

Priceless Baby 481

Chapter 481: A Lot More Exciting With You Tied Up

Xu Xiyán turned her face away in disgust. She inwardly cursed Li Dazhuang a hundred times: Damn fatso! Go to hell!

Right now, her top priority was to get the repulsive creature to untie her. She needed to improve her chances of escaping, so Xu Xiyán decided to put on an act. "I'm so flattered you found me worthy of your time and attention, Mr. Li. I'm sorry I missed that boat, too. You're a truly exceptional man, one in a million. I wish I'd met you earlier—I would have latched onto your back and had you carry me to fame and success."

Li Dazhuang was pleased to hear that. "Heh, it's not too late to latch onto me!"

Xu Xiyán struggled a little. "Mr. Li, look at me, I'm all tied up. I couldn't latch onto you even if I wanted to. Can you untie me, please?"

"Ooooh, you want me to untie you? Okay, let me help..."

Li Dazhuang did not undo the knots. Instead, he seized the opportunity to run his hands all over her.

He had no intention whatsoever of untying her. He was aware that Xu Xiyán was a martial arts stunt double who knew how to put up a fight.

"You have such beautiful skin, Ms. Xu. I think it's a terrible waste for a beauty like you to be a stunt double."

Li Dazhuang tried to tempt her with promises even as he continued to molest her. "If you agree to be with me, Ms. Xu, I promise I'll make you the queen of show business. You'll be a superstar."

"Of course I agree, why wouldn't I? But you have to untie me first, okay?"

Xu Xiyán arched backwards and turned her head away to avoid Li Dazhuang's unwelcome touch.

Li Dazhuang did not bother hiding his lust. He caressed her body as though toying with a beautiful, inanimate work of art. "But I think it's a lot more exciting with you tied up. Don't you agree, Ms. Xu?"

Exciting my ass!

By this point, Xu Xiyán knew that Li Dazhuang was definitely not going to untie her. What next?

Someone help me, please! Xu Xiyán had been inwardly crying for help since the beginning of this ordeal, but she knew she was doomed. Who was going to save her now?

Was this her fate?

The roar of the motorcycle engine abruptly ceased as Ye Xun leapt off his ride, abandoning it. He strode purposefully towards the gate to the estate, head held high.

The bodyguards on gate duty saw his unfamiliar face and stopped him. One of them asked, "What business do you have here?"

Ye Xun did not bother replying. He made short work of the bodyguards, and then kicked the gate open. The other guards inside the estate saw that he was trespassing, and ran to capture him.

Ye Xun opened his windbreaker. He pulled out his weapons and ruthlessly mowed down the obstacles in his way.

The bodyguards in the private estate did not have any weapons on them. They did not stand a chance against Ye Xun.

A bodyguard stepped forward to stop him. One down. Two bodyguards ran up to stop him. Two down. The private estate may as well have been completely deserted, for all the difference the bodyguards made to Ye Xun.

Ye Xun grabbed a bodyguard around the neck. "Where's Jing Xi? Tell me!"

"O-Over there..." The bodyguard pointed towards a room in a villa.

Ke-rack! Ye Xun twisted the other man's neck, breaking it. He ran towards the room.

He kicked the door open, and frantically scanned the room for Xu Xiyan. When he saw she wasn't in the common area, he opened the door to the inner room with another mighty kick.

He finally found Xu Xiyan—and reeled in shock at the sight of her blood-stained hands. "Little Xixi?"

Xu Xiyan was panting with exhaustion. She got up from the floor and wiped her bloody hands on the bedsheet. "Second Senior, why are you here?"

"What do you think?! I'm here to save you, dammit!"

Ye Xun found an obese man lying motionless on the bed, face down. Beside him was a tangle of ropes and a bloody blade. The bedsheet was soaked with blood.

What happened?

Had he been too late?

"Little Xixi, are you hurt?"

"A little." Xu Xiyan nonchalantly wiped the blood trickling from her forehead. "Second Senior, I need your help, quick!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"Help me flip him over."

Ye Xun did as he was told. He flipped the man over, and sucked in a sharp breath at the horrifying sight. "You did this...?"

Chapter 482: Was She Into That Kind of Thing?

"I had to defend myself," said Xu Xiyang with a helpless look on a face. She took out her phone and handed it to Ye Xun. "Help me take all his clothes off and take a nude photo of him."

"What? A nude photo?"

Ye Xun's eyes were wide with surprise. He could not even begin to describe his feelings of shock and confusion—why did Xu Xiyang want him to take a photo of the fat bastard?

"Yes! Hurry up and take the photo!"

Ye Xun swallowed heavily. He now knew that he had been underestimating Xu Xiyang the entire time.

He had come to rescue her after receiving the supreme order, and had envisioned many different scenarios along the way, all of which involved Xu Xiyang being too helpless to fight off the bad guy. He had thought it would be an excellent opportunity for him to impress Xu Xiyang with his fighting skills—he would be her knight in shining armor, and maybe, just maybe, she would be persuaded to see him in a different light.

But Xu Xiyang had not needed his help. She had dealt with the pervert with her bare hands.

Ye Xun wanted badly to tell her: Xu Xiyang, you make all of us men look weak and useless!

Xu Xiyang had been forced to save herself because she did not know that Huo Yunshen had sent Ye Xun to rescue her. She had been alone with no sign of help being on the way.

The very second Li Dazhuang pounced on her, she finally freed herself from the ropes.

It was too bad for Li Dazhuang—a free Xu Xiyang was an angry, I'll-fight-to-the-death Xu Xiyang.

The disgusting pig had kicked her as she fought him off, causing her to hit a corner of the table and cut her forehead.

But Xu Xiyang had gotten back up and ruthlessly beat him into a pulp. As the finishing touch, she castrated him with a blade she had found.

She was satisfied. She had eradicated the "root" of the problem, so to speak. Li Dazhuang would never be able to harm women again!

Ye Xun was extremely reluctant to take naked photos of Li Dazhuang: the man's figure—or lack thereof—was repulsive to look at. The disgusting sight was defiling his eyeballs.

But he could not refuse Xu Xiyang's request, and ended up taking a large number of photos for her.

After handing the phone to her, he asked, "What are you going to do with the photos?"

"Keep them, of course... and savor them."

Xu Xiyang smiled slyly.

Ye Xun: "..."

Ye Xun stared at the change in Xu Xiyang's expression. What, was she into that kind of thing?

Xu Xiyan was only joking, of course. She wasn't keeping the photos to admire her handiwork; they were her insurance, to keep Li Dazhuang from avenging himself.

If he had the balls to try to get back at her, she would publish his nudes.

Xu Xiyan then pulled another gutsy move. She kept the photos of Li Dazhuang in his full birthday suit, but sold the photo of his castration to an entertainment news outlet, earning herself an easy 50,000 Yuan.

Xu Xiyan went to the hospital, accompanied by Ye Xun, to get the wound on her forehead bandaged. Luckily for her, the wound was close to her hairline. Her stylist would be able to hide the wound with her bangs; it would not affect her shoot in any way.

After a long, harrowing day, Xu Xiyan finally returned to Shengshi Yujing.

As they bade goodbye to each other, Xu Xiyan realized that Ye Xun was acting funny. He seemed to be struggling with himself. "What's wrong, Second Senior?"

Ye Xun scratched his head. He deliberated over the question for a long moment, and finally decided he had to ask. "Little Xixi, I have something to ask you. Do you know Zeus?"

"Zeus? You mean your boss?"

Xu Xiyan did not know why Ye Xun was suddenly asking her about this. "If only! If I knew who he was, I'd stop walking and stick to crawling for the rest of my life to show my respect."

It was an exaggeration, but the implication was clear: there was no way she would know someone like Zeus.

Ye Xun had guessed that Xu Xiyan probably did not know Huo Yunshen's real identity.

Even in JS, only a handful knew what Zeus really looked like. And now, as it turned out, Ye Xun had not only seen his face, he actually lived opposite him.

Just thinking about it made him giddy with excitement.

Ye Xun's idol was the Supreme Commander, the Big Boss, Zeus. He knew all of Zeus's legendary feats by heart.

Chapter 483: Kiss Her To His Heart's Content

Ye Xun knew that Zeus was a genius who had taken over the JS Group at the age of 14, and then single-handedly destroyed the Tiwana mafia two years later, at the age of 16. It was a truly miraculous feat, one that was unparalleled in the long history of mercenaries.

It was common knowledge that Zeus always kept a low profile. He was very mysterious: only a small handful of people had met him in person. Ye Xun's idol, Zeus, had been a complete enigma to him—up until that phone call.

Xu Xiyan waited for Ye Xun to say something. When he remained silent, she asked, "Why are you suddenly asking about Zeus?"

"Would you believe me if I told you it was Zeus who ordered me to go on a mission to rescue you?"

The top-level confidential order and supreme honorary mission Ye Xun had received from JS HQ could only be from Zeus. No one else had the authority to give out those orders.

It was clear, then, that Zeus wanted to protect Xu Xiyan.

"You're kidding, right? The great Zeus? Protecting me?" Xu Xiyan was curious. "Do I look like I need to be protected?"

"Nope, not at all. I pity the thugs and hooligans unlucky enough to cross your path."

Before entering his room, Ye Xun stopped to casually add over his shoulder, "But here's a friendly reminder: no man will ever want you if you keep acting like a tough guy."

"Says who?"

Xu Xiyan inwardly rolled her eyes: Was he blind? She already had someone pampering her and treating her like a princess, okay?

After their friendly verbal spar, Xu Xiyan turned, ready to enter her apartment. Just then, the door to Huo Yunshen's apartment opened and a wheelchair rolled into view.

"Jing Xi, are you hurt?"

Huo Yunshen looked at Xu Xiyan, his eyes full of concern. His heart constricted at the sight of the blood on Xu Xiyan.

Xu Xiyan enjoyed being fussed over by her prince charming. She had wanted to say she was all right, but now she changed her mind. "I think it's a small wound, but it really hurts."

Huo Yunshen was already right before her. He grabbed her hand and said, "Come with me, I'll help clean your wound."

"Okay."

Back in his apartment, Huo Yunshen found a medical kit and helped Xu Xiyan clean the cut on her forehead. Though it had already been bandaged, he wanted to have a look and treat it, himself.

"All done. Make sure to keep the wound dry. It should heal up in a few days."

"Okay."

His calloused fingers moved from the wound on her forehead to caress her cheek. Their eyes locked in an intense gaze.

They stared at each other, the air between them growing increasingly warm and thick with desire.

Huo Yunshen swallowed heavily. He slowly approached her, close enough for their breaths to mingle.

A gentle kiss fell upon her lips—his thin lips tentatively pressed against her soft lips before quickly pulling away. A few seconds passed, and his warm lips were attacking hers once again.

His large, sturdy hand pulled her into his lap. He folded his arms around her and began kissing her boldly, without restraint.

Only the gods above knew how anxious and worried he had been when he had heard of her kidnapping. He was so glad she was back with him now.

At that moment, he wanted only to hold her tight in his arms, and kiss her to his heart's content.

The next day, the internet was full of the shocking news of Li Dazhuang's castration.

Huo Yunshen felt that Li Dazhuang had deserved it. In fact, castrating him was letting him off too easy.

Whoever tried to bully his woman would end up regretting it. Huo Yunshen always made sure of that.

He told Yi Xiao to make Li Dazhuang and his company "disappear" from Peijing. He did not want to see Li Dazhuang, that vile, obese bastard, ever again.

The new single "Maybe" and its MV had become a hit in Peijing. Around the same time, Xu Xiyan was officially picked to be the female lead for "Root of Evil."

Xiao Yuqian helped Xu Xiyan negotiate the terms of her contract with the production team for "Root of Evil." Xu Xiyan was now set to formally join the cast of "Root of Evil" in two days.

Before that, Xu Xiyan received a phone call from Xiao Yuqian, asking her to report to Jingyue Entertainment as they had something to discuss.

Xu Xiyan got up bright and early for her appointment. She walked briskly into the building; the first person she met was Wan Dou.

Chapter 484: Feelings Of Love

"Morning, Wan Dou."

"Morning, Ms. Jing Xi!" Wan Dou waved her hand in greeting. She quickly added, "Ms. Jing Xi, look, I bought the same bracelet as yours."

"The same what?"

"You didn't know? That bracelet on your wrist is now available for purchase on Taobao. They're selling like hotcakes!"

"Let me see."

Xu Xiyan was puzzled. She walked a little closer, and saw a bracelet around Wan Dou's fair wrist. The bracelet had a dice pendant hanging from it, just like her own.

Wan Dou found the Taobao page and showed it to Xu Xiyan. The tags in the product title said “Same design as Jing Xi's” and other such marketing gimmicks. The bracelets were, as Wan Dou had said, selling like hotcakes.

Xu Xiyan looked at the images in the product description, and saw that some of them were screenshots taken directly from her TV interviews.

She also noticed that the seller had quoted an old poem by the Tang Dynasty poet, Wen Tingjun, in the product description:

“The red dot on the delicate bone dice represents the love I have for you. Do you understand what that feels like?”

This was a love poem describing feelings of love so profound they were deeply embedded in the poet's bones.

Xu Xiyan looked at the dice around her wrist. She was comparing it with the design on Taobao when it suddenly dawned on her.

If a dice bracelet was supposed to be a metaphor for the yearning between two lovers, did that mean that Huo Yunshen was using this dice to tell her he was always thinking of her?

Oh my god, thought Xu Xiyan. He already gave me a hint a long time ago, but I was too stupid to look under the surface. I wasted so much time!

So what did the bracelet mean?

It meant that Huo Yunshen had fallen for her a long time ago, haha!

Xu Xiyan's heart swelled with emotion at the thought. She hugged Wan Dou in her excitement. “Thank you, Wan Dou! Thank you!”

She released Wan Dou and ran joyfully towards Xiao Yuqian's office.

Wan Dou watched her rapidly retreating back. She scratched her head, unable to comprehend why her boss had suddenly thanked her.

Xu Xiyan entered Xiao Yuqian's office with a radiant smile on her face. Xiao Yuqian gave her a puzzled look as she greeted her. “Yanyan, you look like you're in high spirits today!”

“That's right, I'm in a good mood.” Xu Xiyan seated herself before Xiao Yuqian and asked with a smile, “President Xiao, what are we discussing today?”

“You've recently been selected as the leading lady for 'Root of Evil,' and that helped generate a lot of positive buzz for you. A few companies have asked you to audition for their TV commercials. Take a look, and pick one.”

Xiao Yuqian handed her a file with all the details. Xu Xiyan was very surprised; she had not expected to receive TV commercial offers so soon.

The commercial offers were for a wide range of products: food, sanitary napkins, drinks, and clothing. Some of the offers were better than the others. Xu Xiyao asked Xiao Yuqian, "They all look equally good to me, President Xiao. Which one should I choose?"

"There are no real requirements for the job offers from the food, sanitary napkins, and drinks companies. Once you're selected, you'll probably have to be their product spokesperson. As for this offer from ROSUE, the clothing brand—they're extremely picky, and you will have a lot of competition at the audition. You may not actually get the job."

Xiao Yuqian gave a fair, unbiased explanation of the pros and cons of each offer. She did not try to force her own opinions on Xu Xiyao; she wanted the actress to decide for herself.

Xu Xiyao considered the offers. She said, "I'll take whichever's hardest!"

"Why?" Xiao Yuqian asked, genuinely curious. "As the saying goes, it's better to be a big fish in a small pond than a small fish in a big pond. Why are you giving up easy wins for something much more difficult and uncertain?"

It was simple enough to Xu Xiyao. She smiled and said, "Because a big pond is bigger than a small pond. I like a good challenge, and this is a rare opportunity to prove myself."

Xu Xiyao was the type of person to face challenges head-on. The harder the challenge, the harder she fought. She wasn't one to turn around and look for an easier way just because the road was bumpy.

"Okay."

Xiao Yuqian smiled. Xu Xiyao's choice was exactly what her boss had anticipated.

She removed the smaller job offers from the file and left her the details for the clothing commercial. She pointed out the time and date of the audition to Xu Xiyao and reminded her not to miss it.

Chapter 485: What A Small World

After leaving Jingyue Entertainment, Xu Xiyao headed straight for the set to continue filming.

The shoot in the morning went by without a hitch. She had a working lunch at noon, and once the lunch break was over, it was time for the afternoon's shoot.

She was in the middle of a take when she heard the wail of an ambulance's siren from outside the set. Several members of the production crew began to wonder why an ambulance had come.

Someone went out to see what was going on, and returned to say that Qi Liya, the leading lady for "Red Sleeved Beauty," had been in an accident. Xu Xiyao's heart sank when she heard the news.

She pressed for more information, and learned that the accident had happened during one of Qi Liya's wire stunts: she had been suspended in mid-air when the wires suddenly snapped, sending her plummeting to the ground. It had been a nasty fall.

The ambulance had been sent for, and Qi Liya was now on the way to First People's Hospital.

As soon as she was done filming that afternoon, Xu Xiyan left the set, fully intending to hurry over to the hospital to see Qi Liya.

She walked quickly, and did not notice the puddle on the side of the road—or the minivan that was coming up from behind her.

Splash! The wheels of the minivan ran through the puddle, soaking Xu Xiyan with muddy water.

Xu Xiyan shook off the disgusting water. Temper flaring, she shouted automatically, “Watch where you’re going! What, are you in a hurry to go to hell or something?”

The minivan screeched to a halt. The passenger door slowly opened, and a pair of heels, ten centimeters tall, emerged from the car and made contact with the ground.

Xu Xiyan frowned. What a small world—the minivan that had splashed her was Xu Xinrou’s.

Xu Xinrou’s outfit was elegant and expensive, and her face had been exquisitely made up. She stepped out of the car in her high heels, and stood gracefully before Xu Xiyan.

It was obvious that the public announcement of her romance with Huo Jingtang had boosted her ego: she was practically glowing, and her posture was haughtier than usual.

Xu Xinrou looked Xu Xiyan up and down. A smug smile spread across her face. “Oh my, if it isn’t Jing Xi, the actress rumored to be dating Ni Yun! What happened? You look like you just crawled out of the gutter!”

Her eyes were full of ridicule and disdain. She was implying that Xu Xiyan had deliberately spread the rumors about being in a relationship with Ni Yun to get a leg up in the industry.

Xu Xinrou did not believe for a minute that Xu Xiyan had been awarded the lead role in “Root of Evil” because of her acting skills. Xu Xinrou had helped Yang Qiong spam the poll with fake votes, but had messed up, resulting in Yang Qiong’s disqualification. Xu Xinrou was sure that Xu Xiyan would have never gotten the role had Yang Qiong remained in the running.

Someone—she did not know who— had discovered that the poll results were being manipulated, and then reported Yang Qiong to the poll organizers for cheating. Xu Xinrou was convinced that Xu Xiyan did not deserve the role; she had merely lucked out.

Xu Xiyan gave her a pointed look as she said indignantly, “My clothes are dirty because you told your driver to splash me with filthy puddle water.”

Xu Xinrou pretended to look surprised. She covered her mouth demurely with a hand as she laughed and said, “Dear me, you think I ordered my driver to do that? Are you perhaps suffering from a persecution complex? Why not go all the way, and accuse me of having dug this hole here, just so there would be a puddle ready to splash you with when you walk by?”

“Oh yes, I am clearly suffering from a persecution complex and extreme paranoia. Well, since you’re here, I have a few questions for you. Were you behind Qi Liya’s accident?”

Xu Xiyan knew of Xu Xinrou’s sinister methods. After wrapping up her scenes for “Red Sleeved Beauty,” Xu Xiyan had not been able to rest easy; her instincts told her Xu Xinrou would try to sabotage Qi Liya.

Now that Qi Liya had gotten into an accident, Xu Xiyan's immediately suspected Xu Xinrou of having masterminded it.

Xu Xinrou snorted as she crossed her arms. "Jing Xi, as the saying goes, you don't have to watch what you eat, but you do have to watch what you say. Why would I have anything to do with Qi Liya's accident?"

"I don't know, that's a question for your conscience. And what about the wrap party, a few nights ago? You spread the rumors about Qi Liya and Director Huang, didn't you?"

Xu Xiyan had meant to question Xu Xinrou about it, but had been too busy to find the time. Now that they had bumped into each other, it was time to get the truth out of her.

Xu Xinrou's face immediately darkened. Her denial was prompt and unequivocal: "I had nothing to do with the rumors about their affair."

Chapter 486: An Item

"Oh, really? That assistant of yours—Wen Li—snapped quite a few photos that night. Didn't she ask for your permission before releasing those photos?" asked Xu Xiyan.

Xu Xinrou glowered. "I don't know what you're talking about. Why would my assistant do something like that? You shouldn't go around accusing others if you don't have any proof to back up your claims."

"You better pray long and hard that the rumors from the party—and the wire accident earlier today—aren't connected to you. It's not going to be pretty if the truth comes out and it turns out you were behind both incidents," Xu Xiyan warned.

Xu Xinrou paled a little at that, but her expression quickly returned to normal. She said scathingly, "So now you're spiting me on Qi Liya's behalf, eh? Wow, she must have bribed you with a lot of favors."

Xu Xinrou hated Qi Liya: she was an annoying obstacle who was always snatching roles from her, preventing Xu Xinrou from taking the limelight.

She had asked Huo Jingtang not to offer Qi Liya any more work—to "ice" the actress, in show biz lingo—but he had refused. Qi Liya was still useful to him, and he wanted to wait until filming for "Red Sleeved Beauty" had wrapped up before deciding what to do with her.

Xu Xinrou had gone along with it, but had finally reached the end of her rope earlier that day and sabotaged Qi Liya herself. She had thought that was the end of the matter, but now here was Xu Xiyan accusing her of having masterminded the accident. It irked her to see Xu Xiyan jump to Qi Liya's defense and speak on her behalf.

Xu Xiyan gave a wry smile as she explained, "No, Ms. Qi did not bribe me with anything. I care about her because she's worth it. Unlike some people, she's not the type to pretend to be nice and then stab you in the back. She's honest. And anyway, this isn't about her—I'd go up against you any day."

Xu Xiyan was in a hurry. She did not have time for Xu Xinrou's nonsense.

She began to move away, but Xu Xinrou said behind her back, "Jing Xi, I'll be marrying Huo Jingtang soon. Do you know what will happen then to all those who try to oppose me?"

Xu Xiyan let out a long sigh. She had guessed that this was the real reason Xu Xinrou had sought her out: she wanted to rub the fact that she and Huo Jingtang were now an item in her face, and warn her to keep out of her way.

Turning around, Xu Xiyan put on a radiant smile and said, "Oh? You're going to marry Huo Jingtang? Congratulations! I congratulate you on your masterful seduction skills—you managed to score yourself one of the few golden bachelors in Peijing! I'm so impressed, please, allow me to grovel at your feet, oh mighty one!"

Xu Xinrou's face turned white. Xu Xiyan had made her accomplishment sound cheap and distasteful.

"Whatever, you're just jealous. Hate on me all you want! I'll be Mrs. Huo soon, and when that happens, Yunhai Entertainment will be within my grasp. You'll be like an insignificant bug to me then. You want to stay in show business? Watch me make your life a living hell!"

There was now a hint of something savage in Xu Xinrou's exquisite face.

"Fine. Bring it on. We'll see which one of us gets the last laugh."

Xu Xiyan was unfazed. She had a photo of Li Dazhuang and Xu Xinrou "on the casting couch," so to speak, and she wasn't afraid to use it. The photo had been inadvertently taken by Fang Xiaocheng and Wang Dazhi during one of their vacations.

If Xu Xinrou tried to sabotage her again, Xu Xiyan would not hesitate to retaliate.

"Hmph!" The conversation had ended on a sour note. Xu Xinrou stared daggers at Xu Xiyan before whipping around and climbing into the minivan.

The minivan drove away. Xu Xiyan left the studio lot and returned to Shengshi Yujing to shower and change her clothes. Once she was clean and presentable, she hurried over to First People's Hospital.

In the hospital, Xu Xiyan learned that Qi Liya had been treated for her injury. There was a small puncture in her lung because she had fallen on a nail, but luckily for her, she had not broken any bones. All she needed was some proper bed rest, and she would be able to go home relatively soon.

Qi Liya was still unconscious, but her assistant, Xiao Ke, was in the room, watching over her. Xu Xiyan decided to come back to visit another day.

Aside from Qi Liya's unfortunate accident, Xu Xiyan found herself busy with another important event: the semifinal for the children's talent show Ying Bao was participating in would be taking place the next day.

The night before the semifinals, Xu Xiyan and Huo Yunshen stayed up with Ying Bao, who was nestled in her mother's arms. "Daddy, Mommy, will you come watch my performance tomorrow?"

Chapter 487: You Just Made A Gay Man Out Of Me

"Of course," said Huo Yunshen, without a moment's hesitation.

His darling daughter was going to perform on stage; of course he was going to help cheer her on.

"Okay! I'll do my best, I won't disappoint Daddy and Mommy. Go me!"

Ying Bao was in high spirits. She extended a tiny fist and bumped fists with her parents.

The next day, Xu Xiyan, Huo Yunshen, Ye Xun, Fang Xiaocheng, and Wang Dazhi attended the talent show to cheer Ying Bao on.

In order to stay incognito, Huo Yunshen had disguised himself before entering the venue. Nobody recognized him.

For her semi-finals performance, Ying Bao chose the cheerful song "Filastrocche e Tiritere" from Little Choir of Antoniano, the Italian children's choir.

The dance song Cherry Baby had chosen was extremely upbeat and catchy. The audience was quickly swept up in the song's cheerful exuberance.

She was just a little girl, but she knew how to dominate the stage and hold her audience captive.

Her choreography with the backup dancers was flawless. By the end of the performance, everyone in the audience was on their feet, clapping to the beat and dancing along.

Cherry Baby was given a high score for her dance performance. She had successfully advanced to the finals.

The male host of the talent show walked onto the stage to interview her. "Cherry, you're so cute and pretty. Who do you take after? Your mother or your father?"

Ying Bao puffed her tiny chest out and said proudly, "My Mommy said that I look like my Daddy. She says he's the handsomest man in the whole wide world. I have Daddy's good genes, so I'm pretty good-looking myself."

It was a clever answer from the cheeky little girl: she had praised both her father and herself at the same time.

The audience burst into laughter. The host smiled and asked, "Oh Cherry, you're truly amazing! Can you tell Uncle here what your Daddy does for a living? Does he often play with you?"

The host did not know that Ying Bao had been raised by a single mother. The little girl did not like questions about her father.

She did not want to answer the question, so she deflected by asking the host, "Uncle, why are you always asking me about my Daddy? Are you interested in him?"

"I'm not!" The host shrugged helplessly.

Ying Bao put her hands on her hips and said with a warning look in her eyes, "Uncle, you should give up. My Daddy and Mommy already had me, which means my Daddy isn't interested in men."

The host was stunned. It took him a moment to realize that the little 4-year-old girl before him had just implied he was gay.

He laughed so hard he had to wipe away a tear. Suddenly, he put on a serious face and said gravely, "Cherry, my dear girl, you just made a gay man out of me!"

The host's dead-pan expression was spot on: the contrast between his expression and what he was saying was comedy gold.

After a few seconds of silence, the entire hall erupted into laughter yet again. The special guests and the rest of the audience were laughing so hard they were doubled over.

The adorable little tot was an excellent dancer, and had high EQ to boot. Her clever replies were absolutely hilarious.

This was Huo Yunshen's first time seeing his daughter on stage. His heart swelled with pride at her radiant, confident glow and witty replies.

He wanted badly to announce to the world: that's my daughter up there, look!

In a hospital ward elsewhere, Huo Sanyan and her parents were watching the live TV broadcast of Ying Bao's talent show.

Chen Yunlu wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes. She could not help marveling at her granddaughter's adorable charm.

She said to Huo Sanyan, "Look at the little darling, she's such a cutie pie! Now I really want to know who the mother is, she must be something special to be able to bring up such a lovely child. Wait a minute, didn't you used to work as a reporter for the entertainment industry? Can't you ask around, make some inquiries?"

Chapter 488: Trying To Stir Things Up Again

"I asked around, but I wasn't able to find out anything. Whoever she is, I'm sure she must be a truly extraordinary woman," Huo Sanyan replied with a cheery smile.

She already knew the girl's mother was Jing Xi. But Jing Xi had asked her not to tell her family for now, so she had to pretend not to know anything.

"Yes, of course, that goes without saying."

Chen Yunlu thought for a moment. Suddenly, an idea occurred to her. "Oh, could it be Tang Shixue? Look at the child, she's so talented, I'm sure she's the product of Shixue and your little brother."

"What? No way!"

Huo Sanyan inwardly rolled her eyes at her mother's overactive imagination. Why on earth did she think it was Tang Shixue, of all people?

But the more Chen Yunlu thought about it, the more convinced she became. “I think it's probably her. If I hadn't objected to their relationship back then, they would have probably gotten together by now. Or maybe they've been dating in secret, all this while? Can you ask around and see if you can find out what Tang Shixue has been up to lately?”

“Mom, I don't have to. I know who Tang Shixue is, she's a citizen of M country now, and she's doing really well in the music industry. She's a super famous singer in Europe and America. I've heard from a reliable source that there's good chance she'll be invited to our country to perform during the opening ceremony for the Olympic Games. But that isn't important—I can guarantee that there is nothing romantic between her and li'l bro. The child isn't hers, it just isn't possible.”

Huo Sanyan had seen her mother's eyes light up when talking about Tang Shixue, and knew that she was trying to stir things up again.

Tang Shixue was old news. There was absolutely no connection between her and Huo Yunshen now, geez!

Huo Sanyan knew who Tang Shixue was. When Huo Yunshen had been living in M country, he'd had a very good friend: Tang Shiguang.

Tang Shiguang's sister was Tang Shixue.

Tang Shixue had been the only woman who could approach Huo Yunshen back when he was living abroad.

Chen Yunlu refused to believe her daughter. She continued to babble on. “The Olympics is just around the corner, right?”

“That's right.”

Chen Yunlu had grown excited when she heard that Tang Shixue was a famous singer. Her son loved music, too, which meant that he had something in common with Tang Shixue. Now that she already had a grandchild, all she had to do was play cupid and get Tang Shixue and her son together...

Oh yes, what a fantastic idea!

The semifinal for the talent show was over. Ying Bao had successfully advanced to the final stage, and now it was time for Xu Xiyan and Huo Yunshen to take her home.

Ying Bao received a toy bear from her Daddy, and was overjoyed. She hugged the toy bear during the entire journey home, refusing to let go. She was determined to sleep with the bear that night.

On the way back, Xu Xiyan received a call from Qi Liya's assistant, Xiao Ke. Qi Liya was now awake.

Xu Xiyan did not have a shoot that afternoon. After lunch, she bought a bouquet of flowers and went to the hospital to visit Qi Liya.

Xu Xiyan held her flowers in one hand as she raised her free hand to knock on the door. To her surprise, the door swung open at her touch: Huang Guoqiang, their director, was already in the room, trying to spoon-feed Qi Liya her porridge. Qi Liya, on the other hand, was trying to tell him she could do it herself.

Xu Xiyan was struck by the scene in front of her. She had always assumed Director Huang to be a tough, stoic man, but here he was, all tender and considerate!

She did not enter the room right away. Instead, she stuck her head through the gap and asked cheerfully, "Ms. Qi, is this a bad time for you?"

As soon as Qi Liya heard the voice, she knew Jing Xi had come.

"Ahem..."

Huang Guoqiang jumped up from his seat beside the bed, set the porridge bowl down, and cleared his throat a few times.

Qi Liya looked gratefully at Jing Xi. She did not know how to tell Director Huang the spoon-feeding was entirely unnecessary without hurting his feelings. Luckily for her, Jing Xi had appeared just in time to save her from the awkward situation.

She greeted Jing Xi warmly. "Jing Xi, is that you? Come on in!"

Xu Xiyan entered the room, a smile on her face and her arms full of flowers. She greeted Huang Guoqiang politely: "Oh, I wasn't expecting to see you here, Director Huang! I guess you aren't busy with filming today."

Chapter 489: Indescribable Anger

"That's right," said Huang Guoqiang, his face carefully blank.

Xu Xiyan turned to the woman in the hospital bed and said with genuine concern, "What about you, Ms. Qi? Are you feeling better? These flowers are for you."

"Much better. Thanks."

Qi Liya accepted the flowers. She inhaled the floral fragrance, and smiled.

She had not broken any of her bones, but a nail on the set had punctured her lung. She would have to stay in the hospital for a while.

Xu Xiyan was relieved to see Qi Liya looking alert and otherwise healthy.

She turned around and saw that there was already a bouquet of roses in the vase on the bedside table. She knew at once who had brought them.

She said teasingly, "Oh my, looks like someone already brought you roses! Let me see, there must be at least 99 roses in there. Who are they from?"

Huang Guoqiang rubbed his neck awkwardly. He turned to look out the window; it was now completely obvious that the roses were from him, and also that he was feeling embarrassed about it.

Qi Liya laughed, but did not answer the question. Xu Xiyan smiled and said, "Let me guess: they must be from your admirer. Am I right, Ms. Qi? Wow, whoever it is must really care about you."

“Jing Xi, come on, don't tease me.” Qi Liya gently chided Jing Xi as her eyes flickered towards the man by the window.

Xu Xiyao had long since caught on to the romantic tension between Qi Liya and Huang Guoqiang. “Ms. Qi, what kind of man do you like? Do you like young, handsome studs like Lin Huaijin? Or do you prefer someone more mature and manly, like Director Huang?”

Huang Guoqiang had not expected to hear his name. He whipped around and shot Xu Xiyao a pointed look. Inside, he was secretly dying of anxiety—he wanted badly to know the answer to the question.

“Enough with that. Don't ask silly questions.” Qi Liya awkwardly changed the subject. It was not an attempt at deflection; she had not, in fact, given much thought to her private love life.

She had been wounded in love several years ago, and was afraid to love again.

The entertainment industry was a chaotic place; there were good people, bad people, and people who were only after fame and fortune. She would need a miracle to be able to find true love in show business.

Huang Guoqiang was a little hurt by her answer. Was she completely oblivious to his feelings for her?

Was she still in love with Peng Sicheng, the director of “Root of Evil”?

Huang Guoqiang knew a little of Qi Liya's personal history. He knew that she had dated Peng Sicheng for a while, and that the relationship had ended when Peng Sicheng suddenly asked to break up with her one day.

The breakup had dealt a major blow to Qi Liya. It had wounded her deeply, and she had never recovered from it.

Peng Sicheng had set up camp in Qi Liya's heart while he, Huang Guoqiang, was likely nothing more than an insignificant passerby. That thought alone was enough to stoke the flames of an indescribable anger within Huang Guoqiang.

He grabbed his coat from the sofa and said, visibly unhappy, “Please excuse me, Little Qi. I have to return to the set, there are a few things I need to attend to.”

“All right. Take care, Director Huang,” said Qi Liya politely.

Huang Guoqiang almost coughed up a mouthful of blood. Come on, he thought, I said I'm leaving! Can't you at least pretend to be sorry to see me go?

Huang Guoqiang was already at the door and about to step out of the room when he suddenly remembered something. He turned around to say, “Oh, I almost forgot. Jing Xi, if you're free today or tomorrow, please report to the set. We have to shoot a few in-program ads with you.”

“Oh, okay. I'm free this afternoon, I'll look for you once I'm done here.”

After Huang Guoqiang had left, Xu Xiyao turned to ask Qi Liya: “They're shooting the in-program ads already? Does that mean they're almost done filming?”

“It's pretty much done.”

“When's it showing on TV?”

“Soon, actually! Director Huang will continue shooting new episodes as the show airs. It'll be showing on CCTV during prime time, and he wants to see how well the show does in ratings before deciding how long he wants the show to run for.”

Chapter 490: Touched Her Warm Cheeks

“Wow! Well, I think the ratings shouldn't be a problem. I mean, the show has you and Lin Huaijin, the ratings king, in the lead roles. The show is definitely going to be a hit!”

Xu Xiyan could hardly wait to see the show finally go on TV. It was her first TV show, after all.

“I can't make any guarantees about the ratings, but I'm 100% certain that you'll be famous once the show goes on air,” Qi Liya said.

“But I'm just a nobody in a small supporting role, a palace maiden.”

Xu Xiyan knew better than to expect such a small, insignificant role to propel her to stardom.

“Don't underestimate the part of the palace maiden. You were amazing, you brought the character of Yao Yue to life. On top of that, everyone's been talking about you. The show isn't even on TV yet, and you're already famous!”

Xu Xiyan awkwardly rubbed the back of her head. “You mean all that scandalous gossip about me... that's not exactly good for my image or reputation.”

“Good or bad, it doesn't matter, as long as you get people talking about you. For a newcomer, you absolutely need exposure, and you already have it! Also, you're in Ni Yun's MV. That's going to help open up doors for you.”

Xu Xiyan laughed. “Well, I hope you're right, then.”

Qi Liya suddenly remembered that she had been meaning to ask Jing Xi a question. “By the way, what's Ni Yun like?”

“You want to know about Ni Yun?”

“Yeah. I hear that he's very mysterious because he keeps a low profile. I'm dying of curiosity—his songs are incredibly moving and I want to know the man behind the music. You were in his MV, you must have met him in person.”

Xu Xiyan was surprised. “Ms. Qi, don't tell me that you're in love with Ni Yun?”

“Haha! No, I like his songs, nothing more.”

“Oh,” said Xu Xiyan, relieved. She explained with a cheery smile, “He keeps a low profile, that's true. And he's a thoughtful, considerate man. He doesn't put on airs, he's honest and sincere. He's also a loyal, dutiful son...”

Xu Xiyan could not help bringing up Ni Yun's good points whenever she talked about him.

Qi Liya rested her head upon her arm and watched a blush creep over Xu Xiyan's cheeks as she gushed over her idol. "You like Ni Yun, don't you?"

"Oh, haha, that's right."

Xu Xiyan had previously admitted in an interview that she liked Ni Yun. It was public knowledge.

But everyone had assumed that she was just another star-struck fan who worshipped her idol. No one had guessed that she was, in fact, actually in love with Ni Yun.

Xu Xiyan touched her warm cheeks, suddenly bashful. She hastily changed the subject. "Oh, that's enough of him. Let's talk about you and Director Huang instead..."

Qi Liya knew what she was trying to ask, and immediately cut her short before she could go any further. "Director Huang and I are just friends. You're overthinking it."

"Overthinking it? Really? But these roses look so familiar. They're from Director Huang, aren't they?"

Xu Xiyan smiled, her eyes curving into pretty crescent moons. She was happy to stay and chat with Qi Liya; she hoped her company and conversation would help lift Qi Liya's spirits and speed her recovery.

Qi Liya turned to look at the delicate roses. She did not say anything.

She knew that Huang Guoqiang was in love with her.

But try as she might, she could not bring herself to take on a new relationship.

Peng Sicheng was a director; because of that, Qi Liya now had an instinctive fear of directors.

The last thing she wanted was to repeat her mistake with yet another director.

Just as the conversation lapsed into silence, a nurse knocked on the door and entered the room. She asked, "Are the family members for bed Number 24 around?"

Qi Liya's bed was bed Number 24, but she did not have anyone from her family with her. Xiao Ke, her assistant, was usually around to watch over her, but Xiao Ke had left to attend to other things and hadn't yet returned.

"I'm the patient for bed Number 24. Is something wrong?" Qi Liya asked.