

Stealing Your Heart Chapter 211

She got dressed and went downstairs where she hesitated on the way down when she saw Wen Xian standing alone in the sitting room. She was not sure how she was going to greet her. After all, she slept with her husband last night.

She did not know how was their relationship like. But she could sense that the man cared about his wife.

Wen Xian stopped looking around when she saw a lady standing at the top of the stairs on the first floor. She froze for a moment, wondering whether Cheng Yuxiu had overheard her conversation with Zong Qifeng just now.

“How long have you been standing up there?” Wen Xian frowned.

Cheng Yuxiu walked down the stairs. “I’ve just come down.”

Wen Xian nodded. “Come and have breakfast with me.”

Cheng Yuxiu felt uncomfortable with her around. “When should I leave?”

Wen Xian stared at her before answering calmly. “You may stay here from now on.”

“I beg your pardon?” Cheng Yuxiu tensed up. What am I supposed to do with this couple around all day? Am I a concubine in ancient times?

She felt her heart throbbing. She found it difficult to accept such an embarrassing relationship.

Wen Xian was quick to see through her dilemma. "I'll be away to visit my parents for quite a while. Please stay back. You can help me take care of him."

Cheng Yuxiu looked at Wen Xian before blurting out. "I have noticed that your husband actually loves you very much. If you only need to have a child as I have promised earlier. I can..."

"Just do whatever you have to do," Wen Xian interrupted her quickly. "Sit down and let's have breakfast."

Wen Xian felt better now. As soon as Cheng Yuxiu sat down, she explained, "Our marriage was arranged by both families; there is no affection between us."

Cheng Yuxiu stared at Wen Xian in consternation. She didn't expect Wen Xian to share such an information.

Actually, Wen Xian had intended for her confession to be the reason for Cheng Yuxiu to stay back.

"But..."

"This is nice. Try it." Wen Xian cut short Cheng Yuxiu as she placed in front of the latter a bowl of porridge prepared by the maid. She didn't want to hear what Cheng Yuxiu was about to say.

No doubt, Zong Qifeng treated her well. But she couldn't reciprocate; she loved someone else.

That was why she tried very hard to look for a good woman who would love and take care of him.

With that, Cheng Yuxiu agreed to stay back. Wen Xian had prepared all the essentials for her.

Throughout her first week-long stay, Zong Qifeng never showed up.

Cheng Yuxiu felt relaxed during the absence of the couple.

Usually, she would stroll in the yard after dinner. This activity was good for digestion and helped her pass time in the villa. It was the only thing she could do and this was the time she was most relaxed too.

That night after shower, she picked up a book to read till 11.00 o'clock when she would usually sleep.

As she put down the book, she heard some noise downstairs. At this hour, she knew even the maid would have retired to bed. Who can that be?

At once, she got out of bed. As she looked downstairs, she saw the maid help steady Zong Qifeng's wobbly steps. Obviously drunk, he hanged his suit by the shoulder. Looking around the sitting room, he asked gruffly, "Where is she?"

"Madam has gone to visit her parents. She says it will be for quite a while."

At first, Zong Qifeng froze briefly. Then he laughed.

Though Cheng Yuxiu was some distance away, she could feel the bitterness in his laughter.

She walked down the stairs and helped the maid put him on the sofa. "Go and get a blanket."

"Yes," answered the maid.

Cheng Yuxiu mixed a glass of water with honey in the kitchen. "Drink this," whispered Cheng Yuxiu as she helped him sit up. "It will make you feel better."

He opened his eyes slowly. There was someone in front of him – a total stranger with nice-looking face and bright eyes. Zong Qifeng seemed to have forgotten all about that particular night either in his drunken state or his memory had failed him, “Who are you?”

Instantly, Cheng Yuxiu’s face turned pale. Even her hands trembled as she didn’t know how to answer.

At this point, the maid came with a blanket. Cheng Yuxiu passed the glass of honey water to her. “Serve him this.”

Before the maid could get a grip, Zong Qifeng suddenly shoved at the glass. Bang! The glass fell to pieces and cracked the silence of the night.

“Let me ask you again, who are you?” Zong Qifeng stared at Cheng Yuxiu as he stood up clumsily.

“You’re drunk.” Cheng Yuxiu lowered her head, afraid to have any eye contact with him. She instructed the maid before leaving. “You take over now.”

However, Zong Qifeng suddenly pulled her by the wrist. She thumped on the sofa and started seeing stars. By the time she recovered, he had already climbed on top of her.

His eyes were blurred. His breath smelled terribly nauseating. Cheng Yuxiu was sure he drank too much.

Slowly, her tension eased. “I’m your new maid. You are drunk, ...” Thump! The man collapsed right upon her.

He was big and tall. Cheng Yuxiu struggled in terror and finally broke loose of his heavy weight.

The maid handed Cheng Yuxiu the blanket which she used to cover him.

He proved too heavy for Cheng Yuxiu and the maid to move him upstairs. He had to sleep on the sofa.

Cheng Yuxiu placed the blanket on Zong Qifeng. She told the maid to call it a day, while she stayed to clean up the floor.

The maid nodded. She had no clue who this lady was, but Madam had wanted this lady to be treated like the mistress of the house. That's why she listened to her.

When Cheng Yuxiu finished cleaning up, it was well after midnight. "Water, water." She heard the man the sofa murmuring.

Cheng Yuxiu prepared another glass of honey water and passed it to him. "Here, water."

Zong Qifeng did not respond; he kept asking for water. So, Cheng Yuxiu helped him sit up and let him sip from the glass.

Once his lips got wet, he wanted to drink more.

Having finished the honey water, his mouth and throat felt much better. At this point, Cheng Yuxiu held his head, intending to put him down. But Zong Qifeng gripped her hands firmly. He buried his face in her chest.

Cheng Yuxiu stiffened. She stared at the man hugging her with his eyes closed. He may be very rich, but he is like a deserted child; lonely and helpless, desperate to hold on to anyone to keep him company.

This reminded Cheng Yuxiu of her own experience. While this man was abandoned by his wife, she was jilted by her boyfriend.

While pitying him, Cheng Yuxiu found herself overwhelmed with self-pity.

Zong Qifeng felt asleep before long, she could finally relax now so She bent down and put the glass on the table.

She sat still not wanting to wake him up. She fell asleep eventually. However, when she woke up, she got a shock.

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There was a clean-shaven man sitting on the sofa opposite her. He looked handsome in formal attire. He exuded the fragrance of some shower gel and there was a contrast to his decadence last night.

Cheng Yuxiu became nervous. Though she had known his identity, this was the first time she looked at him when she was sober.

She panicked, not knowing where to look, and it was certainly not at him. She sat up on the sofa and found the blanket covering her body instead.

Cheng Yuxiu felt shy. "Are you sober now?"

"Ummm..." Zong Qifeng answered.

Cheng Yuxiu stood up abruptly. She kicked a leg of the table and fell back down onto the sofa. She felt sorry for being clumsy. "Let me clean up the mess."

"Don't be afraid of me." Zong Qifeng stood up to reassure Cheng Yuxiu. He found his relationship with her embarrassing. He felt uncomfortable with the presence of another woman in the house.

"You are here at her invitation. Do feel at home. Let me know if there is anything you need. You may go out if you feel bored here, but I expect you to keep our relationship private and confidential."

Cheng Yuxiu's eyes squinted. "I know."

Zong Qifeng left without taking breakfast.

Since that day, Zong Qifeng came home every night. He left her alone upstairs and slept in the guest room downstairs.

Cheng Yuxiu learned later that he came back to the villa every night to just please Wen Xian.

Cheng Yuxiu was free during the day; so, she thought of looking for a job to fill her time.

Although she was educated, she lacked the relevant working experience. Hence, it would be easy for her to find a clerical job.

After a successful interview, she got an office job. Since then, she had been working there for more than two months.

Zong Qifeng came home late every night and slept downstairs. They practically did not meet each other.

She lived a full life. After a busy day at the office, she would go through her notes jotted down during work and looked for materials for self-improvement.

That day, she ate dinner after work as usual, and then took a shower before curling up in bed to look for some information.

All of a sudden, she received a telephone call from Cheng Yuwen, the only person who knew her whereabouts. Indeed, after her father's death, Chen Yuwen was her only relative.

“Hongfei is dying to see you.”

Bai Hongfei went overseas to source for some equipment needed for his company's new project.

He faced some glitches which delayed his work. By the time he returned, he was shocked to learn about what had befallen the Cheng Family.

The worst thing was, he couldn't find his girlfriend, his beloved Cheng Yuxiu.

On his prior visits to the Cheng Family, Cheng Yuwen always disappointed him by insisting that he did not know Cheng Yuxiu's whereabouts.

After ensuring the company's new project was on track, he paid another visit to the Cheng Family. This time, he was very insistent. If you don't tell me, I won't go; I will follow you wherever you go.

He was not kidding for he even followed him to the washroom.

Finally, Cheng Yuwen gave in and rang his sister up.

On hearing Bai Hongfei's name, Cheng Yuxiu froze for a while. Then she broke down and cried uncontrollably. She was heart-broken and full of grievances.

"I think he is still in love with you..."

"What love does he have for me?" Cheng Yuxiu interrupted his brother. If he really cares so much for me, why was he not around when I needed him most? And why is it that I could not contact him at all? Where has he been all this while?

"I don't want to see him. You'd better stop hanging out with him. We don't want to have anything to do with the Bai family; do you hear me?" Cheng Yuxiu hung up after making herself clear.

She buried her head in the comforter and cried her heart out. It's you who broke the promise!

“You heard it; she doesn’t want to see you. “ Cheng Yuwen stared at Bai Hongfei. The latter seemed to be wasting away lately.

“When you were having problems, why didn’t you approach my mother? Even if I was not around, she was available...”

“Stop it, okay?” Chen Yuwen laughed sarcastically. He began to hate Bai Hongfei when he mentioned Mrs. Bai. “Yuxiu went to ask for help, but your mom refused...”

“That’s impossible!” Bai Hongfei interrupted. My mom likes Yuxiu very much. She knows I love her and she is happy to approve of me marrying her. How on earth would she refuse it when Yuxiu asked for help?

“If you don’t believe me, go back and ask your mother. For your information, it was your mother who called for a press conference to cancel the engagement!” Cheng Yuwen deplored Mrs. Bai for what she did.

“Seeing our family business in trouble, your mother thought we are no longer useful to her. She made it clear that she was eyeing our family’s textile manufacturing technology. When Yuxiu did not give in, your mother’s attitude changed completely. Not only was your mother unwilling to help; she cut off the ties between both families. This made it all the more difficult for our family to survive the crisis.”

“I don’t believe this! I love Yuxiu and I like her very much!” retorted Bai Hongfei. “I am going back now to ask her; if my mother was not the cause of the problem...”

“I will cut off my head for you to sit on it, okay? Come on, man! You should have asked her much earlier. Yuxiu is no longer a good match for you, because you are the Young Master of Bai family. She is nothing now. You know what, she sacrificed herself for the family, and for me — “

Cheng Yuwen’s voice became weaker and weaker till he broke down and covered his face, crying like a baby.

Cheng family's business collapsed overnight. Had it not been for Cheng Yuxiu's sacrifice, Cheng Yuwen would have ended up in jail; Cheng family would have been in ruin and the family's textile manufacturing technology could have ended up in someone else hand.

As a man, he felt so shameful to have let his sister sacrifice herself to save him. He felt guilty.

Bai Hongfei rushed out of Cheng family's residence and sped home in his car.

Madam Bai just got back after having her facial treatment. She looked rather young for her age; like a lady in her early thirties. She frowned at her son. "Young man, why are you in such a rush?"

"When Cheng family was facing a crisis, Yuxiu came to see you for help. Did you refuse her?" Bai Hongfei grilled her in anger.

Mrs. Bai was stunned and displeased so she avoided his question instead. "So, you have gone to the Cheng family again?"

"Answer me!" This was the first time Bai Hongfei shouted at her mother.

He didn't believe what Cheng Yuwen had told him about his mother.

At this point, Madam Bai sat on the sofa. Looking up at her son, she started explaining. "Your father passed away years ago. I was the only one to support the whole family until today. Life has not been easy all these years..."

"I am asking whether Yuxiu came to see you for help or not!" Bai Hongfei was too impatient to hear his mother out.

"Yes, she did!" Madam Bai's anger flared up. Come on! The girl is just a nobody and I am your mother. "You are my son! How dare you shout at me because of a woman!"

Bai Hongfei froze in shock. Then, something pertinent dawned on him. “So, you have purposely sent me away on the pretext of an overseas business trip, am I right?”

Mrs. Bai remained silent.

“It was also part of your plot for my handphone to fall off into the water.”

“Did you create all those small little problems to delay my return when I was overseas?” Bai Hongfei continued grilling his mother.

Madam Bai did not deny. “Yes, you are right. When you came home after celebrating Yuxiu’s birthday, I received a phone call from Cheng Yuwen. He told me his father has passed away. Mr. Cheng was the pillar of his family business so following his death, no one could guess what would happen to the Cheng family.

That was why I sent you away just to make sure that both of you could not stay in touch with each other. I have planned for your mobile phone to fall into the water on purpose and apologized for my carelessness.

This allowed me to let you use my mobile phone instead. Then, I swapped the SIM cards, I have to make sure that the mobile phone you brought with you carried my SIM card.

When you discovered this later, I readily confessed to that mistake. At the same time, I went to the Cheng family. On the face of it, it looked like I wanted to pay my last respect to Mr. Cheng. In fact, I took the opportunity to switch off Yuxiu’s mobile phone and threw it away when she was grieving over her father’s death. I wanted to make sure both of you were out of contact.”

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“How could you do this?” Bai Hongfei could not believe what his mother said. “I thought that you like her very much, didn’t you?”

“I like her then because she was a member of the Cheng family. After the death of her father, she would no longer be the darling daughter of a rich family. As I have expected, after the death of Mr. Cheng, the family faced a series of problems.”

Madam Bai held the shoulders of his son. “Wake up, son. You are the only heir to the wealth of Bai family. Why worry about women? What is Cheng Yuxiu? Mind you, she is no longer a good match for you. You should be looking for someone better who can help you in your career!”

Bai Hongfei looked at his mother and said, “But I love her and I want to marry her. I want her to be my wife...”

Pop!

Mrs. Bai slapped his son in anger. “Why can’t you be a man?”

All this for a girl!

“She is just a girl. Do you know how she had manage to raise a sum of over tens of millions overnight?” Madam Bai cast a fierce look at his son. “I personally saw her get into a limousine. I am sure she is no longer a virgin. Don’t tell me you don’t mind taking her as your wife now...”

“Ahh!”

Bai Hongfei pushed her mother away. He could not stand listening to such derogatory remarks from his mother.

He raced to the river bank where he used to meet with Cheng Yuxiu. They both enjoyed looking at the crystal-clear water flowing there.

They often met there. Cheng Yuxiu would always lean against his chest while they enjoyed the quiet ambience that seemed to belong only to them.

They came here one day before celebrating Cheng Yuxiu's birthday where he hugged her passionately. "Tomorrow you will be 20 years old."

"So what"?

Bai Hongfei kissed her cheeks. "We can get married now." And then he put his hands round her waist, telling her, "I want you to give birth to many children of our own. We will stay here for the rest of our lives. What do you think?"

She snuggled up to him. Tears welled in her eyes. "Hongfei, will you love me forever?"

"Yes, I will. I will never betray you. I will protect you and make sure you don't get hurt for the rest of your life," Bai Hongfei vowed.

Cheng Yuxiu leaned against his chest, hugging him tightly. She couldn't resist the urge to sound playful. "I am willing to marry you and have many children with you so that Meng City will become White City populated by many descendants of Bai family..."

Bai Hongfei was touched. He kissed her hair and responded in jest, "So, you don't have anything to do with the Cheng family anymore, do you?"

Cheng Yuxiu held him and kissed him on the lips. "I will follow the man I marry, be he a rooster or a dog."

"How dare you compare me to a rooster and a dog?" Bai Hongfei pretended to be angry.

“You are just like that... “

“Like what?”

Cheng Yuxiu feared that Bai Hongfei might want to punish her so she pushed him off and started to run away.

Bai Hongfei chased her. “Cheng Yuxiu, stop running. Otherwise, I won’t let you off so easily.”

Cheng Yuxiu laughed and looked over her shoulders mischievously. “How will you punish me then?”

Bai Hongfei seemed ready with an answer. “I will marry you, lock you up in the room so I can stare at you whole day and love you — “

“Shame on you!” Cheng Yuxiu pretended to hate the proposed punishment. “Don’t even tell others that I know you. Oh!”

She ran too fast and tripped on a pebble.

“Be careful.”

Bai Hongfei dashed over trying to save her from falling face down. He managed to pull her just before she landed on the ground but he lost his balance. He fell back down while hugging Cheng Yuxiu.

The riverbank was filled with pebbles of different sizes. The fall caused him terrible pain.

Cheng Yuxiu quickly went over to check. “Are you hurt? Is it painful?”

Bai Hongfei grabbed her hands which were moving about wildly. He stared at her and his hands cupped her head and he kissed her on the lips before she could even react.

They hugged and kissed by the river bank enjoying the sweetness of courtship.

“After your birthday, I will ask my mother to meet your parents to discuss the necessary arrangements for our wedding. Say, what kind of bridal gown do you prefer? Just let me know and I will have it tailor-made —”

“I am happy just being around you; I don’t want anything else.”

“But I don’t want you to feel wronged for marrying me; I will make sure there will be a grand banquet to celebrate our wedding and announce to everyone that you, Cheng Yuxiu, is my wife.”

He shouted as he stared at the river and the sky.

Right then, even though he could reminisce the joy of courtship and hear their vows reverberating in his head, the girl he wished to marry was nowhere in sight.

Where has she gone?

Looking up helplessly, Bai Hongfei roared.

He could not accept the fact that Cheng Yuxiu had vanished out of his world.

He went to Cheng family’s residence again.

Cheng Yuwen refused to let him in. “Please go away. My sister’s engagement with you has already been cancelled. Both families no longer have anything to do with each other.”

Bai Hongfei was determined to see Cheng Yuxiu. He kept knocking on the door. "Please let me see Yuxiu or I won't leave."

Cheng Yuwen considered his insistence crazy. "Come on, man. Why must you do this? Tell me, do you think you can leave your mother? Of course, you cannot because you are a filial son. The point is, your mother looks down on our family; you can never marry her no matter how much you love Yuxi."

Dong, dong —

Bai Hongfei banged on the gate furiously. "Please, let me see her."

Cheng Yuwen was not moved by his determination. "I don't care how long you want to wait outside."

He went inside the house, not caring whether Bai Hongfei chose to stay back to prove his point.

Bai Hongfei waited outside for three days, without any food and drink.

Mrs. Bai couldn't stand seeing his son suffering like this. She brought some helpers to try to force him to go home. "This is absurd! You are such a useless prick?"

"I am definitely not going back, unless you can make sure I meet Yuxiu!" Bai Hongfei was very determined; he frantically repulsed anyone who tried to approach him and take him home.

This angered Madam Bai even more. "How can I have a son like you! You are doing all this just for a girl? Tell me any girl you want and I will get her for you!"

"I don't want anyone else; I only want Yuxiu, I like her and no one else." His voice became weaker and weaker and he collapsed finally.

He covered his face with his hand and continued to complain, "Why did you call off my engagement with her? Why did you do this without getting my consent? How could you do this to me! Did you even have any respect for me? Did you even get my opinion? Have you ever treated me like I am your son?"

Madam Bai was speechless and her face turned pale. It hurt her very much to find her adult son misunderstand her. "I have done this for your own good. Why can't you appreciate this?"

"I'd rather you did nothing at all!" Bai Hongfei was still sitting in front of the gate of Cheng family's residence. "Go back, please. I won't leave without seeing Yuxiu."

Madam Bai knew she would only get angrier if she stayed here any longer.

"If you insist on mistreating yourself this way, there is nothing I can do to stop you. Get real, son; Cheng Yuxiu won't feel bad because of what you are doing right now. I am the only one who truly loves you!"

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As usual, Cheng Yuxiu ensured she left for work after Zong Qifeng had gone out. This was to avoid any embarrassment.

After all, their relationship was rather strange.

Though they were strangers to each other, they treated each other with due courtesy and respect. Indeed, they did not know much about each other even after meeting face-to-face on a few occasions.

Even though they lived under the same roof, they had not taken breakfast together.

This was because Zong Qifeng wouldn't eat breakfast at home, and he came back at night after she had retired to bed.

Here was a man who went out early and came back late; and the woman avoided him purposely.

When she arrived at the office that day, she attended to the routine as usual. She was ever willing to learn so she had obtained a good grasp of the company's products. She stood by the photocopy machine, to print 20 sets of documents for use in that morning's meeting. Once she finished, she took the duly bound documents into the meeting room, placing one set in front of each attendee's seat.

At this point, someone entered the meeting room. It was Mr. Zhang. He was impressive with the neat arrangement in the meeting room. When Cheng Yuxiu placed the last set of documents, Mr. Zhang stared at her unfamiliar face. "Are you new here?"

Before Cheng Yuxiu could answer, her immediate superior interrupted. “Yes; she has joined us for two months.”

Mr. Zhang was wearing a black suit. He was a rather obese man in his forties. Though his face looked a bit fierce, overall he gave people the impression of an upright person.

He nodded. “Look at her. This is the correct manner to conduct oneself at work. No matter what is your job title or the nature of your job, you must do it perfectly. This is the right attitude all of you must have.”

Some staff showed up in the meeting room and took the chance to butter up Mr. Zhang.

Though Cheng Yuxiu was new to the workplace, she knew how to get along with people. Those were the cream of the company; as a clerk, she knew better not to say much in front of them. She wanted to leave the meeting room quietly by the back door.

“Wait.” Mr. Zhang detected her intention and stopped her. He raised his head to look at Cheng Yuxiu. “Where did you graduate? Where did you work previously?”

“I am a graduate of Huaqing University. This is my first job.” Cheng Yuxiu replied honestly.

Mr. Zhang was rather stunned. “An elite school graduate?”

He wondered why a person with that kind of education would go for a clerical job for a start. “Why did you take up this job?” He just couldn’t believe it.

“I really don’t mind taking up a clerical job as I lack the relevant working experience. Personally, I feel there is nothing wrong with this job. One thing for sure, I get to learn about the company’s core business activities even when I am printing documents.”

“Tell me then, what have you learned so far?” Mr. Zhang was curious.

Cheng Yuxiu did further research online on the company’s products including heavy machinery such as pressing punch, compressor, and ultrasonic equipment.

These products were meant for distribution among hardware outlets in the busiest cities. However, the market competition is very huge.

Like it or not, products that failed to keep pace with current technological innovation would be phased out. The company’s decision-maker would normally focus on those that proved to be profitable.

“The company was established 30 years ago. It has its glories during this period of growth. Talk of heavy machinery, people think of Universal Machinery. But now there are far too many suppliers of such machinery. The focus should be on product innovation, not aggressive marketing.”

“What do you know?” Cheng Yuxiu’s immediate superior frowned at her elaboration.

However, Mr. Zhang was impressed. He nodded approvingly. “Take a seat. I want you to take part in this meeting.”

“She is just a clerk. Today’s meeting is to discuss the company’s future directions. With regard to her position, is it proper to let her attend?”

“Any employee of the company has a right to attend. What’s more, I agree with what she said just now. The company’s sales performance has been declining year after year. We have been facing stiff competition which affect our annual turnover. But have you really looked into the root cause of our poor performance?” Mr. Zhang looked in the direction of Cheng Yuxiu and continued, “I must say I agree with her; the company must be innovative to become a market leader and regain its glories...”

“But innovation will need big spending and dedication... “

“Based on my research, I believe the company can make this long-term investment by tapping its reserves accumulated over the last few years. Otherwise, we will be wiped out.” Cheng Yuxiu reiterated her thinking on the point, without rebutting anyone in particular who held a different view.

“The business environment keeps changing. Innovation is the only way to stay ahead and win bigger market share.”

“You’re just a clerk. What do you know?”

“Well said,” complimented Mr. Zhang. He cast a serious look at the dissenting staff and continued, “Since all of you think that she has no right to attend this meeting as a clerk, then I shall make an announcement. From now on, she will be the vice president of Wanxiang Group, in charge of business development.”

In fact, Cheng Yuxiu had only presented what was on the mind of Mr. Zhang. The latter was surprised to find such a dedicated clerk who did her homework so thoroughly.

He admired her dedication.

It is no doubt, an elite school graduate like her would be brimming with new ideas.

The company has a bunch of old-fashioned senior employees who are resistant to change. Without innovation to drive the change, the company would eventually drop out of the market.

He wanted to make changes. He needed someone far-sighted to help him revamp. Thank God! This girl has indeed come at the right time.

Everyone in the meeting room froze. They thought the announcement was just their imagination.

“Mr. Zhang...”

“That’s all. My decision is final.”

“I am afraid I am not competent for that post.” Cheng Yuxiu didn’t want to sound too assertive. “I was only sharing my thoughts on the matter — “

“It is hard to come by good ideas like what you have shared just now.” Mr Zhang interrupted. “I have confidence in you. Why are you rejecting this appointment? Don’t tell me you prefer to be a clerk!”

Cheng Yuxiu thought of the situation of her family She needed to be strong and do something worthy that could help revive Cheng family’s glory.

After the death of her father, she had to rely on her own resources.

During her time as a clerk in the company, she had learned a lot.

Though her family’s business was in textile manufacturing industry she was eager to learn the relevant management and marketing concepts as applied in the company.

“Thank you for your trust in me. I will give my best at it.” Cheng Yuxiu finally accepted.

“I guess you would have read the documents for this meeting. I’ll let you chair the meeting.” Mr. Zhang sat down.

Senior employees of the company glared at Cheng Yuxiu.

“What does a little girl like her know?”

“You are getting more and more unreliable now.” Some considered Mr. Zhang’s decision too hasty. “How could you promote a clerk to be the vice president just like that? Are you crazy or what?”

“I am the legal representative of the company and the major shareholder. I am the President of the company as well. If you are not happy with this, wait till you get the chance to hold this position before you start lecturing me.”

At once, all kinds of dissenting voice died down in deference to Mr. Zhang’s high office in the company. Everyone in the company knew better to accept the rather surprising appointment made at the meeting.

At first, Cheng Yuxiu looked rather timid. However, based on her detailed research on the company’s target markets, her presentation finally convinced them of her capability.

At the end of the meeting, Mr. Zhang invited Cheng Yuxiu for dinner.

Conscious that she was not completely free to do whatever she liked, Cheng Yuxiu turned down Mr. Zhang’s invitation. “I am sorry. I’ve got something on.”

“There is nothing to worry about. It’s just a dinner. It won’t take too much of your time. Let me put it this way; I am very pleased with your performance today.”

Cheng Yuxiu felt unable to oblige. “I am terribly sorry. I’ve got something on, really.”

“If so, let me know what it is. I’ll help you with that.” Mr Zhang was very insistent.

Finally, Cheng Yuxiu knew she had to give in to not offend Mr. Zhang.

In order to avoid coming into physical contact with Mr. Zhang, Cheng Yuxiu took the back seat of the car.

Mr. Zhang tried to ease her tension. “You’re not thinking of me as a bad guy, are you?”

Cheng Yuxiu shook her head. “No — “

“It’s okay if you think so. I know my look is a bit ugly, but I have a kind heart — “

Cheng Yuxiu smiled at him. The car stopped in front of a high-end western restaurant. Mr. Zhang wanted to open the car door for Cheng Yuxiu.

“That won’t be necessary, thanks anyway.” Cheng Yuxiu felt uncomfortable with this gesture.

Mr. Zhang noticed and gave in to Cheng Yuxiu’s insistence on being reserved. So, he walked in front and the latter followed him as they entered the restaurant.

“You have helped in a big way.” They sat at a table near the window. Mr. Zhang passed the menu to Cheng Yuxiu. “Order whatever you like to eat and drink. It’s all on me. I want to thank you for your help.”

Cheng Yuxiu wanted to refuse. She finally took the menu in deference to his sincerity.

At this juncture, a few persons entered the restaurant. The leader of them was Zong Qifeng, the most high-profile personality in B City. Recently, he took charge of the Company and allied with the Wen family by marriage.

“President Zong.” Mr. Zhang stood up to greet Zong Qifeng politely.

Zong Qifeng looked in the direction of Mr. Zhang.

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Zong Qifeng looked in the direction of Mr. Zhang.

President Zong? When Cheng Yuxiu turned round to look at the person at the entrance, she froze at once. Oh, my God! She didn't know what to do.

Mr. Zhang did not notice anything unusual in Cheng Yuxiu's behavior. He stood up and walked to the front of Zong Qifeng. "President Zong, are you here for dinner? I would be most privileged to have dinner with you."

They had befriended each other during previous business deals.

At the same time, Mr. Zhang also greeted Zong Qifeng's companions. "Come. Let's have a nice dinner. I have taken a table near the window. We can enjoy the scene outside as we eat. It's great, isn't it?"

Those companions dared not decide; they stared at Zong Qifeng, hinting at him to have the final say.

Zong Qifeng stared at the floor and nodded. "We'd be glad to."

Mr. Zhang at once led the way. He pulled out the chair for Zong Qifeng.

As soon as all had sat down, Mr. Zhang signaled the waiter to order more dishes.

Cheng Yuxiu became very uncomfortable. She held her hands together and placed them under the table. She never expected to meet Zong Qifeng here. so she kept her head down.

Someone poked fun at Mr. Zhang. "You are having dinner with a beautiful lady. Sorry for spoiling your plan."

"Mr. Zhang, we haven't met this beautiful lady before, have we?"

Cheng Yuxiu instinctively raised her head and had eye contact with Zong Qifeng.

Cheng Yuxiu was anxious and wanted to explain. However, there were other people around so she kept mum.

She remembered Zong Qifeng told her not to disclose their relationship to anyone else.

She didn't say a word especially in front of Zong Qifeng for fear of drawing unwanted attention.

She looked at Mr. Zhang. "I am sorry. I've got to go now."

Mr. Zhang signaled her to sit down. "Relax. They are only joking. Please stay on to have dinner together. I don't expect to let leave with your stomach empty."

Having reassured Cheng Yuxiu, Mr Zhang glanced at the two who poked fun at him. "Come on, buddies. I am a married man. Don't give me a bad name as a womanizer. I have the pleasure to introduce to you..."

He pointed at Cheng Yuxiu, "My savior."

"As you are well aware, I have a bunch of old-fashioned senior staffs who are resistant to change. They are the stumbling blocks to my efforts to make changes for the company. Luckily,...sorry, I didn't get your name. What's your name, please!"

Mr. Zhang realized he did not even know Cheng Yuxiu's name when he wanted to introduce her.

At this point, he found that during the meeting that morning, he was so bold and hasty as to appoint a newly-employed, name-unknown, clerk to the post of Vice President of Wanxiang Group.

When Mr. Zhang asked for the name of his new vice president, Zong Qifeng winced. He also didn't know the name of this lady who had been living with him under the same roof for two months.

"Cheng Yuxiu," she said with a wince.

Zong Qifeng curved his eyebrows slightly. To him, the name sounded quite like that of a girl from a respectable family.

"Cheng Yuxiu? It's a nice name! To begin with, it is unlike the commonplace names of so many girls. It sounds poetic in Chinese. Sorry for the digression," said Mr. Zhang with a laugh. "You know what, she made an elaborate presentation that succeeded in convincing those old-fashioned senior staff."

Mr Zhang stood up and glanced at everyone at the dinner table. "Gentlemen, this is my company's newly-appointed vice president. In the future, she will be my most trusted assistant. She is capable and has a vision. No doubt, she is beautiful. But I can tell now, her capability is even more impressive."

Mr. Zhang appreciated the capability of Cheng Yuxiu. She showcased this during the meeting in morning when she ably shot down all dissenting opinions from the company's old-fashioned senior staffs.

"Really?"

At once, Cheng Yuxiu became the focus of attention.

For years, Wanxiang Machinery had been a market leader. However, the flush of competitors had impacted its business significantly. Mr. Zhang's plan for a revamp was shelved because of resistance from those old-fashioned senior staff. The latter was content with the company's dwindling profits and opposed to

spending time and money on innovation. There had been no one to help him spearhead his program for innovation.

Everyone was curious. How did she manage to pull down the resistance of those old-fashioned old fellas?

“That was nothing. But thank you anyway. I am flattered.” Cheng Yuxiu felt so uncomfortable at the dinner table; the prevailing tension made her lose her appetite.

“Mr. Zhang, I am sorry. I really must be going now.” Cheng Yu stood up, signaling her insistence to leave.

Mr. Zhang noticed her insistence to leave. He didn’t want to spoil the work relationship with her. So he compromised. “In that case, let me give you a toast. I will get someone to send you home. How about that?”

Cheng Yuxiu considered briefly and nodded. She saw the need to maintain a good relationship with him; at the small cost of a glass of wine, after all.

Cheng Yuxiu and Mr. Zhang stood up to clink their wine glasses.

“You’re a god-sent general to help me revamp the company. The days ahead are going to be tough. Let me know if there is anything you need or even the problems you encounter.” Mr Zhang spoke with fervor. He was certainly a capable person, entrusted to manage a big company.

“Thank you for giving me the chance. I am afraid I am not a capable assistant as you have hoped for. I wish to join the company at a time when it is entering a new era. This calls for team work in order to achieve greater success. We must work hand in hand for better results.”

“Well said.” Mr. Zhang gave her a thumb-up as he emptied his glass of white wine.

Cheng Yuxiu used to drink a little. But now, she found the smell of white wine nauseating.

Mr. Zhang looked at her. “You have to empty your glass of wine, right?”

In order to extricate herself, she did what was expected of her. Frowning, she said, “So, may I leave now?”

“Of course, I am getting my driver to send you home. By the way, where do you stay?” Mr. Zhang asked earnestly.

Shocked, Cheng Yuxiu signaled her refusal at once. “That won’t be necessary, thanks anyway. I can take care of that.” She definitely wouldn’t dare disclose her address. And she quickly walked out of the restaurant, fearing that Mr. Zhang might stop her on some other specious grounds.

Luckily, she got a taxi outside the restaurant. However, she was worried that Zong Qifeng would be displeased with her over the encounter in the restaurant.

After all, she was not as free as she wanted to be. The bottom line was, she shouldn’t cause him any trouble.

Her heart was in turmoil during the trip from the restaurant back to the villa.

Fortunately, Zong Qifeng had not come back before her. She took a deep breath and went upstairs. She started to prepare a hot bath to relax and recharge.

When the hot bath was ready, she got undressed and immersed herself in it. She couldn’t resist admiring her beautiful body in the bath water. It was most alluring, even to herself.

Having immersed in the hot bath for about 30 minutes, her body felt warm. She felt relaxed and recharged.

She wanted to reach for the towel. As she stepped out, she slipped. In desperation, she tried to grip anything nearby for support. She hit off all kinds of bottles and other containers onto the floor. That was a mess when the sharp crackling sound ceased.

She lied on the floor in pain. The lower part of her abdomen felt especially painful. She saw blood as she tried to look in the direction between her legs.

Her face turned pale. She was so tense while living here that she had overlooked this matter. But now she was shocked to realize that she had missed her periods for the last two months. What happened?

She panicked. She called out for the maid while covering her body with a towel.

The bathtub was in her room upstairs, where there was excellent soundproofing. Her shouts failed to alert the maid.

There was a group of businessmen talking incessantly in the restaurant. Half way through, Zong Qifeng begged to be excused, thereby ending the dinner.

When he got back to the villa, he hesitated briefly before going upstairs to knock on her door.

Standing outside her room, he had the urge to tell her what was on his mind. "Mr. Zhang already knew the problems facing his company; he failed to make necessary changes in face of opposition from his senior staff. Someone must come forward to help him deal with the resistance. Now that you have stepped out to be that someone, you will no doubt become their target for vengeance. This will put you in an unfavorable position. If you need to look for some other job, I can help. But if you think you can handle it, then go ahead."

He wanted to alert her so as not to be exploited by Mr. Zhang.

Even though there was no response, he waited for a while. Just before he turned around to leave, he heard some thumping noise from inside her room.

He halted and listened carefully but the noise had ceased. He thought he was mistaken.

As he was walking away, he heard Cheng Yuxiu shouting with all her might. "I am inside my room — "

Zong Qifeng frowned as he turned towards her room and knocked on the door. "Are you okay?"

Cheng Yuxiu held onto the towel instinctively. Her eyes were bloodshot. She was old enough to know her own predicament.

Everything seemed to have happened so suddenly. She was nervous, afraid and terrified.

Her voice almost failed her. "I fell down. I can't move now." Not that I can't move at all; every movement I make will cause my abdomen feel very painful. That's why I am not moving.

Zong Qifeng pushed the door open. She was not in her room, but the washroom door was closed with the lights on.

He walked to the washroom and knocked on the door. "Are you there?"

She saw a shadow through the tinted glass door. Tears that welled up in her eyes started falling down her cheeks.

"Yes, I am inside." She cried out her reply in fear.

She wondered why she was fearful. She feared exposing her naked body in full view of Zong Qifeng; or learning of her possible pregnancy. Whatever it was, her mind was in a mess.

Zong Qifeng pushed at the door, which refused to open. Afraid that she might be in danger, he threw his full weight against the door and broke in. She was lying on the blood-stained floor, half-naked, with a towel covering her private part.

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“Are you hurt?” Zong Qifeng was shocked. He quickly turned his back to her.

“Please, send me to the hospital.” No matter how embarrassing the situation was, she knew that was the priority.

She didn’t know what it really felt like. It was terrible, to say the least.

Zong Qifeng dashed to the side of her bed. He pulled out the bed sheet and covered her body with it before carrying her.

Her body was light. For the first time, Zong Qifeng felt her body warmth and breath. He became very concerned. “Where does it hurt?” Why is she bleeding? How come there are blood stains on the floor?

Cheng Yuxiu lowered her head not knowing what to say and how to tell him so she kept quiet. How am I supposed to tell him that I am probably pregnant with his child?

She was sure Zong Qifeng’s affection towards his wife was sincere.

Hence, she was unsure if he would hate this child she was carrying.

Will he dislike the child, or be unwilling to accept him?

There were just so many uncertainties which were why she dared not disclose the truth.

She was admitted to the hospital before long.

As expected, she was confirmed pregnant for two months; in the ninth week of pregnancy to be exact.

She was unaware of the pregnancy. There had been no morning sickness to alert her.

Given bleeding as a sign of possible miscarriage, the doctor strongly advised her to rest in bed until the fetus had settled down.

Lying on the operating theater, Cheng Yuxiu felt dazed under the lights. The smell of disinfectant on the tip of her nose was cold and pungent. "I have taken some wine. Would it have any adverse effect on the fetus?"

"No problem if it was just a little bit. But if you are worried, make sure you come for checkup regularly. This fall was quite dangerous; it has caused some bleeding. If you want this baby, you must take a good rest. Otherwise, you run the risk of a miscarriage."

Cheng Yuxiu nodded. "I got it."

When the doctor wheeled her out of the operating theater, she closed her eyes pretending to sleep.

Zong Qifeng was on a phone call in the aisle outside the operating theater. When the door opened, he quickly cut short the conversation. Cheng Yuxiu was wheeled out and Zong Qifeng walked over to have a look. Her eyes were closed and appeared to be asleep.

Her face was pale.

Zong Qifeng looked at the doctor. "How is her injury? Is it serious?"

"She is not injured, but there are signs of possible miscarriage. If you want to have this baby, make sure she takes a good rest in bed. Don't move around."

Lying on the bed pretending to be asleep, Cheng Yuxiu gripped the bed sheet under the blanket. She was afraid the doctor would reveal what she had deliberately refrained from telling Zong Qifeng.

Zong Qifeng stood still, lost. She is pregnant!

Whose child is it?

Mine?

Like Cheng Yuxiu, his mind was loaded with confusion.

He wondered how he was going to face this twist of event.

“How long has it been?” He held his hands together.

“9 weeks.”

The doctor added, “She seems to worry too much. This is not good for her pregnancy. She needs a good rest and someone to talk to and keep her company.”

Zong Qifeng nodded.

Then he followed the nurse who wheeled her into the ward.

The doctor gave further advice. “She has started bleeding already. She must not come down from bed to walkabout. Don’t go to work, and no sex please.”

The doctor went straight to the point, thinking they were a lawful couple.

Zong Qifeng coughed in a rather unnatural manner. “I got it.”

Then the doctor left with the nurse.

Cheng Yuxiu felt lucky to have pretended to be asleep. Otherwise, she wouldn't know how to face Zong Qifeng.

This was so embarrassing to the point that she blushed.

Her face felt scorching hot.

Zong Qifeng was caught by surprise, not knowing what to do in face of the confirmed pregnancy.

He stood near the window for a rather long time. Cheng Yuxiu thought he had already left.

She knew he was terrified now and his mind must be in turmoil.

Omm...

Right then, the mobile phone in his pocket buzzed.

The screen displayed the name of Wen Xian. He answered straightaway. "Yes?"

"It's me. Dad would like you to come over."

He squinted and replied calmly, "Alright."

After hanging up, he made a call to the villa, instructing the maid to come over to the hospital to take care of Cheng Yuxiu. The doctor advised Cheng Yuxiu not to come down from the bed and walk around.

Having made all necessary arrangement, he left.

Wen Xian had been staying at her parental home for quite some time already. Wen Jin suspected there could be something wrong between the couple. He asked Wen Xian to ring up Zong Qifeng, asking the latter to come over for a drink.

As expected, as soon as Zhong Qifeng sat down, Wen Jin went straight to the point. "Qifeng, I know both of you have not been married for a long time. The thing is, she has been away from home for more than two months already; yet, you have never dropped by to see her or take her home. To me, this certainly looks strange for a couple. Tell me, is everything okay?"

Wen Xian was shocked. She did not expect her father to express his concern that way. "Dad, actually I am not used to staying there; I prefer it here. Qifeng is very busy. Well, is that why you have asked him to come over?"

Wen Jin slanted a stare at his daughter. "So you don't need your daddy anymore. Is that so?"

"No, it's not like what you think..." She failed to explain as much as her heart would desire.

Zong Qifeng held Wen Xian's hands. "I am sorry; my fault. I am taking Wen Xian home today."

Wen Jin thought highly of Zong Qifeng. This was why he married her daughter off to him. "I know you are busy with your work. But you two are a couple, after all. It has been more than a year now. Drop by more often. Furthermore, it's time to have a child. Right?"

"Dad, you are at it again." Wen Xian feigned impatience with her father.

"Okay, I'll cut it." Wen Jin waved his hands in the air.

At this juncture, Wen Qing turned up. He was Wen Xian's brother and a promising youth holding the position of Captain.

From Wen Xian's grandfather till now, Wen family could boast of high-ranking officials. Her father was the mayor of B City. Her brother joined the military at a young age and had been promoted to the rank of Captain. He had a great potential for advancement.

He took off his uniform and came in. "Oh, brother, you're here."

Zong Qifeng nodded.

Wen Qing pulled a chair to sit down. Glancing at Wen Xian, he asked Zong Qifeng, "You are here to take her home?"

Zong Qifeng cast a look at Wen Xian. "Yes. I have been terribly busy lately. I hope you are mad at me over this."

Wen Qing poured some wine for Zong Qifeng. "I know you are busy. I am aware my sister is quite capricious. I hope you can bear with her."

"Hey, I am your sister. Why are you not siding me?" Wen Xian pretended to be angry.

"I prefer to be on the side of reason. You have come back for two months already. What do you think he needs a wife for? To enjoy her beauty only? It is for procreation and..."

Wen Qing stopped abruptly and cast an ambiguous look at Zong Qifeng.

Zong Qifeng felt helpless. After he bottomed up the wine, he held Wen Xian's hands tightly. There was so much that he wanted to say to her, but he didn't know how to express himself. "Wen Xian is a very nice lady. I am very happy to have her as my wife. If given the chance, I want to dedicate my life to loving her..."

He seemed too depressed to finish his line. He filled up his glass and gulped down the wine. Perhaps only Wen Xian would be able to gauge the bitterness and hardship that overwhelmed him.

She placed her hand on the back of his hand. Afraid that he might tell it all, she wanted to leave with him soonest possible. “I am sorry for being capricious. I have overstayed and forgotten to go home. I assure you this will not happen again.”

“Cut it, please. Go back and show affection at home.” Wen Qing pretended to dislike what he saw.

The atmosphere during dinner was cordial. The young couple went home after that.

On the way home, Wen Xian sensed Zong Qifeng was in a bad mood. “What’s wrong?”

Zong Qifeng remained silent.

Wen Xian apologized. “I am sorry — “

“She’s pregnant.”

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Wen Xian felt choked for a moment.

“How long has it been?”

Zong Qifeng pulled over the car. He lighted a cigarette and remained silent.

Wen Xian waited with patience. She knew he must be feeling awful. After all, he had known Cheng Yuxiu for a short time only.

“Let her give birth to the child.” Wen Xian suggested calmly.

Zong Qifeng puffed. Of course, he wanted to have his child born. Certainly not as an illegitimate child.

“Tomorrow I will ring up my family to tell them I am pregnant; once the child is born, I will take charge and the child would be legitimate. After that, when we divorce, Wen family and Zong family are still relatives because of the child. He will grow up under the care of both families — “

“Are you really that determined to leave me?” Zong Qifeng laughed rather sarcastically. This was the first time he expressed his dissatisfaction of her.

Wen Xian bit her lips. She admitted her selfishness was the cause of what had happened.

“I am sorry — “

“I don’t want to hear any of that.” Zong Qifeng interrupted her.

Wen Xian gave a wince. She did not know how else to respond.

“Wait till the baby is born; after that I will let go of you. Meanwhile, please stay at the villa to take care of her. I only trust you in this. Since she may risk a miscarriage, the doctor said she needs to rest well,”

“Fine. Don’t worry, I will take care of her.”

Wen Xian did not go back to the villa. She went to the hospital straightaway. After getting the relevant confirmation, she announced the following day that she was pregnant.

Both the Zong family and the Wen family were happy to hear the good news.

And so, Cheng Yuxiu started her days dedicated to nurturing a new life.

Usually, in addition to the maid, Wen Xian also helped take care of Cheng Yuxiu.

“Are you feeling okay?” Wen Xian was concerned that Cheng Yuxiu did not have a good appetite during lunch.

Cheng Yuxiu shook her head. “Nothing, really. But your presence here — “

“Relax. You are pregnant with the child of Zong family. It’s also mine. I take it upon myself to take good care of you.” Wen Xian reassured Cheng Yuxiu. She understood the latter’s feeling for not being able to take care of her child.

She pulled a chair to sit beside Cheng Yuxiu. Holding the latter’s hand, she explained, “Our marriage was intended to promote the best interests of both the Wen family and the Zong family. Nothing more. Do you understand?”

Wen family had never had a hand in business. The city’s prosperity was the result of bustling commercial activities. Zong family was good in business and played a vital role in the city.

The Zongs were well aware that they needed the support of local officials to expand their business. They believed the marriage would be conducive to promoting the best interests of both families.

That was why they had to sacrifice themselves to secure the best interests of their families, even if they did not love each other.

Cheng Yuxiu knew their marriage was not founded on mutual affection; it was created to serve their respective family interests.

“Well, he stands to benefit by becoming a grandson of Wen family.” Wen Xian placed her palm on Cheng Yuxiu’s abdomen which was not bulging yet. It was a pregnancy in the second month. “Right now, I am not able to let him marry you according to law —”

“I know. Your divorce may even cause tensions between both families. Forget about working together; both families may even become enemies. However, the families will become allies if a child is born out of this marriage. This will be good for the child. After all, he is the grandson of Wen family and the Zhong family...” Cheng Yuxiu was too sad to continue what had dawned on her by now.

“I am sorry, I...” Cheng Yuxiu apologized.

Wen Xian wiped her tears, then she hugged her knowing well that she was feeling awful. “Believe me, I will make sure you will become his lawful wife. But the status of the child cannot be changed. I am the one to blame for putting you in this difficult position.”

Cheng Yuxiu was clear. Wen Xian couldn’t be blamed. In truth, had it not been for Wen Xian’s help at the last minute, the Cheng family would probably be in ruins and her brother would have to go to jail. She did everything willingly in reciprocating to Wen Xian’s kind assistance.

“It was not your fault. I did it willingly. It is fated. Actually, this child will benefit from being a grandson of the Wen family. It will be better than staying with me...” this was the first time Cheng Yuxiu cried so heart-wrenchingly in her life.

Wen Xian did not know how to console her. Instead, she hugged her and they cried together.

One was crying over the tyranny of fate; the other over the lack of freedom to love.

After some time, they finally calmed down.

“Take a good rest. Qifeng will come over tonight. I’ve got to go now.” But Cheng Yuxiu gripped Wenxian’s hand to plead, “Please don’t go.”

In fact, Cheng Yuxiu was afraid to be alone with Zong Qifeng.

Wenxian patted Cheng Yuxiu’s hand to reassure her. “He is a nice man. If I have not already met my lover, I may even fall in love with him.”

Wenxian covered her with the blanket. “Take a good rest. Relax. Trust me; everything is going to be fine.”

Cheng Yuxiu nodded. She felt very drowsy, probably due to her pregnancy. After Wenxian left, she lied down and fell asleep shortly.

The sound of people talking woke her. She could hear them in a daze...

“This is the fetus.” The doctor pointed at an image on the ultrasound print-out.

Zong Qifeng failed to identify the fetus. He wondered how it could develop into a baby.

“She is in her early pregnancy. It will be possible to clearly see two months later. Given her conditions, she will require extra attention. You must keep her company often. After all, you are the father of the child.”

Zong Qifeng nodded.

“Based on her check-up today, she seems to have recovered alright. She may go back in two days to rest at home. Your sister is a really nice person. I can see she really takes good care of your wife. Nowadays, it is so hard to find such a good little sister-in-law.”

Wen Xian had identified herself as Zong Qifeng’s sister. This was to avoid people gossiping about their relationship.

Zong Qifeng was stunned at first but he laughed halfheartedly. upon hearing that. Then he sent the doctor off and came back in after closing the door.

He pulled a chair near the bed of the pregnant woman. He sat there quietly, looking at her up close for the very first time.

Actually, as Wenxian had described it; she was very beautiful. He had never looked at her properly.

Cheng Yuxiu could sense someone looking at her so she purposely turned her face away.

Two hours had past and Zong Qifeng hadn’t left. Cheng Yuxiu had withheld the urge to answer nature’s calls for more than an hour already. Oh, my God! When is he going to leave?

Zong Qifeng looked at his watch and frowned. Wow, she has slept through the whole afternoon.

“Mmm...”

Cheng Yuxiu pretended she was just waking up.

“Are you awake?” asked Zong Qifeng.

Cheng Yuxiu continued to pretend and gave him a stare. He sensed that she wanted to sit up so he held her up and put a cushion at her back.

Cheng Yuxiu winced. “Are you free today? I need to discuss something with you.”

Zong Qifeng sat down again. “I have helped you quit your job. You don’t have time to work anymore, especially when you are pregnant.”

Of course, he got someone to do it and ensured that Mr Zhang would not disturb her anymore.

Cheng Yuxiu nodded. “Thanks.”

“Don’t mention it. We are not strangers anymore. After all, you have conceived our baby. We’ll get married after the child is born.”

Cheng Yuxiu stared at him with surprise. She did not expect him to say such a thing. She was speechless.

Finally, she opened her mouth. “Pardon me. What did you say just now?”

Zong Qifeng felt like smoking a cigarette, but killed the urge out of his consideration for her. “I said, we’ll get married after the child is born. Although we cannot declare in public that he is our child, we as parents are responsible to raise him. What do you think?”

At this point, Cheng Yuxiu’s mobile phone on the desk rang.

Zong Qifeng noticed the screen was displaying the name of Cheng Yuwen.

Cheng Yuxiu almost blurted out. "It's my brother."

As if he could read her subconscious mind, Zong Qifeng looked up at Cheng Yuxiu and assured her, "I didn't misunderstand anything."

Cheng Yuxiu found herself looking too eager to explain.

Indeed, she knew there was no need to explain for their kind of relationship.

"I — " Cheng Yuxiu hesitated.

Zong Qifeng passed the mobile phone to her. "Go ahead and answer the call."

Cheng Yuxiu concluded any explanation would only make matters worse.

She answered the incoming call.

"I am in B City. Where are you?" asked Cheng Yuwen.

Bai Hongfei was impatient. He snatched the mobile phone from Cheng Yuwen. "Where are you, Yuxiu? I want to see you. Please tell me where are you!"

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Cheng Yuxiu's face went pale in a second. She held on tight to her phone and couldn't say a single word.

Bai Hongfei began to panic. "Yuxiu, please come and see me. If there's any misunderstandings, we can work it out together!"

Cheng Yuxiu sighed. He had been extremely stubborn, to the point that even Mrs. Bai couldn't get him to go home. He stayed in front of the Cheng residence for about a week without food and water, before he finally collapsed and had to be carried back by Mrs. Bai's men.

However, he ran to the Cheng residence again the moment he woke up, saying that he would not leave unless he got to see Cheng Yuxiu.

With that, Cheng Yuwen had no choice but to bring him to B City just to meet Cheng Yuxiu.

"Let me talk to her," Cheng Yuwen said, snatching the phone over. "Hello? It's me, sister. Bai Hongfei is being a stubborn mule, so I have no choice but to bring him here to see you. Make things clear with him once and for all. Y'all had such a long history together, so you should probably give him some closure."

Cheng Yuxiu closed her eyes for a second, before opening them again and glanced at Zong Qifeng. "I need to go out for some matters..."

Cheng Yuwen managed to convince her to see Bai Hongfei and put an end to their entanglement.

She had to end things herself.

Zong Qifeng wasn't sure what happened, but he could tell that Cheng Yuxiu was troubled. He didn't want to give her any more pressure now that she's pregnant.

"You shouldn't tire yourself. I'll send you there."

Cheng Yuxiu hesitated for a moment before rejecting him. "I..."

"If you don't let me send you there, I won't let you out of bed. Even the doctor has ordered you to stay in bed."

Cheng Yuxiu had no choice but to nod. She asked Cheng Yuwen where they were so that she could go over.

After he told her the address, she hung up and grasped the phone tightly in her hand. "Can you go out for a moment?" She asked Zong Qifeng, slightly embarrassed.

Zong Qifeng frowned. "Is something wrong?"

Cheng Yuxiu immediately shook her head. "No, it's just..."

"It's just...?" Zong Qifeng frowned.

Cheng Yuxiu lowered her head. She couldn't tell him that she wanted to go to the bathroom, could she?

He was a man after all.

Although they had gotten intimate before, there hadn't been any feelings involved, let alone the fact that they were barely acquaintances.

She couldn't bring herself to say it.

Looking at her flushed face, Zong Qifeng seemed to understand. He was a man after all then he got up from the bed and said, "I'll go out first."

He called a nurse to take his place, since he couldn't trust Cheng Yuxiu to be alone.

When the nurse came in, Cheng Yuxiu froze for a second. "I'm fine."

She thought the nurse came to check up on her.

Instead, the nurse walked over and said, "Mr. Zong told me to come in since he was worried about you being alone."

Cheng Yuxiu looked at the nurse and blinked a few times, feeling surprised that Zong Qifeng would do such a thing. She was feeling sad suddenly.

Was he concerned about her because she was carrying his child?

The nurse helped her into the bathroom and closed the door.

After a while, the nurse heard some noise coming from inside, and took that as a cue to knock and ask if she was done.

Cheng Yuxiu answered yes, and the nurse opened the door.

She offered to help Cheng Yuxiu back to the bed, but she waved her off. Instead, Cheng Yuxiu told her to bring her coat over.

"You can't go out, you are too weak," the nurse chided.

Cheng Yuxiu nodded. "I know. I'm just going out for a short while, and I have someone to accompany me."

"But you..."

“It’s fine. I’ll take care of myself. Besides, I won’t be gone for long.”

Before the nurse could finish what she was going to say, Cheng Yuxiu cut her off and told her that Zong Qifeng gave her permission to go out. However, the nurse was still reluctant to let her out. “You can’t walk if you want your child to survive.”

Cheng Yuxiu felt troubled. How was she going to go out if she couldn’t walk?

The nurse looked from Cheng Yuxiu to Zong Qifeng, and she couldn’t help but wonder why he was being so dense in front of his wife. “Aren’t you a couple? Why don’t you just carry her?” The nurse asked in a loud voice.

Cheng Yuxiu’s face went red and was about to explain herself when Zong Qifeng cut her off. “Let me carry you.”

“But...”

“But what? The child you’re carrying doesn’t just belong to you. Both of you should put in effort to ensure the baby’s safe delivery.”

The nurse gave Cheng Yuxiu a look. She’s going to become a mother soon, and she’s still so shy in front of her husband? That’s unheard of.

Zong Qifeng bent down and picked her up bridal-style. “I’m not plotting anything, I just want you to be safe and healthy.”

Cheng Yuxiu didn’t know where to put her hands, but Zong Qifeng came to her rescue by placing them on his shoulder. “We’re supposed to be a ‘couple’, so we gotta act like one in public. It’s not good to tip people off that we’re just acting.”

Cheng Yuxiu had never been so awake and aware of their intimacy, and her entire body went taut. Zong Qifeng noticed it and sighed. “Aren’t you going to get tired from being so tense?”

Cheng Yuxiu lowered her head. "I'm not used to this."

"It looks like I've been neglecting you. I'll come and see you more often from now on," he said, before adding, "For the sake of our child."

They arrived at the car park downstairs. Zong Qifeng gently placed her down on the backseat of the car and buckled up her seatbelt for her. When he turned around to look at her, Cheng Yuxiu immediately pushed herself upright against her seat.

Zong Qifeng gave her a look without saying anything. He closed the door and slid into the driver's seat in front then started the engine.

Reversing the car into the main road, he turned around and asked, "Where is it?"

"The train station," Cheng Yuxiu said. Cheng Yuwen and Bai Hongfei had called her right after they got off the train, and since they didn't know anyone in B City, they decided to wait at the exit of the train station for the time being.

"Is it your brother?" Zong Qifeng asked.

Cheng Yuxiu felt anxious, and she clasped her hands together tightly. "Yeah..."

She didn't know how to tell him about Bai Hongfei.

After all, they hadn't officially broken up yet, and it would be a lie to say that they won't regret it considering how close they were in the past.

She had mixed emotions.

Zong Qifeng looked at her through the rearview window, and although he noticed that she was worried about something, he didn't question it and drove on without saying a word.

Soon, Cheng Yuxiu could see the train station from the car window, and two people were standing on the steps right outside the exit.

One of them was her brother, the other her ex-boyfriend.

Cheng Yuxiu took a while to alight the car after it stopped and grabbed the handle on the car door tightly.

Zong Qifeng got out first and opened the door for her, but when he made a move to carry her out, she pushed him away almost instinctively.

Zong Qifeng raised his head. "The child in your belly is mine too, and I don't want anything to happen to our baby."

It sounded like a simple reminder, but he was actually reiterating that fact that she had no right to disregard his presence.

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Cheng Yuxiu hooked her arms around his neck. Maybe that would make Bai Hongfei understand.

Soon, Cheng Yuwen and Bai Hongfei caught sight of Cheng Yuxiu, nestled comfortably in someone else's embrace.

Even Cheng Yuwen froze for a second when he saw his sister in another man's arms.

The last thing she told him before she left was that she promised someone else something and had to leave. She told him not to worry about her.

He knew that she wouldn't be able to put together such a hefty sum of money so quickly, especially considering the fact that she was just a young woman.

The last thing he expected was to see her with another man.

Bai Hongfei, on the other hand, turned to stone on the spot. The woman he loved wholeheartedly had been taken by another man.

Their promise to marry each other rang in his ears.

It sounded so clear that it hurt.

"Yuxiu?" He growled. He sounded like a lion that was about to go berserk.

Cheng Yuxiu felt her heart beating against her chest violently. It was clear that Bai Hongfei was not the only one in pain.

However, there was nothing she could have done to change things.

She rested her head against Zong Qifeng's shoulder and gazed at the fuming man before her. "That's right. I don't love you anymore. Let's end things," she said with much resolve.

She surprised with how determined she sounded as she thought that she wouldn't be able to take it and end up bursting into tears. Yet, she was strangely calm.

Knowing her current situation, she knew that she wouldn't be able to reverse things.

"This is not something you'll say!" Bai Hongfei yelled. He refused to believe that she would give up on him so easily.

"You said that you're going to marry me..."

"That was in the past!" Cheng Yuxiu said, cutting him off. Without a hint of remorse, she looked straight into his eyes and said, "Where were you when I needed you the most? Did you know how rude your mom was when I went to find you? How would I dare entrust myself in your care? Bai Hongfei, I don't love you anymore, not like I ever truly loved you. I only said so because you're from the Bai family..."

"I don't believe it!" Bai Hongfei screamed, shaking his head and charging towards her. Zong Qifeng was prepared for this, and he sidestepped Bai Hongfei just before he made contact.

Bai Hongfei didn't want to give up just yet.

"Who are you?" He yelled, glaring at Zong Qifeng and his hands that were carrying Cheng Yuxiu. "She belongs to me! Let her go now!"

Zong Qifeng immediately figured out the situation from their conversation.

He finally understood their relationship.

Cheng Yuxiu must have run into some kind of problem, and Wen Xian stepped in to help her.

That was how Cheng Yuxiu ended up on his bed, she had to repay Wen Xian to fulfil her side of the agreement.

This man was her ex-boyfriend.

All that led to the confrontation they were having at this moment.

It didn't matter how many boyfriends she had previously, but the child in her belly was something he won't allow anyone to hurt.

"Are you two married?" Zong Qifeng asked calmly.

Bai Hongfei didn't know how to answer that. After all, they were only lovers, not a married couple.

Their marriage pact was cancelled without his knowledge.

"Your mom had announced that the Bai's' had called off the wedding. We have nothing to do with each other anymore. Please leave," Cheng Yuxiu said, moving her gaze away from him.

She thought she had been strong but when she saw his disappointment, she had to struggle to stop herself from giving in.

She was scared that she wouldn't be able to stay determined if she kept looking at his sad expression.

She wanted to tell him that she was sorry; however, she couldn't bring herself to say it.

She couldn't give him false hope that would eventually hurt him even more.

"I'm here to apologize on my mom's behalf. Yuxiu, do you even know how much I love you?" Bai Hongfei rasped, his eyes swollen.

Cheng Yuxiu's nails dug into Zong Qifeng's suit. It hurt, but Zong Qifeng's face remained stoic.

"No, I don't. If you loved me, you wouldn't have left me when I needed you the most..."

"I didn't know that something so bad had happened with your family! My mom sent me overseas to cut off all contact with you, but I was clueless the whole time! If I had known, I would have helped you to the best of my abilities, even if it meant going against my mom. Please, believe me."

Every word of his was filled with sincerity.

Cheng Yuxiu knew him well, and she had already figured out that he must have been kept in the dark the whole time. He wasn't the type to overlook her pain.

That was one reason why she agreed to see him that day.

"I came to see you today to say goodbye. I've found someone I love, and he's way more handsome and much richer than you. He cares about me too, unlike you and your excuses."

Her words were sharp, tearing his heart to shreds and at the same time stabbing her soul repeatedly.

She held on tight to Zong Qifeng. "Let's go."

Zong Qifeng looked down at her for a couple of seconds and he noticed how distraught she was. Her body was trembling uncontrollably.

He lowered his voice and asked, "Do you need me to help you?"

Cheng Yuxiu looked up at him, unsure of what he meant.

"Do you want me to help you chase him away?" Zong Qifeng asked. He knew that she just wanted Bai Hongfei to give up.

Cheng Yuxiu gave him a look long before nodding. "Alright?"

"Yuxiu..."

Bai Hongfei ran over and stood before her, his eyes trained on her. "I'm sorry..."

"She doesn't need that," Zong Qifeng said, his expression fierce. "She's pregnant with my child, and when she gives birth, I will take her in as my rightful wife. Please don't harass her in the future."

That struck Bai Hongfei like lightning, and he could only stare at Zong Qifeng in disbelief. He was speechless for a long time.

He couldn't believe what Zong Qifeng said.

How could someone as modest as Cheng Yuxiu get pregnant?

That's impossible!

Bai Hongfei refused to believe him.

"He's telling the truth. Please don't come and find me anymore, it's getting annoying," Cheng Yuxiu said while looking at him. Her heart was in shambles, yet she pretended to be fine.

"You're lying."

Bai Hongfei staggered backwards. "You..."

The Cheng Yuxiu standing before him felt like a total stranger. Since when did she become so heartless?

"Please get me out of here," Cheng Yuxiu whispered into Zong Qifeng's ear.

She was scared that she would start crying if she stayed any longer.

Zong Qifeng picked her up and left the scene swiftly.

Bai Hongfei could only watch them in despair as they walked away. His whole world had just imploded.

Cheng Yuwen sighed. He understood everything, being a bystander.

He walked over and patted Bai Hongfei's shoulder. "Let's go. I think you've seen enough..."

Bai Hongfei nudged his hand away with his shoulder. "You're her brother. Why did she have to bear the brunt of it?"

Cheng Yuwen's expression turned grim. If he had tried to resolve the situation, his sister wouldn't have ended up like this.

"I'm useless, but so are you. We can't protect the person we love," Cheng Yuwen said, before turning around to leave.

He couldn't afford to break down as well.

Just as Zong Qifeng was about to put Cheng Yuxiu into the car, Bai Hongfei yelled after them, "Did you ever love me?"

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Did she ever love him?

It would be a lie to say that she didn't. She used to love him wholeheartedly.

However, she couldn't afford to say that at this moment. She needed to keep her heartless façade up for as long as possible. "No, I've never loved you," she answered.

The tears that she had been holding back the whole time began to fall as well.

Lightning ripped across the gloomy sky as thunder roared in their ears.

Bai Hongfei's legs gave way, and he fell to the ground. He had just wanted to see her again, yet this encounter felt worse than death.

He slipped into unconsciousness as his breathing became labored...

Cheng Yuwen turned around and grabbed his head, slapping his cheeks and pinching his philtrum in an attempt to wake him up. "Bai Hongfei, wake up!"

Zong Qifeng stayed put, giving Cheng Yuxiu a look. "Do you want to take a look?"

Cheng Yuxiu's tears began to fall like pearls falling off a broken necklace.

She shook her head. "Let's go."

Since she'd made up her mind, then dragging her feet would only make things worse for both of them.

“Are you sure?” Zong Qifeng asked, testing how determined she was.

“I’m sure,” Cheng Yuxiu said, raising her head to meet his eyes. It was a silent declaration of her resolve.

Zong Qifeng realized just how resilient this woman was despite her delicate appearance.

He closed the door and drove off.

Cheng Yuwen’s panicked babbles filled the air as he got on the phone with the ambulance.

Back at the hospital, Wen Xian had arrived too. She sat beside the driver’s seat in a black car, and a young, handsome man sat next to her. Zong Qifeng couldn’t really tell who it was due to the reflections on the window, but he could tell that he was Wen Xian’s lover.

His gaze darkened for a second.

Wen Xian noticed his presence and turned to the man. “Ziyi, you should go back first.”

Zhuang Ziyi nodded. “Take care of yourself. If there’s anything, just drop me a call.”

Wen Xian nodded, before she opened the door and alighted.

Zong Qifeng happened to alight from his car as well, and they exchanged looks for a few seconds. He was the first one to break eye contact, as he turned around to carry Cheng Yuxiu out from the car. He remained silent the whole time.

Just like Cheng Yuxiu, he was in a bad mood.

He started to climb the stairs but stopped after a couple of steps. "Go home. I'll take care of her today," he said.

Wen Xian stopped in her tracks, raising her head to look at his back. After a while, she finally spoke, "Fine. She isn't really in her best shape now, so I'd suggest that she stay indoors as much as possible. After her condition stabilizes..."

"Why don't you get pregnant yourself if you're so interested in it?" Zong Qifeng asked, cutting her off.

He looked at her straight in the eyes. "Was that your lover?"

Wen Xian pursed her lips together. "Don't do this to me, Qifeng..."

Zong Qifeng scoffed. "What do you want me to do? Can't I be curious as to why my wife is going on a date with another man?"

Wen Xian's eyes grew red. "I promised not to get serious with him before you fall in love with someone. We were just having a casual get-together today, and I didn't expect you to show up..."

"I don't want to hear that. Now leave."

Zong Qifeng left after spitting those words.

He cut through the bright corridors that smelled of antiseptic before arriving at Cheng Yuxiu's room. The maid had cleaned the room up when they were away, and was arranging the flowers in the vase when they came in.

The doctor had told them to put some plants in the room to calm her down and freshen up the air.

Wen Xian had gotten the maid to do just that.

When the maid saw them entering the room, she hurriedly put down the flower in her hands and pulled the blankets aside. "Did both of you go out?" She asked them.

Zong Qifeng was in a bad mood, and he kept quiet. Cheng Yuxiu's face was streaked with tear stains.

Neither of them answered the maid.

The maid understood the situation and stepped aside quiet.

"You may leave for now. I'll call you when I need you," Zong Qifeng said, covering Cheng Yuxiu with a blanket.

The maid gave a soft yes and left the room before closing the door gently behind her.

Zong Qifeng helped Cheng Yuxiu lie down on the bed. "Does anything hurt?"

Cheng Yuxiu shook her head.

Zong Qifeng pulled the blanket over her body carefully.

Cheng Yuxiu looked at him and figured that he was troubled too. If not, he wouldn't have confronted Wen Xian at the entrance.

She couldn't help but pity him for a second. What else would be more insulting than seeing one's beloved wife swoon over someone else?

"If you feel sad, just look at me. I've had it worse than you," Cheng Yuxiu said, her lips dry and voice cracking.

Zong Qifeng looked at her. "You're hurting so much on the inside, and yet you have the heart to comfort me?"

Cheng Yuxiu bit her lip and forced a smile on her face. “Don’t you think we’re kind of fated?”

“Hmm?”

“Both of us are pretty unlucky.”

Zong Qifeng went silent.

After a week of hospitalization, Cheng Yuxiu was finally discharged.

The doctor gave her the green light to walk, but not too much. She had to stay in bed as much as possible.

Even so, there was plenty of space to walk around in the house, unlike the hospital.

As she had trouble getting around with her big belly, she started to sleep downstairs. Wen Xian followed suit.

Zong Qifeng slept alone on the second floor.

Their relationships seemed strange, yet they lived harmoniously.

Cheng Yuxiu began to think of herself as a surrogate.

However, she couldn’t see a difference between her current situation and that of a real surrogate.

She would smile bitterly whenever that thought popped up.

“Why are you smiling?” Wen Xian asked as she folded the laundry.

Cheng Yuxiu froze for a second. She didn't notice that Wen Xian had been watching her.

"Nothing much. I just thought of a joke," Cheng Yuxiu said.

"What joke?" Wen Xian asked. She was feeling bored, and a conversation seemed enticing.

Cheng Yuxiu was caught off guard, but she managed to think of something funny that happened when she was in primary school. "In my first year of primary school. I had a classmate whose mom asked him how much he learned on the first day of school. Guess what he answered? 'Not enough apparently, that's why I have to go back tomorrow!'"

Wen Xian laughed. "Your classmate's really cheeky."

Cheng Yuxiu laughed with her, her troubles dissipated.

When Zong Qifeng returned, he saw the two women laughing and getting along well in the living room, and immediately got a feeling that he was the one who was not needed in this household.

When they noticed his return, they stopped laughing immediately. Wen Xian picked up the folded clothes and said, "I'm going to put this in the closet."

Cheng Yuxiu stood up as well. "I'll help you."

The two of them disappeared into a room as Zong Qifeng stood at the doorway frowning.

Why were they avoiding him?

He understood if Wen Xian had pretended that he didn't exist, but Cheng Yuxiu too?

He could feel the tension building up within.

During dinner, Wen Xian suddenly asked Cheng Yuxiu, “Do you prefer having a boy or a girl?”