

Chapter 311: Mother Can No Longer Control Her Daughter

By the time he reached, it would probably be the next day.

Yan Huan and the rest hadn't left as they were waiting for Lu Yi's car. The road here wasn't very good and the crew car would send them away by batches. It wasn't her turn yet and of course, she didn't think of going along with the rest of the crew too.

She wasn't in a rush. This was a tranquil place and she was thinking of dropping all her burden and taking a walk around this area. She wanted to buy some souvenirs here to bring back home.

Lu Yi only reached around the afternoon.

He looked a little tired but he still seemed to be in a good mood. Yan Huan had forgotten his character and how scary it was. He was one of those rare people in the world who couldn't tell if he was hot, cold or in pain. His bodily functions were perversely good.

"I thought you couldn't go out when you like to?"

Yan Huan propped her face up on the table. She had more than enough sleep, was incredibly refreshed and her body felt light. On the other hand, Lu Yi didn't look very well. In her past life, Lu Yi didn't spend much time at home all year round. Sometimes, he would be busy over the new year too. How is it possible that he is free everyday now and could even drive a whole day to fetch her home?

Lu Yi rubbed the top of her head, "The road here isn't safe. I am worried about you."

Yan Huan broke out into a huge smile before she took his hand and placed them on her face. His palm was incredibly dry and was warm to the touch. His huge palm was enough to help hold up her world.

Outside, the moon wasn't shining but the skies were illuminated by the lights from people's homes. Night had descended and in the night sky, bright stars shone.

Some people said that a star represented a person. Yan Huan had no idea where her star was?

In actual fact, stars are but rocks in the sky; they can be known as meteors too. They are far less pretty than one makes them out to be. Even the moon has no Chang'e, Wu Gang or the Jade Rabbit on it.

Hence, they weren't anything tangible, they lived in the imagination and dreams of people. Reality is way harsher and crueler than one's dreams.

"Let me bring you to eat something nice."

Yan Huan stood up and put on her cap. The view here was nice and even though she had walked around for a few times, Lu Yi might not have had a chance to explore this place. They would eat a good meal before returning to rest for a night; they could leave early in the morning tomorrow.

Lu Yi stood up and walked towards her before helping her adjust her cap properly.

Her moderately long hair had been trimmed short for her show.

“You really don’t miss your hair?” Lu Yi touched her hair that reached her ear neatly. Women had a natural connection with their own hair and whether it was the past or now, they would be sad with having short hair.

Was she really not upset at all?

“There is nothing to miss about it,” Yan Huan grabbed her hair. “It will grow back sooner or later. Beside, this is more convenient when filming.” In her past life, she liked her long hair which it reached her waist. However, that hair was annoying too as it was too messy and extra. If it was extra, then there was nothing to miss about it. After all, it would grow back sooner or later, right?

“Let’s go,” Yan Huan grabbed Lu Yi’s large hands. She liked his hands the most; they were dry and not wet at all, just like him. They were clean and compared to them, she felt dirty.

That was right, in her past life, she was dirty.

Lu Yi followed her too, she could bring him anywhere she wanted. This was his character; he wouldn’t say no to any woman. He was like this with Fang Zhu in the past too.

Inside, Luo Lin was covering Yi Ling’s mouth in fear that she would scream and shout, ruining the perfect environment. After all, it was normal for the two of them to be dating. If not, why would Lu Yi put in all his efforts to help them?

It seemed they had such a relationship after all.

Yi Ling managed to escape from Luo Lin’s grip at the end, but she was almost strangled to death by her.

She extended her hand as she took in huge gulps of air in front of her. “Why did you cover my mouth?”

“I’m afraid you will say some nonsense.” Luo Lin smacked her hand. She was surprised as Yi Ling seemed calmer than she should be. Yi Ling had always protected Yan Huan like she was her daughter but she was quiet today. “Why, do you not have any thoughts about Huanhuan and Lu Yi being together?”

“What thoughts?” Yi Ling sat down on the sofa. “Everyone would end up marrying someone at the end of the day. Huanhuan would marry someone one day and she will not be a spinster for the rest of her life. Moreover, I knew about them a long time ago.”

A good friend of Lei Qingyi shouldn’t be a problem.

Luo Lin shrugged. It seemed she had cared too much.

Even though Yi Ling could be a little neurotic at times, when it came to certain things, she was clearer and would see things deeper than others. Of course, this included things about Yan Huan.

She treated Yan Huan like a daughter but even a daughter couldn’t stay unmarried for her whole life. Whoever she married, it depended on whether he was in their good books. Luckily, Lu Yi were in their good books. After all, he had helped them many times.

Hence, Yi Ling was very open about it. If she handed her Huanhuan to Lu Yi, she believed Mother Yan would have no objections.

Just from the fact that he and Lei Qingyi saved so many lives in Peace City, he was qualified. A man who loved other people and animal lives couldn't be a bad person.

Outside, Yan Huan was wearing a cap with a pair of tinted sunglasses. However, it couldn't mask her elegance. In actual fact, this wasn't any different from what she usually dressed in. But this wasn't a crowded area and there weren't many reporters around. There weren't many people in this area too and everyone lived a simple life. There wasn't much bustle in the streets and simplicity was the specialty here.

Yan Huan brought Lu Yi to eat at a rice noodle roll stall. Their rice noodle roll was pretty delicious and melted almost instantly in one's mouth. She loved to eat their rice noodle roll over here but she had been busy filming and only wanted to sleep at night. Hence, she only had a few portions of this despite being here for a few months. She managed to make her way down here the past few days as she was free, to have a taste of something delicious here. However, she only tried a few of them as she was afraid of overeating. She didn't have any more stomach space to stuff other food.

She gave whatever she thought was nice to Lu Yi to try. She didn't care much about Yi Ling and Luo Lin, the two of them had explored this place thoroughly in the morning. There was a decent night market here at night which the two of them loved. When they had nothing to do, they would come over to grab something to eat. If not, they would be stuck eating the plain bento boxes every day.

Chapter 312: Tease

Lu Yi had never eaten at so many different restaurants in his entire life. They ate at five different restaurants, sampling all the local delicacies. It did not take long for him to be full.

"Are you full?" Yan Huan asked. She had noticed Lu Yi gradually slowing down over the course of their dinner; he was no longer as enthusiastic about the food as he had been at the start of their night out. After so much food, even an insatiable food monster like Lei Qingyi would be full. Lu Yi's appetite was a lot smaller than Lei Qingyi's, so it was only natural for him to be full.

"Yeah. I'm stuffed."

Lu Yi let out a soft sigh. He had overindulged himself, but then again he had had a good appetite. All the local delicacies he had sampled were unique and worth the calories.

"Let's head back, then." Yan Huan stood up and adjusted her hat. Lu Yi got to his feet as well and automatically held her hand in his. They took their time, stopping to take in the sights every now and then; it was only a 10-minute walk at most, but they stretched it out to half an hour.

They spent most of the journey in comfortable silence. In fact, they felt like an old married couple.

In that moment, everything was perfect. All was right with the world.

Their half-hour walk had the added benefit of aiding their digestion. Yan Huan had read that going to bed right after a meal led to obesity and indigestion, and this seemed like a good way to avoid that.

When they finally returned, Yi Ling and Luo Lin were nowhere to be seen. Yan Huan guessed that they must have gone out for dinner and drinks. They would most likely not be back until late at night.

That meant that Lu Yi and Yan Huan had the place to themselves. They could do all kinds of naughty things.

But Yan Huan knew Lu Yi was not that kind of man.

Lu Yi stood with his back against a table as he watched Yan Huan change the bed sheets.

“You can sleep in my room tonight. I’ll bunk with Yi Ling. Don’t worry, the sheets are new, no one’s used them.”

Lu Yi did not reply.

“Or perhaps... you have other plans?” Yan Huan moved away from the bed and padded over to Lu Yi on her bare feet. She looked at him, her misty eyes reflecting his stoic face.

“What?” Lu Yi lowered his head, not quite understanding what Yan Huan was hinting at.

“Don’t you want to sleep in my room?” Yan Huan’s face was perfectly serious, but there was a merry twinkle in her eye.

Lu Yi did not reply. He was not the type to waste his breath on confirming what had already been decided.

Yan Huan knew that, but she wanted to have a little fun with Lu Yi’s “I have absolutely no earthly desires” character all the same. She wanted to see what his face looked like when flushed with other emotions.

She was both curious and excited. She suddenly wondered whether she was actually a naughty tease, deep down.

Lu Yi arched an eyebrow. “What if I don’t want to sleep in your room?”

“Oh...” Yan Huan chewed coyly on her thumb. “You mean you want to sleep with me?”

Her beautiful eyes twinkled as her long, thick lashes fluttered flirtatiously, sending a ripple across the placid lake within Lu Yi. His heart began to stir with desire.

But he did not move or speak. He leaned elegantly against the table with one hand in his pocket, his long legs casually crossed.

He was the very picture of a well-mannered English gentleman.

Yan Huan stepped closer to him. She thrust her face towards him as she wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Prosecutor Lu, if that’s what you want, well, I suppose I’ll just have to—reluctantly—agree to it.” She pretended to pout, but her voice was sweet and flirtatious.

Lu Yi was still gazing at her with calm, placid eyes. His expression remained inscrutable, but Yan Huan had picked up on the subtle changes in his posture. His breathing had become uneven and heated, and the “behemoth” lurking under his clothes was beginning to stir to life.

“Don’t you want to give it a try?” Yan Huan cocked her head coyly as she locked eyes with Lu Yi. She realized then that he had slender, beautiful Phoenix eyes. Small as they were, his eyes were exquisitely shaped and in perfect harmony with the rest of his features. In fact, he looked like a male lead in a Korean idol drama. Yi Ling had always lamented that it was such a waste of his perfect figure and idol-worthy features, and Yan Huan had to agree: if Lu Yi ever decided to go into showbiz, he would be more famous than Lu Qin. He was positively brimming with star potential.

She was still thinking about it when a hand lifted her shapely chin.

“Ms. Yan, are you sure?”

“Sure?” Yan Huan blinked. “Sure about what?”

Lu Yi caressed her cheek with his fingers. “You’ve spent so much time and effort teasing me—are you sure you want me to... do something about it?”

Yan Huan withdrew her hands. Uh-oh, she thought to herself, looks like he saw through me. Yes, I was deliberately being a tease.

She inwardly added: I guess my acting skills aren’t up to snuff if he saw through me.

But Lu Yi wasn’t about to let “Ms. Yan” off so easily after her relentless teasing.

Before Yan Huan could reply or even react, she had switched positions with Lu Yi. She felt the table behind her pressing into her back, but only slightly—Lu Yi had placed his hand around her waist and upon the small of her back, supporting most of her weight.

Yan Huan turned her head to the side. The short locks of hair next to her ear swayed with her movement, before coming to a gentle stop. Lu Yi found the sight captivating.

Her vision grew dim as the man before her loomed closer, blocking out the light. Before she knew what was happening, he had sealed her lips and taken her breath away. The faint, pleasant scent of kapok flowers on him was familiar to her: she had smelled it in her previous life, on this man who had saved her life and then witnessed her death.

His lips pressed insistently against hers, sparking an electrifying current that coursed into the depths of their hearts. They trembled at the feeling, even as they continued to lock lips.

They were engaged in a ferocious battle. They attacked each other’s lips as they tried to take each other’s breath away, neither of them yielding. Yan Huan’s brain turned to mush—she could no longer tell what was going on. This went on until she felt his forehead against hers, warm and gentle, like a patch of sunlight.

She had assumed they would go beyond kissing, and her body had turned to jelly at the thought. But just when things were beginning to get steamy, Lu Yi abruptly pulled apart from her and rested his forehead upon hers. His breathing was still ragged, and he seemed on the brink of devouring her.

But he kept himself under control.

Yan Huan blinked in confusion. She was young and beautiful—so exquisitely beautiful that most men would lose control of themselves in her presence. She was slender, but not sickly thin; her body

proportions were perfect. Her waist was so small Lu Yi had to be careful not to exert too much force when he held her, for fear of breaking her in half.

Chapter 313: Things Will Be Fine

Lu Yi squinted. He was a little disagreeable and it was a warning.

“Yan Huan, don’t play with fire.”

Of course Yan Huan knew she was playing with fire. Teasing and seducing a man in front of him, any normal man would have pounced on her a long time ago. But Lu Yi didn’t. Even though he very much wanted to, he had a limit. His rationality was unimaginably scary at times.

She extended her hand before hugging his neck tightly. She then lifted her face and buried it on his shoulders.

“Lu Yi...”

“Yes?” Lu Yi lightly tapped her shoulders. They were almost on top of one another now. Just a little more and a spark might emerge and the situation would go out of hand. But they didn’t do anything. This wasn’t a good place nor the right time for it.

“Do you not want to try? It is my first time,” she didn’t think the fire was strong enough and her voice was so soft that it almost stirred something in his heart.

“Yan Huan!” Lu Yi’s clenched his jaw.

He then carried Yan Huan up and threw her into Yi Ling’s room.

With a bang, he closed the door.

Yan Huan laid sprawled on the bed as she gnawed on the pillow.

She flipped around on the bed a few times before she touched her red lips. She still felt a slight tinge within her but it was a different feeling from the one Lu Qin had given her. Such a trembling and awakening of her soul, she had only experienced it from Lu Yi in both her lifetimes.

She wanted to try again but she knew it was impossible.

Lu Yi would definitely throw her out.

In actual fact, she had no idea if she were to try again, whether Attorney Lu would be forced down by her. A man’s self-control is limited. Lu Yi is a man and there will come a time when his self-control breaks down.

However she doesn’t know this and of course, Lu Yi wasn’t about to tell her.

When Yi Ling and Luo Lin returned, Yan Huan was long asleep. She was hugging the pillow and sleeping soundly.

Yi Ling covered the blanket over her as she nagged. “You are already so old but you still don’t know how to use a blanket. You were just like this when you were young, small and tender, you have always been

this beautiful. Back then, you would still hug your doll to bed and look for your mother when you wake up. Now that you're old, you have found a boyfriend for yourself too."

She said a little despondingly, "Sigh, my kid has grown up and doesn't need me anymore. Right, Mother Yan?"

"But don't worry, I will help keep a watch over Huanhuan, she will not marry any random jerk. Not many people can match our Huanhuan but of course, Lu Yi is one of them."

She touched her round stomach before taking a shower and rest for the night. When they wake up early tomorrow, they can prepare to go back home and earn more money. At the thought of them going back to take up endorsement with all the money entering into their pockets, she got too excited to fall asleep. When Yan Huan wasn't famous, money wouldn't come their way no matter what. Even in her dreams, money didn't fall into her pocket. Now that Yan Huan was famous, money was falling everywhere even outside of her dreams. Even though it was cliché to bring up money, Yi Ling was just like anyone else.

What does everyone like? Of course it is money.

Hence, she wanted to earn more money, as much as she could. She wanted to buy a house, a car, good clothes. She wanted to drink soy milk every day, bowl by bowl. She wanted to eat seafood delicacies, splurge on clothing...

After that, even before she could spend all her money, she had fallen asleep.

The next morning, Yan Huan was already awake. No one was rushing her to go anywhere and her time was her own to manage. She could wake up whenever she wanted to but recently, she had been working from dawn to dusk. Hence, when she woke up it was already bright. She didn't have a good sleep too and only Yi Ling was still in a deep sleep. She laid sprawled across the bed and it was unlikely that she would be awake now. Of course, Yan Huan wasn't about to wake her.

When she went out, Lu Yi was already awake and he had placed breakfast on the table. This man was fantastic at getting around and even though it was his first day here yesterday, he already knew where to get breakfast.

Yan Huan touched her belly, after eating so much yesterday, she was still hungry this early.

"What are you looking at, go wash up and have breakfast." Lu Yi came over and helped her with her messy hair. He then pushed her into the bathroom. He had already set up breakfast nicely, the chopsticks were placed neatly and when they came out, they could eat.

Yan Huan went into the bathroom. She hadn't combed her hair, brush her teeth nor washed her face. She was a shabby woman. However, she still felt pretty; she had a likeable face.

After staring at herself in the mirror, she opened the tap and started brushing her teeth and washing her face. When she came out, she was refreshed. She was thinking if she could enjoy like this for the rest of her life, her life would be perfect. She stared quietly at him.

At this moment, he turned around and looked at her too. Even though he wasn't smiling, one could make out streaks of happiness in his eyes.

Yan Huan ran over and hugged him at his waist. She buried her face in his embrace.

Lu Yi tapped her shoulder lightly. He wanted to push her away to eat first but she heard a quiet protest from her.

Were all women like this?

But Fang Zhu wasn't.

Hence, men were more rational and less emotional.

Women are more emotional but less rational than men.

At the end of the day, in most cases, emotions outweigh rationale, rationale would never be above emotions.

It was time to eat. It almost seemed as if Lu Yi was cajoling a kid as he rubbed Yan Huan's head.

Yan Huan lifted her face and didn't look as if she was crying. But only she knew that in that moment, she really did not want to let go. She was afraid that if she did, she might not find it back. She was afraid that if she did, she was going to lose him.

She quietly ate her own portion: soy milk and dough fritters. They were her favorite and her mum used to make them for her. She ate them again recently and it was a similar taste, together with the longing that was slowly fading away.

Mum, do you believe it? I will be better in this life.

I will not be like my past life, ruining the life that you gave me. I will live well this time, forever.

She smiled but under her eyes, there were streaks of pain.

She placed one hand on her face.

Lifting her face, she smiled.

Lu Yi scratched her face, "Don't think so much while eating. Eat more, say less, think less."

Chapter 314: Jumanji

"Okay," said Yan Huan as she reached for a Chinese breadstick. She took a large, unladylike bite out of it.

And then she handed her breadstick to Lu Yi.

Lu Yi took a bite out of it as well, not at all bothered by the fact that she had already taken a bite out of it.

Yan Huan happily ate the rest of the breadstick after that. She had a feeling this lovey-dovey breakfast would keep her full for the next three days.

By the time Luo Lin and Yi Ling woke up, it was almost nine in the morning. The breakfast that had been set out for them had gone cold, but they did not mind. Hot or cold, food was food.

Their routine was now out of sync with Yan Huan's. They were still asleep when Yan Huan woke up, and when they ate breakfast Yan Huan was already busy packing her things.

Inside her room, Yan Huan knelt before her suitcase. She opened it and extracted the beautiful box she had hidden inside.

"Why aren't you wearing it?" Lu Yi asked as he helped her pack her clothes, folding and arranging them neatly one by one into her suitcase. His long, beautiful fingers moved elegantly—unhurried, yet extraordinarily efficient.

"I was afraid I would accidentally lose it, so I kept it inside the box."

Yan Huan opened the box. She took out the watch and strapped it around her wrist.

"How does it look on me?" Yan Huan thrust her wrist in Lu Yi's face as she gleefully showed off her new watch.

"It looks great on you," Lu Yi said without missing a beat. It was the truth—he had hand-picked the watch himself, and he had known all along that the watch would look beautiful on Yan Huan's wrist.

Yan Huan leapt to her feet and ran out the room to show her watch to Yi Ling and Luo Lin, eager for further praise and flattery. She was already on her second lifetime, but this was a rare moment of childish glee for her, and she wanted to indulge in it.

Lu Yi stayed behind to continue packing Yan Huan's clothes. He maintained his stoic poker face as he folded her underwear and stacked them neatly in the suitcase. He looked around to check whether he had missed anything; once he was sure he had packed everything, he shut the suitcase.

He picked up the suitcase and carried it out of the room.

He had driven alone for an entire day on his journey here, but the drive back to the city was a lot less taxing for him. Everyone in the car knew how to drive, and they took turns driving every few hours. It was, in fact, a relaxing and enjoyable journey home.

Hummers were excellent cars, and it was no surprise that Lu Yi preferred his Hummer to every other car. It was spacious inside, and it looked stylish no matter what it was used for, be it ferrying passengers or moving cargo. Yi Ling could not help thinking of her own Hummer back home as she settled behind the wheel for her turn to drive. It felt like ages since she had last seen it, and she wondered whether Lei Qingyi had been considerate enough to help her wash and pamper her "Little Blackie"—the name she had given her Hummer.

By the time they returned to Sea City, it was already the following day. Lu Yi carried the luggage up to Yan Huan's apartment for them. There was a lot of luggage, but then again they had been away for a long time.

"Do you want me to bring Little Bean to you now?" Lu Yi asked as he helped Yan Huan smooth her frizzy hair. He could tell from her dull, lifeless locks that she had been exhausted for the last several weeks. In the past, Yan Huan's hair had always remained smooth and lustrous even when she overslept or neglected to comb her hair.

“No, it’s okay.” Yan Huan was still tired. She rested her head upon Lu Yi’s shoulder. “My agency arranged a number of commercial shoots and a video game endorsement for me. They’ll keep me busy till the new year.”

Lu Yi placed his hand on her head. He stroked her hair, gently and affectionately, as though comforting a child who had to suffer a punishment she did not deserve.

“Lu Yi...” Yan Huan suddenly lifted her face and looked into his eyes, her expression earnest. “You never tell me to quit acting. Why is that?” The question had been on her mind for a while now. Lu Yi was a serious, no-nonsense man who worked hard at his job and led a simple life when off the clock. She knew he did not approve of showbiz—what more an actress like her who was only home a week out of a year?

But he had never mentioned it to Yan Huan. He had never asked her to turn down a project, or quit showbiz entirely. She understood his character: he did not need his significant other to help him earn money or acquire power, because he already had both in spades. And yet he had never broached the topic of her career, and was even willing to drive for a full day just to see her when she was filming outside the city. It was completely unlike him.

“I’ll wait for you to come home.” Lu Yi pinched her cheeks affectionately. “If you’re tired, come home. If you’re not, carry on. You have your own dreams. If you can handle it, stick to your goals and don’t give up. If it’s too much for you, come home to me and tell me all about it.”

It was simple and to the point. It was neither a promise, nor a romantic poem.

There was nothing more beautiful than words in this world. And yet they were also the most vicious.

She had learned that from Lu Qin.

There was nothing more straightforward than words in this world. And yet they were also the hardest to understand.

She had learned that from Lu Yi.

She understood now. She leaned her head against Lu Yi’s shoulder again as she circled her arms around his waist, hugging him tight.

“I’ll go home when I’m tired,” she mumbled to herself as she closed her eyes.

She had to be stronger to fend for herself and prove herself worthy of him. She needed bargaining chips to protect both herself and Lu Yi. She needed money, fame, and power.

Lu Yi frowned. He could tell that Yan Huan’s mind was troubled. The young lady had always seemed to be struggling under the burden of unspoken secrets, but he knew there was nothing he could do if she did not want to tell him about it. Instead, he would protect her and watch over her, until the day she was tired and wanted to come home to him.

Yan Huan only took half a day off before reporting to her talent agency. She was no longer the no-name actress that had first walked through the doors of the building—she was flooded with so many acting offers these days she could no longer keep track of them, to say nothing of the many celebrity endorsement offers asking specifically for her.

As her popularity increased, her asking rate increased as well. In fact, she was now one of the top 10 highest paid celebrities.

“We have an offer from a variety show. Are you interested?”

Li Changqing handed the show’s program to Yan Huan. “The show’s really popular right now, so I’m sure you’ve heard of it. They only invite famous actors onto the show. A camera crew follows the guest actors around at all times, which means that many actresses have to appear before the camera without makeup. But I’m sure you have nothing to worry about.”

Li Changqing gazed wistfully at Yan Huan’s exquisite features and flawless skin. Ah, he thought, such radiant youth! Yan Huan usually went without makeup when she wasn’t working. Her flawless skin was the real deal, and not the product of heavy makeup, photo editing, or camera filters. She was just as beautiful on camera without makeup.

The variety show was called *Man vs. Wild*, a *Jumanji*-type show in which a number of celebrities got into competing groups and tried to survive in the wild. It was the top-ranking variety show because it was 100% unscripted and unrehearsed. The show had a massive audience, which was another win for Yan Huan if she accepted the offer.

Chapter 315: Senior Sister

Yan Huan had not participated in any variety show so far, and therefore had not received as much exposure as most other celebrities. Aside from regularly appearing on variety shows, deliberately creating scandalous gossip to get on the tabloid headlines was another common tactic used by celebrities to get free exposure. As the saying went, “any publicity is good publicity.”

But Yan Huan had never done that, either. She did not like cheap, underhanded tactics; she preferred to climb to the top on her own merits.

But Li Changqing knew that sometimes such tactics were necessary to maintain one’s fame and popularity in showbiz. He had therefore chosen this variety show for Yan Huan, and the show’s production team had responded by officially extending an offer letter to Yan Huan.

Yan Huan idly tapped the program for *Man vs. Wild* with a finger as she considered it. She had heard about the show before this, and knew that the show’s production team was famous for inviting only A-listers onto the show. And not just any A-lister—aside from being popular, the celebrity had to have a clean and wholesome image. The show was highly-rated, and had a proven track record of further boosting its guest celebrities’ popularity and turning them into superstars. Most celebrities would kill to get onto the show.

In her previous life, even though she had been an award-winning actress, the show’s production team had snubbed her because she had originally debuted as an AV actress. She had not expected the showrunners to invite her onto the show now, during her second chance at life.

Yan Huan was not interested in the other variety shows because they were more or less a waste of time for her. And she did not think it was necessary to pretend to date her co-stars to create juicy gossip for the tabloids, either. She was above using such cheap tricks for the sake of further “exposure.”

She wanted to survive showbiz without dirtying her hands. She knew it would not be easy to do so, but she would rather fail to be a star than live with a guilty conscience.

She would not compromise. If the chaos of showbiz finally wore her down, she would dust her hands, walk away, and never look back.

Showbiz was not what she loved best in life. That distinction went to the people around her; they were important to her, above all else, and she wanted to protect them this time around.

She reeled in her straying thoughts and returned her attention to the program for Man vs. Wild. She liked the show and the challenges it presented. In fact, she was curious to see how far she could go on the show.

“I’ll take it.” Yan Huan tapped her finger on the program. The smile on her lips was both warm and elegant.

Li Changqing finally breathed a sigh of relief. He had been afraid that Yan Huan would refuse the offer. Now that she had accepted it, his next move would be to contact the showrunners and ask them about their filming schedule so that Yan Huan would be able to clear out her schedule ahead of time. He knew he had to do it quickly or risk Yan Huan taking up yet another project “just to fill the time.” She was the agency’s most hardworking celebrity; her professionalism and dedication to her work put most men to shame. Plenty of the agency’s other celebrities had achieved their fame solely because of the agency’s generous resources, talent cultivation programs, and continued efforts to artificially boost their popularity with time and money. Yan Huan, however, was truly one-of-a-kind; she was the only one who worked almost every day of the year. She had single-handedly created her own career, without having to rely on the company’s resources.

Just then, someone knocked on the door.

Li Changqing sat up straight as he called out, “Come in.”

The door opened and a man entered the room. He was reasonably good-looking, but the sly look in his shifty eyes was off-putting. He could not keep from ogling Yan Huan, and it was clear to everyone in the room that the man was a schemer.

Li Changqing frowned. He asked brusquely, “Ding Ming, what do you want?”

“Oh, it’s nothing, really.” Ding Ming nonchalantly walked over to Li Changqing and Yan Huan. “I heard that Ms. Yan’s back in the city now, so I thought I’d pop in and say hello, ask her how she’s been. We may not be working under the same manager anymore, but Ms. Yan is still my Senior Sister in this company.”

Yan Huan stood up. Ding Ming’s eyes crinkled in eager anticipation as he waited for Yan Huan to walk over to him and greet him.

He lifted his hand and arranged his face into a smile.

But Yan Huan merely turned around and walked out of the room. She had not acknowledged his presence at all. In fact, she had not even looked at him.

Ding Ming lowered his hand awkwardly, feeling thoroughly humiliated. He inwardly cursed Yan Huan: Who do you think you are? Think you're some kind of hot-shot superstar, eh? Just you wait, you'll fade into obscurity soon enough!

No one, not even Yan Huan herself, knew if her popularity would last, but everyone knew that she was a huge star right now. Every project she participated in, be it movies or TV shows, were massive, record-breaking hits. This alone was an achievement well beyond Ding Ming's mediocre talents.

Ding Ming sat heavily in the chair Yan Huan had just vacated. He grabbed the program on the table and looked it over, his eyes lighting up as soon as he saw the words "Man vs. Wild."

"Uncle Li, I want to get on this show." He set the program on the table and pointed at the words "Man vs. Wild."

Ding Ming had his heart set on getting on the show. Anyone who could get on it was a certified superstar; as long as he appeared on the show, he would receive a massive boost to his popularity. He would be flooded with acting offers after that. He would no longer have to take on supporting roles, like his previous humiliating role as a eunuch. Even if he could not turn into leading man material overnight, he would at least be able to take the secondary or tertiary male lead roles, and slowly climb his way to leading man status from there.

He wanted Yan Huan to kneel before him and admit that she had been wrong. After that, he would have his way with the actress and see whether she was really all that pure and innocent. And not just her—he would have his way with Yi Ling as well, the manager who had kicked him off Yan Huan's team in the first place.

His fantasies barreled on. His powers of imagination were so strong he actually believed that he was now an award-winning actor, with countless adoring fans. He was now on stage, receiving his award in the dazzling glare of the spotlights amidst wild, unrestrained cheering. The world trembled at his feet.

Cough...

The sudden cough yanked Ding Ming from his imaginary paradise back to Earth. No, not Earth; he had been yanked straight to Hell—his personal Hell.

Li Changqing took the program and placed it in his drawer. He lifted his eyes and looked calmly at Ding Ming.

He had given Ding Ming his shot at fame. The agency had provided Ding Ming with every job offer available, but Ding Ming had failed to achieve any kind of popularity all the same. There was nothing more Li Changqing could do for Ding Ming. If the actor had obediently listened to Yan Huan and followed her instructions, he would have been in many hit films and shows by now. Li Changqing could not guarantee that Ding Ming would have achieved stardom if he had listened to Yan Huan, but at the very least he would have been a familiar face on TV and the big screen. Right now, not a single soul on the street recognized Ding Ming as an actor. And yet, Ding Ming still put on a mask and oversized sunglasses every time he went out, as though afraid he would be mobbed by his non-existent fans.

Li Changqing was pretty sure that even those who had actually seen Ding Ming's shows so far would be hard pressed to identify him or say his name.

“Uncle Li, did you hear what I said?” Ding Ming was getting impatient. He wondered why he had not gotten the reply he wished to hear, or the offer he wanted.

Chapter 316: He Thinks Of You As A Man

“Yes, I heard what you said,” Li Changqing replied flatly. “I’m sure you’re aware of this, but I’m just a lowly manager in Yuelun Entertainment, not the director for Man vs. Wild. I can’t get you on the show. It isn’t up to me.”

Ding Ming almost exploded when he heard that, but he stopped himself in the nick of time.

He switched tactics and used a pitiful, pleading tone instead. “Uncle Li, sorry, I was so anxious that I got ahead of myself. I’ve been in a few shows so far, but all my roles have been tiny parts. Can’t you arrange bigger roles with more screen time for me?”

“I did. You refused to accept them,” Li Changqing said bluntly. “Please Close Your Eyes had amazing ratings, and it was also very well reviewed by both the critics and the general audience. Everyone who participated in that show is now doing really well in the industry.”

“But I wasn’t...”

Ding Ming felt his temper flare up at the mention of Please Close Your Eyes and all the lost opportunities the show represented. It was a sore spot for him; if he had acted in that show, he could have been acting in lead roles by now. But he had not, and now he was practically begging for scraps from the agency. How was he supposed to achieve fame and popularity if he did not have the publicity and exposure that came with respectable acting roles?

He looked at Li Changqing again, and froze when he saw the sneer on the manager’s face.

“Refresh my memory please—what were you filming at the time?”

“I...” Ding Ming faltered. The answer was just too embarrassing for him.

He had joined a different project to play a eunuch. He had essentially given up a good opportunity for a eunuch, of all things. He had thought the historical drama would be a hit, but it had turned out to be a flop of epic proportions.

Ding Ming walked out of Li Changqing’s office, drenched in cold sweat. He knew he was in trouble. Li Changqing was no longer as friendly with him as he used to be, and if he failed to jumpstart his career as an actor in the near future, well, the agency was almost guaranteed to dump him. Li Changqing’s unenthusiastic attitude would be the least of his problems then.

He had to find a solution.

As he mulled over his problem, he saw Yi Ling leaning against a wall, playing with her phone.

He was suddenly hit with a strange, inexplicable feeling. Something told him that he had to get closer to her—yes, all he had to do was get close to her, and he would succeed in getting what he wanted.

Yi Ling’s connections and Yan Huan’s current popularity would be more than enough to make a star out of him.

Li Changqing had been unwilling to help him. Well, he would do it himself, then. He refused to believe that he would be stuck as a background actor forever.

Ding Ming began to walk toward Yi Ling. The closer he got to her, the more certain he was that his intuition was correct.

Closer, closer...

One step, two steps... three steps.

Almost there. Any second now.

But just as he was about to take another step, he heard Yan Huan's voice.

"Yi Ling, what are you doing?"

Yi Ling looked up, stuffed her phone into her bag, and hurried over to Yan Huan. She did not even notice that Ding Ming had been standing only a step away from her.

Ding Ming froze in place, his foot arrested in mid-air as he stared stupidly at the two women walking away.

Suddenly, Yan Huan turned and looked at him. Her face was devoid of expression, but her deep, dark eyes pierced his heart like a sword.

Ding Ming could not stop himself from staggering backwards. A part of his heart seemed to have been sliced away. He had lost something—was it an opportunity? The opportunity to make it big? Or was it something else? He did not know...

The only thing he was certain of was the horrible sinking feeling in his stomach and the frustration welling in his heart. He wanted to scream...

"Yi Ling, I just saw Ding Ming," Yan Huan said nonchalantly.

"Huh? Ding Ming? Who's that?" Yi Ling looked at Yan Huan, puzzled. She genuinely could not recall who Ding Ming was—there were just too many things for her to keep track of every day.

"He's that male artist you used to manage," Yan Huan reminded Yi Ling.

"Oh, him?" Yi Ling finally remembered: he was the effeminate pansy she had been forced to manage for a while. She was glad she had kicked him off the team; it would have been absolutely disgusting to have to see his face every day.

"Well, what about Ding Ming?" Yi Ling got out a bag of salted dried plums from her bag and began sucking on them. The plums were a gift from Lei Qingyi; he had told her that since she was always hungry all the time, she should suck on a plum whenever she was bored to stave off her hunger pangs.

Yi Ling had been pleasantly surprised to discover that Lei Qingyi's advice actually worked.

Right now, Ding Ming was so inconsequential to Yi Ling she would gladly choose any of the plums in her hand above him.

“Oh, it’s nothing.” Yan Huan continued walking. “I accidentally saw him holding hands with another man, that’s all.”

Yi Ling’s jaw dropped. She accidentally swallowed the plum in her mouth.

“Eww, Huanhuan! Did you have to tell me that?”

Yan Huan turned to look at Yi Ling. Her eyes moved downwards to Yi Ling’s chest. It was flat as a grassland, with no hills to be seen.

“What are you staring at? Pervert!”

Yi Ling hastily covered her chest.

Yan Huan looked away. “I wasn’t looking at anything.”

Yi Ling breathed a sigh of relief. When she uncovered her chest, however, she heard Yan Huan say:

“Yiyi, a thought just occurred to me. You know how Ding Ming kept talking about your flat chest? Well, maybe it’s because he thinks of you as a man. I mean, he likes men, right?” Yan Huan lied without missing a beat. None of what she had said was remotely true, but she did not hesitate at the least to drag Ding Ming’s name through the mud. In fact, she said it so matter-of-factly it sounded like the honest truth.

Yes, she was telling the truth. Even if it was a lie, she would find a way to twist it into the truth.

“Ugh, he’s so disgusting!” Yi Ling gritted her teeth. She felt like puking. What a repulsive man!

For the rest of the day, Ding Ming tried his best to “bump into” Yi Ling, but Yan Huan thwarted his attempts every time. It was difficult not to run into him while they were in the company building, so Yan Huan knew that she had to take extreme measures to let Yi Ling know that some men were complete trash and had to be avoided at all costs.

She had to teach Yi Ling to cherish her own life, and be sure to stay away from scumbags.

Scumbags such as Ding Ming and Lu Qin.

Yan Huan spent the day shooting a commercial. It went well enough; there was a slight hitch halfway through the shoot, but the problem was resolved by the time they wrapped up.

When it was time to leave, she got into Yi Ling’s car. Yi Ling had just started the engine when she spotted Ding Ming—that pesky fly—approaching them.

“That damned pansy!” Yi Ling spat out. “Why is he always prancing about in front of us? If he has the time to do that he should grab whatever acting role he can get and work on his career. Ugh, I feel sick already!”

She floored the gas pedal. The car zoomed off, leaving Ding Ming in a cloud of dust and exhaust smoke.

Chapter 317: He’s Gay

Ding Ming wiped the exhaust fumes and dust from his face. He seethed with resentment—resentment that transformed into a look of vicious hatred upon his face.

He thought that no one had seen the expression on his face, but he was wrong. Yan Huan had seen everything—his expressions, his feelings, and even his schemes.

Yan Huan got out her phone and sent a message to Lu Yi.

“Will you be coming home tonight?”

She did not have to wait long for Lu Yi’s reply.

“I want to eat noodles tonight.”

“Okay,” was Yan Huan’s reply.

“Yiyi, how about noodles for dinner?”

“Sure.” Yi Ling was not a picky eater. She ate everything and anything—meat, vegetarian, vegan, whatever. “I’ll buy extra noodles, you should invite Lei Qingyi over for dinner, too. We’ve been back in the city for so long now but we haven’t had him over for dinner yet. I’m sure he’s itching to eat your cooking.”

Yi Ling was the type to spring into action as soon as she had come to a decision. She made a bee-line to the supermarket and went inside to get the noodles, leaving Yan Huan in the car.

Yan Huan browsed the internet on her phone as she waited. The hat on her head obscured most of her face. A few curious passersby stopped to stare at the black Hummer, wondering who it belonged to. It was difficult not to stare, given how flashy the car was.

Yi Ling finally returned with huge bags of groceries. She had planned on buying noodles and nothing more, but had ended up getting side-tracked when she saw all the other food she felt like eating.

They were still raw ingredients right now, but they would turn into delicious food soon enough.

Yan Huan counted the bags of groceries in the back seat. She wondered if she should get a maid to help out in their apartment.

Once they returned to their apartment, Yan Huan shed her superstar aura and prepared to cook. She washed her hands and pinned her short bob in place with hairpins. An unruly lock of hair escaped to dangle next to her cheek, waving lightly as she moved about the kitchen. She did not mind; in fact, she liked the way the smooth, silky lock of hair caressed and planted warm kisses upon her cheek.

She heard the front door open. Her guests had arrived.

Yan Huan tucked her hair behind her ear. She had originally planned only on cooking noodles, but Yi Ling had bought so many other ingredients it seemed a waste not to use them.

Luckily, Yan Huan and Yi Ling had returned to their apartment early, which gave Yan Huan plenty of time to prepare dinner. She would be able to serve her guests in a moment.

After dinner, Yi Ling and Lei Qingyi began playing video games. Lu Yi and Yan Huan went out for a walk to help digest their hearty dinner. Yan Huan, who was usually a small eater, had ended up eating until she was full because she had been in a particularly good mood that night.

She knew she could not afford to overeat. She would have to go on a diet if she gained weight.

Yan Huan stopped walking. She tugged Lu Yi's sleeve.

"What's wrong?" Lu Yi stopped. He saw the troubled look on her face. "Is something bothering you?"

Yan Huan leaned against the railing behind her. She moved her fingers from Lu Yi's sleeve to his buttons. She had to hold on to something; she felt uneasy otherwise.

This was a habit of Yan Huan's that Lu Yi had only recently discovered.

"Lu Yi, I want to ask you to help me with something."

Yan Huan looked up at him as she tugged at his buttons. Fortunately, the buttons remained firmly in place even as she played with them.

Lu Yi poked her in the forehead, before folding her into his arms. He patted her back comfortingly, as though she were a little girl.

"Good girl. You did the right thing. Don't forget, I'm not a stranger to you. I'm your family. Your closest family."

"I know." Yan Huan grabbed Lu Yi's buttons again as she inwardly said to herself: You're my family, my closest family. You're the person I want to protect in this life. I'll be strong, strong enough to get rid of all the threats lurking around you—including that ruthless Lu Qin and his equally ambitious mother. I can't stop now. I have to continue on my journey. I have to earn a lot more money.

...

Ding Ming had been in a bad mood over the last several days. He had planned on getting close to Yan Huan's manager, Yi Ling, but how was he supposed to do that when he could barely even see her? On top of that, he had failed all of his auditions.

He was reasonably sure that his looks and his acting skills were good enough to net him a supporting role. He already had several shows under his belt, after all. All his roles so far had been bit parts, true, but then again Yan Huan had started out that way, too. No, she had started out even lower down the ladder—she had been a background actor.

Why was she now a superstar, with a never-ending stream of movie offers and a paycheck that grew with every passing day, while he, Ding Ming, was still a complete nobody? It was terribly unfair.

No, I refuse to believe that she's better than me, he sneered to himself. I refuse to believe that this is my fate. I'll leech off Yan Huan if it's the last thing I do! She's so famous and successful now. She has a responsibility to help her Junior Brother out, right?

He was so absorbed in his own thoughts and schemes he nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a hand on his ass. No, it wasn't just on his ass—it was actively groping it.

"What are y—" Ding Ming had been about to yell in anger when he felt something against his stomach.

"Kid, you better not move. Not unless you want to see your guts on the floor."

Ding Ming lowered his head. His pupils dilated with fear when he saw the shiny knife against his stomach. He began trembling all over like an autumn leaf in the wintry wind. Large beads of cold sweat rolled off his forehead.

The man kept the knife against Ding Ming's stomach as he groped the latter's ass with his other hand. Ding Ming was so disgusted he felt like puking. He was straight, not gay!

But he could only stand rooted in place and let the large man molest him. The man had moved his hand from the back to the front, and was now touching his unmentionables. Ding Ming's face flamed with anger and humiliation—he wanted badly to dash his head against the wall.

Ding Ming did not realize that someone was watching. A small distance away, Yi Ling sat in her car, gawking at the scene unfolding before her.

She had just looked up when she saw two people kissing and fondling each other...

She had not intended to be a voyeur. She was not a pervert; she did not ogle couples when they made out in public. But when she had been about to look away, she suddenly realized that the couple was not made up of a man and a woman, but two men.

Tsk tsk, BL...

Her interest had immediately been piqued. As the saying goes, every woman was secretly a BL fangirl at heart.

She stared harder, in hopes of being able to make out the juicy details. Under the streetlight, one of the men turned towards her. Her jaw dropped—that man was definitely Ding Ming. She suddenly remembered what Yan Huan had told her: Ding Ming was gay.

Chapter 318: Lifelong Disgust

She remembered how he had tried to hit on her because she was flat-chested.

He had essentially treated her like a man—and that was even more insulting to her than calling her flat-chested.

She floored the gas pedal. The car roared past Ding Ming and sped away. Ding Ming, who was still being molested, had not even had the time or presence of mind to see who was inside the car. If it weren't for the knife against his stomach, he would have puked his guts out by now.

The molester had removed Ding Ming's belt, and was now caressing the skin on his hips. Ding Ming felt his throat close up. He wished the man would go away soon. He wanted only to put as much distance between himself and this man molesting him.

At the same time, he vowed he would never forgive this man for humiliating him in such a manner. I'm going to kill this man, he thought to himself, if it's the last thing I do.

Suddenly, a bright light shone into his eyes.

He instinctively closed his eyes as his heart skipped a beat. The cold sweat upon his forehead rolled down his temples in large beads.

He knew what had happened. “Stop that! You can’t take a photo!” he yelled at the man with the camera, standing a short distance away. Meanwhile, his molester had hastily slid the knife back into his sleeve and ran off. Ding Ming was left standing alone, his clothes torn and disheveled. His lower lip was swollen because he had bit it, and his hair was drenched in cold sweat. He was actually in a state of shock, but to everyone else who did not know better, he looked like he had just been in an intense make-out session...

He sat heavily on the floor, on the verge of tears. The man who had taken the photo had long since vanished.

The next day, all the news websites ran the same headlines. The news was so shocking it was on par with news of the stock markets crashing—in this case, Ding Ming’s stocks had crashed all the way to the bottom.

This was the first time he had ever made it onto the headlines. Given the choice, however, he would rather live his entire life without ever getting on the headlines, especially when the headlines went:

“Out Of The Closet: Male Artist From Yuelun Entertainment Makes Out With Boyfriend In Public!”

The articles were accompanied by several photos that had not censored the subjects’ faces with mosaic filters. The other man’s face was difficult to make out as it was in the shadows, but Ding Ming’s features were clear and easy to recognize. In the photos, Ding Ming’s features were twisted in a sort of grimace, and his hair was wet with cold sweat. Ding Ming knew that this was an expression of pain and misery, but to everyone else it looked like an expression of sexual arousal and bliss.

Ding Ming was never going to be able to clear his name now. The CEO of Yuelun Entertainment began to pressure Li Changqing to deal with the scandal quickly, before it affected Yuelun’s reputation. The CEO could not understand why Ding Ming had done something so utterly stupid—why couldn’t he have made out with his boyfriend at home, instead of out on the streets, in public? Now there was photo evidence of it, and Ding Ming’s career was completely and utterly ruined. There would be no coming back from this.

Yuelun’s CEO wanted to fire Ding Ming right away and throw him out the building doors. This was the absolute worst scandal possible. Ding Ming was a total nobody in showbiz, but it did not change the fact that no one would ever accept a gay celebrity.

Li Changqing threw the newspaper in Ding Ming’s face. He was furious. Ding Ming’s misconduct had embarrassed Li Changqing as well—everyone in Yuelun knew that Li Changqing had previously tried his best to turn Ding Ming into a star. And this was how Ding Ming had repaid him! Li Changqing wished he could punch Ding Ming in the face and break his nose.

“Uncle, it isn’t my fault.” Ding Ming grabbed his hair and pulled it in frustration. “I’m innocent! That man was threatening me with a knife!” As soon as he recalled what had happened the day before, he felt his stomach churn and his hair stand on end. “It really wasn’t my fault! What did I do wrong? My life was in danger. He was threatening me. And then someone took a photo of me and posted it online.”

The internet was proof that bad news and scandalous gossip always traveled faster than good news. Within a few hours, Ding Ming’s scandal had spread all over the country. It had even been picked up by the some of the news sites overseas.

Yuelun Entertainment had eventually killed the news and stamped out the fire, but Ding Ming was now a massive liability to them. Any further mention of Yuelun Entertainment in the scandal would be a huge blow to the agency's reputation.

The orders had come directly from the CEO. Ding Ming had to scam.

There was no longer anything Li Changqing could do to help Ding Ming. Ding Ming's career in showbiz was effectively over: with such a huge scandal attached to his name, none of the movie directors would ever consider hiring him.

Li Changqing shook his head as he placed a contract on the table.

Ding Ming opened the contract with trembling fingers. The color drained from his face. He sat in his chair stupidly, struck dumb.

He had been let go. Full stop. His original contract with the company had clearly stipulated that none of the artists signed with the company were allowed to damage the company's reputation in any way. As soon as there was a breach of contract resulting in irreparable damage, the artist would have to bear full responsibility for his or her actions.

And so Ding Ming had been fired. He had signed a contract for five years, but that contract was no more than a worthless piece of paper now. He had been shown the exit. He was no longer welcome.

He exited the building in a daze, unable to believe what was happening to him. He saw a woman wearing sunglasses walked towards him, with two other women in tow—one of them had short hair and a no-nonsense expression on her face, while the other looked highly competent and world-wise.

He could not bear to look at them. They were the winners in life, stars who would continue to climb the sky, while he was nothing more than a loser.

Yi Ling spotted Ding Ming. Her lip curled in distaste as she pointedly looked away. He had defiled her eyes. She had seen many disgusting people, but none had been anywhere near as disgusting as him. What a sick pervert! He made her want to puke.

Ding Ming bowed his head as he slinked away with his tail tucked between his legs. He did not notice that the woman in sunglasses had stopped to watch him walk away. She removed her sunglasses—it was Yan Huan.

Her cherry red lips curved into a small smile.

Ding Ming, she thought to herself, let's see if you can remain in showbiz after this. If you manage to do it, I'll gladly change my surname to yours. In my previous life, this was the punishment I gave you for what you did to Yi Ling, and you deserve it again this time around.

In her previous life, this was in fact the exact same method she used to run Ding Ming out of showbiz. She had ruined his career forever. But his previous punishment had come after Yi Ling's death. This time around, she would make sure he never appeared before Yi Ling again.

From that day on, Ding Ming disappeared from Yuelun Entertainment and Yi Ling's life. In Yi Ling's previous life, Ding Ming had been the parasite that had eventually taken her life. This time around, he was merely a source of lifelong disgust.

Yi Ling was now conditioned to feel nauseated upon hearing his name.

The moment his name came up in a conversation, Yi Ling instantly felt nauseated.

When his name came up a second time, Yi Ling was so nauseated she felt like gagging.

When his name came up a third time, she puked her guts out.

Chapter 319: Her Mother's Cooking

Yan Huan was very, very busy. Her agency had accepted several commercial offers on her behalf, and all the shoots and reshoots had kept her busy. This continued for some time, and before she knew it Chinese New Year had come again. Once the year was over, she would be 23 years old, according to the traditional Chinese method of counting ages. That meant it had already been three years since she started her second chance at life. Three years! It had not been easy. She had worked almost every day of the last three years, shooting movies and TV shows one after another. She had gotten the Best Newcomer award for her efforts, and also Most Popular Artist, Best Supporting Actress, and also the Rising Star Gold Award. She had participated in most of the industry's award ceremonies over the last three years, and had the awards to prove it. She was famous now, of course—her many awards and her highly recognizable face saw to that. Her journey to stardom so far had been smooth-sailing, and she knew her star would continue to rise for as long as she wanted it to.

The Chinese New Year movie lineup was finally announced. Among them was Director Huang's *The Uncle and the Flower*, and also Director Yan Hua's big budget movie, *Three Kingdoms*.

All the actors in *Three Kingdoms* were famous. And then, of course, there was also Su Muran.

Su Muran was the female lead. She had managed to get into one of the Chinese New Year movies, which was no mean feat for a newcomer. That achievement alone was enough to boost her status in the industry.

Yan Huan did not know how much Su Muran's acting skills had improved. She had been too busy with her own work to pay any more attention to Su Muran than what was strictly necessary. But Yan Huan knew that Su Muran had participated in several big budget shows; even if her acting was still not up to par, she had the full support of her powerful family, and plenty of backdoor connections to make up for it. It would be nigh impossible for someone blessed with that many resources to fail to become a star.

Yan Huan now knew that she could not prevent Su Muran from becoming famous. As in her previous life, Su Muran would climb the ranks of showbiz while protected by the halo of the mighty Su family. At the same time, it was entirely possible that Su Muran would eventually fall from grace—Yan Huan's current life had already diverged from her previous life, after all.

She was no longer the Yan Huan from her previous life, but Su Muran was still the same Su Muran.

She finished shooting all the commercials, all the magazine spreads, and all the other work that had been arranged for her by her agency. When she was done, Yan Huan breathed a sigh of relief; she could finally go home to celebrate the New Year now. She had been so busy it was already the eve of Chinese New Year by the time she got home.

She was really tired—so tired, in fact, that she fell asleep as soon as she collapsed onto her bed. By the time she woke up, the night was bright with fireworks and loud with the sound of firecrackers. The festive mood was in the air.

It was after midnight now, which meant it was officially a new year. As per Chinese custom, she was now one year older.

She recalled that she had received a red packet last year. She wondered whether she would be getting one this year as well. Neither she nor Yi Ling had any older relatives, so Yan Huan had given Yi Ling a red packet to make up for it.

She had given both Yi Ling and Luo Lin a generous red packet each, as a thanks for the help and support they had given her over the last year.

The doorbell rang. Yan Huan got up and went to see who it was. Yi Ling was not around; she had returned to her riverside villa, which she considered to be her home now, and insisted on returning to it during the New Year for “housewarming.” As for Yi Ling’s meals, Yan Huan did not worry about that; Lei Qingyi had gone with Yi Ling, and he was never one to go hungry, let alone let Yi Ling starve.

Yan Huan had stayed behind in the apartment her agency had given her. No, that was no longer true—she had bought out the apartment, so it belonged to her now. It was her home. The place was quiet and safe. She liked it here, and it was home. She knew better than to join Yi Ling and Lei Qingyi and be the third wheel. The day Yi Ling finally settled down with a good, dependable man was the day Yan Huan would finally be able to stop worrying about Yi Ling.

She opened the door. To her great surprise, it was Lu Yi.

Why was he here? Hadn’t he gone home to celebrate the New Year?

Lu Yi entered the apartment. He removed his shoes at the door and changed into a pair of indoor slippers. There were two pairs of slippers meant for men in the apartment—Lu Yi’s and Lei Qingyi’s.

Lu Yi set the tupperware he had brought with him on the table. He opened it—it was filled with plump dumplings.

“My mom made them herself. Come over here and have some.”

Lu Yi took out the dumplings. There were vegetarian dumplings and meat dumplings. He knew that Yan Huan preferred to eat vegetarian meals, and so he had asked his mother to make some vegetarian dumplings as well. His mother, Ye Shuyun, had been puzzled at first—when had her son taken an interest in healthy vegetarian meals? He had never shown the slightest interest in it before this. She had then assumed that her boy was “all grown up now,” and knew how to take better care of his health by eating more vegetables.

Lu Yi extracted a stack of red packets from his pocket.

“Happy New Year.” He placed the red packets in Yan Huan’s hand. She did not count them, but she could tell there were several dozen in that stack.

“Where are these from?” Yan Huan had never received so many red packets in her life. There were so many of them! It did not matter how much money was inside; just the number of red packets alone was enough to send her mind reeling.

“My family,” Lu Yi began dividing the dumplings: meat dumplings for him, vegetarian dumplings for Yan Huan.

“And you’re giving them all to me? Don’t you want them?” Yan Huan carefully put the red packets away. He had given them to her, so they were hers now.

“I’m giving them to you.” Lu Yi did not feel at all sad about parting with the money. His heart ached for her—he knew that Yan Huan loved receiving red packets during the New Year. But there were few people around her in a position to give her red packets, and so he brought all of his red packets to give to her.

He hoped it made up for the sorrow she felt over the lack of red packets.

He took out another red packet from his pocket. “And this is from me.”

Yan Huan unabashedly took that packet and slipped it into her pocket as well, looking very much like a greedy money grubber—which was ironic as her net worth and the paycheck she commanded had both reached astronomical levels. But she was not the type to show off her wealth, nor was she the type to spend her money on expensive luxuries. The clothes she wore and the food she ate were no different than those of the average Joe on the street. Her down-to-earth lifestyle led many people to mistakenly assume that she was poor when in fact the opposite was true—she was incredibly wealthy.

Yan Huan picked up her chopsticks and ate a dumpling. As soon as she bit into one, however, tears gathered in her eyes. She took another bite, unable to believe it.

The taste was strikingly similar. It was all so very familiar. Could it be...?

“What’s wrong?” Lu Yi put down his chopsticks and reached out to caress Yan Huan’s cheek. She was openly crying now, like a young child. Her tears were a rare sight—she was a tough, independent woman who did not shy away from hardship and pain. So why was she crying?

“Nothing.” Yan Huan wanted to smile, but the tears would not stop flowing.

“These dumplings taste just like my mother’s. I haven’t had them in a very long time.”

She was telling the truth. The dumplings tasted just like the ones her mother used to make. She had never learned the recipe when her mother was still alive; because of that, she had never been able to recreate the same taste in her dumplings after her mother passed. This was the first time she had had dumplings that tasted like her mother’s in a very, very long time.

Chapter 320: Glass Ring

There was the taste of mum.

It was a taste in memory, a special taste from both her lives.

“If you want to eat in the future, I will get my mum to make some for you. You can have them any time, don’t cry now.” Lu Yi handed her a tissue to wipe her face dry. “Alright”, he patted her face. “Eat the dumplings. Once today is over, it will be a new year and your new movie will be released tomorrow. I will bring people to watch it.”

“Alright,” Yan Huan blew her nose as she agreed. She lowered her head to continue eating the dumplings.

This was indeed a dumpling made by a mum. Ye Shuyun had made them and it was her aunt in her previous life that made it. Despite staying at the Lu house for such a long time, she had no idea that Lu Yi’s mother whom she hates the most in the past was able to make dumplings just like the ones her mum used to make.

All the feelings were right.

All the tastes were right.

That’s right.

She almost finished the entire plate of dumplings and she loved the taste of it. It was delicious.

But what she liked even more was the mother and son that had made and delivered her the dumplings.

She really felt as if she was blind. In her past life, she had given her everything for Lu Qin and his mother only to lead a life for those few years that wasn’t human-like at all.

The sound of firecrackers sounded from outside again as Yan Huan sat on the balcony and watched the thousands of lights outside. The fireworks were being lighted up one by one too.

The fireworks burst in a short time but it left a permanent beauty in one’s heart.

Lu Yi stood behind her as he took off his jacket and placed it over her shoulders. At this moment, he was only wearing a single t-shirt as he allowed the wind to blow. He didn’t budge at all.

He started tidying up her hair that had been messed up by the wind.

Yan Huan turned around and saw a smile etched on his face. His smile was filled with warmth.

This was the Lunar’s New Year and was one of the most warmth-filled ones that Yan Huan had experienced. She received many red packets and she got to eat dumplings that were like the ones that her mother made.

At night, Lu Yi only left after Yan Huan fell asleep. He gently closed the door as he took a look outside. The firecrackers had stopped and the sounds had faded. Another year passed.

At night, Yan Huan had a dream. She dreamt that she was little and was carrying a small plate. On the plate were the dumplings that her mum had made.

A young and pretty woman pinched her daughter’s face.

“Huanhuan, are the dumplings nice?”

“Yes,” Little Yan Huan nodded.

“Shall we make more to eat tomorrow?”

The little girl nodded hard again. With her bright and big eyes and her fat face, she looked almost the same as how Yan Huan looked now. Except there were no worries on that small face of hers that still had baby fat on the cheeks.

She was really innocent then. She was still under her mother’s wings and was fighting hard to grow up.

But when she grew up, everything changed.

Her mother is no longer around, the dumplings were no longer around.

Nothing was left.

“Huanhuan, wake up, wake up...”

A loud voice from a mad man sounded by her ear.

She opened her eyes and realized that the corner of her eyes was sour. She lifted her head at the familiar ceiling. It was a dream. She had a dream and it had been a long time since she last dreamt of her mother.

Her mother seemed to be smiling at her. In her past life, her mother was always crying in her dreams. She knew it was because her mother pitied her; she pitied that she was being cheated by others. She pitied that her blood was taken away from her bag by bag. She pitied that her stomach was split open by others and she pitied that 6-month-old child.

But in this life, her mother was smiling.

Mum, don’t worry. I will lead a good life, I will.

She placed her hand in front of her chest before turning her head. She saw the red packet on the table in front of her. She picked up the red packet; it was from Lu Yi and it was pretty thick. She had no idea how much money there was inside.

She placed the red packet in her hands before opening it and taking out the contents.

There was a stack of hundred-dollar notes inside. She estimated there were around a thousand dollars inside.

Attorney Lu was this magnanimous and had so much money for her. She happily laid down on the bed to count the money. They had to go for a movie premiere soon and her movie was at night while Three Kingdoms was in the early morning. This was one step ahead of Uncle and the Flower but she wasn’t upset by it. After all, it was from a famous director and he needed face.

She counted one by one and got happier as she counted. There really was a thousand dollars inside. She took over the red packet and was about to stuff the money back inside the red packet when she felt as if there was something else inside.

She sat up and shook the empty red packet. Indeed there was something inside as it made some noise.

She placed the thing inside the red packet on her hand; it turned out to be a ring. It was an exquisite ring.

Suddenly, she covered her mouth and in an instant, she felt her nose turning sour. The sourness enveloped her eyes as she felt a few hot tears emerging. They fell into her palms.

She put on the ring on her ring finger; it fitted exactly.

“Alright, it will be you in the future, I won’t take it off.”

“Huanhuan, are you awake?” Yi Ling knocked on the door from outside, “Are you not hungry? I am dying of hunger. I want dumplings, dumplings.”

Yan Huan wore her shoes and when she walked out, Yi ling was lying on the sofa waiting. One of the shoes was kicked somewhere else. She kept shouting that she was hungry and how she was dying of hunger.

Yan Huan walked into the kitchen and opened the fridge before taking out the dumplings inside. She cooked 2 bowls, one for herself and the other for Yi Ling. She had hired a nanny for the house but she had to celebrate the new year too and would only come over after.

Hence, they still had to do everything themselves these few days.

When Yan Huan placed the dumplings on the table, Yi Ling’s dog nose was very sensitive indeed. She sniffed with her nose before rushing to sit down. She took up her chopsticks and stuffed one dumpling into her mouth. Of course one had to eat dumplings during the new year. If not what new year was it?

Yi Ling’s eyes were incredibly observant as she grabbed Yan Huan’s hand. “This ring is really pretty.”

Yan Huan winked but before she could say anything, she heard Yi Ling rambling on.

“The glass looks exactly like a diamond. I want to go get one soon too.”

Yan Huan only laughed as she lightly twisted the ring on her finger.

Yi Ling called Lei Qingyi at night to tell him. She asked him where she could find a large glass ring.