

Chapter 721: Did It Really Flop?

Luo Lin was so anxious that she was nearly frothing at the mouth, but Yan Huan did not seem pressured at all. She continued on with the roadshow along with the others. She talked a lot lesser but the basic qualities of an actress was still there in her behavior. She had also maintained a much lower profile than before.

Among all the movies that premiered during Chinese New Year, Aster was indeed a dark horse that came out of nowhere. Its box office was sky high everyday and it broke many records, and it was likely that it would soon surpass the number one film, White Fox. Many professional critic websites also predicted that Aster would soon reach the No.1 spot of domestic box office performance, hence replacing White Fox.

Almost everyone thought so too.

It could make at least two hundred million box office sales daily, and it had already accumulated a total of more than 1.6 billion in box office sales over a single week. There were still 20 plus days of showing, thus even if it made only a hundred million a day, it would eventually surpass the current record holder.

However, predictions were always optimistic. After the seventh day ended, on the eighth day of Chinese New Year, Aster's performance in the box office started to drop. The earnings had been reduced to barely half of its initial volume, from two hundred million daily to one hundred million.

On the ninth day, it didn't even reach a hundred million, and its box office sales decreased day by day after that.

Aster's momentum simply fizzled out, therefore it did not get to surpass White Fox like how all of the critic websites had predicted. It would only earn around two billion at the end of its run in the theatres. But even so, it was already an astounding box office result. There were only a total of two films that had crossed the 2 billion mark in local theatres and one of them was a big budget foreign film that occupied the charts for a very long time. The foreign film was no.1 in the chart before it was beaten by White Fox, hence it occupied the second place and had stayed firmly since.

Aster's box office earnings slowly declined, signifying its inevitable downward spiral in ticketing sales. Its box office prediction dropped from three billion to two billion while the actual number was still climbing its way at a snail's pace to the 1.7 billion mark.

Its current daily box office sales was around ten million, but even that was slowly dropping to single-digit millions. Despite that, it was not exactly performing poorly. It could be said that overall, all the other films had started to slide down and Aster still remained the best of them. It had been occupying the top spot of the recent box office charts, but it lacked the power to push itself to the point of a breakthrough. Hence, it could not challenge the number one spot at all, and might not even reach the second.

Nevertheless, it was considered successful since its box office managed to reach 1.7 billion, and hopefully around 1.9 billion at the end. It had also been announced in the later stage that due to its great reviews, its theatre run was prolonged.

If Aster could steadily earn a certain amount of box office sales during the extended period, it might even climb its way to the 2 billion mark, making it one of the few films with over 2 billion box office sales.

Aster's reign would end at that point. It was not as great as expected, so Luo Lin heaved a light breath of relief. Now, they were looking forward to seeing what would happen when their movie premieres on the lantern festival.

Would it be a hit, or will it flop? It was still up in the air.

Based on what Luo Lin saw, the chances of flopping would be higher, as their presales did not even reach 30 million. Aster made almost 150 million during presales, therefore their own number was merely one fifth of Aster's.

It seemed like it would really flop.

On the day of the lantern festival, Before the Beginning premiered with 50 million presales, but those who bought tickets on site were showing up in great numbers.

Before the Beginning featured a truly star-studded cast which included Liang Chen, Qi Haoran, Yan Huan and Zhou Zizhe. All of them packed a decent level of charisma. They were all famous movie stars and had strong followings. Their fans were the earliest batch to flock to the theatres.

At the start of the movie, the familiar Linlang logo animation was shown and it was announced that this film was exclusively distributed by Linlang. There were not more than three sponsors, so if the film became a hit, then Linlang would certainly get the biggest share of the profit distribution. As such, they hoped the film could sell well.

The movie started with the monologues of the two main actresses. Yan Huan's soldier look was very handsome and mature, and her headstrong temperament was refreshing to watch. Her eyes had a sharp and flinty look to them, which was accentuated when she sucked up to the higher ups and bullied her juniors.

As for the other main character, Yao Xiaoyu, she was the comic relief. Every action she made, every gaze, stare and squint were all performed naturally. That was why it was scary when Liang Chen's acting reached such a high level, as expected of an award-winning actress that had been in the industry for over twenty years and an internationally renowned actress. Her acting does live up to her reputation.

The initial narration was dull and plain. It felt like a normal drama film, hence some viewers were disappointed. Then the scene took a sharp turn and revealed another world before the audience's eyes, a beautiful, shining sci-fi world.

Many viewers were awed and visibly astounded, especially at the 3D scenes. The five billion budget was mostly invested into the CGI, as the actors and actresses did not get paid a lot. A big portion of the money was spent on post-production editing, so the scenes were gorgeous and grand.

All sorts of weird-looking plants appeared in the other world, which stimulated the audience's imaginations and astonished them. Especially when certain animals performed some special moves, like spraying gas at the main characters or widening their mouths to show off a row of bleached teeth, the CGI was very convincing. The scenes that followed were nothing shy of grand, dinosaurs, savages,

volcanoes, coupled with an interesting plot. Everyone was reluctant to leave. They were afraid that once they left their seat, they would miss out some beautiful scenes.

The strongest striking point of the film was actually its portrayal of the four seasons. Vigorous growth during spring, lush and lively tree leaves in summer, the falling leaves of autumn, and the pure white snow of winter.

One could practically feel the temperature change with the scenes. The film would give you a first person view of the four seasons, as if you were living in the samsara of seasons. Up in the sky, under the water, up in the snowy mountains and deep in the forests, the scenes kept changing. The visual experience of the film was truly astonishing.

However, it did not end on a happy note. It was not a comedy and had no signs of one. It left up to the audience's imagination to decide if the main character lived or died.

When the credits rolled, no one walked out of the theatre for a while because they were overwhelmed. The moment they removed the 3D glasses, it felt like they had just woken up from a beautiful dream, and the scenes they experienced in the dream were still vivid in their minds.

The first show premiered around 6 in the evening on the first day, so they've only got 80 million box office for that day. Luo Lin really wanted to cry when she saw the number, as it was a mere 30 million raise. It's a flop, right?

Although it premiered with a box office elixir in its cast, it seemed that Yan Huan's title had deserted her in this situation. Even with the box office elixir blessing their movie, they could not possibly compete with a film that had been showing for half a month.

Chapter 722: Great Sales

On this night, many people might not be able to sleep because they had worked so hard all this while to show the public their achievement. However, the outcomes did not seem to work quite well. Hence, many of them appeared to be unsatisfied, but regardless of whether they were reconciled, their roadshow needed to be carried on.

Luo Lin also fell asleep in a daze. In fact, she was not aware of what time she fell asleep. After all, it should be very late. Even after she opened her eyes, she did not pay attention to the time. She woke up early in the morning while others were still sleeping. She was awake early because she could not fall asleep. It would be strange if she could still hit the sack. She was thinking if they could reach the target of 30 million, and retrieve their investment of 500 million.

She went crazy whenever she thought of these things. Although Linlang was able to compensate for the loss, the only thing that could be indemnified was only money, but not their reputation.

She turned on the computer and dared not check the number of tickets which had been pre-sold today. She spent nearly half an hour sitting there, and finally, she made up her mind to turn on the computer to check the pre-sold ticket for today.

10 million.

She lowered her head, thinking that it was over for this time, not because she was not confident with her own movie, but in her opinion, the production of *Before the Beginning* had certainly surpassed the international standard. However, it was difficult to satisfy the taste and preference of the audience. As for this 10 million, it was sufficient to inform her that they had messed up the movie, losing their audience and of course, their investment fund.

She turned off the computer and freshened up herself exhaustedly. When she headed out to have breakfast with the rest of them, she was surprised to find others being energetic and extremely delighted.

For sure these young people had yet to realize that their movie had gone down the pan. That was why they could still laugh out loud. Forget it, let them laugh for now and they could spend the next few days crying.

“For you,” Yan Huan placed the breakfast in front of Luo Lin. Each person had a small bag filled with soybean curd, fried dough sticks as well as buns. If the portion was insufficient to fill one’s stomach, one could request a second set as this was free-flow breakfast.

“What expression is that? Did you lose money?” Yan Huan was eating her meal and realized that Luo Lin pulled a long face as she turned around. Her face looked terrible and she was wondering who offended Luo Lin.

“How could I get rid of this expression?” Luo Lin opened up her mouth, trying to smile but to no avail.

“Yan Huan, the pre-sold tickets are 10 million, how come you can still be so relaxed? All of you can still smile but I can’t. You are not the same as them, you are the founder of Linlang and the movie is produced by you. I think you know better than anyone how much effort you have put in for this movie. Aren’t you sad because of the unfavorable ticket sale? This may be your last movie. Won’t you want to leave a perfect end to your acting career?”

“10 million?” Yan Huan felt that this was almost impossible. Hence, she took out her phone and checked the tickets sold again.

“Luo Lin, was your Mathematics taught by a language teacher?”

“What do you mean?” Luo Lin frowned. “I’m good at Mathematics, I used to be a representative for the Mathematics lesson.”

“Really?” Yan Huan passed her phone to Luo Lin. “You count yourself to see how many zeros there are before you feel discouraged.”

Luo Lin was stunned, she kept thinking about the number of zeros. When she was about to ask Yan Huan again, Yan Huan had already carried her bowl and walked over to eat with others. The whole crew seemed to be very relaxed, not revealing any feelings of being disturbed.

She wondered if she had seen it wrongly. She quickly turned on her phone and started checking today’s ticket sale. To her surprise, the initial 10 million was actually 100 million pre-sold tickets and the number of tickets sold was increasing tremendously.

An advance sale of 100 million. What kind of a concept was this? If nothing went wrong, they should be able to reach a total of 200 million tickets sold for today. Perhaps, this was the rise of Before the Beginning.

A moment ago, she was not in the mood to have her meal, and now she was unable to eat because of her excitement. She must keep an eye on the box office. She felt as though the company was just like her condition. All of them remained calm and carried on with their tasks at hand.

Especially Yan Huan, she wondered what Yan Huan was thinking about every day. She had never seen her worry about the box office, attendance rate or the audience reviews. On the other hand, the time she spent on daydreaming had increased over time.

She felt the urge to knock on Yan Huan's head and asked her to at least be more alert during peak periods.

Luo Lin was waiting now. Her hands had never left her cell phone for a day as she was keeping track of the number of tickets sold. She never kept her eyes away from the figure. She would refresh the page several times in a minute.

However, there was a situation that had turned into a custom. The movie by Yan Huan would usually bring out a surprising after-effect. The tickets on the first day or in advance would not be a lot, but once it had received positive critics, the movie would become famous. She hoped that Before the Beginning would face a similar situation.

On that day, Luo Lin held her phone and seemingly she had a muscle cramp most of the time.

Until about 10 o'clock at night, her face turned pale, judging from it, one knew that it was the result of her hard work.

"520 million."

Yan Huan blinked her eyes.

"What do you say?"

"520 million."

Luo Lin swallowed her saliva and she felt as though she was going crazy, seriously crazy. Yan Huan had broken the record for daily tickets sold. 520 million, oh my god, what kind of concept was that?

This time they would not make a loss. Finally, they had earned back their cost and more importantly their reputation.

Following the box office of 520 million in a day, Before the Beginning was the top of the hot search and its popularity was way better than The Aster.

The Aster had positive audience reviews while Before the Beginning was unimaginable.

Such an exquisite moment, a movie that was compatible with any international films. It felt like a 360-degree panorama and the rating rose from the initial rate of 8.2 to its highest rate of 9.8 at the moment.

At first, they thought that Before the Beginning was not as good as The Aster. It was not known if it was Su Muran's desperate fans or the professional cyber paid posters who had devalued Before the Beginning the day before, with countless comments, claiming that this was a worthless movie. However, the box office today had successfully shut the mouth of these individuals.

A box office of 520 million, seriously, 520 million of the ticket sales. It had completely broken the daily box office record of the White Fox two years ago.

The maximum daily tickets sold by The Aster was approximately 200 million at most but Before the Beginning had exceeded 500 million. It was also released in North America and the performance there was not too bad as well. The box office record was continuously refreshed from time to time.

Chapter 723: This Is The Real Success

Yan Huan received a photo on her phone from Lu Jin. Lu Jin and Ye Shuyun both went to a movie, they even bought popcorn and soda like young people, which made them feel a little younger.

Sitting beside them were all foreigners. When the movie started, there were almost no empty seats, the attendance was astonishingly high.

Lu Jin also sent Yan Huan a message.

"Nicely done, you have brought glory upon our country. The film's quality is on par with international big budget films. We are proud of you."

Yan Huan moved her phone closer. She saw Ye Shuyun waving their national flag, seemingly in a good mood. She was relieved to see that her mother-in-law was in good health. Maybe in the near future, they could come home and their family should have a reunion to celebrate the success of her movie.

On the third day of the Lantern Festival, everyone was still guessing how much more Before the Beginning could make in the box office. There were many who checked the box office charts from time to time, like Luo Lin.

One hundred million, two hundred million. In the evening, it was another astonishing number.

Four hundred and ninety million. Another ten million and it would have reached five hundred million.

Unfortunately, it did not reach five hundred million in the end and many critic websites were still laughing before this, saying that the movie would flop and end its run without even reaching five hundred million.

Five hundred million, what did that mean? Some films could only earn a total of five hundred million throughout its box office run. But Before the Beginning was able to reach five hundred million within a single day, why wouldn't they be happy?

On the fourth day, which was a non-working day, it made 300 million in the box office.

Aster had such good traffic during the New Year period, yet its box office a day had peaked at around three hundred million. Before the Beginning could make three hundred million box office a day even on a typical non-working day.

What surged together with the domestic box office and the amazing reviews was the sky high foreign box office. On its second day, Before the Beginning was able to seize several front spots on the box office charts in North America, meaning that they had forcefully pushed the other films that premiered in the same period down the charts. Being a local film, everyone thought that it would not do well overseas. However, this particular one refreshed the foreigners' knowledge about Chinese films.

The domestic box office continued to grow in a terrifying speed. On its ninth day, it has broken the box office record that was held by White Fox for two years, and the daily box office was breaking its own record day after day. It maintained over a hundred million in daily box office sales for almost half a month. After a month, Before the Beginning finally went into its extended run. The daily box office sales slowly decreased but it still held on to the title of Daily Box Office Champion.

From four hundred million to three hundred million, then two hundred million, one hundred million, slowly and gradually, it should have reached the end of its theatrical run, when it wouldn't even reach a hundred million a day anymore. Otherwise, it would be too absurd.

Meanwhile, on the internet, everyone was guessing how much Before the Beginning could make after everything. 4.5 billion? 5 billion? 6 billion? Or even higher than that? Many passersby walked into the theatre to watch this. Since it was a big budget film, it was a must to watch it in a theatre to fully experience the astounding visual effects. Therefore, many viewers brought their families to the movie, maybe once or twice, or even more. It felt like they were addicted as they kept watching it again and again. It was also the reason why Before the Beginning was such a hit in the box office.

Before the Beginning finally decided to prolong its run for another month, just like how Aster Flower did. They would extend it further after that if there was a necessity.

Aster's name was no longer on the box office chart, but Before the Beginning was still on it. It was still fighting with other newly released films for the top spot in the daily box office chart. From its premiere until now, Before the Beginning had achieved its mission and was currently sitting on 5.2 billion in box office sales. Therefore, it was successful, other than creating an astounding box office record, it also boosted Yan Huan and Liang Chen's name madly. Of course, Linlang managed to propel their starlets to stardom as well.

Advertisement offers came in like the rising tide, endorsements were increasing day by day.

Of course, the ones who got the most out of the success were none other than Liang Chen and Yan Huan. However, Liang Chen had her hands full with her baby, so she could not return to work this early. Of course, she did not want to return either. She had earned enough. All she wanted to do now was to take care of her baby. Since Qi Haolin was out working and feeding the family, she had no reason to go back to work.

As for Yan Huan, she was still the same, rejecting all of the endorsement and advertising offers that came her way. She boarded the plane and left by her own after the roadshow ended.

Knock knock. She knocked on the door and pulled her suitcase inside, reeking of travel fatigue from top to bottom. It felt strange, as everyone back at the company was exalted, but her heart remained as still as water. Having such a high box office achievement under her belt, it still felt like nothing more than a

string of bigger numbers, because no one was there for her to share the joy with, no one was there to celebrate with her.

Therefore, on the contrary, she was not really excited. All she felt was that she might have cast a perfect final curtain over her acting career.

When the door opened, the housekeeper was stunned when she saw Yan Huan. Then, she screamed happily into the house.

“Sir, madam, Ms. Yan has returned.”

Yan Huan continued to drag her travelling case as she walked over. Lu Jin and Ye Shuyun were present as expected. Of course, Mr and Mrs Lei were there as well.

“Auntie...”

A fat little boy tumbled over clumsily like a meatball. He was as fat as a blob and looked very cute.

Yan Huan bent down and extended her arms to pick the little meatball up. She pinched his little puffy face as she cooed, “It’s only been days since we last saw each other! Look how chubby you’ve gotten!?”

The little meatball obviously had no idea what she meant. He only widened his tiny mouth and smiled innocently.

“Auntie, did you bring Leilei any fun toys?”

It had been a long time since Little Lei saw Yan Huan. However, he knew that Yan Huan would never forget about him because she loved him very much, so of course she would buy him a lot of toys.

Kids are very honest, they would always put on a smile on the faces of those who showed them kindness or gave them toys and good food.

And Little Lei’s impression of Yan Huan was indeed as such. She would buy him food and spoil him with toys. So, she was the one whom he smiled at the most.

“You little rascal, are you only looking forward to the toys?” Madam Lei laughed. “I was just talking about how excited he is to meet his aunt. It seems like this sly little boy knew that Huanhuan was gonna bring him toys!”

“Right? Kids nowadays are all so cunning even at their young age.” Ye Shuyun seemed to be in a good mood. She originally thought that Yan Huan would return some days later. Since her movie was still showing in theaters, there would still be promotional roadshows. It seemed like Yan Huan came back a lot earlier than she expected.

Chapter 724: The Past that Shouldn’t Be Mentioned

Yan Huan lifted the plump little boy in her arms, and noticed the difference in his weight. He had grown heavier again. Soon, she might have trouble carrying him.

Little Lei nibbled on his finger. “Do you have any toys for me, Aunt?”

“Of course,” she gave his cheeks a squeeze. “I bought you a big robot. It’s even bigger than you.”

She had bought an expensive AI-powered model from a foreign country, the newest in its series. There was still loneliness in Little Lei's life, and she thought it would be a good remedy for that. It was an advanced and safe toy.

"Where is it, Aunt?" asked Little Lei, his eyes twinkling like Yi Ling whenever she saw tasty-looking good. Little Lei was the same as his mother, except he had more passion for toy cars and airplanes than food. He would play with them for hours, gripping them tightly in his tiny hands.

Yan Huan lifted her wrist to consult her watch.

"It's gonna be here anytime now," she said. The delivery status had informed her that the package was on its way. It shouldn't take long.

She put Little Lei down and held his meaty hand in hers. He had grown too heavy for her to carry, she had to admit.

And Little Lei had turned out to be a crafty little fellow. He let go of Yan Huan's hand, ran to his granny, and wrapped his hand around hers, telling her that he would soon have a big robot in a purring voice.

"How big is it?" she asked, playing along.

"It's thiiiis big," said Little Lei, making out the outline of a figure bigger than himself with his arms.

"It's that big?" asked Madam Lei, trying hard to stifle her laughter. "But how are going to feed it? You eat a lot, so we don't have that much food left. With your new robot friend, you might have to starve a little. Would that be alright?"

Madam Lei pretended to be troubled. It wasn't a complete act, however. Little Lei was healthy and had a good appetite, two factors combined that made him little overweight. The child would demand to be carried after a short while of walking, but how could they blame him? His little feet had a hard time supporting his weight.

He Yishan suggested to put him on a diet, but he was only three; an infant who understood nothing and cried whenever he grew hungry. No one had the heart to do it. And so they had to devise a plan to make the child eat less on his own.

Little Lei considered the bad news, nibbling on his fingers and blinking in quick succession.

"Leilei understands. I'll share my food with the robot, so that he wouldn't starve."

"Such a good boy," praised Madam Lei, rubbing his head, hoping that he would keep his word. She gave her grandson's little limbs another squeeze. So meaty. It made her happy, but worried at the same time. Children looked cuter with a little meat on them, but her grandson was clearly getting a little too much meat on him.

Yan Huan walked to Ye Shuyun and sat down beside her.

"Has your health gotten better lately, Mom?" she asked. Ye Shuyun's return had surprised her, after claiming that she might not be able to make it back for the New Year. Yan Huan had not expected to see her before March.

“How can foreign places compare to home? Look at me now,” said Ye Shuyun, all smiles. “I have gotten much better lately. It’s as though the soil and water at home nourish me. Nothing beats home, after all. Now that the weather has gotten better, your Dad was for coming back too. He misses his recruits, I know. If we stayed any longer, he might have started drilling me instead.”

That made Madam Lei laugh out loud. “Do you still remember that time when he just got promoted to platoon leader? He was so not confident he felt the need to practice at home, so he had you posing as a recruit and drilled you on military postures.”

Ye Shuyun had to smile. She remembered that. Time flies, doesn’t it? At that time, Lu Jin had just married her into the family. Old Master Ye had chased him across a few streets, yelling that he had stolen his daughter. Lu Jin became so terrified of the old man he fled at the sight of him. Zealous in his new designation, Lu Jin drilled her every day. That was until she had a heat stroke when maintaining a military pose under the sun. Lu Jin had been so scared that he was on the brink of tears, red-eyed when he brought his wife to the hospital, thinking that he had killed his own wife. He even thought of killing himself if something bad befell Ye Shuyun.

The examination results soon revealed that Ye Shuyun was pregnant. When Ye Jianguo and Old Master Lu learned about it, they beat him in turns. The doctor had given him an earful too.

The child turned out to be fine, thankfully, just a bit dimmer than others at birth. Ye Shuyun always complained, attributing their child’s lack of intelligence to Lu Jin making her do military postures. Lu Jin had to endure the unjust accusations for years, before they found out that Lu Yi was actually a genius, and wise beyond his years.

As a child, he talked little, mainly because he was lazy, but they took his taciturn nature as a red flag for stupidity, even though no one had actually decreed that cleverness had anything to do with talkativeness. The extreme extent of Lu Yi’s intelligence could only be matched by his obstinate reluctance for speech.

But now, Ye Shuyun had outlived her son.

The thought of that made Ye Shuyun and Madam Lei grow silent. In her heart, Madam Lei regretted sorely. Why did she have to mention that? Things were going great before she stirred up the bitter memories.

Little Lei nibbled on his fingers, confused at why the adults had suddenly stopped talking and smiling.

A pair of hands lifted him up. The attention made him grin again. He bit his fingers and tilted his head.

“Aunt, Leilei wants to sleep,” he said, rubbing his eyes. The sleepiness was really getting to him.

“Go to sleep, my dear. The robot would be here by the time you wake up.”

She carried Little Lei into his own room and tucked him in. She left Ye Shuyun and Madam Lei to their talk; she wasn’t from the same generation as them, and they could talk more freely without a junior around.

Chapter 725: You Were Arrogant

She set Little Lei down on the floor gently and pinched his puffy little hand. This little guy was fair and chubby, looking just like an adorable little meat bun. Sometimes, she could not help but think that if she ever had a kid with Lu Yi, then she would put everything else on hold. She would not take on any other acting jobs or advertisement modelling opportunities. Instead, she would stay by her son's side, teaching him to speak and educating him on how to be a responsible member of society. Perhaps in the future, he would even follow in his father's footsteps and become an outstanding prosecutor.

However, she did not have that kind of blessing.

It was possible that she had exhausted all her luck in this lifetime, and karma had responded by taking away Lu Yi, as well as their child that would never exist.

She tucked Little Lei's hands into the blanket, and sat next to him on the bed to prevent him from rolling all over the place.

Although Little Lei was usually an active child, he was still an obedient kid. When he slept, he slept peacefully, barely moving a finger. His little lips were parted slightly, his breathing deep and even.

After a while, even Yan Huan had succumbed to her drowsiness and the tranquil atmosphere. She leaned to the side and started to nap with an arm supporting her face.

The curtains fluttered in the wind. The winter breeze was still cold.

Little Lei sat up and rubbed his eyes. At the start, when he did not see his mama or grandma around him, he pouted his lips and nearly burst into tears. However, when he saw Yan Huan resting at his side, his pout disappeared, and the tears that were threatening to fall from his eyes did not increase. He inched his little bottom closer to Yan Huan and reached out to tug at her hair.

Yan Huan was woken up by the stinging pain on her scalp. When she opened her eyes, the first thing she saw was Little Lei, who was tugging at her hair joyfully while kicking his bare feet on the mattress.

She carefully tried to pull her hair out of this little fellow's grasp, but his grip on them was unexpectedly tight. In the process of rescuing her hair, a few strands had been ripped right out of her scalp. Tears sprang into her eyes from the pain.

Little Lei tapped the tips of his fingers on each other. It seemed like he knew that he did something wrong.

Yan Huan rubbed his little head indulgently. Naturally, she could not be mad at him.

Little Lei must have sensed that Yan Huan was not mad, as he quickly tugged at her hands and said, "Auntie, poo poo."

Yan Huan helped him put on his socks and shoes and brought him to the toilet. There was a kid-sized toilet bowl in there. As Little Lei would come over all the time, they had installed one in their house for his use.

Little Lei heaved himself onto his little toilet bowl and insisted that Yan Huan stay to talk to him. A child was indeed a child, who are usually needy and clingy.

When Little Lei was done with his business, Yan Huan helped him clean his bottom and brought him out into the living room. Upon stepping foot into the living room, Yan Huan immediately noticed a robot that was half the size of an adult standing in the middle of it. The people in the living room were crowded around it, trying to figure out how it worked.

Lu Jin extended his hand, which prompted the robot to take a step back in response. He stepped forward, and the robot backed off even more.

"This is rather interesting," Lu Jin commented as he retreated to a couch at the side. He felt slightly puzzled at the robot's reactions, wondering if it understood Chinese.

Well, robots were still robots, right? They were merely children's toys, and was far from matching the intelligence of an actual human.

Little Lei scampered enthusiastically toward the robot that was about his size, and gave it a big hug. He liked it very much. The robot had an anti-collapse base built under it, so it would not fall over easily. Its entire body was covered with a sleek and shiny material that would not harm a child's tiny hand. It was invented for the purpose of being a smart nanny for children. It will remind the children to drink water, to sleep on time, to study and behave and it can even sing lullabies to them. Of course, it will lock onto the child's location and would follow them wherever they go.

"This is a fine thing indeed," Lu Jin praised. He really liked this kind of advanced technology.

"Unfortunately, there's no adult version yet," lamented Yan Huan. She had wanted to buy one for Lu Jin as well, but this was a toy for children, not for adults.

"I was just kidding!" Lu Jin chuckled. If a highly respected commander like him walked around everywhere with a robot nanny rolling along at his side, he would become the laughing stock of the city. He could not afford to lose his reputation at this point, as he was already close to retiring. If he lost his reputation, then he would have to live out the rest of his life in shame.

Little Lei tugged at the robot's hand and chattered on to it in his adorable toddler voice. The robot was smart enough to understand most of what Little Lei is saying, and it followed him wherever he went.

"You have to share your meals with the robot, or it will starve," Madam Lei grabbed the chance to hoodwink her clueless grandchild.

In response, Little Lei thumped on his chest in determination.

"Grandma, Lei Lei will not eat that much," Little Lei promised. He would not touch his snacks anymore, not even the desserts and cakes that came after his meals. He would leave all of them to the robot.

In reality, Madam Lei did not harbor too much hope that her little grandchild would honor his promise, but at least they were off to a good start. Hopefully, if things went well, then Little Lei could slim down and avoid the fate of obesity.

Little Lei spent the day playing with the robot at the Lu family's house before leaving with Madam Lei. Of course, the robot nanny went home with them.

Lu Jin and Ye Shuyun left to visit Old Master Lu. After that, they had several other stops to make at various relatives' houses. Since they had just returned from their trip, they had a haul of souvenirs and

gifts to deliver to the elders of their families. First, they shall visit Old Master Lu, most likely getting a fresh scolding in the process, before continuing on to the Ye family.

Yan Huan was left alone in the house again. She placed her laptop on her lap and turned it on, navigating to a webpage that showed the box office performance of recent movies. The box office sales of *Before the Beginning* had continued to climb, slowly but surely. Right now, its box office sales had surpassed 5.2 billion, breaking the record of *White Fox*, and doubled that of *The Aster Flower*.

During the New Year, the fans of *The Aster Flower* and *Before the Beginning* were at war, tearing into each other and flaming the opposing movie. They used whatever they could get their hands on to throw shade on the movie that their opponents supported.

However, at this point, the box office performance and public opinion was firmly on *Before the Beginning's* side. *The Aster Flower* was a fairly decent film, but it had went up against a tough opponent that it could not beat. Neither of the movies were inferior to the other, yet *Before the Beginning* had resonated more with the audience. It was unforgettable and the plot was readily embraced by the audience, thus its box office sales had continued to soar even now.

Of course, the fans of *Before the Beginning* had declared victory because of that.

You were arrogant and smug, claiming that your acting was phenomenal, that your plot was captivating and flawless, touching and bittersweet yet hilarious and comedic. But in the end? Look at the results at the box office.

Do you think 20 billion can compare to 50 billion? You claim that you are better, but can you achieve 50 billion box office sales? Although it is true that box office sales does not mean everything, but in the eyes of our fans, box office sales is everything. Not to mention that the best resources were invested into the production of *The Aster Flower*!

Chapter 726: No Means No

Just like that, the Lantern Festival movie took all the glory and attention away from its New Year predecessor, before the latter could even savor its success.

Yan Huan closed the laptop. Her revenge, it's finally done. She had retaken the glory and pride that should have been hers in her previous life. Everything that should have been hers, was hers again.

This was most likely the furthest Su Muran and Lu Qin could go.

And it wasn't over yet. They were all waiting to see who will win the best actress award internationally.

Lin Lang's fame had been swelling lately, some of its actors in the peak of their stardom. Even a few rookie actors had sprung to fame overnight.

To concrete its foundations, Lin Lang released a new drama in the new year. With the success of *Before the Beginning*, the viewership ranking for the new drama was gradually on the rise.

It started at fifth, then fourth, second, and eventually became the first.

The cast for this film, which had a great plot, was nearly made up entirely of rookie actors, who had risen up to the challenge and put on a brilliant performance that earned them the support of the public.

Who was the one that said that good-looking people can't act? Lin Lang's actors were all top-notch in their trade. As a company, Lin Lang was focused on the holistic development of its actors, and strictly barred out anyone who couldn't act. Anyone who wanted to get in through connections had to think twice about whether they had the power to match up to the three families behind it.

With the Lei, Lu, and Ye Family as its shield, Lin Lang became a company no one dared mess with. Anyone who was in the industry could assure the quality of Lin Lang's productions, and testify to how well-received they are by the public.

As the drama swept the nation by storm, *Before the Beginning* began to fade away from the public's eye. Whenever there was a new film, the fickle public never fails to take their attention off the older films. There were new films every month, both good films and bad, but none had even come close to surpassing *Before the Beginning*.

It had a box-office income of 5.3 billion, after all. With its global income, it had even made it into the Top 30 highest-grossing films. This was a result that pleasantly surprised everyone.

Of course, everyone in Lin Lang was still working hard.

In the domestic charts, Lin Lang had taken both first and second place in the top-grossing category. Everyone was optimistic that they could come up with another sell-out film that succeeds in both reviews and sales. When that time comes, they could finally get rid of that foreign film hogging the spot of number three.

It had been chaotically busy within Lin Lang's internal departments; it has been days since Luo Lin returned home. There was a pile of notices piled up on her desk, including work schedules and endorsement offers.

She pulled at her hair. What was she to do with this huge stack? How annoying.

She sighed, her hair standing on their ends.

It was starting to drive her crazy.

She picked up the telephone and dialed Yan Huan's number.

"Tell me, Yan Huan, what are you doing right now?"

"Giving Little Lei a bath," replied Yan Huan, switching her phone to speaker mode. Little Lei was in the bathtub, playing with a yellow rubber duck.

"Yan Huan!" yelled Luo Lin. Thankfully, they were speaking through the phone, and Yan Huan had already turned the volume down. If they were face-to-face, Yan Huan might have gone deaf.

"Yea, I'm listening," said Yan Huan, sitting at the edge of the bathtub as she gave Little Lei a good scrubbing. Little Lei giggled, naked and covered in bubbles. His plump little body explained his weight. She couldn't even find a spot on him where she could feel his bones.

"Get over here and accept these endorsement offers right now!" yelled Luo Lin like a lunatic.

"No thanks," said Yan Huan, uninterested.

Rich people can do what they like. That was how it is. Back then, she acted as a stunt-double, rushing from set to set, doing whatever it took to appear briefly in the screens. And now? Even international endorsement offers couldn't interest her.

Before Luo Lin could say, or rather, yell again, Little Lei reached out and grabbed the phone. Yan Huan saw, but didn't stop him.

The phone slipped right out of his bubbled hands, into the bathtub.

Little Lei pointed his fingers together, his face covered in bubbles.

"Don't worry about it," said Yan Huan, brushing a finger across his face. "You can ask your Dad to buy me a new handphone."

"Okay," said Little Lei, nodding hard. "Dad will buy new. New handphone for Aunt."

"That's right," said Yan Huan as she rinsed the bubbles off Little Lei. The kid was a neat freak, and behaved well during his showers, unlike most kids that screamed and howled at the prospect of a shower. Little Lei was content, as long as he had his rubber duck to play with.

Yan Huan took a towel and wrapped the little guy up. If he gained a little more weight, she might actually not be able to carry him anymore.

She toweled him off, then fed him his meal. With those done, there was nothing left to do.

"Dad, buy a new hand for Aunt. Leilei had dropped into the water," Little Lei babbled to his Dad through the speakers.

Lei Qingyi pondered on it at length, but couldn't fathom the meaning behind those words.

He consulted his secretary for a second opinion.

"My son told me to buy a hand, and something about dropping himself into the water. Do you have any idea what he's trying to tell me? Could he be washing his hands, perhaps?"

The secretary chewed on it, but was equally clueless.

Suddenly, it came to him.

He understood it now.

"Sir, I think what your son meant is that he had dropped his handphone into the water, and is asking for a new one," he offered.

Ah... Lei Qingyi nodded. That made sense.

Looks like his son had been naughty again. He bought a phone on the way home; he didn't know which model Yan Huan liked, so he just picked one that was popular among youngsters these days.

When he returned to the Lu Family, she saw Yan Huan feeding Little Lei an egg. Little Lei sat on a stool, complying.

"Have you bought me a new one?" asked Yan Huan, reaching out.

“Yes,” replied Lei Qingyi, giving the phone to her. Yan Huan passed him the bowl for him to feed his son, but Little Lei only shook his head profusely.

Chapter 727: Her IQ Was On Point

“Daddy stinky, Lei Lei won’t eat.”

Lei Qingyi’s eyes widened in a glare as he pointed a finger at his son. He was sorely tempted to give the little tyke a stern scolding, but he had no choice but to suppress that urge as he passed the bowl to Yan Huan.

Little brat, how dare you? Just wait until we get back and I’ll kick your ass.

However, can he really do that? Little Lei’s position in the family was higher than everyone else. A mere commoner like Lei Qingyi did not even have the right to touch his little butt, let alone kick it.

Once, Little Lei had peed on some of his important documents. Lei Qingyi was so angry that he pulled down his son’s pants and started to deliver a series of firm smacks to his buttocks. Little Lei was so scared that he started to wail at the top of his lungs, giving Madam Lei and Yi Ling quite the shock.

Yi Ling nearly tore the door off its hinges when she barged into the room. The first thing she saw was her son’s rosy buttocks, the poor boy crying so much that his voice was hoarse. Upon seeing his mother, he kept sniffing as he sobbed about how his father was a bad guy, a bad guy who hits people.

Madam Lei, who was right at Yi Ling’s heels, promptly picked up a broom and chased after Lei Qingyi to give him a whacking. Lei Qingyi’s dignity was crushed to dust, and at one point he was even denied entry to his own house.

Ever since then, Lei Qingyi could only be a paper tiger. All he could do was admonish and threaten his son verbally, but Little Lei was smart enough to know that although his dad stood like a giant, he was actually afraid of Yi Ling, and Yi Ling was afraid of Little Lei.

He then shifted his little butt and parked himself in front of Yan Huan, waiting for her to feed him eggs. Yan Huan could only pick up the bowl obediently and started to feed him, spoonful by spoonful.

All of a sudden, the door was pushed open and a woman ran into the room in a hurry.

Yan Huan raised her head to see who came in and was surprised to see Luo Lin. Why is she here? Shouldn’t she still be at Linlang?

At this moment, Luo Lin looked like a war goddess, flames practically oozing out of her body.

“Yan Huan, where is your phone?” Luo Lin was so furious that she wanted to throttle Yan Huan. If she died from the throttling, then so be it. How dare she hang up on me? I’ve never seen such an uncooperative artist before.

Yan Huan pointed at the phone that was still sealed and untouched at her side. “My old one drowned, this is a new one. The SIM card isn’t installed yet.”

Upon hearing this explanation, Luo Lin did not know if she should yell at the human or the phone. Out of all the times to lose her phone, of course she had to lose it now.

Yan Huan fed the last spoonful of eggs in the bowl to Little Lei, who opened his mouth to accept the offering. His stubby limbs were like lotus roots, fair and chubby, making him appear cuter than ever.

“Come, give aunty a hug.” Luo Lin dumped everything that was in her arms onto a table and leaned down to pick up Little Lei. She was shocked when she hoisted him into the air.

“Oh dear, isn’t this little guy a little too chubby? He’s so heavy now.”

“He’s just healthy. Such a good boy,” Yan Huan praised as she pinched Little Lei’s chubby cheek lightly. She then brought him over to Ye Shuyun for her to look after him. As for herself, she had to settle whatever Luo Lin brought over here by today, otherwise with Luo Lin’s persistence, her manager would definitely stick around and never leave.

“These are the companies that are asking for you to endorse their products in commercials. I don’t care about most of them, but these two must be accepted no matter what. If you refuse, then I won’t leave, leeching off of your food and hospitality until I annoy you to death.”

Luo Lin plonked two documents down in front of Yan Huan. She was practically grinding her teeth as she threatened her artiste.

Yan Huan picked up the documents and skimmed through them. Finally, she understood why Luo Lin was so persistent. One of them was an internationally renowned perfume brand, while the other was a chocolate company that enjoyed international popularity. Both were international brands, thus they rarely chose Asians as their brand ambassadors.

This time, they were looking for an Asian to become their brand ambassador for the year, and they had decided on Yan Huan. Of course, there were other companies that were clamoring for Yan Huan’s attention, which she did not have to reject personally as Luo Lin must have already rejected them for her. However, both of these offers could not be turned down lightly, as they were crucial to building up Yan Huan’s international fame.

She had achieved local recognition ages ago, back when she ascended to the throne of Best Actress. Despite that, on an international scale, she was still relatively unknown when compared to Su Muran.

It was an honor to be chosen as the Asian ambassador for these two companies. If she accepted their offers, then Yan Huan would bring glory to her country. However, if Yan Huan refused to take them up on this opportunity, then it was likely that the offer would be extended to Su Muran or some other idol from another Asian country. That notion did not sit well with her.

Yan Huan sat down and flipped through the documents briefly. Then, her eyes honed in on the chocolate advertisement. “Can I bring some of it back to eat?”

Luo Lin stood up abruptly, and proceeded to wrap a hand threateningly around Yan Huan’s neck.

“Yan Huan, I swear, if your IQ deteriorates any further...”

However, Yan Huan did not think that her IQ was deteriorating at all. On the contrary, she believed that her IQ was on point, not a single deviation from her usual intellect. Little Lei loved to eat, so he would definitely enjoy the newest products offered by the company, those that might not even be available in local markets yet.

In the end, Yan Huan accepted the offers of both companies to be their brand ambassador. Of course, she preferred the chocolate company, but the products of the perfume company would make great gifts for her friends too.

The perfume advertisement was filmed in France in a breathtaking sea of flowers, whereas the chocolate one was filmed in a beautiful town. Both of the advertisements took two whole months to be completed, filming and editing taking place intermittently, again and again. Finally, the companies approved and green-lit their respective advertisements. Yan Huan went home with several bottles of perfume and a mountain of chocolate, which were complimentary gifts from the companies.

She gave the perfumes to Ye Shuyun to be gifted to others, while the chocolates went to Little Lei and his stomach. Chocolate was his favorite snack, so he gorged himself until his face was smeared with it. Of course, this had made him love his Aunt Yan Huan even more.

Every time he opened his mouth, he would sing Yan Huan's praises, talking about how much Aunt Yan Huan loved him, how her chocolates were the tastiest, while the ones that daddy bought was horrible.

This infuriated Lei Qingyi so much that he nearly tried to pull down the little brat's pants for another spanking. Little Lei crawled under a chair and wailed obnoxiously.

"Grandma, daddy's hitting Lei Lei again."

In the blink of an eye, Madam Le stormed out of her room with a broom in her hands. She proceeded to run all over the house in pursuit of her wayward son as Little Lei cheered enthusiastically for his daddy at the side.

"Good luck, daddy!"

Lei Qingyi was so incensed that he almost vomited a litre of blood onto the floor.

As for Yan Huan, her life went on as usual. It had not changed that much since the beginning, and she had gotten used to days like this. In fact, she had started to enjoy days like this.

As time went by, the snow started to thaw and the weather became warmer. Winter had passed, relinquishing the country to the warm embrace of spring and its blooming flowers. The worst of the storm had passed, leaving behind sunny days and gentle breezes in its stead.

Time flew by so quickly. She would turn 27 soon, and in another year, she would be 28. It would be a critical year for her, a year that determined if she would live past her death in her previous life. However, she had faith that she would not die this time. She would live on and make the most out of her life.

Yan Huan put on her black rimmed glasses and got into her car, preparing to pay Liang Chen a visit. Liang Chen had given birth a few days ago to a daughter. However, the infant was born slightly underweight, so it was still being monitored in an incubator. As Liang Chen herself had faced complications while going into labor, she was also asked to remain in the hospital for further monitoring.

Chapter 728: What's There to Congratulate?

Maternal altruism is a powerful thing; to Liang Chen, who used to be very image-conscious, nothing mattered more than her child. She had gained weight, stretch marks, and a nasty scar on her belly, yet she had no complaints.

If I was given a chance to be a mother, thought Yan Huan, I would have done the same, no matter what it cost me.

She arrived at the hospital. Not anyone was allowed to enter Liang Chen's room, but Yan Huan just had to make a call to Qi Haolin. Soon, he came out to attend her.

"Where's the baby?" Yan Huan asked the new dad.

Qi Haolin smiled. "She's well and healthy, but smaller than most babies. A tiny thing, just a little above 5 grams. She's in the incubator now. Come, I'll bring you to her."

Qi Haolin was eager to show off his daughter.

"She's pretty, just like her mother."

Yan Huan didn't doubt that. Liang Chen was a natural beauty, and the apple wasn't like to fall far from the tree.

She watched the child, a small and tender creature, through the incubator's glass. It was too early to tell how she would look in the future, but her tiny limbs made Yan Huan melt.

She placed her hand on the glass, once again in admiration of the wonders of life.

Children are the most wonderful in these world, aren't they?

Watching them grow, watching them learn to walk and talk, watching them acquiring their own thoughts... As you watch them grow and age along with them, you realize that turning old isn't so scary a thing after all, for there's no way they could mature without you aging.

Overcome with sadness, she felt a sudden tingle in her nose. In this life, she could never be a mother, and all she could do was watch the children of others. First it was Little Lei, and now, Liang Chen's daughter.

She stood up and turned around, without betraying anything on her face, where a faint smile lingered.

Liang Chen was awake when Yan Huan arrived. She was in good health, but moved little so as to not aggravate her wounds. She grasped Yan Huan's hand when she saw her.

"Have you seen my daughter?" she asked. "She's pretty, isn't she? Does she resemble me?"

"I did. She looks exactly like you, a pretty and lovable child," said Yan Huan, sitting down. She passed Liang Chen her gift, a golden locket she had someone craft for the child. According to the older generation, this was the best gift for a child. If you are rich, you are obliged to give a golden locket, and a silver one if otherwise.

With joy, Liang Chen accepted it in her daughter's stead. She will put it on her when they are both out of the hospital.

“Congratulations,” said Liang Chen, holding out her hand.

“Congratulations?” Yan Huan pointed at her hand. “What for? I’m not the one who just gave birth.”

Liang Chen rolled her eyes. “What nonsense are you thinking about? I’m congratulating you for smashing the domestic box office record, and making it to top 50 in the worldwide charts. Also, congratulations for becoming the first Eastern brand endorse of Alice Perfume. Back then, I vied with ten domestic nominees for the spot, but in the end the position went to a white person.”

“That’s why I wanted to tell you...” Liang Chen sat up cautiously. She felt genuine happiness for Yan Huan. “You have done well and did our nation proud. You brought our Eastern culture to the international stage, made yourself known, and made the beauty unique to Easterners known. Isn’t that worth celebrating?”

“I never thought as much as you did. I’m a lowbrow, and all I know is I got good money from it,” said Yan Huan. She really didn’t feel much about it. She wouldn’t even have gone, had Luo Lin not pestered her so much. Liang Chen’s elaborate praises made her blush.

She was merely a selfish woman.

Liang Chen felt like whooping her. How could Yan Huan turn such a classy topic into something about money?

“Speaking of which,” remembered Liang Chen. “The nominations for the International Film Award is in May, isn’t it? Before the Beginning is going to be qualify, right? I don’t see how such a good film wouldn’t make it pass the qualification phase. I just know that it’s going to get nominated.”

“Maybe,” said Yan Huan. She felt neither nervous or excited. Her heart had always been like calm water. After Lu Yi’s passing, it had become more like the Dead Sea.

Liang Chen had hoped that the news would lift Yan Huan’s spirits, but she was wrong. As always, Yan Huan didn’t look happy in the least. Perhaps Yan Huan had died along with Lu Yi, after all.

The Yan Huan that was alive was only waiting for the day death arrives.

Her eyes always seemed a little distracted, and there was little joy in her smiles. She was cold and distant, but that has only added to her charms.

The International Film Award was the most prestigious award worldwide, and the number of Chinese winners up till then could be counted on one hand. Most of the awards had gone to overseas megastars. Domestic films were rarely nominated, yet this time two Chinese films had made it past the selections; one being *The Aster Flower*, and the other being *Before the Beginning*. They were both crowned as masterpieces of the Chinese film industry, and had been in the limelight ever since their release. The two films were both difficult to surpass, especially *Before the Beginning* with its 53 million grosses. It could be decades before another film accomplishes that feat.

There was no telling as to which film would win, but both nominees this time round were high-quality production that did not lose out to any overseas films.

“Why must they be nominated along with us?” complained Su Muran. Her luck was never good whenever she crossed paths with Yan Huan. It was as though she was her kryptonite. She beat her in

everything, whether it was in box office grosses or popularity. It was probably going to be the same with this International Film Award. Whatever chances she stood was as good as gone when Yan Huan came into the picture.

Chapter 729: Not Low Key, But Rather Not Wishing To Attend

“This is not under our jurisdiction,” said the person in charge. “The nominations are handled by the National Radio and Television Administration.”

What he left unsaid was that if they had to choose between the two movies, then there was no doubt that *Before the Beginning* would be their first choice. After all, the target audience for that movie was a lot wider than *The Aster Flower*, and it was a very mainstream and well-received movie even among other countries and over a wide range of ages and social backgrounds. Moreover, it was the only locally produced movie that made it into the top 50 highest box office sales globally, so they definitely had an edge because of that achievement alone. The probability for *Before the Beginning* to net an award was definitely higher than its local competitors.

“Can we kick them out?” snarled Su Muran as she sat down. No matter what, by hook or by crook, she would never appear at the same place as Yan Huan. Most of the time, when that happened, she was often oppressed by Yan Huan so severely that she did not even have the chance to retaliate.

“We can’t do that. Everything’s already submitted to the International Evaluation Committee, not to mention that this isn’t something that we can interfere with recklessly.” Of course, the person in charge did not reveal that the other party had their own behind-the-scenes supporters, which meant that they could not kick them out without a proper reason.

“Why do they insist on fighting with us over this award?” Su Muran was so angry that she felt her chest constrict painfully. The person in charge sitting opposite her could only nod awkwardly, unable to answer this question.

The International Film Awards were held once every three years, and coincidentally one would take place this year. They could not possibly wait three more years for the next one, and neither could Linlang. Thus, it was natural that their movie entries would clash.

Of course, it was not only these two movies that had made it into the list that was submitted for evaluation. There were several others, but those were not mainstream movies, so it was highly unlikely that they would win an award. They might even be eliminated early on in the first round of nominations.

The most promising movies that stood a chance of winning at the awards this year were *The Aster Flower* and Linlang’s *Before the Beginning*.

As for which one the award would fall to, or whether both of them would leave with empty hands, that was a question that no one could answer until the awards ceremony. It was useless to speculate right now as everything was still in the unknown.

No matter how unwilling Su Muran was, Yan Huan’s name would always be brought up in contrast to hers. Whatever she did, that woman would always be involved as well, and they would be compared against each other. This included the annual International Film Festival this year.

Three months later, both movies were nominated for the International Film Awards.

This was the first time that Director Jin was nominated for the award of Best Director. Of course, they were also nominated for Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography, as well as Best Actor and Best Actress.

If they ended up winning these awards, then this would be the most valuable and meaningful fruits of their lifetime. Winning at the International Film Awards would add a layer of shine to their entertainment career. Of course, that was still secondary compared to the glory and fame that they would enjoy, a testament to the blood, sweat and tears that they had injected into their performances and creations. Who in the world would not desire such a highly recognized international award?

Director Jin was so nervous that he could barely speak. Before the ceremony, he had dyed and styled his hair, in addition to having a suit tailored specifically to fit him. He did everything he could to make himself appear flawless, so that he would not bring shame upon his country's name and its people when he was standing amongst the other big-shot directors.

On the other side, Su Muran had arrived with at least ten different outfits in her suitcases. She had also brought along an entourage of makeup artists and stylists, all dedicated to her personal service.

In contrast, Yan Huan had only brought Yue Ran along with her, and two outfits. One to wear before the ceremony, and one for after.

"You're so low key." Yue Ran was in awe of Yan Huan's calm disposition. Currently, Yan Huan was reading a book while leaning on her side. Traditional paper books had lost its popularity in recent times, as people had mostly switched to using their phones for browsing reading materials. However, Yan Huan still preferred physical books as she liked to inhale the faint papery smell as she read.

"I would not have attended this thing if I could opt out of it," Yan Huan sighed as she flipped another page of the book. She did not have much expectations for awards at this point. It would be nice if they won, but it did not matter that much if they lost.

"You will succeed," Yue Ran said in a serious tone.

"He will bless you."

A faint smile appeared on Yan Huan's lips. No one knew that mentioning this 'blessing' was actually twisting the knife in her heart. She did not like it when people brought up Lu Yi's name, because she did not want to associate his name with the word 'death'.

Even though it was true that he had died. He had been dead for two years.

Yan Huan lowered her eyes and flipped another page of her book, the smell of ink staining her fingers. In the many years to come, that familiar silhouette would always remain in her heart, constantly reminding her of an aching loneliness and a lingering melancholy that pierced all the way down to her bones.

Finally, the plane landed, their feet stepping onto foreign land as they disembarked. The people milling around them were of the golden-haired and blue-eyed variety, and even the air they breathed was unfamiliar and somewhat unsettling. There were many different smells blending together in the air: perfume, sweat, and the smell of a foreign country.

Since it was not the first time that they had set foot abroad, they were neither overwhelmed nor amazed by the unfamiliar sights and smells around them. They made a beeline for the designated

vehicle that was waiting for them, setting off toward their hotel immediately so that they can rest and regain their energy. The next day, they would attend the award ceremony for the International Film Awards.

Yan Huan did not think about anything else. She firmly believed that not worrying about it would help her manage her expectations, or lack thereof. When night fell, she did not know if everyone else were having good or bad dreams, but the only thing she knew was that she was exhausted. As a result, her slumber was deep and undisturbed, and when she opened her eyes, the sun was already up.

The outfits that she had brought along with her consisted of a white outfit and a black outfit. They were of a minimalistic yet elegant style, as she did not want to stand out too much amongst her peers on the red carpet. She was fine with any outfit as long as they were presentable.

The look that Yue Ran decided to put her in was a similarly elegant and sensible style.

“Even if they used the best cameras, I don’t think anyone could find a single flaw on your face. Every angle is a perfect angle for you.”

Yan Huan tied her hair in a loose ponytail, leaving her head free of any additional ornaments or accessories. The simplistic hairstyle was casual yet refined, highlighting the natural beauty of her facial features.

Asians usually had flatter and less defined facial features when compared to Westerners. However, Yan Huan belonged to an exceptionally gorgeous variety of Asian beauty, delicate and reserved yet completely natural. Her eyes were as dark as pure onyx, and she carried herself gracefully. Merely judging from her external features, she was a rare beauty when compared to everyone else in her country. Although she was not beautiful enough to be stunning or breathtaking, but her looks were soothing to the eyes.

She gave people a clean and minimalistic impression, making her seem gentle and approachable. However, in reality, it was hard to get close to her. She had closed off and sealed the door to her heart, concealing herself in the sunset, refusing the face the world in its full brightness.

Su Muran was truly dressed to the nines as she stepped onto the red carpet. She was decked out in an elaborate cheongsam with high slits along the sides, all the way along her legs up to her thighs, which combined the delicate beauty of Eastern culture with the daringness of Western culture. Her face was dolled up with makeup, making her features pop. Her beauty did not pale the slightest bit even amongst all of the Westerners, as the makeup had done a good job of enhancing her features.

Chapter 730: A Full Harvest

When it was Yan Huan’s turn, she merely waved lightly at the press as she crossed the red carpet, unkeen on hogging the spotlight and lifting her skirts so that it wouldn’t touch the ground. She was smiling, but distant, and the contrast made her stand out in the limelight.

Under normal circumstances, it takes one around five minutes to cross the red carpet.

Yan Huan took five minutes, no more and no less, to finish her round.

Su Muran, on the other hand, had been on the red carpet before Yan Huan made her appearance, and was still not done posing for pictures. She had been up there for at least ten minutes, which had put the staff in a tough spot, unsure as to whether they should remind her.

Yan Huan appeared again in a black gown. Yue Ran had styled her hair into a natural wave, accented her lips, and added an iridescent sheen to her eyeshadows.

Under the lighting, her eyeshadow had multiple colors, and it was beautiful.

Yan Huan always had full faith in Yue Ran's skills. Under his hands, a woman can only become prettier, never the other way round.

By the time they found their seats, the award ceremony had already begun.

As Yan Huan expected, the Best Director Award had gone to Huang Ming, as it did during her previous life. This was the most prestigious award in the world, the dream of every director.

And who would have believed the man on the grand stage was the same man as the recluse from years back? He was young, not even thirty, but he managed to deliver a masterpiece that lived up to everyone's expectations with his unique views and techniques.

Director Jin was happy enough to be nominated. Even if he didn't win the award, the trip had been well worth it. This nomination would no doubt propel his career further.

Westerners had always been taking the International Awards home, which made every Asian all-the-more proud and excited about the emergence of an Asian winner, as well the increase in Asian nominees.

Hearing that Huang Ming had received the Best Director Award, Su Muran was confident that the Best Actress Award was in the bag.

She straightened, her lips curving upwards. Her heart thumped madly as the host was about to announce the winner of the Best Actress Award.

Su Muran, it has to be Su Muran... she told herself. The host raised his voice in excitement.

His announcement was followed a deafening applause, so loud that Su Muran couldn't hear anything but her internal chants of Su Muran. She made it. She had won, hadn't she?

Su Muran stood up, but a hand pulled her back.

"What are you doing?" asked Su Muran, turning around to find Lu Qin pulling her back to her seat.

"Sit down. You are making a fool of yourself," warned Lu Qin.

Making a fool of myself? Su Muran scowled. She was going up to receive her award; how was that making a fool of herself? She had no time to explain, or to sit back down. The award was waiting for her. However, just as she put on her best smile again, she glimpsed a person walking towards the stage.

It was a young woman in a black gown, her black hair loosely draped across her shoulders in a wave. She wore little accessories, but her hourglass silhouette was graceful and dreamy.

Su Muran drew up short. It didn't make sense to her. What was going on here?

Lu Qin quickly dragged her back to her seat. There were many eyes on them by now. One misstep and there would be rumors all over the place by the next morning.

Meanwhile, the black-clad woman with a mermaid-like grace ascended the stage, and received the beautiful statuette that symbolized glory and honor, something that could represent a person's entire life.

She extended her hand and brought the trophy high above her head. Her eyes were like the finest black pearls, and her skin, though not as white as Caucasians, had a natural, youthful tint that made it look almost fragile.

Why her?

Until now, Su Muran could not believe what she was seeing. It should have been her. The host had said her name, right? It should have been her. Should have been her. This wasn't right.

She was meant to receive that award.

Yet, why wasn't she the one receiving the award? Somebody needs to explain it to her. What happened? Why wasn't it her? Why...

Yan Huan?

Yan Huan kissed the statuette in her hand. Finally. Her career has finally ended, on the highest note possible. She could step away from the screens and spend all her time with her family now, like Liang Chen.

There were more meaningful things than awards and honors; things like spending time with her family, and living out the rest of their simple days in peace.

Before the Beginning turned out to be the biggest winner; despite losing the Best Director Award, it was nominated for Best Visual Effects, Best Story, Best Adapted Screenplay, and four other awards. In the end, it took home two.

The first was Yan Huan's Best Actress Award, and the second the Best Adapted Screenplay Award. It was a full harvest.

Sitting before the mirror, Yan Huan began removing her makeup. The blush and foundation had made her skin look clear and pretty, and her eyes bright and sparkly. She was beautiful, indeed.

But what use did that have?

Bit by bit, she removed her makeup, until her original skin color showed. Her skin wasn't dull, but slightly pale. Even so, she was extremely beautiful.

Beside her stood the golden statuette. From this day onwards, she would be known as the Best Actress in the world. She had taken what Su Muran had hankered sorely.

The statuette, the title, they all belonged to her now. Su Muran's fate was about to change too.

She wouldn't kick her when she's down, but neither would she sacrifice herself for others. Not for Su Muran, at least. She won't give her the blood she needed this time.

That's why only Lu Yi and a couple others were privy to the fact that she had RH negative AB blood. Lu Yi wasn't around anymore, and He Yibin and Lei Qingyi's lips were sealed. She wanted to see how Su Muran was going to go about saving herself, without an innocent child at her disposal.