. Although almost four years have passed, they are still afraid that it will have some implications now and in the future. You might not know this, but after you went to prison, many of your projects got affected. The investors are only out for profit, so it’s only natural that they would have concerns. As such, the production company overrode me today and selected a B-list young gun to join the film. They didn’t even seek my opinion on it.”

Zhang Ye said in amusement: “Old Li, you’ve been in the industry for so long, and you’re considered one of the few elite directors in the country, but why does it feel like you’re starting to lose your authority?”

Li Ke said helplessly: “The environment has changed. It’s a different era now. I’m getting old, and my previous few movies didn’t do well either, so I’ve lost the influence that I had. It’s now the era of the male idols. Do you know why the investors love them so much? Even though their salaries are high, with some productions hitting 200 million RMB in investment, half of that being used for their salaries, they’re still willing to pay that amount. That’s because their involvement in the movie basically guarantees a certain profit. A male idol can bring in a massive number of fans, and that means that even before a movie is filmed, or before a television drama starts production, the box office earnings and viewership are already a guarantee.”

Zhang Ye said: “Is it really that exaggerated?”

Li Ke told him: “That is how it works these days. With a young stud cast in a leading role of a movie, even if the word of mouth for the movie is terrible, with ratings so low that even the industry insiders are unable to bear seeing it, the box office earnings at the end still leave everyone dumbfounded. 500 million yuan! Can you imagine that?”

Zhang Ye said: “Then help me find a reliable investor. I’ll shoot something myself.”

Li Ke asked: “You want to self-direct and act in it?”

Zhang Ye said: “Yes.”

“A TV series or a movie?”

“Either is fine.”

“I don’t think there are any opportunities like that. Who would be willing to invest in you? Be it a movie or TV series, you’ve never done any of them before. Can the investors trust you? To shoot a production these days, all you need is a large investment and have hot, young men join the project to make it work. Do you think they still care about acting skills? Or experience? All of those are outdated ways of doing things. Do you know why Ning Lan retired? It’s not because she got married, but that her last two movies after her marriage only took in just over a 100 million yuan at the box office. This is Ning Lan we’re talking about, an A-lister and a best actress winner. What does it mean to earn just over a 100 million yuan at the box office? Can you imagine that?”

The call ended.

Zhang Ye shrugged.

Endorsements?

Commercial appearances?

Acting?

Directing?

All of the possible inroads seemed to be cut off for him.

Ha Qiqi rubbed her forehead. “Even Director Li can’t help?”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “Director Li can’t even fend for himself anymore. He also has it tough.”

When Chenchen, who was playing with Sisi nearby, heard that, she said, “So, Zhang Ye, it’s true that you’re a has-been?”

This was show business.

The cruelest place in the world.

Hearing that, Sisi panicked. “Daddy isn’t a has-been! Daddy is the greatest!”

Zhang Ye picked up his daughter with a smile and gave her a kiss. “Right, they just don’t know how to appreciate what’s good.”

Sisi nodded enthusiastically. “Daddy is the greatest superstar!”

Zhang Zuo was tickled. “That’s right, your daddy is the most unique celebrity in the world. You can’t find someone like him no matter how hard you look.”

Ha Qiqi came over and patted Sisi on her head. She said emotionally, “It’s been four years already. A lot of people seem to have forgotten about the earth-shattering events that your daddy caused. Since they’ve forgotten, let us remind them once more! Since no one is optimistic about your daddy, let’s tread our own path to move forward on. We’ll make them remember your daddy’s name again!”

Chapter 1537: An anti-corruption drama project?

One day.

Two days.

Three days.

Be it in China.

Or in Asia.

The entire entertainment industry was observing the activities of Zhang Ye's Studio. However, after several days had passed, there were still no signs of anything happening. The first project that Zhang Ye would be taking after his return did not come to fruition. Originally, everyone was not too optimistic about Zhang Ye's chances and felt that his status in the entertainment industry was kind of awkward. But now, they felt even more pessimistic about it.

Quite a few news reports came out.

"The fees to invite Zhang Ye for a commercial appearance falls to a low!"

"Zhang Ye's endorsement fee drops like crazy!"

"Advertising fee is not even comparable to a C-list celebrity?"

"According to an inside source: Li Ke's new film had the intention to invite Zhang Ye on board their project but was blocked by production's investors!"

"Zhang Ye's Studio reopens, but obstacles abound!"

"Experts' opinion: It will be difficult for Zhang Ye to rise again!"

"For now, no entertainment company is willing to offer an olive branch to Zhang Ye!"

"A Heavenly King returns, but no one is optimistic!"

...

On this morning.

At the studio.

Ha Qiqi kept lamenting, "Out of sight, out of mind."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Still no suitable projects?"

Ha Qiqi shook her head. "I've already asked everywhere."

Wu Yi said, "We're not asking for those big projects like we used to do four years ago. But the problem is that there aren't even smaller but reliable cooperative deals that we can find. The investors are only thinking of making a quick buck. They're trying to make use of the momentum from your comeback to stir up those nostalgic feelings from the yesteryears, but their offers are quite insincere."

Zhang Ye laughed. In the entire studio, he was the only one who was taking it well. He said, "Take it slowly. I've only just returned, so everything will have to start afresh."

Cooperation?

Projects?

Where were they supposed to look for all of that?

Zhang Ye's Studio was really short of money right now. Zhang Ye had given in on taking commercial appearances. They could accept those jobs, but the offers were too low. Further, this wasn't going to be a solution for them in the long run either. For work like commercial appearances, one's popularity would decrease the more they took. The root of the problem was: They had to urgently get a project to prove themselves with. They had to prove that they could still do everything well after so many years away!

At this moment, Zhang Ye's cell phone rang.

It was a call from Wu Zeqing.

Zhang Ye walked off to answer. "Old Wu, you've reached your office?"

She said: "Yes, I just got out of our morning meeting. Where's Sisi?"

"I sent her to my parents' place this morning."

She asked: "Are you at the studio?"

Zhang Ye said: "Yeah."

She asked: "You haven't received any work yet?"

"Not yet, everyone is just chatting."

She said: "Then why don't you come to my office to have a look."

"What's up? Is there something?"

She said: "Come over and talk."

"Alright, I'll go over to have a look then. I haven't been to your workplace after you were transferred to a different department."

After hanging up, Zhang Ye informed his staff and drove out.

Around 20 minutes later.

At West Chang'an Avenue ¹.

At the compound of the Central Publicity Department ².

In front of a high wall, Zhang Ye's car drove over. There were three cars waiting in the line ahead of him, and the security guard at the gate was checking them one by one. One of the cars did not have a valid pass and was stopped.

The woman in the car said, "I have an appointment with Deputy Director Chen."

The security guard said with a straight face, "We did not receive any notice of that."

The woman had to make a call on the spot. Soon after, a young man who seemed to be a secretary working here ran out to bring the woman in. All of the inconvenience left her very unhappy.

The woman said, "Little Sun, why is it so strict over here?"

Secretary Sun smiled and said, "A lot of meetings have been held here recently, so the checks have gotten stricter."

Zhang Ye's car also drove in.

The security guard stopped him.

Zhang Ye lowered his car window and took off his sunglasses.

When the security guard saw his face, he immediately waved him through.

The woman wasn't happy to see that. "Why didn't they check him?"

Secretary Sun also wondered and said, "I've never seen that car before?"

When the BMW got parked, the car door opened and Zhang Ye got out.

The woman said angrily, "Why is there such biased treatment? I needed someone to escort me in and even had to go through the security checks, but why is that person allowed to just come in like that?"

When Secretary Sun saw the young man, he froze. Then, when he heard the complaints of his boss's cousin, he got scared. He anxiously hushed her. "Sister Li, be quiet, be quiet!"

The woman asked, "What's the matter?"

Secretary Sun whispered, "That's an official's husband."

"And I am an official's cousin!"

Secretary Sun gave a wry smile. What kind of official is yours, and what kind of official is that person's!

Secretary Sun said, "That's Minister Wu's husband."

The woman was startled. "Isn't Deputy Minister Wu's husband that guy?" She finally reacted as she looked at the man. "Ah? That's—"

There were a few people in the compound.

One of the young men who spotted Zhang Ye reacted very quickly. He hurriedly went up to greet him. "Mr. Zhang, you're here?"

Zhang Ye didn't know who he was, so he just smiled and said, "What floor is Old Wu on?"

The young man replied, "I'll bring you there. This way, please."

Zhang Ye smiled. "Alright, sorry to trouble you."

"Aiyo, you're too polite," the youth said courteously as he led the way.

On the way there, they met a few other people, and all of them also greeted Zhang Ye.

Zhang Ye smiled and nodded back at them.

The environment here was clearly different from the SARFT when Old Wu was working there. It was very quiet in the compound, and everyone seemed to be very reserved and careful when they spoke.

A few minutes later.

In a building block.

Zhang Ye met with Wu Zeqing's new secretary.

The young man said, "Sister Ci, it's Mr. Zhang's first time here, so I led him over."

Secretary Ci smiled. "Thanks, Little Han."

The young man said, "You're welcome, you're welcome."

Secretary Ci quickly opened the door. "Teacher Zhang, please come in."

Zhang Ye went inside.

In the room.

Wu Zeqing was altering a document with her head lowered.

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "It's so difficult to meet you in here. I had to go all over the place just to get here since you didn't arrange for anyone to bring me in."

Wu Zeqing finished writing and put aside the document. She said with a smile, "I didn't know what time you'd get here, so I didn't arrange for Little Ci to meet you downstairs."

"You're so busy?" Zhang Ye asked.

Wu Zeqing said, "Yes, I was just transferred here a few months ago, but there's already a lot of work piling up. It wasn't so bad in the past few years when I was in a non-leadership role. There wasn't much to do then, and I could still occasionally take care of our daughter when I wasn't busy. But I can't do that anymore."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "You're a deputy minister, so of course you'd be busy."

Wu Zeqing said, "I'm just at the lowest rank of ministers in the Party, and it's just a deputy post."

Zhang Ye spread his hands and said, "It's still a high-ranking official position. You didn't see it earlier, but when I entered the compound, so many people were greeting me to the point that I felt embarrassed. It wasn't so bad with the 'Mr. Zhang,' but some others were clearly around your age and greeted me as 'Big Brother Zhang.' I don't even know if I should acknowledge them. I think it's best that I come here as little as possible."

Wu Zeqing smiled. "I'll talk to them next time."

Zhang Ye waved it off. "Forget it, this happened when you were at the SARFT too. I'm used to it."

Old Wu had been officially posted to the Central Publicity Department, so Zhang Ye was actually pretty happy. He knew that after his incident, Old Wu also got implicated. They were a couple, after all. When

Old Wu took the initiative to resign from her role at the SARFT after the incident, the party transferred her to a standard department. For several more postings after that, she continued being transferred to other standard departments, holding a non-leadership role as well. Now that her career was back on track, Zhang Ye felt very happy for her.

Zhang Ye asked, "Oh yes, Old Wu, why did you ask me to come here?"

Wu Zeqing pulled a drawer open and took out a document. "Take a look at this."

"What is it?" Zhang Ye crossed his legs and sat back, taking the document from her.

Wu Zeqing smiled. "Aren't you getting no work at the moment? I have a project over here, but it's not anything good. Take a look and tell me if you're OK with it."

Zhang Ye blinked. "You even have something for me here?"

Wu Zeqing said, "I really do."

Zhang Ye flipped through the document. He was dumbfounded!

A film and TV project?

An anti-corruption drama?

Wu Zeqing explained, "This was a project that the Central Publicity Department came up with at the end of last year. You may call it a political duty, because there is a very fierce crackdown³ on the 'tigers' going on, and the State is very determined to fight corruption. As an ideological mouthpiece, the ministry is leading the way by producing a TV series, and the basic concept is anti-corruption. It's been over half a year, but there hasn't been any progress at all. There are many reasons for this, with one being that no one dares to take on a TV series with propaganda, and two being that there isn't much funding for it. The funds that the ministry has for this project is limited, with at most 30 million RMB allocated to it. Based on the specifications, it's not really enough to get any of the more popular actors on board for the project. We've approached quite a few directors, but none of them are willing to take it on. Although the ministry also has an in-house video department, they are only meant for doing promotions. There aren't any professional film directors. With the lack of a director and a script, the project kept getting put on hold."

Zhang Ye was already getting very excited. "Are there any limitations on the script?"

Wu Zeqing said, "No."

Zhang Ye asked, "What about the scope of involvement?"

Wu Zeqing smiled and said, "It can involve official ranks."

Zhang Ye said, "OK."

Wu Zeqing said, "Without any restriction on how high up the ladder it can go."

Zhang Ye said, "Don't try to fool me. I know the criteria that the SARFT will assess it on. When one of the dramas back then showed a police station's director getting involved in criminal activities, the SARFT banned it."

Wu Zeqing smiled. "That's old news from so many years ago. The SARFT is under our jurisdiction, so would they dare ban a project headed by the Central Publicity Department?" With a pause, she said, "Since this was requested by the higher-ups, everything will naturally be greenlit. But since this is a drama with a political message, there are some requirements to it. We request that it meet a 1% nationwide viewership rating. We don't want to fork out 30 million yuan and end up having no one to watch it. That wouldn't do. At the very least, there must be a minimum amount of viewers. This was also why a lot of the directors that we approached were unwilling to take on the project. There's no profit to be made, yet they must still guarantee a minimum amount of viewership. Therefore, just like I told you, this project isn't actually that good. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been delayed until now with no one wanting to take it on."

An anti-corruption drama?

Without any restrictions?

Hahahaha!

Zhang Ye jumped to his feet.

Wu Zeqing said, "What is it?"

Zhang Ye strode up to Old Wu and excitedly kissed her. "Old Wu, you're really my dearest wife!"

Wu Zeqing laughed. "What am I if I'm not your dearest wife?"

What do you call timely rains?

This is what you fucking call timely rains!

What do you call timely assistance?

This is what you bloody call timely assistance!

He was getting whatever he needed!

Wu Zeqing knew that her husband did not have any experience filming TV series and films, so she asked, "Can you direct a TV drama?"

Zhang Ye banged the table excitedly and said, "Can I direct it? I'll direct one and show you what I can do. Old Wu, I accept this project!"

Chapter 1538: Come on out, In the Name of the People!

Noon.

At the studio.

Zhang Ye came back to the studio with the project in high spirits. "Everyone, gather around. We have work to do!"

Everyone was startled and pleasantly surprised.

“There’s work?”

“So quickly?”

“I thought you went to look for your wife?”

“So what big job is it?”

Zhang Ye placed the documents down and said, “Have a look.”

When the studio’s staff saw the project details that Zhang Ye had brought back, many of them were dumbfounded.

Ha Qiqi said dumbfoundedly, “An anti-corruption drama?”

Tong Fu exclaimed, “What the hell!”

Wu Yi said anxiously, “Director Zhang, calm down! Don’t rush into it!”

Little Wang said in a panic, “Although we aren’t exactly in the best of situations, we cannot take any job that is offered to us. Th-This project mustn’t be taken!”

Zhang Ye laughed and said, “Why can’t we take it?”

“This sort of project is a trap!” Tong Fu was sweating. “A political drama isn’t going to be easy to shoot. Even up to a few years ago, no one would dare to take on such a drama. The topic is too serious, and there’s too strong a political inclination. The public definitely won’t accept it. Furthermore, what era are we in now? It’s the age of commercial productions. To surpass 1% in the viewership ratings, only a commercially motivated drama or an idol show could do it. Nothing else can achieve that. We cannot jump into a pit like this. What if the viewership does not meet the requirements of the Central Publicity Department after we film it? Who is going to take responsibility for that? That kind of pressure is too great!”

Ha Qiqi gasped and said, “There will only be an investment of 30 million RMB?”

Zhang Ye smiled. “That’s all that they have.”

Ha Qiqi still understood the market. She said, “To throw 30 million yuan into a TV series, that should only be enough to cover the shooting costs, right? Which TV series these days don’t have an investment of a 100 or 200 million yuan? There’s even a TV series with a budget of 500 million yuan. This is indeed not a good project to take.”

Zhang Ye smiled. “I know that.”

Zhang Zuo wiped his sweat away. “And we even have to assemble the production crew ourselves?”

“Isn’t there already a production crew?” Zhang Ye said.

Zhang Zuo was taken aback. “Where are you getting that from? It’s not like the Central Publicity Department will be providing us with one, right?”

Zhang Ye said calmly, “Isn’t our forte exactly in filming things? What’s wrong? Have you all thrown away all your skills after so many years away?”

Everyone was floored!

Turning the studio into a production crew?

Little Wang was horrified. She said, "We have only shot variety shows in the past!"

Tong Fu said, "At most, we dabbled in documentary filmmaking!"

Zhang Ye sighed and remarked, "Isn't that more or less the same?"

More or less the same?

It's way too different, alright!

This is an entirely unrelated subject!

This is two entirely different skill sets!

Ha Qiqi gave a wry smile. "Director Zhang, aren't there any better options than this?"

Zhang Ye spread his hands with a smile. "This is the best option we have in our situation, a 30 million RMB anti-corruption drama. I'll be the director and the project manager. From the casting, allocation of funds, filming, and editing, all of that will be decided by us alone. There won't be anyone else getting involved, and we will have absolute autonomy over the project."

Ha Qiqi gave it some thought before saying, "Then let's do it."

Little Wang said, "Director Zhang, Sister Ha...but!"

Ha Qiqi laughed and said, "There's indeed no better option than this."

Everyone sighed.

Tong Fu asked, "So it's gonna be a TV drama then?"

Wu Yi asked, "We're crossing over again?"

Little Wang said, "It feels like we've been crossing over all our lives."

Zhang Zuo said, "For a celebrity's comeback, instead of restarting in a familiar field, we're taking on a totally new trade. We're truly the only ones who dare risk it all and do something like this in the entire industry. But alright, the general trend in the entertainment industry these days is slowly moving towards TV dramas anyway. It is the same be it locally or abroad, so we definitely have to dip our hands into doing them from now on if we wish to advance further. It's not something that we can avoid, so this is a good time for us to try it out. Hai, it's just that this feels really stressful."

Zhang Ye snapped his fingers and said, "Alright, then our production crew has been officially set up."

Since Director Zhang had had made his decision, everyone went along with it.

Ha Qiqi said, "Please delegate the tasks."

Zhang Ye said, "Old Ha, you've been involved in directing for these few years too, so you definitely have to be my assistant director. I'll let you be responsible for the filming."

“OK.” Ha Qiqi responded.

Zhang Ye said, “Brother Zuo, you will also be appointed as an assistant director. I’ll leave all internal matters and affairs to you.”

Zhang Zuo said, “Understood.”

Zhang Ye said, “Old Wu, get in contact with the Central Publicity Department and have them get the equipment and funds ready.”

Wu Yi said, “OK, I’ll get it done.”

One by one, the tasks were laid out.

Ha Qiqi asked, “What about the script?”

Zhang Ye smiled and said, “I’ll write it myself.”

Finally, Zhang Ye returned to his own office.

There had never been a change in the order of popularity for a celebrity in the entire entertainment circle before.

#1: Film and television stars.

#2: Singers.

#3: Variety stars.

#4: Hosts.

#5: All other artists.

From the 2nd to 5th places, they might vary a little due to certain factors surrounding the celebrities themselves, but it was always the film and television stars who were in first place. Their status in the industry was virtually unshakable. Be it in China or Asia, or even the world, a film and television star always ranked first in their orders of magnitude. This was a long-recognized phenomenon in the industry.

Many years ago, a lot of experts and media personalities had evaluated Zhang Ye as someone who walked the celebrity path with only one leg. If a celebrity wanted to develop a long-term career in the entertainment circle, how could they not get involved in film and television? The film and television field was a much bigger one than the music scene, so a lot of people were not that optimistic about Zhang Ye’s chances in the entertainment circle. But today, Zhang Ye was finally getting involved in a television project. He was going to make an attempt, and it was also an opportunity for him. Having journeyed with only one leg so far, he had managed to get to the top of both the Chinese and Asian entertainment circles. And now, Zhang Ye was finally going to walk without anything holding him back. As for how far he could go on this path and how well he could walk it, no one knew yet.

Only Zhang Ye was very much looking forward to it. He smiled and booted up his computer.

A script?

Let it be that one then.

He didn't even think of a second option.

An hour.

Three hours.

Five hours.

Night had fallen, but Zhang Ye's office door did not open all this while. Only the sound of tapping away at keys could be heard coming from inside. They couldn't create a grand setting with a 30 million yuan investment, nor could they afford to hire any hot, young guys. In the understanding of this world's people and industry insiders, even if this sort of television drama could be shot well, it wouldn't garner much viewership. Because no matter which angle you looked at it from, it didn't have any qualities that would suggest the drama would be explosive. That was an absolutely impossible outcome.

Perhaps only Zhang Ye knew.

Perhaps only the people of Zhang Ye's previous world had witnessed it before.

Without any hot, young men.

Without any huge investments.

An anti-corruption drama could become so explosively popular that its own mother would not recognize it!

Zhang Ye could already see the dumbfounded expressions of this world's people!

Come on out, In the Name of the People

This is going to be this bro's first project since my comeback. I'll be depending on you!

Chapter 1539: A group of old friends take on the industry again! (First half)

Several days later.

At Yao Jiancai's house.

Ding dong, ding dong. Someone was pressing on the doorbell.

When Old Yao's wife opened the door, she froze right there. Then she exclaimed, "Zhang'er! What are you doing here? Come in quickly!"

Zhang Ye came in carrying large and small bags of items. "Sister-in-law, it's been a while."

Old Yao's wife's eyes had reddened. "It's been four years."

Zhang Ye smiled. "Yeah. In a flash, four years have already passed."

A scream came from a bedroom. Yao Jiancai's daughter, Yao Mi, came running out. "Is it Uncle Zhang? Is it Uncle Zhang?"

Zhang Ye smiled broadly. "It's me."

Yao Mi went up to him and gave him a hug. "You're finally back!"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yes, I'm back. Where's your dad?"

Finally, Yao Jiancai, who was still dressed in his pajamas, slowly walked out of his bedroom.

When the two saw each other, they both broke into smiles.

Old Yao had changed too much.

He had less hair now and was thinner than before.

Yao Jiancai looked at him. "You've been back for how long now? So you've finally remembered about coming to visit, huh?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "There were too many things to handle since I got back. I haven't even met up with any of our old friends yet. Let me say this first. You're the first person that I came to look for, so how's that for a friend? I heard that your career has been going backwards these few years? You don't even do crosstalk anymore? And the roles that you play on TV are always as the antagonists? What's with that?" He sized him up. "Why have you gotten so thin? You're old, why would you go on a diet? What's the meaning of this? Are you planning to become an idol celebrity?"

Old Yao's wife snickered. "What diet can he be on? He has become thin from anger."

Zhang Ye said in surprise, "Oh, who has offended our Teacher Yao?"

Old Yao's wife said, "It's all because he couldn't get any roles in the good productions these days. The market is being dominated by the young studs nowadays, so there are fewer and fewer spots for the other actors to maneuver around."

Yao Jiancai smacked his lips and said, "Enough, why are you bringing that up?"

Old Yao's wife rolled her eyes. "Little Zhang isn't an outsider."

Yao Mi hurriedly said, "Uncle Zhang, what do you plan on doing now that you're back? Quickly start something. My dad has been slacking at home for the past two months."

Zhang Ye said in amusement, "I do have a project on hand."

Yao Jiancai said curiously, "There's actually someone who would hand you a project to do?"

Zhang Ye said a bit embarrassed, "It's a project from the Central Publicity Department."

When they heard that, they were astounded.

Yao Jiancai burst into laughter. "You two intend to keep the family store running, huh?"

Zhang Ye ignored him and placed the script down. "I've kept a role for you. Take a look and see if you want to take it. But let me say this first: Don't have any expectations for the pay. It will definitely be very low. I'll let you in on something, though. If you can act well in this role, I guarantee that you won't have

a problem staying popular for the next three to five years. But I'm afraid that you'll screw it up with your acting. It's been so many years. Can you still do it?"

Yao Jiancai chuckled and said, "Your bro has only got his acting skills left now."

Zhang Ye said, "Then read the script."

Yao Jiancai said, "There's no need for that. Just let me know when the filming begins."

...

In a luxurious villa neighborhood.

Ning Lan's home.

Zhang Ye and Ning Lan were sitting across from each other. Ning Lan's husband got their servant to step down as he personally brought over some tea.

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Boss Yuan, you're too kind."

Ning Lan smiled. "Why would you call him Boss Yuan? Just address him as Old Yuan."

Old Yuan laughed and said, "Right, any friends of Lanlan's are also my friends."

"Sure then, I'll address you as Old Yuan." Zhang Ye said, "So when did you two get married?"

Ning Lan crossed her legs and said, "Two years ago. In the past, I thought that I would definitely have to get you as the emcee for my wedding. But since you couldn't be released, I thought maybe I shouldn't wait any longer. So I went ahead and got hitched."

Old Yuan was a very rich businessman.

But Zhang Ye could see that the two of them enjoyed a very good relationship with each other.

Old Yuan smiled. "Go ahead and chat. I'll be in the living room watching TV."

When he left, Ning Lan smiled and said, "You've been back for a fortnight already, right? So how's everything? Can you sense how different the world has become?"

Zhang Ye said, "Yeah, it's very obvious."

Ning Lan said, "Do you really intend to take on the industry again?"

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Why not?"

Ning Lan said emotionally, "We're all getting old, and our popularity is no longer the same."

"Is that why you retired? Is that why you didn't take any more acting roles?" Zhang Ye looked at her. "You were the model worker of the entertainment circle, a best actress winner who dared to take over a dozen projects in a single year, so what's this about? You're retiring so soon? Are you thinking of sitting back and enjoying a rich housewife life from here on out?"

Ning Lan was looking a little out of sorts. "I've already gotten married and am a wife now, so of course my focus would have to shift towards my family."

Zhang Ye could see that Ning Lan still couldn't let go of acting.

Having been in this industry for her entire working life!

Having been involved in so many films and television series!

How could she possibly just drop everything so easily!

To people like her, work was a part of their life.

Zhang Ye said, "There were only two recognized model workers in the entertainment industry back then, with the male artist being me, and the female artist being you. Of course, calling me a model worker was a little ironic and I only got called that because I kept causing trouble every day. But for you, calling you a model worker was a really well-deserved title. Until now, no one has managed to break your record for the number of projects taken in a year." He then took out a script and placed it on the table. "I've accepted a TV drama project, and there's a role in it that I just can't seem to think of anyone who it's suitable for. It calls for a really skilled actor to be cast, so I could only think of you and no one else."

Ning Lan looked at the script on the table but did not reach out to take it. "I've retired from the scene."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Then can I invite you to make a return?"

Ning Lan looked out towards the living room. "Forget it, I'm old, and I don't have the energy for acting anymore. So what if you can act well these days? That isn't worth even half of what a young hunk can offer."

Zhang Ye blinked. "Take a look at the script first."

Ning Lan shook her head.

Zhang Ye said, "Read it."

Ning Lan hesitated for a moment before picking it up. "Alright, alright, I'll have a look."

After she did that, she read for the next hour.

When she finished reading it, Ning Lan put down the script with a bitter smile and pointed at Zhang Ye. "I finally understand now. You're purposely trying to hook me in!" She was itching to take the project.

From the living room, Old Yuan walked over.

Ning Lan smiled and said, "Old Yuan, quickly chase him out."

Old Yuan said in amusement, "What's the matter?"

Ning Lan sighed. "I'm happy being your wife, but this fellow keeps insisting that I return to the industry. Isn't he trying to scam me?"

Old Yuan glanced at his wife. "You still wish to act, don't you?"

Ning Lan did not reply.

Old Yuan stayed silent for a while before saying, "If you wish to act again, go and do it."

Ning Lan looked at him. "I thought you didn't want me to act anymore?"

Old Yuan said with a wry smile, "I just didn't want you to be too tired. But ever since we got married, I can see that you haven't been as happy as before. I heard from the servant that you're always catching up on the entertainment news when you're at home. I know that you can't let go of those old friends of yours or your acting. If you wish to act, then do it. I will support you."

Ning Lan smiled at this and asked Zhang Ye, "So what do you think of my husband?"

Zhang Ye gave him a thumbs up. "He's a good man!"

Ning Lan decided, "It's only you who can convince me to make a return. Alright, I'll accompany you to take on the industry again!"

Old Yuan was floored. He said, "I finally understand now. So the two of you were trying to set me up?"

Both Zhang Ye and Ning Lan burst into laughter.

Chapter 1540: A group of old friends take on the industry again! (Second half)

At Zhang Xia's house.

Zhang Ye came over uninvited.

Grandma Zhang Xia said in surprise, "Little Zhang?"

"Grandma Zhang, I'm here to visit you." Zhang Ye put some fruit down. "How has your health been?"

Zhang Xia was very happy. "I'm doing well, I'm doing well."

Zhang Xia's daughter said from her side, "Teacher Zhang, my mom has been talking about you almost every day for the past few years. When she learned that you were back, she was so happy."

Zhang Ye said, "What about me have you been talking about?"

Her daughter smiled and said, "She would be commenting whenever she watches TV, saying how the artists these days have no entertainer's ethics and how they're all only out to earn money. She says that they all should really learn more from your generation of artists about what social responsibility is and what serving the people is about."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "They should not learn from me. I ended up in jail when I served the people."

Zhang Xia said, "Stay for dinner."

Zhang Ye rubbed his belly. "Alright, I'm feeling hungry too. I didn't eat anything when I was at Sister Ning's place earlier."

Zhang Xia smiled. "You went to look for Little Ning?"

Zhang Ye said, "Yeah, I met Sister Ning's husband too. He's not bad."

Zhang Xia nodded and said, "Her husband is a pretty good man. I met him once too, when they got married."

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yes, he's pretty good. Otherwise, I wouldn't have managed to convince Sister Ning to return."

Zhang Xia was taken aback. "Get her to return?"

Zhang Ye said, "I took a TV drama project recently, so I've been busy recruiting cast members for it. I'll also be acting in it and be directing it as well. But as you should know, I only know so many people. They're all our old friends, so I'll definitely need to get everyone's support. This will be my first TV series since I debuted, and also the first project I'll be working on since my return to the entertainment industry. As such, I'll definitely have to do it well. Grandma Zhang, you'll have to give me your support too."

Zhang Xia smiled and said, "What do you need me to do?"

Zhang Ye said, "The theme song, sing it for me."

Zhang Xia looked at him. "There are so many popular singers. Why would you get an old singer like me who's washed up instead of them? Who would still want to listen to me sing these days?"

Zhang Ye smiled. "I do. I really like listening to you sing."

Zhang Xia laughed for a long time. "Alright, alright, I'll sing one for your sake."

Her daughter said, "Mom, aren't you no longer accepting any more work?"

Zhang Xia grinned. "That depends on whose work it is."

Her daughter giggled. "So you've also become picky about your work?"

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "Grandma Zhang is just picky about the people."

...

At Dong Shanshan's Studio.

It was a busy in here.

When Zhang Ye pushed open the door and entered, everyone froze and stared at him.

Zhang Ye smiled. "Is Shanshan around?"

The next moment, Dong Shanshan appeared in his sights. When she saw Zhang Ye, Dong Shanshan smiled. She suddenly raised her hands and opened her arms with a smile.

Zhang Ye also opened his arms.

They looked at each other.

And then hugged.

Dong Shanshan asked, "You're back?"

Zhang Ye replied, "I'm back."

"How does prison fare taste?"

"It's great. I've even put on weight."

"You finally remembered your old classmate?"

"I just accepted a TV drama, so I've been busy writing the script for the past few days."

"You need my help?"

"Play a role for me."

"When does filming start?"

"In a few days' time. I heard that you've become quite popular these days and even turned to the performing arts? Do you have free time?"

"Yes, I've been quite free recently."

"How's Yingyi, Old Wang, and the others doing?"

"We've all been waiting for you to come back to throw a party."

"Alright, let's set a day sometime to have our class reunion."

When Zhang Ye left, Dong Shanshan's agent came over to her not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"Shanshan, you've got quite a few events lined up next month. Why did you—"

Dong Shanshan smiled happily and said, "Reschedule all of those events for later."

The agent did not say any more. She knew well the friendship between Dong Shanshan and Zhang Ye. In the recent two years, Dong Shanshan had not taken host positions for any variety show. She had already left Beijing Television for some time. But each year the new season of King of Masked Singers came around and at every grand finals of I Am a Singer, Beijing Television would always check in first with Dong Shanshan. As long as Dong Shanshan agreed, the host role would go to her. No one else in the entertainment circle could fight her for this.

Quite a few hosts were very jealous of her.

Quite a few industry insiders could not understand it.

The staff of Dong Shanshan's Studio did not used to understand either and were very puzzled. Later, someone from Beijing Television told them that it was because Zhang Ye had authorized quite a few of his shows to their station without requesting any compensation. The only condition he had for it was that as long as Dong Shanshan did not refuse, she would be the only choice of host for these shows. At that moment, the staff of Dong Shanshan's Studio finally understood.

How strong was their friendship?

One wouldn't have many such friends in their lifetime!

...

At night.

It had turned dark.

At an old, two-story villa.

A woman looked warily at Zhang Ye, who was standing at the door. "What are you doing here?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "I'm looking for Old Jiang."

The woman said with a dark expression, "He's not around!"

At this moment, Jiang Hanwei's voice came from inside the house. "Let him in."

Only then did Old Jiang's wife unwillingly stand aside to let Zhang Ye into the house.

Jiang Hanwei looked at him. "Take a seat. How did you find out where I lived?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "This bro has been in the circle for so many years. How hard would it be for me to find someone? Aren't you belittling me?"

Jiang Hanwei asked, "What do you want to drink?"

"Anything's fine." Zhang Ye was not picky.

Jiang Hanwei said to his wife, "Pour him a cup of water."

Zhang Ye said, "Thank you, Sister-in-law."

His wife still did not show him a welcoming attitude.

Everyone in the entertainment circle knew about the old feud between Zhang Ye and Jiang Hanwei. It would be ridiculous if his wife did not also know about it.

Jiang Hanwei said, "Why are you looking for me?"

Zhang Ye said, "I heard that you haven't been doing too well in the industry these past few years."

Jiang Hanwei sneered. "I'm still better off than you."

Zhang Ye chuckled. "Is that so?"

Jiang Hanwei lamented, "We're both has-been celebrities, so let's not laugh at one another."

Zhang Ye said, "I heard from someone that you got into a fight with a young gun? And even sent that guy into the hospital? Which nearly caused you to get blacklisted?"

Jiang Hanwei threw his hands up and got angry the moment he was reminded of it. "That brat was riding on his popularity and getting all touchy with my goddaughter, so of course I had to beat him up!"

His goddaughter's relationship with Zhang Ye was very good. After all, she was a former member of Spring Garden, Xiaodong.

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "That's a good punishment. Even if you had not beaten him up, I would have done so myself."

Jiang Hanwei curled his lips. "You've gotten into all that trouble and were even sent to jail. As if you could beat him up."

Zhang Ye grinned and said, "So how? You've witnessed the might of the male idols' fans, right?"

Jiang Hanwei rolled his eyes and did not pay attention to him.

Zhang Ye said, "I heard that he has so many fans that they can each spit on you once and drown you. The media also scolded you terribly in a one-sided affair. Hur hur, you understand it now, right? That when it comes to fighting, you aren't a match for me? This bro was involved in so many fights back then and even scolded so many popular artists, yet there was nothing they could do about me. I still carried on living my life as normal."

Jiang Hanwei said with contempt, "That's true, who can compare with you in that aspect? I'm a professional actor, but you're a professional fighter."

Zhang Ye laughed and said, "It's been so long, yet you still haven't forgotten about our feud? I don't even bear a grudge anymore."

Jiang Hanwei nearly blew his top. "At Xiaodong's birthday banquet, bastard, it was you who sent me flying with my car into the ditch. Why would you bear any grudge!"

Zhang Ye laughed loudly at that.

When Jiang Hanwei saw his reaction, he also couldn't hold back his laughter.

About their feud years ago, who could really say who was to blame?

It was all water under the bridge. Now that they were talking about it again, there wasn't a hint of hatred. The only thing left was a sense of nostalgia.

Zhang Ye brought out the script at this moment. "Let's get down to business then. I've taken a TV drama project recently, and there's a role that reminded me of you. Take the role."

Old Jiang's wife was bringing the water over when she heard that. She was dumbfounded. "You're looking for our Old Jiang to act in a show?"

Zhang Ye smiled and said, "Yes, Sister-in-law."

Jiang Hanwei also did not expect this. "My reputation is quite bad now."

Zhang Ye said, "It's fine, it's an antagonist role anyway."

Jiang Hanwei got extremely curious. "Why did you think of approaching me?"

Zhang Ye spread his hands. "In the entertainment circle, how many can still act well? The shows these days are all reliant on the male idols and their looks. Acting skills have become a secondary consideration for a role, right? But that won't work for my show. This role has a very specific requirement and needs to be played in the way that I want. I've seen your acting before. They're almost always fighting roles, so I think it's time that you change your formula. This role of mine could very well be your breakthrough role. For such a good job, I only ever considered you for it. It can't be given to just

anyone. What's more, I think that you can definitely act well and bring the character to life. After all, you've won the best actor award before."

He looked through the script.

Jiang Hanwei read through every single word in it.

Finally, he said to Zhang Ye, "You even dare take a drama like this?"

Zhang Ye smiled and asked, "Of course I dare. But the question is, do you dare act in it?"

His wife said, "Old Jiang—"

Jiang Hanwei waved her off. "Which other actors are there?"

Zhang Ye explained, "Me, Yao Jiancai, Ning Lan, Dong Shanshan, and a few other veteran actors. They're basically the same group of people that you knew."

Jiang Hanwei broke into a smile. "Other than Dong Shanshan, the people you approached are either retired or washed up?"

Zhang Ye shrugged and said with a laugh, "I can't afford to hire any of the male idols, after all."

Jiang Hanwei pondered it. "I'll accept the role."

Zhang Ye said, "Aren't you going to ask about the pay?"

Jiang Hanwei sneered. "Yours is a political drama. What pay can there be? It's already good if you don't ask me to dip into my own pockets."

His wife said in a speechless manner, "Then why did you accept it?"

Yeah, why did I accept it?

Jiang Hanwei didn't know how to answer either.

Perhaps he wanted to make use of this opportunity to find out if he was really old.

Perhaps he wanted to see if the industry still needed veterans like them who used to call the shots.

...

One person.

Three people.

Five people.

Ten people.

Some of them had retired.

Some of them were old.

Some of them were no longer popular.

They were disheartened by the state of the industry.

On this day, on Zhang Ye's return, he had gathered many of his old friends and foes together. It wasn't for the money, and it wasn't for the profit. All of it was to remind the industry of their names!