

As Agreed 31

Chapter 31

Just as the car drove out of the gates of the Gu Family's ancestral mansion, Gu Shaoting's face, which had appeared calm when bidding farewell to Grandpa Gu a moment ago, suddenly lost all expression.

Watching his cold face, he drove the car at high speed, then abruptly slammed on the brakes after making a turn. The screeching sound of the wheels rubbing against the ground accompanied his sudden stop. These actions happened too quickly, and Shu Pan struggled to keep up with the pace. With wide, dark eyes, she looked at him.

Seeing him silent, Shu Pan finally gathered the courage to speak up, "If it's inconvenient, I can take a taxi home by myself."

"What? Don't you know that I was just putting on an act in front of Grandfather? Do you actually believe it? Did you think I would especially drive you home?" Gu Shaoting's tone carried a hint of mocking sarcasm in his last sentence.

"I didn't believe it. If it's so painful to be around each other every day, why don't we get a divorce?" Shu Pan's eyelashes trembled slightly, and she instinctively tightened her grip on her bag strap.

She didn't dare to move, afraid that tears would start falling if she did.

"Don't even think about it. Whether you find a new partner or not, I won't agree to a divorce. Let me tell you the truth, it's out of the question!" Gu Shaoting's voice resounded again, sharp and harsh.

Because of Shu Pan's words, Gu Shaoting took a deep breath. How could this woman have such naive thoughts? Didn't she know that he felt happy seeing her and her father in pain, suffering?

"I have something to do later. I made plans with a friend. You can take a taxi home by yourself." At this moment, he just wanted to have a drink to calm his anger.

Silently, Shu Pan tried to open the car door, but she couldn't find the handle after feeling around for a while. Seeing her struggle, Gu Shaoting's patience ran out. He got out of the car directly, walked around to the passenger side, pulled open the door, and after Shu Pan got out of the car, he forcefully closed the door. He swiftly circled around the front of the car, returned to his seat without any hesitation or pause, stepped on the accelerator, and the car sped away like an arrow released from a bowstring.

Shu Pan stood by the roadside, trembling in the cold wind. This place was in the suburbs, with few pedestrians and even fewer cars. She took a few deep breaths, and Gu Shaoting's car was no longer in sight. Only a variety of different vehicles flashed by with their red lights, passing in front of her intermittently.

After waiting for a while, a taxi finally arrived. Shu Pan hailed it like she had found a savior, and the car finally stopped.

"Driver, to Shuimu Qinghua residential area." Shu Pan's anxious heart finally relaxed. Fortunately, a car came. She placed her hand on her stomach and couldn't help but silently criticize Gu Shaoting in her heart, "Baby, you have a bad father."

Because of her father's situation, even if Gu Shaoting treated her this way, she would willingly endure it. She felt that she owed him.

Somehow, Shu Pan suddenly thought of the scene at the Gu Family's ancestral mansion during dinner. Gu Shaoting, acting like a gentleman, pulled out her chair, personally served her favorite soup, and picked the dishes she liked. That indulgent tone truly made Shu Pan unable to distinguish between reality and falsehood.

He behaved impeccably, just like the image of a loving husband who dotes on his wife. It delighted Grandfather, who dreamed of seeing them live happily together. Seeing Master's delight, the servants in the Gu Family's ancestral mansion were also happy, and she maintained a smile, appearing happy and satisfied. But no one knew how much she was suffering inside.

Because she knew he was only acting.

But even though she knew it was just an act, her heart couldn't help but tremble.

Because she loved him, loved him dearly.

Chapter 32

After returning home, it was almost 9 o'clock. Shu Pan quickly took a hot shower.

When she came out, seeing that it wasn't too late, she went to the study and retrieved a thick sketchbook from under the cabinet where she kept her materials. As she picked up the album, a dull pain pricked her fingertips.

The sketchbook titled "Mr. Gu" was filled with drawings of him, capturing various moments and expressions.

Shu Pan randomly flipped open a page and saw a sketch of Gu Shaoting sitting on the terrace, engrossed in reading documents. Every detail was so captivating. She particularly loved seeing him at work. Although she hadn't witnessed him working in the office, every scene at home was deeply etched in her mind.

Whenever she felt tired or lacked inspiration for drawing, she would take out the sketchbook and create a drawing. She imagined showing them to her future child, proudly telling them, "Your dad is very dedicated to his work. You should learn from him."

But now everything was just a dream. It was unlikely that they would ever achieve a harmonious family.

Before going to bed, her thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of her phone. Who could be calling at such a late hour? She checked and saw that it was Ye Xiaomeng, who wanted to meet tomorrow. Shu Pan agreed immediately after they decided on the time and place. They hung up their phones.

Although the doctor had advised her to rest and avoid exhaustion, she thought it wouldn't hurt to go out once in a while. It had been a long time since she last saw Xiaomeng. She wondered how Xiaomeng had been recently. Judging from Xiaomeng's tone, Shu Pan had no idea what had happened, but she guessed that Xiaomeng had some conflict with Cheng Yang. However, based on Xiaomeng's current attitude, the situation seemed to be more serious than she had imagined.

After graduating, Ye Xiaomeng went directly to a real estate company to work in sales. Normally, she had no ambitions or desires and didn't care much about work, especially since Cheng Yang earned a high income. While her colleagues who joined the company at the same time had already become department managers, she remained a salesperson, with average performance that didn't stand out.

Now that she was pregnant and feeling unwell, she had taken a long leave to rest at home.

In the afternoon, they agreed to meet at the Left Bank Café. Soft, melodious background music flowed gently in the quiet atmosphere.

Shu Pan looked at Ye Xiaomeng sitting across from her, noticing her troubled expression. She pretended to be relaxed and said, "Your Highness, what would you like to drink?"

"I'll have a glass of fresh juice," Ye Xiaomeng replied indignantly.

Shu Pan called the waiter over and ordered two glasses of fresh juice, along with two slices of cake for their afternoon tea.

She then instructed the waiter to serve them as quickly as possible.

The waiter nodded repeatedly and brought them their tea.

Looking at Ye Xiaomeng's displeased face, Shu Pan tried to ask in a casual tone, "What happened? Which servant upset her grace?"

"Hmph, some people really have no shame. Who does he think he is? Did he think I wanted to work under him? Look at himself first, relying on women for personal gain and climbing the ladder through vanity. It's embarrassing to even talk about it."

Shu Pan listened with confusion, not understanding what Ye Xiaomeng was saying. "What's the situation? Can you explain?"

Ye Xiaomeng looked at Shu Pan seriously and said, “Thank goodness you didn’t end up with that heartless and despicable guy. He’s simply not a decent person.”

After saying that, Ye Xiaomeng was filled with indignation. Seeing the person in question, she would probably spit in disgust.

“Are you talking about Su Yuan?” Shu Pan cautiously asked.

“It’s not just him. There’s more to it!” Ye Xiaomeng was getting angrier just thinking about it. Initially, she didn’t even know who the new boss of the company was. But then she received a personnel letter that stated she was negligent in her work, lacked initiative, and couldn’t create value for the company. The letter informed her that the company would no longer employ her.

Chapter 33

Because when Ye Xiaomeng took leave, she only mentioned feeling unwell and didn’t tell anyone about her pregnancy. After all, she was unmarried and pregnant, worried about her reputation and colleagues gossiping. She didn’t want people to think she had a shotgun wedding.

Since she was a long-standing employee, the manager turned a blind eye and approved her leave. But now that there was a new boss, the first thing he did was target her.

“What exactly happened?” Shu Pan was getting confused. She didn’t understand how Su Yuan was involved with Ye Xiaomeng and their work relationship.

It felt like these two individuals were worlds apart and had nothing to do with each other.

Ye Xiaomeng took a sip of water before slowly explaining. Recently, Ye Xiaomeng’s company was acquired by a large American conglomerate. After the new boss took over, he acted swiftly to restructure the company, causing everyone to feel insecure about their jobs. Since Ye Xiaomeng was on leave, when a colleague discreetly informed her of this news, she had already received her dismissal letter from the company.

The HR department even called Ye Xiaomeng directly, urging her to come back and complete the necessary procedures. When Ye Xiaomeng went to the HR department yesterday, the manager stated that it was the company's decision to terminate her employment due to her lack of dedication and initiative at work. They also mentioned discussing compensation with her.

"I'm pregnant now, and the company has no right to terminate me. I'm protected by labor laws. I know you guys can't do anything, I'll talk to the boss myself."

Without hesitation, Ye Xiaomeng went straight to the CEO's office and, upon entering, began berating the person sitting at the desk. As she approached, she realized it was Su Yuan and was taken aback. It was unexpected.

Su Yuan, who was equally surprised, recognized Ye Xiaomeng at first glance. She was Shu Pan's best friend and Cheng Yang's fiancée. That alone deserved some respect.

But when the HR manager showed him the list of terminated employees, Su Yuan did see Ye Xiaomeng's name, but he thought there were many people with the same name in the world and didn't think much of it. Moreover, they hadn't seen each other in six years, and many things had become hazy in his memory.

Now seeing Ye Xiaomeng causing a scene in the office, he finally understood.

"So, it's you, Ye Xiaomeng. Weren't you about to marry Cheng Yang? When I met Cheng Yang last time, he said you were on leave and not working. I didn't expect you to be in this company." Su Yuan asked in confusion.

"I'm pregnant, and the fetus is not stable. I took leave to rest at home, and I'll be back to work later. How can the company dismiss me?" Ye Xiaomeng didn't care about being a pregnant woman and raised her voice. She had never been treated like this before, and her anger surged inside her.

"That must be a misunderstanding. You're still pregnant, so take care and go back to rest. Come back to work when you're feeling better." Su Yuan quickly tried to persuade her. The well-being of a pregnant woman was of utmost importance, and if anything happened, it would be hard to explain.

Ye Xiaomeng wanted to say a few more words, but seeing him respond this way, she decided not to argue further. After all, it was better to let it go.

“Fine, let’s call it even this time. Consider it a minor inconvenience. But who knows what will happen next time.” Ye Xiaomeng grumbled a couple more sentences under her breath.

“When you have time, let’s all meet up. It’s been a long time since we last saw each other,” Su Yuan suggested opportunistically.

“We’ll see then.” Ye Xiaomeng knew he wanted to see Shu Pan, but she didn’t want to fulfill his wish, especially since she was annoyed with him.

Then Ye Xiaomeng left, feeling somewhat uneasy. Afterward, she called Shu Pan to meet and vent about her frustrations.

Chapter 34

“Don’t be angry anymore. It’s not like they actually fired you, right? Getting angry isn’t good for the baby when you’re pregnant.” Shu Pan, upon understanding the situation, felt a bit short of breath, especially when she realized that Su Yuan had also helped her in the past. She took a sip of juice, contemplating whether or not to tell Xiaomeng about this matter.

“What a hypocrite, a true villain, not even worth a thing.” Ye Xiaomeng angrily expressed her feelings while continuing to eat. She picked up a fork and took a big bite of cake, then spoke to Shu Pan, “Luckily, you didn’t end up with him. He’s just a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Looks decent on the surface, but he’s worse than a pig or a dog. He even bullies a pregnant woman.”

Shu Pan smiled helplessly, secretly thinking, “Well, he has no clue you’re pregnant, does he?”

She watched Ye Xiaomeng without any rebuttal, refraining from exposing her friend’s past dorm room conversations where she endlessly praised Su Yuan and Cheng Yang as the epitome of perfection at T University. They were with top-notch grades, striking looks, and impeccable character. She had exhausted nearly every adjective to describe them, painting an enchanting picture.

Perhaps in the past, Shu Pan would have never believed that Su Yuan possessed such manipulative tactics. He had always been refined and courteous. However, after six years, she learned a valuable lesson. Time changed everything, especially people. Those once intimately known now left only a sense of unfamiliarity upon reunion.

Six years were enough to turn a small innocent rabbit into a cunning wolf.

Ye Xiaomeng took a sip of water, swallowed her food, and cautiously asked, "Hey, how's it going between you and Gu Shaoting these days?"

Ye Xiaomeng felt that fate hadn't been kind to Shu Pan, delivering a series of blows. As a good friend, she couldn't help but feel heartbroken for her.

Shu Pan was taken aback by the question and replied, "It's still the same. He refuses to divorce, so we're just stuck in this situation." Her tone sounded nonchalant, but deep down, she felt the heaviness. The person she loved had become her enemy.

Ye Xiaomeng paused with her cake fork in mid-air, overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness. She couldn't do much to assist her friend, so all she could do was silently pray and hope that everything would turn out fine. Then, she resumed eating, devouring her second piece of cake.

Shu Pan rolled her eyes, feeling defeated and powerless in the face of Ye Xiaomeng's eating prowess.

"Xiaomeng, cakes are high in calories. Don't eat too much. You still have dinner tonight," Shu Pan advised, trying to intervene.

"It's alright. I can still eat two bowls of rice tonight. Ever since I got pregnant, I've been feeling hungry every day. Sometimes I can't sleep at night due to hunger, so I ask Cheng Yang to go out and buy food," Ye Xiaomeng nonchalantly replied. She didn't think she was eating excessively and believed that one person eating for two was normal.

As Shu Pan watched her friend's growing belly, she felt embarrassed. She poured herself a glass of water and took a big gulp before reminding Ye Xiaomeng, "You've gained weight now, and it's not easy to give

birth or recover after delivery. Aren't you worried that Cheng Yang will lose his appetite seeing you like this?"

Shu Pan administered a strong dose of reality, knowing that Cheng Yang was what mattered most to her.

Ye Xiaomeng was momentarily stunned, suddenly realizing that she had been indulging herself lately. She used to have a healthy appetite, but it had intensified since becoming pregnant. Shu Pan had barely touched her cake, leaving Ye Xiaomeng to finish it all by herself.

"Am I really gaining a lot of weight? Do I look bloated now?" Ye Xiaomeng was alarmed by Shu Pan's words, realizing that she needed to exercise more restraint.

"Not yet, but be mindful of your diet," Shu Pan quickly reassured her. Glancing at the time, she realized they had been chatting for quite a while. Indeed, joyful moments passed by quickly.

Chapter 35

Shu Pan got up and went to the restroom. When she returned, she saw Ye Xiaomeng blushing and talking on the phone with Cheng Yang. It made Shu Pan realize that, despite Ye Xiaomeng's straightforward and tough personality, she too could be a shy and charming woman. People could change when they met the right person.

As Shu Pan approached, Ye Xiaomeng exchanged a few words with Cheng Yang before hanging up. She turned to Shu Pan and said, "Cheng won't have any engagements tonight. He'll come to pick me up for shopping and then take me out for dinner. Do you want to join us to avoid going back home to eat?"

"I don't want to be a third wheel and spoil your time together. You two go ahead. Just take it easy and don't overeat. Take care of my godchild," Shu Pan reminded her once again.

"Forget it. My baby has a strong stomach just like me," Ye Xiaomeng proudly replied, giving Shu Pan a glance.

Shu Pan smiled wryly and sat for a while before they both left Left Bank Café.

Shortly after, Cheng Yang arrived in his car. After greeting Shu Pan, he left with Ye Xiaomeng.

Watching the car drive away, Shu Pan felt a sense of melancholy. Sometimes she truly envied Ye Xiaomeng for her carefree nature. It seemed easier for her to find happiness by being simple and carefree.

She used to believe she was the happiest person, simply because she was able to marry the person she loved. But now? She didn't dare to expect anything. Everything she had once dreamed of had become distant.

She was pregnant, and she couldn't even tell Xiaomeng about it. Because she didn't know how it would end. If Gu Shaoting refused to divorce, and her belly grew larger, how would she hide it? What would she do?

She had to carry this secret on her own. Pregnancy was supposed to be the happiest thing between a couple, but now she was the only one experiencing joy. However, she would give her child all the love in the world.

Her thoughts were interrupted, and she realized there was still plenty of time. Instead of going home to a quiet room, she decided to take a leisurely stroll outside.

Not far away, she noticed a shopping mall, so she walked there slowly.

As she passed a sleepwear store, she remembered that a few of her bras had become deformed. So she went straight to the lingerie section and picked a few of her usual styles. They were simple designs, and she didn't bother trying them on. With tight finances, she couldn't afford to buy anything that wasn't essential.

She took out a bank card from her wallet and handed it to the salesperson without paying much attention. After the transaction, the card was returned to her. As she put it back in her wallet, her heart skipped a beat. It was the credit card Gu Shaoting had given her, which she had never used before. Now she had mistakenly used it for payment, and for buying lingerie of all things. She felt overwhelmed.

Shu Pan forced a bitter smile, deciding to act as if nothing had happened. If he confronted her, she would simply repay him the money.

On the other end, Gu Shaoting was at a social gathering when he heard a notification sound from his phone. Glancing at it, he saw the words “lingerie store purchase” and couldn’t remain calm. He had given that card to Shu Pan, and she had never used it before. However, he wasn’t a stingy person, and even though he despised Shu Laide, he didn’t extend that attitude toward Shu Pan. So, upon receiving the message, he was only slightly surprised.

He was always efficient and decisive in his actions, never hesitating or procrastinating. Except when it came to Shu Pan. He didn’t know what he was thinking, but every time he considered divorcing her, he felt a heavy heart and struggled to breathe. But when it came to Shu Laide, he harbored deep hatred. He often wondered why Shu Pan had to be Shu Laide’s daughter.

Chapter 36

When Shu Pan returned to the residential area, it was already 8 PM. The dim streetlights illuminated the area, but their floor was devoid of any light.

Shu Pan’s brows relaxed, realizing that Gu Shaoting hadn’t returned yet. She was alone at home, so she went straight to the bedroom and took a hot bath, which made her feel much more comfortable.

Compared to the chilly outdoors, the warmth inside her home was welcoming. Shu Pan read a book for a while and was about to go to sleep when she suddenly heard a knocking sound at the door. She furrowed her brows in confusion and instinctively got up.

Who could be visiting at this hour? Gu Shaoting had his own key and wouldn’t bother knocking.

“Mr. Gu, be careful and don’t trip,” came the voice of their driver, Wang, from outside the tightly shut door.

“I’m fine. Come on, let’s have another drink,” Gu Shaoting replied, clearly intoxicated.

Shu Pan opened the door and saw two people standing at the entrance. Wang was supporting Gu Shaoting, who emitted a strong smell of alcohol. His face was flushed, and he leaned on the driver for support.

“Madam, Mr. Gu had a few drinks at a business gathering tonight. Please take care of him,” Wang respectfully explained.

“Alright. Thank you. Please help me guide him to the bedroom,” Shu Pan requested, making way for them. Wang assisted Gu Shaoting into the room.

After settling Gu Shaoting on the bed, Wang turned to Shu Pan and said, “Madam, I’ll take my leave now. If you need anything, feel free to call me anytime.”

“Okay, thank you. Take care on your way back,” Shu Pan replied, expressing her gratitude.

Once Wang left, Shu Pan walked over to help Gu Shaoting take off his shoes so he could sleep more comfortably. However, he suddenly stood up and stumbled with unsteady steps toward the direction of the bathroom. As he passed by the door, Shu Pan saw him bump into it.

He seemed unfazed by the impact and made no sound. He paused for a moment before entering the bathroom.

The bathroom door remained open, and the sound of flowing water could be heard.

Was Gu Shaoting planning to take a bath?

Concerned about him potentially drowning due to his intoxication, Shu Pan decided to stay near the doorway and keep an eye on the situation. Suddenly, she noticed his clothes scattered on the floor. She tidied them up and blushed at the thought of what was happening inside.

After a while, she heard the sound of the water shut off. Shu Pan trembled in fear and quickly returned to the bedroom.

Gu Shaoting emerged from the room, still in his pajamas. He closed his eyes and lay down on the bed.

He was quiet, not making any snoring sounds. Shu Pan couldn't be sure if he had fallen asleep or not, so she stared at him for a while, observing his movements. Once he remained still, she quietly made her way out.

Just as Shu Pan was about to close the door, she heard a muffled sound coming from the bed behind her—Gu Shaoting's voice.

Shu Pan was startled, thinking that Gu Shaoting had woken up.

She glanced back and realized he was still asleep, but after a while, she heard his voice again.

This time, Gu Shaoting muttered several words in succession. Shu Pan listened attentively and finally distinguished a word from Gu Shaoting's mouth, "Water."

Water?

Did he want water?

As Shu Pan's mind slowly processed the situation, Gu Shaoting repeated his plea twice more: "Water... water..."

He seemed thirsty, and the room was filled with a pungent smell of alcohol.

It seemed like he was about to vomit as his head hung outside the edge of the bed, eyes closed, emitting a suppressed groan.

Shu Pan hesitantly called out to him, "Gu Shaoting?"

Gu Shaoting didn't respond as if he hadn't heard anything.

Unable to bear seeing him in such distress, Shu Pan turned back and approached the bed. Only then did she notice that his complexion had turned pale, in stark contrast to the flushed face he had when he entered.

Seeing him in this vulnerable state, so different from his usual coldness, Shu Pan couldn't ignore it.

"...water..." Gu Shaoting muttered the word again, softly and indistinctly.

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Shu Pan immediately snapped back to reality. Without any hesitation, she hurried to the living room and poured a glass of warm water from the coffee table. She carried it back to the bedroom.

In his drunken state, Gu Shaoting appeared much more docile than when he was sober. He was as obedient as a child.

As Shu Pan helped him sit up and drink the water, he showed no resistance. He followed her guidance and sat up, opening his mouth obediently to drink. With a few gulps, he finished the water. The furrow between his brows relaxed significantly.

Once Shu Pan laid him back down on the bed, he immediately closed his eyes and fell asleep.

Shu Pan covered him with the blanket. However, noticing him continuously rubbing his forehead, she couldn't bear it. She gently reached out and started massaging his temples with a gentle and soothing touch. Perhaps her actions were effective, as he gradually grew calmer, and his breathing became more even.

Shu Pan continued the massage until Gu Shaoting had fallen into a deep sleep. Only then did she stop, feeling her hand slightly sore and numb. She shook her wrist and her gaze involuntarily fell upon Gu Shaoting's sleeping face.

Asleep, Gu Shaoting looked truly harmless—a dignified and captivating face that rivaled that of a celebrity, effortlessly drawing people’s attention.

Until now, Shu Pan struggled to find an adjective to describe him.

The best she could come up with was “handsome and elegant.”

His refined eyebrows, straight nose, thin lips, and graceful facial contours—Gu Shaoting’s face was captivating from any angle.

Although Shu Pan hadn’t been drinking, just looking at Gu Shaoting’s face made her feel intoxicated, as if it was never enough.

Because there was a lingering smell of alcohol in the room, Shu Pan slightly opened a window to let in a gentle breeze. His short hair fluttered in the air.

“Water... I want water...” Not long after, Gu Shaoting’s indistinct words echoed once again. Shu Pan bent down and listened carefully. It seemed he still wanted water.

Quietly, Shu Pan walked out and poured a glass of warm water. She then attended to the heavily intoxicated Gu Shaoting, helping him drink. Glancing at the time, it was already around midnight. Considering that staying up late was not good for the baby, and Gu Shaoting seemed to be sleeping more peacefully, Shu Pan gently closed the door and made her way to the adjacent guest bedroom. She lay down on the bed, her thoughts swirling.

She and he had gone from being the most familiar to becoming complete strangers. Or perhaps they were never truly familiar with each other. Throughout their marriage, it seemed like she had invested the most, and sometimes she considered extricating herself. However, she was already deeply entangled, and at times, it felt impossible to break free.

As Shu Pan pondered, her eyes gradually grew heavy, and she drifted off to sleep.

Around 6 o'clock in the morning, Shu Pan woke up. Groggily, she quietly approached Gu Shooting's bedside and glanced at him. He was sleeping soundly.

Considering that he had consumed alcohol the previous night, she guessed he might wake up with an upset stomach.

Housekeeper Sister Zhang wouldn't arrive so early. He would probably be awake by the time breakfast was prepared. It would be best to prepare something for him.

Shu Pan walked to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. There were plenty of ingredients prepared by Sister Zhang. Shu Pan took out some lean meat and vegetables, intending to make minced pork congee for him.

First, she cleaned the meat and chopped it into small pieces. Then, she rinsed the rice and put it in the clay pot. She brought it to a boil over high heat. Once it started boiling, she added the lean meat and reduced the heat to a simmer.

When the porridge was almost done, she added some vegetables and stirred before turning off the heat.

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She placed the cooked congee on the dining table, admiring the creamy grains of rice with hints of green vegetables, making it look truly delicious.

Shu Pan glanced outside and noticed that the sky was starting to brighten.

After a moment of contemplation, she remembered that today she had to visit her father and Auntie Lu in the rented house.

There was also an important matter at hand—she had to go to work. With the baby gradually stabilizing, she needed to work to pay off debts and save money for the baby's arrival.

Shu Pan was also worried that Gu Shaoting would wake up and see her. She hastily returned to the bedroom, changed her clothes, and quickly left.

She bumped into Sister Zhang at the elevator moments ago and greeted her, "Mr. Gu is still asleep. I cooked porridge. When he wakes up, please make sure to tell him to eat."

Sister Zhang looked at her hurrying out and paused for a moment before responding, "Okay, Madam."

Although she didn't understand why Shu Pan was leaving so early, it was a private matter and not her place to ask. Looking at Shu Pan's slightly pale complexion, Sister Zhang couldn't help but say, "Madam, are you okay? You don't look well."

"I'm fine. But Mr. Gu drank last night, and hangovers can be quite uncomfortable. He'll likely have a headache. Please make him a cup of honey water later. It might make him feel better."

"Understood, Madam. I'll remember." After Sister Zhang replied, she couldn't help but ask one more question, "Madam, are you going out early because of work?"

It wasn't because of work. She just didn't want to face Gu Shaoting. Shu Pan didn't tell Sister Zhang the truth, simply nodding her head and saying, "Yes."

Sister Zhang believed it and quickly said, "Madam, go ahead. Is there anything else you want me to do?"

Shu Pan thought for a moment, shook her head, and still somewhat concerned, said, "Take good care of him. Thank you."

"Don't worry, Madam."

Shu Pan lowered her head and remained silent.

Sister Zhang gestured toward the house and said, "I'll go in then."

“Okay,” Shu Pan responded. Just as Sister Zhang was about to open the door and go inside, Shu Pan called her back. “Don’t tell him that I cooked the congee.”

Sister Zhang was quite surprised and blurted out, “Why?”

Shu Pan suddenly felt a bit embarrassed. She tried hard to hide her hidden sadness and loneliness, maintaining a calm tone as if speaking about something unrelated to herself. She casually replied, “Because if he knows, he might not want to eat it. Besides, I’m not a good cook.”

Sister Zhang was momentarily stunned. She thought to herself that it was difficult to meddle in household affairs. Rather than saying anything else, she observed Shu Pan’s composed demeanor. After a simple “thank you,” Shu Pan turned and left.

Not long after Shu Pan left, Gu Shaoting woke up.

Hangovers were truly uncomfortable. His headache was intense. He opened his eyes, forced himself to sit up on the bed, and remained there for a moment before finally getting out of bed and heading to the bathroom to freshen up.

After taking a hot shower, Gu Shaoting felt refreshed. He grabbed a set of casual home clothes from the dressing room and put them on before leaving the bedroom.

He couldn’t quite remember how he had made it home. Lately, he had been acting out of character. Normally, he knew his limits when it came to drinking and rarely allowed himself to get drunk. What had happened recently? Whenever he felt frustrated, he ended up drinking more.

He scanned the room, finding the bedsheets and carpet clean and tidy, without a trace of disorder.

Was his alcohol tolerance really that good? He started to doubt it. How did he even get home? Could he have made it back to his room on his own?

Furrowing his brows, he retracted his gaze, opened the door, and walked into the living room.

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As he stepped into the living room, he saw Sister Zhang busy cleaning.

“Mr. Gu, you’re awake.” Sister Zhang looked up and immediately stopped her work.

Gu Shaoting didn’t say anything, he just nodded slightly, indicating that he was awake, and then he walked towards the dining table.

Sister Zhang followed him and, as instructed by Shu Pan, first brought a cup of warm honey water and placed it in front of him. Then she went to the kitchen, brought out the congee that Shu Pan had cooked in a clay pot, and served it in a porcelain bowl.

Gu Shaoting had just woken up and had consumed alcohol the previous night, so he felt dry and parched. He drank more than half of the honey water in one breath before placing the cup down. Then he picked up the congee and slowly brought it to his mouth, stirring it a couple of times with the spoon before savoring it.

The congee, cooked for a long time, was fragrant, smooth, and delicious.

As soon as it touched his tongue, Gu Shaoting’s brow furrowed slightly, and he continued to take spoonfuls, savoring the warm and tasty congee that soothed his stomach. It was so delicious.

In no time, the bowl of congee was empty.

Sister Zhang, who was watching, tactfully asked, “Mr. Gu, would you like another bowl?”

The congee obviously suited his taste, and he nodded slightly, indicating that he wanted another bowl.

After finishing the congee, Gu Shaoting’s stomach felt much better, and he was in a better mood. While eating the second bowl, he couldn’t help but ask Sister Zhang, “The congee is cooked perfectly.”

Sister Zhang was taken aback for a moment but then remembered what Shu Pan had told her, not to reveal that she had cooked the congee. The words that Shu Pan had said before leaving echoed in her mind. It seemed that the couple had been having some conflicts, as it is common for married couples to argue and become reconciled.

But she couldn't help but say, "Mr. Gu, Madam prepared this congee for you early this morning before she went out."

She thought that if Mr. Gu knew about Madam's efforts, he would be deeply moved.

Gu Shaoting paused for a moment upon hearing this and casually responded, "Oh." He continued to spoon the congee into his mouth, this time savoring each spoonful slowly. Perhaps because he was accustomed to indulging in extravagant delicacies, occasionally enjoying a simple congee was not bad at all.

Seeing him enjoying the congee, Sister Zhang felt a sense of satisfaction. She believed that she had done the right thing, as Mr. Gu still cared for Madam. Madam's intentions were not in vain.

After finishing the congee, Gu Shaoting's empty stomach was filled, and he felt much more comfortable.

After breakfast, Gu Shaoting returned to the bedroom to pack his luggage. He had to go on a business trip for a few days, a task that Shu Pan usually took care of, but now he had to handle it himself.

As he looked at the bed, a scene suddenly flashed through his mind. Last night, when he was drunkenly half-conscious, it seemed that someone had brought him water.

He couldn't recall whether his hand was too weak to lift the cup or if he hadn't raised it at all. But that person had carefully supported his upper body and fed him water. She had even massaged his head, her gentle touch bringing great comfort.

Besides Shu Pan, who could it be?

"Have you heard from Madam about where she went?" Gu Shaoting asked as he saw Sister Zhang passing by the bedroom door, suddenly throwing out the question.

Sister Zhang shook her head, indicating that she wasn't sure.

"It's alright," Gu Shaoting continued with his task.

When he was done, he picked up his phone from the bedside table and left.

Chapter 40

Shu Pan returned to her father's rental house and saw his increasingly white hair. She couldn't help but feel a surge of sadness, knowing that her father was worried about debt and feeling guilty for burdening herself.

No matter how much Shu Pan tried to console him, she still blamed herself.

"Panpan, we need to discuss something with you," Auntie Lu suddenly said with a serious expression.

"What is it, Auntie Lu?" Shu Pan asked nervously, thinking that something significant had happened.

"Your father and I have discussed it. We plan to return to our hometown. The scenery there is beautiful, and it's quieter. It's suitable for your father's recovery, and we won't need to rent a house, which saves money. The old house is still there, just needs some tidying up before we can live in it. Besides, the transportation is convenient."

"How can that be? If something happens to you, what am I supposed to do? Renting a house here doesn't cost much, so you don't need to worry about money," Shu Pan became anxious. She couldn't leave them right now as she needed to take care of them, and she couldn't immediately go back with them due to her work and other responsibilities.

"It's alright, we will take care of ourselves. Don't worry. I just need to focus on recovering my health, and Auntie Lu will take care of me. You can come back to visit us whenever you have time. It's just a three-hour drive," her father added. He felt that staying here was a burden to Shu Pan, and he also wanted a change of environment as he was easily recognized by acquaintances when he went out. He wanted to start fresh.

Shu Pan's hometown was a small town near Bin City, about a three-hour drive away. It had beautiful scenery and was a famous tourist destination, which had developed even more in recent years.

When Shu Pan's grandmother was alive, they used to go back frequently. After her grandmother passed away, they stayed in Bin City.

Seeing that her father and Auntie Lu had already made up their minds, Shu Pan reluctantly agreed but insisted that she would accompany them on a trip back. She couldn't leave without ensuring their well-being.

Finally, they nodded in agreement. After having dinner at home, Shu Pan went back to her own house.

When she arrived home, it was only 2 p.m., so Gu Shaoting wouldn't be there. As expected, there was food prepared on the dining table, probably Sister Zhang assuming she would come home for lunch.

As she passed by the bedroom door, she noticed a branded suitcase placed next to the dressing room. Shu Pan suddenly felt melancholic, thinking about the times when they were on good terms, and she used to help him pack his luggage before every trip. Now? They were practically strangers.

Suddenly, the doorbell interrupted Shu Pan's thoughts. She walked over and opened the door, only to see Gu Shaoting's secretary, Zhang, standing outside.

"Madam, I'm here to help Mr. Gu with his luggage. He's going on a business trip," Zhang stated the purpose without waiting for Shu Pan to speak.

"Alright, come in. It's in the dressing room," Shu Pan opened the door and let Zhang in to retrieve the luggage.

She turned and poured herself a glass of water in the kitchen, gazing at the warm sunlight outside, which alleviated some of her gloom. Now she could only go with the flow. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't change her relationship with Gu Shooting.

Her only focus now was taking good care of herself, protecting her child, and looking after her family.

After Zhang left, she remained standing there, her thoughts in disarray.

Shu Pan walked into the study, prepared her professional books and some drawing tools, and decided to end her leave and return to work. Her current goal was to work, earn money, and support her family. The once carefree princess now had to face reality, deal with the necessities of life, and embrace the mundane aspects of everyday living.