

## Chapter 61 Get Out

Yan Huan was reminded of a famous Chinese saying: “it takes ten years of hard work just to get ten minutes in the spotlight.” It was clearly not an exaggeration.

Yan Huan suddenly sensed that someone was looking at her with less-than-friendly intentions. She turned and saw Wen Dongni’s icy smile; the other actress appeared to be mentally slashing Yan Huan all over with her hostile, razor-sharp gaze.

Yan Huan turned back around. She found a chair and eased herself comfortably into it. Go on, try and cut me up, she thought, I have thick skin. Yan Huan was, as the saying went, pure gold, and she was not afraid of fire. She did not believe for a second that Wen Dongni would be able to do anything to her.

“Cut! Wen Dongni, what the hell do you think you’re doing? You’re playing the part of Hong Yu, not some kind of vengeful spirit. If you don’t get it, pack your things, go home, and make sure you read the script this time.”

“Cut! Wen Dongni, can’t you even position yourself correctly?! Look at where you’re standing, you’re blocking out everyone behind you!”

“Cut! Wen Dongni! Ms. Wen! Where are your lines? Did you feed them to the dogs?! If you don’t know how to act, get out of my sight!”

Director Jin’s booming shouts resonated through the set. It had begun with a simple warning, and then escalated into colorful, unrestrained swearing. No word was too foul for the director; the verbal abuse was enough to break the spirit of most men, let alone a woman.

Wen Dongni was in tears from all the scolding. Her makeup had turned into a smudged mess.

This was the first time she had been scolded like this since becoming an actress. It was utterly humiliating. Her temper suddenly flared; she picked up a prop and smashed it, before whipping around to kick the props next to her feet.

Hmph! That was it, she was quitting. It was just a supporting role anyway, nothing special. There were plenty of other roles out there waiting for her.

She strode arrogantly out of the studio, leaving her assistant dumbfounded. After a moment of speechless gaping, he was left with no option but to follow her out the door.

The same thought was now going through everyone’s minds: what an unpleasant and unprofessional actress!

If there was one thing Jin Hailiang hated most, it was actors who threw tantrums and behaved like divas. How dare she wreck his set! Very well then, he vowed to himself, I didn’t get my reputation in this industry for nothing—I will never let Wen Dongni participate in my projects ever again!

Anyone who dared mention Wen Dongni’s name in his presence would earn themselves a good scolding.

Now that Wen Dongni had walked off the set, it was necessary to get someone else to play the part of Hong Yu. The role went to a new actress; her acting was not quite as good as Wen Dongni's, but she was very obedient and humble. Jin Hailiang was not completely satisfied with her performance, but he would take someone who was obedient, if not too bright, over a drama queen like Wen Dongni any day. He had seen and worked with plenty of actors, and, quite frankly, Wen Dongni was nothing special. Who did she think she was?

The new actress was Sun Shasha. Yan Huan knew a little about her from her previous life: the actress would eventually become famous enough for those in the industry to recognize her name, but she would fall short of becoming a true star. That was the reality of the industry—competition was fierce as there were new, fresh-faced actors entering the scene every day. Yan Huan did not know what became of Sun Shasha after her own untimely demise in her previous life, but she knew that Sun Shasha's acting had slowly improved after taking on roles in a number of TV shows and movies of differing genres. She had a reputation for being a nice person, and Yan Huan felt she would probably make a good friend.

Yan Huan did not try to out-act the new actress and steal the show. Instead, she worked with Sun Shasha to make sure she performed to the best of her ability. Sun Shasha knew Yan Huan was doing her best to accommodate her, and that knowledge was enough to turn her into a starry-eyed fan.

"Ms. Yan, your acting skills are amazing. Thank you so much for today." Sun Shasha had found time after the scene was over to personally thank Yan Huan. It was sincere, too, for if it hadn't been for Yan Huan, she would probably have had to redo her scenes many, many times.

## **Chapter 62 She's New**

"You don't have to be so respectful to me. I'm new, too." Yan Huan lowered her head and shyly played with her hands. She knew it was better to act her physical age; if she was too mature and jaded people might start thinking she was some kind of immortal witch.

Sun Shasha cupped a hand over her mouth in surprise. Her thoughts were in a jumble: A new actress? I don't believe it! There's no way she's never done this before!

Sun Shasha found it difficult to believe that a new actress was capable of such flawless, nuanced acting. She burned with shame: she was the equivalent of an insignificant bug in the face of Yan Huan's incredible acting skills. She inwardly kicked herself, and then immediately felt sorry for herself.

The production crew hurried to set up the next scene. It was the first scene with Jiang Chao, the male lead played by Qi Haolin.

Yan Huan had read the script, and knew that Hong Yao and Jiang Chao had a number of scenes together. She was also aware that Qi Haolin was a veteran actor with impeccable acting skills. This scene was the first one with both Hong Yao and Jiang Chao together.

The character of Hong Yao served as the linchpin for several plotlines in *Love and Tribulations*. The relationship between Hong Yao and Jiang Chao was one of those plotlines: they were two people who, under other circumstances, would have ended up together. But fate had gotten in the way.

"Action!" shouted the director as soon as the lights, camera, and props were ready.

This was the first scene with both Yan Huan and Qi Haolin.

Inside Rouge Pavilion, amidst the ongoing debauchery, Hong Yao continued to sit alone in her chair. She watched the men and women flirt with each other with a dispassionate eye, as though she were merely a disinterested observer. She watched the men grab the women around their slender waists, before stealthily moving their hands either upwards or downwards. The men boasted of their love for their family and country, but deep down, they were disgusting pigs.

She had seen her fair share of such men.

Suddenly, a group of soldiers from the militia barged in. There was something intimidating about their military boots and gleaming rifles.

A hush fell upon Rouge Pavilion. In the silence, a tall military officer strode into the building; he was wearing the officer's uniform of the National Revolutionary Army. There was a gun in the holster around his waist. His black military boots thumped ominously across the floor, breaking up the sound of his spectators' nervous breathing.

Hong Yao's red lips curved upwards, ever so slightly. She had nothing but contempt for these so-called soldiers: they spent their days lazing about doing nothing, wasting the hard-earned money of their fellow countrymen. All they ever did was bully helpless women.

Her eyes flickered towards the military officer. Suddenly, her pupils constricted as her fingers reflexively flew to her forehead. She brushed her bangs aside, her fingers tracing the uneven bump on her skin as she did so. It was a scar, the only scar on her body—and it was the reason why she always covered her forehead with her bangs.

Her eyes grew unfocused. She appeared to be lost in thought; her red lips parted as she silently mouthed a few words.

“Cut!” Director Jin shouted. Everyone else finally snapped out of their trance.

Yan Huan's magnetic performance had pulled everyone on set into the world of Love and Tribulations.

Everyone agreed that Yan Huan was an incredible— perhaps even awe-inspiring— actress. Her expressions and body language had been on point; every look, every gesture had been exactly right. She had expertly positioned herself for the camera in every shot. All of the above could be taught through professional training, but they could only be mastered after years of hands-on experience. Yan Huan's masterful acting was beyond even Wen Dongni, who already had a number of acting credits under her belt. During the audition, Wen Dongni had captured who Hong Yao was on the surface—a prostitute—but she had failed to express who Hong Yao really was inside.

### **Chapter 63 Search**

They were now shooting the next scene. Jiang Chao, played by Qi Haolin, raised a hand and casually signaled to the soldiers beside him. The soldiers immediately surrounded Rouge Pavilion.

Madam Huang, the owner of the brothel, immediately ran over when she saw what was happening. She was wearing numerous layers of makeup; as soon as she opened her mouth to speak, the air around her exploded with the powder flaking from her face.

“With all due respect, Sir, you can't do this to us. We're just honest folk doing honest work.”

“Honest folk doing honest work?”

Jiang Chao removed his gloves, an icy smile on his lips. “Since when is prostituting yourself ‘honest work’?”

Large patches of powder broke away from Madame Huang’s face as her expression froze in place.

“That doesn’t seem fair, sir. We’re just trying to feed ourselves in these troubled times. It’s so hard to earn a living these days. You can’t expect an old woman like me to take all these young ladies out to the streets to beg for food and jobs. Even if we tried that, someone would have to be willing to take us in, and you know very well that times are tough for everyone. We don’t have a choice. We have to sell ourselves, or starve.”

Madam Huang wept as she spoke, staining her handkerchief with copious amounts of makeup. The wrinkles in her old, sagging face surfaced in patches as her makeup continued to wear away. Jiang Chao was forced to press a finger under his nose to keep from inhaling the cloud of makeup powder and choking to death.

He signaled to his soldiers. A soldier ran over, extracted a search warrant from his uniform, and waved it under Madam Huang’s nose.

“Madam Huang, we have reason to suspect that you are harboring a communist. We will now search the building.”

Madam Huang teared up as soon as she heard the word “search.” She opened her mouth to protest, but before she could say a word Jiang Chao had already crumpled his gloves into a ball and stuffed it into her mouth. Madame Huang’s courage deflated at once; she could only whimper helplessly, too afraid to remove the gag and speak her mind.

Just then, the tension in the air was broken by the crisp clack-clack of high heels from above.

“Oh my— a search, you say? Well, you’ll find that there are only women here. Please, search to your heart’s content, but be quick about it. We’re running a business here, and my sisters have to earn money to be able to feed themselves.”

A foot appeared at the top of the wooden stairs, followed by a pair of lovely, perfect legs. Most of the men present were suddenly filled with the urge to run their hands over the exquisite calves, to feel whether they were just as smooth and supple as they looked. The legs belonged to a lady dressed in a blue cheongsam; she descended the stairs slowly, one hand upon the railing and the other casually fanning herself with a feather fan. There was something fascinating about the way she moved. When her face finally came into view, everyone present sucked in a breath, unable to contain their feelings of surprise and awe.

It was Hong Yao, Rouge Pavilion’s top prostitute. Her status at the top of the hierarchy meant that her services were reserved only for important customers—the average customer could not approach her or ask her to attend to them.

She sauntered across the room, stopping in front of Jiang Chao to gingerly place a hand upon his shoulder. She looked directly into his narrowed eyes.

Her lashes fluttered as she leaned into Jiang Chao's chest.

Jiang Chao's eyes narrowed further. His hand shot out, shoving Hong Yao roughly away before brushing his clothes in a manner that suggested he had come in contact with something dirty. He silently appraised Hong Yao with eyes that were utterly devoid of emotion.

### **Chapter 64 Go Ahead, Eat Up**

"You must be Miss Hong Yao of Rouge Pavilion. Your reputation precedes you."

Rouge Pavilion was the top brothel along the Qinjiang River, and it owed its reputation to Hong Yao, its most successful prostitute. She was talented at entertaining men and she was also stunningly beautiful. Even Jiang Chao had to admit that she was gorgeous.

But her beauty could not erase the fact that she was a shameless prostitute.

A light seemed to go out in Hong Yao's eyes as her smile wavered ever-so-slightly at the open ridicule and disdain in Jiang Chao's eyes. She leaned against a table and began fanning herself.

"My dear sisters, stand aside, make way for these soldiers and officers, they have a search to conduct. Oh, I nearly forgot—we should take out the things hidden under our clothes, too, to make it easier for them to do their job." She tugged at the cheongsam she was wearing; all at once, the men around her turned to ogle her. She could hear someone swallow heavily.

Men— they were all the same.

She was still fully clothed, but the way she moved and the look in her eyes was more than enough to send the men around her into a lecherous mood. She was a natural at seduction; the men could barely restrain themselves from pouncing on her and tearing her clothes off.

Jiang Chao gave another signal, and his soldiers promptly marched upstairs. Jiang Chao, however, stayed behind. He did not move.

Hong Yao continued to fan herself. She took in the sight of the man standing before her: the military uniform, the square jaw, and the thin, slight scar on his temple.

She kept her red lips curved in a careless, disinterested smile. But there was something else hidden within that smile—something no one could detect or understand.

From time to time, the soldiers upstairs could be heard rummaging through cabinets, pushing things over, and breaking God-knows-what.

Madame Huang could not stop twisting her handkerchief in anxiety. It pained her to listen to the soldiers wreck the place. No, it was too much, it was killing her inside. She wailed inwardly: every stalk of flower in the building, every table, every chair, every cup, every mosquito— yes, mosquito— were worth gold and silver.

It sounded incredible, but Madame Huang truly believed that Hong Yao could turn even the mosquitoes in Rouge Pavilion into gold.

She could not bear to think of their losses.

Hong Yao was still leaning against the table with her exquisite red lips in a small, pretty pout. She smiled at Jiang Chao every once in a while—the smile was both seductive and challenging.

“Cut. That’s a wrap.”

Director Jin raised his hand, signaling to the cameraman to stop filming. Today’s shoot had been extremely successful; all of the scenes had required only a single take.

“That was fantastic, I enjoy working with you.” Qi Haolin extended his hand towards Yan Huan. “You’re an amazing actress— you set the pace, and I was already in-character before I realized what was happening.”

“Oh no, that was all you. I learned a lot from your wonderful performance,” Yan Huan replied modestly as she took Qi Haolin’s hand and shook it. Qi Haolin realized that Yan Huan was not the talkative type, and gave her an understanding smile before leaving her alone.

He was truly grateful that Yan Huan was such a smart and competent actress. No one enjoyed having to redo scenes, after all. It was a waste of everyone’s time.

At noon, everyone took a short break to eat lunch, which consisted of just a simple lunchbox as they were pressed for time. The TV series was slated to go on air next March, which meant they had only a few months left to finish filming. But no one complained about the lackluster meal; they had all signed onto the project knowing what they were in for.

### **Chapter 65 A Stunning Performance**

The production team had ordered fewer lunchboxes than usual that day. Ordinarily, the cast and crew were allowed to take as many set meals as they wanted, but now each person was entitled to only one. Only those who desperately needed two and specifically asked for it could get an extra set.

Yan Huan and Yi Ling had gone too late, and could only get one lunchbox each. Yan Huan gave Yi Ling some of the food from hers.

“Aren’t you hungry?” asked Yi Ling as she shoveled food into her mouth. She was starving. She was close to tears from hunger, even though she had barely done anything. She could not imagine what Yan Huan, who had spent the entire morning acting, must be feeling.

“Go on, eat up.” Yan Huan gave her some more food from her lunchbox. She pinched her own waist. “I can’t eat too much, or I won’t fit in my costume.”

She wasn’t lying: that blue cheongsam was too small for the average woman to wear. Yan Huan had been able to wear it because she had a ridiculously small, 60 cm waist. If her waist was any bigger, she was quite sure she would not be able to squeeze into the dress. It was better to eat too little than too much; she did not want the tiny dress bursting apart on her.

“In that case, I’ll help you finish your lunch.”

Yi Ling quickly pulled Yan Huan’s lunchbox towards her. She did not want Yan Huan to have a change of heart, eat the rest of her lunch, and discover that she was too big for her costume later. No way was she going to let a stupid outfit ruin her beautiful Huanhuan.

They finished their lunch and had barely rested for 10 minutes when someone came to get Yan Huan for next scene. The bulk of Yan Huan's scenes took place near the beginning of the story, after that, it was the first and secondary female leads' turn to shine. Hong Yao had a few scattered scenes later on, which would be shot all at once to save time. Once all her scenes had been shot, she would be able to sit back and relax.

The cameras rolled.

Several soldiers ran down the stairs, their military boots thumping heavily against the wood. They stood before Jiang Chao and saluted him. "Sir, we didn't find anything."

Jiang Chao's eyes narrowed dangerously as he toyed with the ring around his little finger.

"You searched the whole building?" he asked, his voice incredulous.

"Yes, sir, that is correct. We searched everywhere, but we didn't find anyone suspicious."

"Assemble the rest of the men. We're leaving." Jiang Chao had turned around and was just about to take his first step towards the door when he heard a burst of feminine laughter from behind him.

Hong Yao had gone from leaning against the table to sitting on it. She had grabbed a handful of sunflower seeds and was now eating them one by one. "Leaving so soon, Officer?"

Jiang Chao swung around, his eyes flashing dangerously.

But Hong Yao was not afraid of him. She was not a proper, respectable lady; she was a filthy woman leading a miserable life. She was a prostitute, a whore. Nothing scared her. Her life was a high-wire act, and she was used to it.

All she had was this insignificant life that led nowhere.

She could only hope that her next life would be better. She did not want to prostitute herself again, not if she could help it.

The camera lingered on her as she ate the sunflower seeds in a leisurely manner. This was Hong Yao, the top prostitute whose name was known all along the Qinjiang River. Her body, her expression, her every move—everything about her was sexy. There was even something dangerously alluring about the way the empty sunflower seed shells emerged from between her red lips. Everyone watching felt their heart constrict and their knees go weak at the sight of her.

This was acting on an entirely different level. It wasn't necessary for the director to give her acting directions: her portrayal of Hong Yao was perfect. This was the interpretation of Hong Yao, and no other actress would ever be able to surpass it.

"Director Jin, where on earth did you find this actress? Her acting is incredible! She shines in every shot. Aren't you afraid she might steal the show?"

Director Jin merely chuckled in response as he continued watching Yan Huan on the monitor. He was enjoying her performance so much that he didn't want the camera to stop rolling.

## **Chapter 66 Not Famous Enough to Get an Agent**

As the director had not yet cut the scene, Yan Huan continued to chew on the sunflower seeds, an enigmatic smile on her lips. Qi Haolin, too, continued to act; he was a veteran actor and knew he had to remain in character as long as the camera was rolling.

Director Jin was impressed: it was apparent to him that Yan Huan was a highly proficient actress despite being only 20 years old. She had the entire set under her spell with her easy confidence.

Since the camera was still rolling, Yan Huan continued to act. The actors around her automatically followed her lead, they remained in-character even as they quietly withdrew into the background to allow her to shine.

Yan Huan dropped the remaining sunflower seeds in her hand. "Sir, I know that you're a high-ranking officer, but that doesn't mean you can do whatever you like. The military police is supposed to serve the people." The smile on her face was extremely seductive. "You barged in here, wrecked the place, and now you want to leave, just like that. Surely you can do better than that?"

Madame Huang's heart skipped a beat. She resisted the urge to wipe the drops of cold sweat rolling off her forehead.

Jiang Chao stared at Hong Yao for a long while. Hong Yao, however, was entirely unfazed. She did not fear death; she was aware that her life had no meaning and was of no value to anyone. She was nothing more than a waste of oxygen and water: alive, dead, what difference did it make?

But she would not stand aside and let these soldiers push her sisters at the brothel around. So what if they had to earn their living by spreading their legs? It was a dishonorable job, but not illegal. They were citizens, and had rights. Hong Yao was not about to let the soldiers walk away scot-free after wrecking the place. You break it, you pay for it— that was the universal rule.

Jiang Chao extended a hand to his side. One of his soldiers immediately walked over and placed a small box into his open palm.

Jiang Chao opened it to reveal gold pieces.

"Is this enough for you?" His eyes were filled with contempt.

"Y-Yes..." Madam Huang quickly ran over to him, grabbed the box, and pressed it into her bosom. She cooed to it under her breath, My precious gold, oh, look at all these little "goldfish!" She made sure no one was looking, and furtively bit into one of the gold pieces to make sure it was real.

"Thank you, Sir." Hong Yao hopped off the table easily, landing lightly on both feet. She walked over to Jiang Chao and leaned forward seductively as she traced his chest with a finger. "You should ask for me sometime. I'll be waiting..."

She winked seductively at Jiang Chao. Her acting was absolutely flawless, it was the look of a shameless, degenerate prostitute.

No, it was an insult to call it "acting"—at that moment there was only Hong Yao; Yan Huan had ceased to exist.

Jiang Chao slapped her hand away. He said impassively, "Have you been to a hospital to get tested?"

Hong Yao withdrew her hand. She turned around; the other actors could not see the melancholic smile on her face, but the camera did not miss it.

She continued to smile as she hummed a nostalgic melody. Her quiet humming was seductive, but her heart was in pain. A solitary tear rolled down her cheek.

“Cut,” Director Jin finally shouted.

Yan Huan dried her tears. She was already back to being Yan Huan; she slipped in and out of character as easily as changing into costume.

“Good job.” Director Jin patted Yan Huan on the shoulder. He said cheerfully, “You can go home and take it easy now. I’ll give you a call when it’s time to shoot your scenes for the second half of the show.”

Director Jin was in a good mood because he enjoyed working with Yan Huan. She rarely made mistakes, and most of her scenes had been completed in a single take. He was thankful for that since they were running on a tight schedule and did not have time to waste on retakes.

“Oh, by the way,” Director Jin interjected suddenly. “Ms. Yan, have you signed with an agent yet?”

Yan Huan shook her head. “No, not yet.” She did not have enough roles under her belt to look for an agent just yet. No entertainment agency worth their salt would give a nobody like her the time of day.

## **Chapter 67 A Company with a Conscience**

“Well...” Director Jin thought for a moment. “Ms. Yan, what do you think about Yuelun Entertainment? I’m on good terms with their boss, we often work together.”

Yuelun? Yan Huan’s eyes lit up. In a flash, her memories from her past life came flooding back to her: Yuelun was still something of an enigma at this point, but it had a strong, competent team managing the company. In her past life, she had signed with Chengcheng Entertainment, but that was definitely out of the question for her this time around. Su Muran was part of Chengcheng as well, and that was reason enough for her to stay away.

Yan Huan liked the idea of signing with Yuelun.

Yuelun had a reputation for being “a company with a conscience.” It was one of the few entertainment agencies in the industry that did its best to protect its artists. Yan Huan chewed on her thumb as she considered it. If she signed with an entertainment agency now, she would have a lot more roles to choose from, and Yi Ling would no longer have to fret and pray to her ancestors every day just to get a couple of insignificant background roles for Yan Huan.

Entertainment agencies helped secure audition opportunities for their artists, so signing with an agency would be like having a mother to look out for your best interests. Yan Huan would be a tree with proper roots, instead of a tiny, powerless blade of grass drifting in the wind.

Yuelun was definitely her first choice among all the entertainment agencies. She had had a good impression of Yuelun in her past life, but by that time she had already sold herself off to Chengcheng. When she had retired from acting, she had been forced to pay a hefty sum to Chengcheng as compensation for breach of contract.

She had not wanted to violate the terms of her contract, but then again she had not foreseen that she would eventually give up her life's work— all her blood, sweat, and tears— for Lu Qin. And for what? In the end, she had given up everything just to die a gruesome death at the age of 27.

She had only lived for 27 years in her last life.

Director Jin had helpfully suggested Yuelun Entertainment to Yan Huan, but he could not guarantee that Yuelun would be open to signing her. Yan Huan was a new actress, after all; she did not have enough shows under her belt to prove she was worth the investment.

Yan Huan and Yi Ling packed their things, ready to leave the set and go home. Before leaving, Yan Huan turned to take one last look at the set: the production crew was already busy shooting the next scene. She let out a small sigh; she wished she could spend more time on the set.

When they arrived at their apartment, Yi Ling shouted "Finally! Home sweet home!" as she kicked off her shoes. She made a beeline for the sofa and made herself comfortable on it.

"Meow..."

As soon as Little Bean saw that both her owners had returned, she jumped onto the sofa, climbed onto Yi Ling's chest, and began licking Yi Ling's face.

Yan Huan poured some milk into Little Bean's food bowl, and then placed a handful of cat food on the floor.

"C'mere Little Bean, it's dinner time."

"Meow..."

Little Bean jumped off of Yi Ling, purring happily as she ran over to Yan Huan. She immediately began wolfing down her food.

Little Bean was a docile, well-behaved kitten. She was a little timid, however, and stuck to her owners whenever possible.

Yi Ling was already asleep on the sofa, snoring lightly.

Yan Huan walked over to Yi Ling and covered her with a blanket. After that, she seated herself at a nearby table and began reading her script.

It wasn't long before Yan Huan began to doze off. She rested her head upon the table and fell asleep.

She was exhausted: she had spent the last several days shooting her scenes, and had had only three or four hours of sleep every night. She had lost some weight, but she could live with that. It was better to be thin than fat: she had to be able to squeeze into Hong Yao's iconic royal blue cheongsam, after all.

Suddenly, she felt something tickling her face. She opened her eyes and saw Little Bean lying on the table, batting at her clothes with her tiny, fleshy paws.

Yan Huan sat up and scooped Little Bean into her arms. She checked the time: it was almost five o'clock in the afternoon. No wonder she was feeling stiff all over—she had spent the last couple of hours sleeping on the table in an awkward position.

She pulled the blanket over Yi Ling once more; she didn't want her to wake up with a cold.

### **Chapter 68 Save Him**

She set Little Bean down, grabbed her purse, and got ready to go grocery shopping at the market. She would cook dinner that night; the two women had been surviving on the production's meagre boxed meals the last several days, and now that they could finally relax at home it was a good opportunity to have something much more nutritious and filling for dinner. Yan Huan reminded herself to cook something with meat in it: Yi Ling loved to eat meat, and was always in a sulky mood whenever she had to forgo it.

Yan Huan had just arrived at the entrance to the market when she heard the wailing of an ambulance siren. She idly wondered what had happened.

The ambulance reminded her yet again that life was fraught with difficulties such as poverty, disease, and sudden injuries.

Now that she had been given a second chance at life, her top priority was to avoid repeating her past mistakes. She did not want to lose her life yet again to the vile, despicable man known as Lu Qin.

She wanted to live and be happy this time.

She was in the middle of choosing her vegetables in the market when she overheard several of the other customers discuss the ambulance.

"Have you heard?"

"What about?" The second voice sounded absent-minded: it was obvious that this person had not been paying attention.

"Didn't you hear the ambulance just now?"

"The ambulance? What about it? Babies are born and old people die. This happens every single day, there's nothing surprising about it."

"But this is different," the first voice insisted. They were beginning to sound a little hysterical. "This isn't something you hear about every day. Apparently a prosecutor tried to save someone, and ended up getting stabbed with a knife in the process. He lost a lot of blood..."

Yan Huan dropped the vegetable in her hand.

"I'm sorry..." she whispered. She turned and walked out of the market.

Prosecutor, massive blood loss, knife attack...

She got out her phone to check the time. Her hands were trembling, and she was mentally kicking herself for having forgotten this. The prosecutor had to be Lu Yi. It had to be him. There were only a few prosecutors in Sea City, after all. In her past life, after marrying Lu Qin and moving into the Lu residence, she had heard from someone in the family that Lu Yi had lost a lot of blood several years ago; he had been stabbed while working on a case, and had almost lost his life because of his rare blood type. He

had remained in the hospital for a very long time because of that, and had to spend several months recuperating at home after he was discharged.

“Yan Huan, I’m begging you. Save Lu Yi, save my son, please...”

Yan Huan remembered Ye Shuyun kneeling on the floor as she begged Yan Huan to give her blood to Lu Yi to save his life. That had been the second time Lu Yi had been admitted to the hospital, the second time he had needed a blood transfusion.

In her past life, she had not given him her blood the first time he needed it because she had not known about the stabbing. But she had not given him her blood the second time he needed it either, not even when Ye Shuyun begged her to save her son as he teetered on the brink of death. She did not have an excuse for that.

She would save him. She would save him. She was going to save him.

More than once, she had woken from her nightmares with three words echoing in her head: “I’ll save you.”

But who was she saving, really? Was she saving Lu Yi, or herself?

She would repay her debt to him from her past life. She would atone for her past sins in this life.

But as she ran out of the market, she realized that she did not know which hospital he was in. She hailed a taxi and decided to try her luck with the nearest hospital, which also happened to be the largest in the city; she had been close enough to hear the ambulance, after all, so there was a good chance Lu Yi had been admitted nearby.

When she arrived, she paid the driver and hurried into the hospital. As soon as she stepped inside, she overheard a nurse say they had a patient who needed a lot of Rh negative, type AB blood.

She was relieved; she had come to the right place. The cold sweat on her forehead began to dry.

She could see a SWAT team standing in the distance, their hands clasped around their guns.

## **Chapter 69 Not Afraid of Death**

The old Yan Huan would have been scared senseless by the SWAT team, but she had lived in the Lu residence for a very long time in her past life, and had grown accustomed to the sight of armed policemen. She knew now that her old fear had been completely irrational; these officers were human beings just like her. In fact, these men deserved respect, not fear, for it was sometimes necessary for them to give up their own lives to save the lives of others.

One life for another. One life for a number of other lives. Was it worth it? No one could say for sure. Barring a miracle like Yan Huan’s, everyone had only one shot at life. Once it was over, it was over— in the end, everyone would eventually be reduced to mud, soil, and a lonely grave.

Yan Huan walked towards the SWAT team. She was not the least bit surprised when the officers immediately moved to block her path.

“Sorry, but this area is off-limits. Please find a different route.”

Yan Huan brushed her disheveled bangs away from her smooth forehead and tucked them neatly behind her ear. Her hair was slick with sweat.

“I know that there’s a man in there in need of blood. I’m Rh negative, type AB.”

She was quickly invited into the room, but first had to undergo a pat down as part of a security check. It was entirely unnecessary—it was obvious to everyone that there was no way she would be able to conceal a weapon under her thin clothes, but protocol was protocol.

The doctor quickly performed a blood test on her. They were in urgent need of her blood.

“Miss, are you sure about this?”

The doctor had to make sure Yan Huan knew what she was in for. “Our patient has had a massive hemorrhage, and he needs a lot of blood. However, his blood type is very rare, and we don’t have it in our blood bank. You’re the only donor we have right now with a compatible type, which means we’ll have to take more blood from you than usual. But I promise we’ll be careful not to take too much.”

“It’s okay, I know what I’m doing.” Yan Huan smiled at the doctor. She rolled up her sleeve and placed her arm on the armrest. The message was clear: take my blood, go on.

She was not afraid of pain—not when she had a debt to repay. She was repaying him for the blood he had given her in her past life.

A thick needle stabbed into her vein. She was suddenly reminded of her past life: she remembered the fear and pain every time the doctors showed up to take her blood without her consent.

She remembered what it felt like to have her warm blood ruthlessly sucked out of her body. Back then, she had not felt any pain, but she had been completely and utterly terrified.

A little bit of that old fear crept into her, but she took a deep breath and steeled herself.

There’s nothing to be afraid of, she told herself. It’s okay. It isn’t painful.

Bags of blood were sent into the operating room. A doctor came into the room and said reluctantly, “We need another 400cc of blood. The patient has lost too much, many of his organs are damaged. There may be long-term health complications for him if we don’t give him enough blood in time.”

“No, she can’t give any more blood. She’s already donated 700cc. Any more blood from her and she’ll pass out.” The doctor in charge of the blood transfusion had been keeping a close eye on the total amount of blood donated. He could not allow Yan Huan to donate any more blood; it was completely out of the question to kill their blood donor just to save their patient.

“But...” The doctor who had just come in did not know what to do. He knew he had to save his patient, but the only blood donor available was a skinny young lady. Like the other doctor, he could not, in good conscience, take any more from her. But he could not let his patient die either...

“It’s okay.” Yan Huan opened her eyes. Her face was deathly pale; even her lips had gone white. “Take my blood. I won’t die from this.”

She lowered her gaze to her arm, before closing her eyes again. Her long, thick lashes fluttered against her cheek.

“Go ahead. Take my blood,” she repeated.

As a general rule, donors were not allowed to give more than 500cc of their blood at any one time. Donating 800cc was already pushing it; anyone who gave 1000cc would probably pass out from the lack of blood. But Yan Huan was confident she would be able to give 1100cc without passing out. She knew she could do it.

### **Chapter 70 Why Noodles?**

Yan Huan donated another 400cc of blood. She did not pass out; in fact, she did not even feel light-headed. She was a little weak, however, and her hands and feet were cold. The doctor covered her with two blankets, and hooked her to an IV. She felt much better after that.

“I’m fine now.” Yan Huan pushed the blanket away and sat up. She smiled at the nurse, but her voice sounded weak. She did not look okay. “Can you remove this for me? I want to go home now.”

She could not stay at the hospital. She did not want anyone from the Lu family to see her. She did not want Lu Yi to know that the blood had come from her. This was her new life, and she did not want to have anything to do with anyone from the Lu family ever again. Especially Lu Qin— she did not want to see that scumbag’s face. She was afraid she might vomit out of sheer revulsion, or worse, slap him viciously across the face as soon as she saw him. She could not afford to cross him just yet, not when she was still a fledgling, unable to fly on her own.

She was no match for Lu Qin. A starving, sickly horse was still bigger than a dog; Lu Qin was still part of the Lu family, despite his lack of accomplishments. Right now, she was just a two-bit actor with no one to back her, there was no way she would be able to win against him. Not yet, at least.

“You should lie down for a little longer,” the nurse said kindly. “Is there something you have to attend to back home? I can help you call your family and let them know you’re still in the hospital.”

“I’m fine.” Yan Huan had already gotten to her feet. She swayed a little, but told herself she could handle it. “I have to go home, my family’s waiting for me.”

The nurse was about to try to persuade her to stay more, but she saw the determined look on Yan Huan’s face and knew her mind was set. She helped Yan Huan remove the IV needle and let her go home.

Yan Huan walked out of the hospital. Her face was deathly pale; her skin was already extremely fair to begin with, and now she looked like a ghost. But she went to the market anyway and bought her groceries, swaying unsteadily on her feet the entire time. After that, she walked home, looking as though she might collapse at any moment.

She opened the door. Yi Ling was inside, carrying Little Bean in her arms, and the two of them appeared to be engaged in a staring contest.

“Oh, Huanhuan! You’re back!” Yi Ling noticed Yan Huan standing at the door, and tossed Little Bean aside unceremoniously. Luckily, Little Bean was a cat, and landed deftly on all four feet. A dog would probably have died of broken bones in this home by now.

“I’m dying of hunger here.” Yi Ling ran over to Yan Huan and hugged her. “Where did you go? Wait, did you sneak out to have dinner without me? I’m so hungry I feel like I’m just skin and bones now. Little Bean’s starving, too.” Little Bean jumped off the sofa, walked over to Yan Huan, and began to rub her tiny head on her owner’s legs.

Meow... Master, I’m hungry.

Meow... I was bullied while you were gone.

“I’ll make dinner right away.” Yan Huan touched her face, feeling a little self-conscious. Before entering the apartment, she had put on some makeup and lip gloss to hide the lack of color in her face. She didn’t want Yi Ling to worry.

Yi Ling knew about Yan Huan’s rare blood type and was extremely paranoid about Yan Huan not having enough blood. She was so worried about it she watched Yan Huan carefully whenever she was on her period, checking every so often to see if she was feeling light-headed or was suffering from anemia. Her concern was understandable; Yan Huan’s blood type was extremely rare, after all.

Yan Huan knew that her mother had a common blood type, which meant that Yan Huan probably inherited her rare one from her father. But Yan Huan’s father was a complete mystery to both Yi Ling and Yan Huan.

Yan Huan’s mother had never mentioned him, and Yan Huan had never asked. She had assumed early on that she was fatherless, that he had died a long time ago.

Leaning against the kitchen counter, Yan Huan wiped the cold sweat from her forehead and valiantly made two bowls of noodles, despite her discomfort.

Yi Ling’s face fell. “Why noodles, Huanhuan? Can’t we eat something else?”