

Chapter 41: A Kitten

Thunder cracked outside suddenly. After a while, it was obvious the bad weather had turned into a thunderstorm.

Yan Huan put down her chopsticks, distracted by her thoughts. Of course she couldn't focus on eating her meal.

"Huanhuan, what's wrong with you?" Yi Ling also put down her chopsticks. She took Yan Huan's face in her hands, "Why you are so uneasy?"

"Emm..." She bit her fingernails, "Is your stomach upset?"

"No." Yan Huan gazed at Yi Ling, whose mind was wandering, "Don't worry, I'm pretty healthy, it's okay." Yan Huan pushed Yi Ling's fingers away. The wind outside was getting stronger but she stood up, opened the door, and ran out.

"Huanhuan, Huanhuan, where are you going?"

Yi Ling followed her until the doorway, but Yan Huan was already out of sight.

"What's wrong with her lately? She's going crazy!" She turned around and clung to the door with her whole body like a gecko. "Oh, she's grown up so she's not obedient like before. She used to tell me everything in the past but now she doesn't say anything at all. It's a start for her to have her own little secrets."

She bit the fringe of her clothes with force, her tears almost could not stop.

"Mother Yan, I am so sorry to you. Huanyan was brought up to disobedience."

At the moment, Yan Huan had already ran into the street. She raised her arms before her eyes, she almost could not open her eyes because of the wind and the rain, which were as big as beans, that dropped onto her body.

Those cats still stayed outside. It was not a problem if the weather was good, but it was troublesome if it was a rainy day. If she had known the situation would be like that earlier, she would have brought them home. There was little space, but it was a shelter from the storm for them.

Although they were not rich, they could still afford cat food for them. It wasn't that she was extremely sympathetic, nor a busybody. She just remembered that when her mother was hospitalized for her illness, Yi Ling and she had also slept rough on the streets, she also had no fixed home like those cats.

Therefore, she didn't have the heart to do nothing.

When she arrived, the rain became harder and harder, falling drop by drop, which hurt her face.

"Meow..."

"Meow..."

She heard a weak meow.

She ran to where the stray cats gathered. The box was still there, as well as the cat food beside it. She squatted and opened the box, but the cats who had been inside disappeared.

“Meow...” One more sound came. She followed the meow and found a kitten in the corner. It was a tortoiseshell cat, and the mother cat’s kid as well. Yet where were other cats? Where was the mother cat? And the other kittens?

At that time, the little kitten was trembling in the corner, all of its fur was wet. It yowled weakly and its eyes were wet like it was about to cry. It looked as pitiful as could be.

Yan Huan went over and picked up the little kitten carefully. Perhaps it was lost, or the mother cat and other kittens were brought home by other passers-by and just it was left.

The rain became harder, she wrapped the kitten in her clothes, then ran into the rain, clenching her teeth. Now the rain commenced pouring down violently.

Chapter 42: In Fact, They Were Strangers

She found a shelter, the entrance of a mall, for herself. At present, many pedestrians were taking shelter from the rain here, and Yan Huan was on the edge with rain occasionally falling on her body. She was almost soaked, her hair plastered down to her neck wisp by wisp, and the raindrops gathered from her hair and fell down with a tock-tock, silently, making ripples.

Under the blue-gray sky, cars came and go and pedestrians walked by in a hurry due to the pressures of modern life.

She curled up. Some people left. Maybe they didn’t want to wait for the weather to clear up so they took taxis, or were picked up by their relatives. Yan Huan lowered her head to look at her wet clothes. No taxi driver would want to take her. Even if someone would like to, she didn’t want to make the seats dirty.

Then she felt that the rain seemed to slow above her head. She blinked and a raindrop fell from somewhere above her wet eyelash. She looked up and found there was an umbrella. The one who was holding the umbrella was a tall man, wearing a black windbreaker and a pair of black leather shoes. It was a man who was almost in all black, with an angular jaw and thin lips that seemed to mean apathy.

She lowered her head in a hurry, letting raindrops fall from from her hair to her neck.

“Meow...”At the moment, the kitten came out from her breast. She looked almost like a drowned rat, but the kitten was protected well. She cooed at the little kitten in her arms, smiling. But there was mild pain in her heart, which made her cry, made her shed tears.

Music came to her suddenly. It was an old song, which she was also familiar with. It was the ringtone of a man that had not been changed for decades.

Don’t look back if it’s end,

If there is something that deserves my lingering,

I think it must be that you have loved me,

But there is no end of the road,

Both of us are passers-by, what kind of feeling I can take away,

I can refrain from tears,

But my broken heart cannot be saved.

She raised her head, with the song ringing in her ears now and then. Perhaps he had answered the call, perhaps the song had been stopped.

When I lost your hand,

Blowing sand blurred my eyes,

I love you but the last scene was hazy,

Don't regret the pain.

I don't regret that I have loved,

But since then I am alone in the world.

The ferry was far away with lights on the other shore,

People on the river can just drift.

I don't regret that I have been loved,

But we can't have a happy ending.

Suddenly, her lashes veiled her eyes again and a teardrop that nobody saw dropped from her eye. The deep voice of the man sounded. She was so familiar with the voice that her heart instantly ached.

"Okay, Mom, I'll go back soon. It's raining outside. I'm under a building. No, you don't need to send someone to pick me up, it's fine." She forgot what he said then. Occasionally, raindrops fell down from the umbrella above her head, splashing on the ground. Then, for a long time, just her breath could be heard. The kitten had fallen asleep. The rain was still falling. The man was still there.

There were fewer and fewer people at the entrance of the mall. Just them two were left at the end. The man was holding the umbrella the entire time. The umbrella was tilted to keep all the rain off of the thin woman. He gave her more shelter but nobody knew in fact, they were total strangers.

Chapter 43: Picking Up A Kitten

But actually, they were not strangers, they even knew each other for a long time.

Yan Huan wrapped herself tighter in her wet clothes, dropping her eyes. She was waiting, waiting til the rain stopped, waiting til the wind stopped, waiting til he left.

Memory lets one relive certain moments. Time gives a limitation to promises, and the limitation is an instantaneous moment. If you want, it could last forever; if not, you could also say it was just a lie.

She reached her hand out to touch the raindrops trickling outside. The drips started to chill her fingertips, tock tock, tock tock, like a song without rhythm.

In the stream of time, she was really grown up. She knew who could be trusted and who couldn't, she knew who could be loved and who couldn't.

In the distance, the weather suddenly started to clear up. And the slightest glimmer of light dazzled her.

The man folded up the umbrella and left with long strides. His feet were on the ground and the water splashed, wetting his shoes. But he still kept his steady pace without any pause.

Lu Yi.

What you are like, actually?

Yan Huan lowered her head and stroked the little kitten in her arms. You fed stray cats. You held an umbrella for a soaked woman without any words.

It was said that the man was heartless and affectionless. But why, until now, did she find that sometimes only the affectionless man would help her unconditionally?

At that moment, she caught a whiff of the fragrance of ceiba and redbud. Then someone told her he had found heaven. But why did she think that she would go to hell?

"Meow..." The kitten in her arms gave a soft cry and then licked her fingers.

"Yes, we'll go back home now." Yan Huan stroked its head that was as small as a walnut. "We can eat there." A cold wind was blowing, and she gave an involuntary shudder, clasping the kitten close to her bosom as she ran home.

When she opened the door in wet clothes, Yi Ling was so shocked she could not say anything for a while.

"What happened to you?" Yi Ling pointed toward Yan Huan, who was totally soaked, almost jumping with shock, "You went swimming? Diving? Or did you have a water gun fight?"

"I was just in the rain for a little while. I'm OK." Yan Huan took off her shoes and entered the room. She couldn't wear those shoes again, they were too wet. But she didn't own too many shoes. She remembered that she was in serious circumstances at present. She really wanted to be famous more quickly to improve their life quality.

She cupped the kitten in her arms carefully and put it in Yi Ling's arms, "Dry it, please. I need to change clothes. It's too small to be bathed. Just make it dry."

Yi Ling held the little guy in her hands carefully, like it was a bomb.

"Huanhuan, where did you get it?" She almost didn't dare to do anything with it. How to deal with it? Will it die because of something she does? Yi Ling was quite a tomboy.

"I found it up on the road." Yan Huan went into the tiny bathroom. The water was so icy at first that she dodged the stream. After a while, the water became warmer.

Chapter 44: A Chance to Become the Heroine

“Achoo!” She sneezed, her nose feeling itchy. She was afraid that she would get a cold.

After she came out from the bathroom, she looked for some medicine for herself and took it, then drank hot water, holding the cup in hands. She hoped that the cold was not too severe, and it would be gone after taking the medicine.

In the living room, Yi Ling had cleaned the kitten up and prepared a nest for the kitten. She fed it milk and the little guy began lapping it. It saw Yan Huan, and meowed to her.

“Huanhuan, look, is Bean clever?” Yi Ling tapped the little head of the kitten, taking this opportunity to name it.

“Bean?” Yan Huan didn’t mind the name. It was neither bad nor good. But it was not bad for a name made by Yi Ling. At least she didn’t name it Doggie, it was a cat after all.

“Yeah, Bean, not bad, right? Little bean.” Yi Ling played with the kitten’s tail. “Look, it’s so tiny just like a bean. Well, Bean is memorable as a name.”

“But, it seems like Bean’s not adjusting. Will it live?”

Yan Huan drank a cup of water again. She didn’t know how they could keep it successfully, but they would try their best.

The next morning, after waking up, Yan Huan had a look at Bean in the living room at first. The little guy was sleeping quietly. It’s little pink nose and little paws. She touched the paw, pink, soft, and lovely. The paws were not sharp yet, so it wouldn’t hurt her.

The kitten opened its eyes a little then closed them, napping in the nest again.

She decided to buy some cat food after a while, and add milk to it, which would make the food softer. It probably would be difficult to survive just with milk.

So a new member, the kitten, joined Yan Huan and Yi Ling’s family. Perhaps the popular belief that cats had nine lives was true, because little Bean was quiet and disliked meowing. It always slept after eating food. If it needed to use the litter box, it would go in by itself. And it grew up a little, seemed to be feeling better.

Yan Huan like reading some books about the period of the Republic of China recently. She was waiting for this chance. Perhaps she wouldn’t be famous all at once, but at least it would be her first step on her career path.

“Huanhuan, good news, a surprise!”

Yi Ling flung the door open, held Yan Huan’s hand, and made for the door immediately.

“Hurry up. A director wants you to be the heroine. You will be famous this time. I read the script, although it’s a little simple, it didn’t have a high requirement for acting experience, you are absolutely able to do it!” Yi Ling gushed. She must be very excited that she could get the opportunity this time. They had been doing this for a long time, so long. How tough had it been? What kind of nightmares had they experienced? They touched a real script finally, and the role was heroine!

Yan Huan let Yi Ling drag her away, without any words, without protest. However, her eyes showed irony and scorn. Could she get the role of heroine, did she want to be a heroine without clothes?

They arrived in a small apartment. How simple the environment was and how low the cost was. The team even wanted to shoot a film here.

The man who was the so-called scriptwriter was Chen Wanda, he must have been satisfied with Yan Huan's appearance, nodding occasionally.

Chapter 45: Return

"Miss Yan, this is the script, you can skim it quickly. Although you are not famous at present, trust me, I will lift you up as long as you follow my instructions. I will make you a super star, even get you international honors. Then you will be an international household name!"

If a new actress, or an actress like Yan Huan who was fighting for fame at the bottom of the entertainment industry but hadn't succeed yet, heard such an opportunity to have a skyrocketing rise, she could not refuse. Becoming the movie queen from an acting nobody was fatal attraction to most people, almost nobody could refuse and Yan Huan in her last life was the same as well. But she found out later, temporary greed would bring her regret in a lifetime and an indelible stain.

It just took a few minutes for an actress to remove her clothes, even a few seconds. But if she wanted to wear them again, how long did she need? Yan Huan was typecasted until she died in her last life. This was her skeleton, which would not be cleared forever.

Yan Huan was sober. She knew there was no free lunch in the world. If it was free, it would either kill you or hurt you.

She picked up the script from Chen Wanda and turned the pages one by one, sneering in her heart. What a outdated story with almost no plot and an inconspicuous literary title.

Return (Gui in Chinese).

Wasn't it actually Liaison (Chugui in Chinese)?

As for content, it was a literary film at first sight. But in fact, it was porn, which was disguised as a literary film. In the film clips, she was in a revealing dress. It made her feel sick.

Those clips not only revealed her body, but also her worst soul and past.

The story told the lifetime of a woman. A housewife who was not reconciled to her husband's infidelity so she started to change herself. She started to get acquainted with those she didn't know before, then she had a new life. She thought that since her man deserted her, why couldn't she manipulate men? So she became corrupt and had affairs with different kinds of men, drawing immense satisfaction from them. And she walked onto a road of no return in the end.

She got divorced from her husband and started her befuddled life, and died in the end.

Turning the last page, Yan Huan put the script down and pushed it back to Chen Wanda. Her face look changed at once, with fear in her eyes.

"I'm sorry, I don't think I can play the role well. I've only played small roles before this and the heroine needs better acting skills. I'm sorry that I am not able to do this. I hope we can cooperate in the future if I improve my skills."

Chen Wanda looked confused for a moment. He never dreamt that Yan Huan would decline the offer as a new actress without skills or experience. The role was a mouth-watering meal, a piece of charcoal on a snowy day. But she refused.

Chapter 46: She Refused

It was illogical, really.

"Miss Yan, I didn't hear you properly?" Chen Wanda was not sure, so he asked again, "You mean, you decline the offer?"

"Yes," Yan Huan nodded respectfully. She hid her scorn and disdain perfectly to play an innocent coward. "I'm afraid I can't play the role well. Therefore, I've thought about it for a long time and made the decision. I think I am not competent for it."

Off to the side, Yi Ling was like a cat on a hot tin roof. How could Yan Huan miss such a good chance? It was the heroine! A chance like this was rare and hard to find! She tried to pinch Yan Huan's waist and stepped on her foot with force. Yan Huan felt pain but still smiled politely, and she pinched Yi Ling back.

Who are you to pinch my waist?

Yi Ling withdrew her hand promptly and got it. Yan Huan really didn't want to take the role. Yan Huan was stubborn sometimes, and would not be persuaded by Yi Ling. But she really thought it was a rare opportunity. She was afraid that Yan Huan would regret it later, but she couldn't help her.

Chen Wanda was also worried, you could see cold sweat on his forehead. It was hard for him to find such a beautiful actress. If she really refused, it would be very difficult for him. He didn't know if he could find another actress as beautiful as this girl again.

"Miss Yan, the most important part of the movie is the plot. High acting skills are not necessary. You just need to play the role naturally."

Ha, naturally? Yan Huan dropped her eyes, her gaze falling on her fingers. Right, a naked role, naturally? Of course it needed to be natural.

"Sorry, Director Chen, I can't accept the role." Yan Huan refused again, with a soft voice. She was not tough at all but everyone who knew her knew that it was not negotiable if she refused something. If she said that one word, no, then change was impossible.

Pausing for a moment, her soft voice sounded again.

"I still want to keep my feet on the ground, and make it step by step. And I am young, I will have a lot of chances in the future. I think there will be many actresses who are more suitable than me for such a good role." Then, she stood up and offered her hand to shake with Chen Wanda, "Sir, sorry for wasting your time."

Chen Wanda desperately looked to Yi Ling, but she gave him a look that showed she was willing but unable to help. Chen Wanda was discouraged and felt uncomfortable. He thought it was easy to sign a contract with such an unknown actress. And he had succeed many times before, no one had refused him like Yan Huan.

It was like the sound of nails on a chalkboard, which made him uncomfortable but would not hurt him.

“Humph!” He scoffed, picking up his script instead of shaking Yan Huan’s hand. His face darkened suddenly, and his voice was filled with scorn. “I’ll see what kind of role you can get in the future. You are just an acting nobody. How dare you try to make it here?”

Yi Ling wanted to explain, but Yan Huan took her arm tightly.

Chapter 47 Not Their Kind of Movie

Chen Wanda stomped off, fuming. Yi Ling wanted to say something, but thought better of it. Yan Huan, on the other hand, was entirely unperturbed. She did not look like someone who had just lost an amazing opportunity; she merely looked as though she had wasted half an hour.

Yan Huan did, in fact, feel that she had wasted her time. She did not want to spend a single minute with someone as disgusting as Chen Wanda, let alone half an hour. If it had been up to her, she would have stayed at home and spent the time playing with her cat instead.

“Huanhuan, what’s wrong? Why didn’t you accept the offer?”

That was the question Yi Ling repeated over and over again on the way home. She did not blame Yan Huan; she was merely sorry to see the opportunity slip away. Chen Wanda had been unnecessarily scathing with his choice of words, but he was right: who knew how long they would have to wait for their next opportunity to come knocking?

Yan Huan stopped. She looked directly into Yi Ling’s eyes as she asked, “Yiyi, do you know what kind of movies Chen Wanda makes?”

Yi Ling was caught off-guard by the question. “Um, he’s a new director, and this is his first feature film. But I’ve seen his short films, and I think they’re okay. Kind of artistic. He’ll be writing and directing this movie. It’s low-budget, he doesn’t have a lot of money or sponsors to work with, which is probably why he chose us. I mean, he would have gone with someone more famous if he had the money, right?”

Yan Huan reached out and squeezed Yi Ling’s shoulder. In her previous life, both of them had been deceived by Chen Wanda. They had happily signed the contract with the director without knowing what the movie was truly about. On the first day of the shoot, they finally discovered, to their horror, that it wasn’t an art film at all—it was one of “those” films. Yi Ling had frantically tried to stop Yan Huan from going ahead with the shoot; she had even gone so far as to agree to pay the director for breach of contract. It was an astronomical amount of money, but they would pay it, slowly but surely, even if it meant having to take on every small role and stunt double job that came their way. But Yan Huan had not been able to appreciate Yi Ling’s desperate efforts back then; she had been ravenous for fame, and her hunger had clouded her judgment. She took on the role, and thereafter it followed her around like an indelible stain for the rest of her short life. And why wouldn’t it? Everyone had seen her naked.

That was all in the past now. She was no longer the naïve girl who would willingly put her lifelong reputation on the line for a film that would end up being worse than trash.

“Yiyi, I have to take off all my clothes for that role. Do you understand what that means?”

She smiled. It was a complicated smile: it was the smile of a prisoner who had finally broken free, and also the smile of a woman looking ironically upon her past.

“What did you just say?” Yi Ling could not believe what she had just heard. “You’re saying it’s a porno? A... a porno?”

The word was so repulsive to her she had to force herself to spit it out. She didn’t mind her sweet Huanhuan taking on small roles, but acting in such a disgusting movie? Never!

She understood now why the director had said that the role did not require any acting skills, only that Yan Huan would have to “show her true self.” She knew now why he had been adamant about choosing someone young and beautiful, and why she had been deeply uncomfortable with the way he had looked at Yan Huan. She would never have guessed...

Yi Ling’s face clouded over. “Let’s go.” She took Yan Huan’s hand, squeezing it. “I don’t care if we have to take on small roles for the rest of our lives. I will never, ever, let you act in such a trashy movie. That scumbag Chen Wanda tried to pull a fast one on me, eh? The next time I see him, I’ll break both his legs—and make sure he won’t be able to have children!”

Yi Ling was bristling like a protective mother hen. Yan Huan’s heart, which had become cool and cynical, gradually warmed up again as she listened to Yi Ling’s angry rambling. She felt a slight stinging in her eyes, but she did not cry.

We won’t shed any more tears this time.

We’ll be happy this time.

Right?

Chapter 48 Open Audition

Yi Ling now had Chen Wanda on her official hate list. She had been a manager for some time now, and knew what lay in store for celebrities who participated in “dirty” movies. If the movie flopped and faded into obscurity, well, no harm done, but if it became a hit, the actors’ reputations would be ruined forever.

She had therefore been extremely careful not to accept any roles that required Yan Huan to strip or show excessive skin.

Yi Ling walked into the room. “Huanhuan, I found another opportunity.” She saw Yan Huan kneeling on the floor, feeding Little Bean dry cat food. Little Bean had gotten a bit bigger, but was still growing. Yan Huan smiled serenely; there was something about the gentle curve of her lips and the subtle arch of her eyebrows that made Yi Ling feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

She was beautiful, exquisitely beautiful. Yi Ling sighed wistfully, for the umpteenth time: if Yan Huan’s gorgeous looks weren’t enough to propel her to stardom, then there really was no justice in the world.

“What’s wrong?” Yan Huan stood up. She walked over to the table and seated herself before it.

Yi Ling snapped out of her reverie. She quickly followed Yan Huan over to the table and sat opposite her.

“You’ve heard of Director Jin Hailiang, right? His next project is Love and Tribulations, a 30-plus episode TV drama set in the period of the Republic of China, during the war. I want you to audition for one of the roles. It’s a small supporting role, but you’ll get a lot of screen time. Also, it’s an open audition, so everyone gets a fair chance.”

“Still...” Yi Ling pulled nervously at her hair. “Even though it’s an open audition, they probably already have someone in mind for the first and second female leads.”

“Well that’s none of our business, it’s not like we’ll be trying for the lead roles. But we should definitely audition for one of the supporting roles.” Yi Ling launched into an explanation of what the story was about and who the major characters were. “What do you think?” she asked. She felt that some of the supporting roles would be a big boost to Yan Huan’s career, if she could get them.

“I’ll go for the audition.” Yan Huan rubbed her arm. She closed her eyes against the sunlight shining through the window. The filtered light left fleeting shadows upon her cheeks. After a while, her eyes suddenly flew open. “Yiyi, I want the part of... Hong Yao.” For a split second, they seemed to blaze with conviction and heartfelt longing. Yi Ling gaped at the sudden change, unsure of what to make of it.

Hong Yao was one of the supporting characters in the drama. Although the character did not have a lot of screen time, she was the heart and soul of the story, the lynchpin holding it together. She was the Rouge Pavilion’s most famous prostitute; she was ruthless, selfish, and greedy. She lived in degradation—but she never stopped loving her country and people. She traded her broken, battered body for crucial wartime intelligence, ultimately saving the lives of many, at the cost of her own.

Yi Ling actually wanted Yan Huan to get the part of the female lead’s maid, not Hong Yao. She had felt that the maid character was a better match for Yan Huan, but now she was not so sure. Yan Huan seemed to be a different person these days.

Yi Ling inwardly shrugged. Hong Yao had less screen time than the female lead’s maid, but if Yan Huan wanted the role of Hong Yao, who was she to object?

Three days later, Yi Ling and Yan Huan arrived early at the open audition for the period drama. They knew that they had to be there early to get a good number, which was, ideally, somewhere in the middle. Actors who auditioned first were at a disadvantage because the judges tended to reserve judgment until they had seen everyone, while those who auditioned last were at an even worse disadvantage: by then, the judges would be exhausted and impatient.

Yi Ling was happy with their number: they were the 25th in line. Director Jin was famous, which meant a large number of actors had come to try for a role. Many of them were no-name actors like Yan Huan; a few looked vaguely familiar, having acted in minor TV roles recently. There were also famous actors in attendance, but these actors had their own resting rooms, and did not mingle with the other lowly candidates who had to wait in the hall.

Chapter 49 Jumping the Queue

“Why is she here?” Yi Ling muttered under her breath, visibly unhappy.

Yan Huan followed the direction of Yi Ling's gaze, and saw who she was referring to: Wen Dongni, the actress who had slapped Yan Huan so hard in her previous stunt role her face had nearly doubled in size from the swelling. Why was she here?

Then she remembered. Yan Huan folded her arms across her chest, and gently tapped her fingers on her arm, as though playing the piano. It was all coming back to her: in her previous life, Weng Dongni had played the role of Hong Yao. In Yan Huan's opinion, however, Wen Dongni had not been able to capture the true essence of the role. Even so, the TV series had helped her become a minor celebrity, and she had received several acting offers after that.

As for Yan Huan, back in her previous life...

She had been shooting Chen Wanda's movie Return, and had therefore lost the opportunity to participate in Love and Tribulations, which had turned out to be a first-class production in terms of casting, plot, and subsequent audience reception. She had also lost the opportunity to participate in Director Jin's future projects, and had had to bear the shame of being known as one of those "nude stars" for the rest of her short life.

Her fingers tightened around her arm. She swore to herself that she would get the role of Hong Yao this time, no matter what.

The PA system blared out: "Number 25! Yan Huan!" Yan Huan checked the small slip of paper she had been clutching tightly in her hand: yes, that was her number.

"Don't be nervous, everything will be fine. Just do what you always do." Yi Ling tried her best to encourage Yan Huan, even though she was actually a lot more nervous than her. The palms of her hands were slick with nervous sweat.

"I know." Yan Huan smiled at her, her crescent eyes twinkling with gratitude.

She stepped forward. This was it: the true beginning of her new life.

She wasn't nervous. She was confident in her acting skills, because they had been hard-earned: she had put in the hours, the effort, the sweat, and the tears to slowly but surely hone her acting skills in her past life. She remembered all the hardship and the injustice she had suffered along the way, and she channeled those memories now into her determination to get the part of Hong Yao.

She had just entered the audition room and was about to introduce herself when the door abruptly swung open. Wen Dongni strode into the room with her manager, whose hand promptly shot out to push Yan Huan to the side because she was standing in their way.

The push had not been particularly strong. Nonetheless, it was enough to cause anyone unprepared for it to lose their balance.

There was a loud thud as Yan Huan's shoulder struck the cabinet beside her, but no one cared enough to turn to see what was going on. A corner of the cabinet dug into her flesh, and although it wasn't sharp enough to cut her skin, the force of it would leave a bruise.

Yan Huan's body was special in more ways than one. Aside from her rare blood type, her skin was extremely fair. In fact, she was a little too fair: any accidental collision with a hard surface resulted in a bruise that was far more obvious on her skin than anyone else's.

She rubbed her arm. She straightened herself, but everyone around her continued to treat her as though she was invisible. Her fingers tightened around the slip of paper with her number on it; she was number 25, but Wen Dongni had jumped the queue and taken her spot.

Wen Dongni appeared to have recognized her; she had turned to look behind her just as she was cutting in line, and in that split-second Yan Huan had seen the smug, challenging look in her eyes.

Wen Dongni did not feel that there was anything wrong with jumping the queue; she was famous, had solid acting experience, and had someone backing her. It would be a waste of her talent if she did not audition for a role. She wasn't about to waste her time waiting in line, however, she already had other jobs lined up for after the audition, after all.

Chapter 50 Competing for the Role

Yan Huan's lips curved into a placid, indifferent smile.

It wasn't an act: she honestly didn't mind. In fact, she was happy to get the chance to witness Wen Dongni's acting skills up close and personal.

Wen Dongni stepped forward. She flicked her long hair across her shoulder, a seductive look in her pretty eyes. She was dressed in a silk cheongsam; it was obvious that she had chosen the attire to complement the role she was auditioning for.

"Good day to all of you, Mr. Director, Mr. Screenwriter, ladies, gentlemen. My name is Wen Dongni, and I will be auditioning for the part of Hong Yao."

Wen Dongni smiled confidently.

Jin Hailiang exchanged a few words with the other men and women at the table. A few of them began to nod enthusiastically, as though agreeing that Wen Dongni looked the part. The smile on Wen Dongni's face grew wider.

She was sure she had the role of Hong Yao in the bag. She was not a complete nobody in the entertainment industry; most of the people in the industry knew who she was, had heard of her name. The same could not be said for the other candidates, most of whom had only been film extras before this and had no acting skills or reputation to speak of. Hong Yao was basically just a prostitute; acting the part would be easy, and she could not wait to steamroll over all the actresses idiotic enough to try to compete for the role. There was one woman, especially, that she could not wait to put in her place...

Her eyes flickered surreptitiously to the actress waiting behind her. The smile on her red lips widened.

Jin Hailiang gestured towards her.

"Please begin."

Wen Dongni immediately launched into her performance. She was acting out the scene in which Hong Yao entertained customers in Rouge Pavilion. Rouge Pavilion was the biggest brothel in the area, and

Hong Yao was its most profitable prostitute. Her hips swayed seductively as she walked across the floor in her high heels. The subtle click clack was enough to stir the imagination of everyone present; there was something coy and irresistibly alluring about the sound.

She put her hand on her assistant's shoulder. Part of her assistant's job was to act opposite her during an audition, and right now he was playing the part of a customer.

"All alone, mister?" She blew a warm, seductive breath out between her parted lips and towards the neck of the male customer. It was extremely effective; the man stiffened as his neck broke out in goosebumps.

"Um... yes... I-I'm alone..."

The man stumbled over his words, his thoughts racing every which way. He was under Hong Yao's spell.

Hong Yao suddenly burst into laughter. Her red lips moved towards the man's ear. "Well, in that case... I'll be waiting for you..." With that, she straightened her back, turned around, and walked away with an exaggerated sway of her hips.

Wen Dongni turned around and bowed to the director. "Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you enjoyed my performance."

Jin Hailiang nodded enthusiastically as he conferred with the others at the table. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction whenever they flickered towards Wen Dongni. Barring any unexpected turn of events, the role of Hong Yao would most likely be going to her.

Out of all the actresses who had tried so far, Wen Dongni was the only one who had been able to make them sit up and take notice.

Wen Dongni lifted her chin and strutted out of the room with her assistant.

Yan Huan looked up. Her eyes were as calm as a placid lake on a clear day. She had seen Wen Dongni's performance and had to admit that she was a good actress. She had brought out Hong Yao's seductive charms, Hong Yao's burning passion, and Hong Yao's amorous nature. Her body language had matched the part well. But that wasn't enough for Wen Dongni to surpass Yan Huan.

Yan Huan was still lost in her thoughts when a loud voice interrupted her reverie.

"Next! Number 25."

She quickly reeled in her straying thoughts, and composed herself. Anyone else would have lost their temper if someone cut in line right in front of them, but not the new Yan Huan. She knew the proper way to deal with something like this, which was to brush it off instead of letting it get under her skin.