

Full-Level 861

Chapter 861: Please Help Me

Zhou Cui'an didn't want Ye Leng'an to witness such an embarrassing situation. However, given the current circumstances, she had no other choice.

Ye Leng'an strolled into the luxury store and glanced at Zhou Cui'an, curiously asking, "What are you doing here?"

It wasn't that she looked down on Zhou Cui'an, but regardless of appearances, Zhou Cui'an didn't seem capable of affording anything here.

Her question was straightforward, devoid of emotion. But to Zhou Cui'an, it felt like mockery, intensifying her embarrassment. Her eyes reddened, and she couldn't help but feel a tinge of resentment towards Ye Leng'an.

"Why can't I be here?" Zhou Cui'an's emotions seemed to spiral out of control. Her tone turned brash. "Are you the only one allowed to shop here? Am I not worthy enough?"

Ye Leng'an wasn't naïve. She sensed Zhou Cui'an's animosity. Frowning, she clarified, "That's not what I meant. Zhou Cui'an, I haven't wronged you, so there's no need to be so agitated. If you don't want to see me, I can leave now."

She wasn't one to tolerate nonsense. Plus, her relationship with Zhou Cui'an was merely that of roommates; they weren't close. If Zhou Cui'an hadn't asked her earlier, she wouldn't have come here at all.

She owed Zhou Cui'an nothing, so there was no reason to endure her anger.

"Don't go!"

Seeing Ye Leng'an about to leave in anger, Zhou Cui'an panicked. She stepped forward, attempting to stop Ye Leng'an.

But Ye Leng'an evaded Zhou Cui'an's grasp.

Zhou Cui'an withdrew her hand, feeling frustrated. "Leng'an, I'm sorry. My tone was harsh earlier, but I didn't mean to. It's just that this matter got me anxious, and I spoke without thinking!"

She didn't approve of Ye Leng'an's actions but had no choice but to swallow her pride. Besides Ye Leng'an, there was no one to help her now.

Reluctantly, she had to yield to Ye Leng'an

"Don't dwell on the past. You must take responsibility for this!" The salesperson directed a stern gaze at Zhou Cui'an. "You dirtied this gown, so you must purchase it."

Though speaking to Zhou Cui'an, the salesperson's eyes involuntarily drifted towards Ye Leng'an.

Having worked in the luxury store for so long, the salesperson had sharp eyes. Hence, it was natural for her to notice that the elegant girl who entered later, despite her understated attire, was adorned

from head to toe in haute couture, even sporting a multimillion-yuan watch on her wrist. Such an individual would undoubtedly be capable of footing the bill for this gown.

It didn't matter who paid; they needed to resolve the issue. The gown was now unsellable due to the stains Zhou Cui'an caused. Someone had to take responsibility.

"What happened?" Ye Leng'an frowned, unaware of the situation

Zhou Cui'an felt embarrassed, not wanting to answer. She didn't want Ye Leng'an to see her as a laughingstock.

The salesperson, however, had no such reservations and explained the situation.

After finishing her explanation, the salesperson wore a look of distress. "We really can't just let this slide. This gown is our latest season's flagship item, and in the entire capital, we're the only store with it. But when this young lady tried it on, she somehow got foundation smudged over it. We can't sell it like this. So, she must purchase this dress."

"This is not my fault at all!" Zhou Cui'an instinctively defended herself. "Clearly, you were the one who urged me to try it on in the first place. And while I was trying it on, you didn't remind me to be careful, nor did you advise me to take any preventive measures! And now you're shifting all the blame onto me. Why?"

Seeing Zhou Cui'an attempting to shift the blame onto herself, the salesperson became agitated and quickly retorted, "How can you say that? It's clearly your own negligence. What does it have to do with me? Nothing like this has ever happened in our store before!"

The implication was clear: anyone capable of shopping in this store would know this.

Zhou Cui'an's face darkened upon hearing the salesperson's mocking tone. However, before she could respond, the salesperson interrupted her, "Regardless, you're the one who dirtied the gown, so you must take responsibility. Otherwise, we'll have to call the police!"

At the mention of calling the police, Zhou Cui'an's expression turned sour. She had no intention of continuing the argument with the salesperson. Instead, she turned to Ye Lengan with a pleading tone, "Leng'an, please help me!"

Deep down, she knew that if this escalated to the police, it wouldn't end well for her. Ultimately, she would have to compensate the store for its losses.

After hearing the explanation, Ye Leng'an furrowed her brows. "How can I help you?"

The situation was murky. But Zhou Cui'an had dirtied the gown, so the salesperson's demand was reasonable

However, Ye Leng'an was curious. Why had Zhou Cui'an suddenly appeared in this luxury store, trying on gowns?

Zhou Cui'an hesitated, unsure how to respond to Ye Leng'an's question.

She assumed Ye Leng'an would understand her intentions by now.

With Ye Leng'an's wealth, buying the gown would resolve the issue. So why the need for further inquiry?

Chapter 862: Offending Ye Leng'an

Ye Leng'an looked at Zhou Cui'an with a wry smile, awaiting her response.

She found it amusing. Her relationship with Zhou Cui'an wasn't that close! The other party's air of entitlement made her wonder where she got the confidence to assume she'd help!

Under Ye Leng'an's gaze, Zhou Cui'an's face gradually flushed, her expression changing into one of anger and embarrassment.

However, knowing she needed a favor, she suppressed her inner frustration and resentment.

"Leng'an, can you put in a good word for me?"

With no other option, Zhou Cui'an changed her approach. "The dress is merely stained now. I'm willing to cover the dry-cleaning costs, but buying it is out of the question."

Though she said so, she knew it was impossible. If it were possible, she wouldn't have been held back by the salesperson.

She only said this to prompt Ye Leng'an to come up with a solution herself.

"Oh." Ye Leng'an nodded, then replied, "If you think that's feasible, you should discuss it with her yourself. Why do you need my help?"

Zhou Cui'an's expression soured; evidently, she hadn't expected such a response from Ye Leng'an.

"But I..."

Zhou Cui'an composed herself, trying to hide her resentment. With a look of grievance on her face, she almost looked like she was about to cry. "You know they won't agree even if I ask. But you're different. If you put in a good word, they might agree?"

At this point, the salesperson stepped forward. "Ladies, this gown is brand new, and its material can't be dry-cleaned. We can't agree to that plan. No one, regardless of who it is, can intercede!"

Though her tone lacked deference, it was calm and even somewhat amiable.

If Zhou Cui'an had been alone, perhaps she wouldn't have been so defiant. But with Ye Leng'an present, she dared not act too arrogantly.

As salespeople, they had keen eyes and could tell Ye Leng'an wasn't someone to be trifled with.

However, at the same time, there was a faint sense of regret lingering in her heart. If she had known it would turn out like this, she wouldn't have let Zhou Cui'an try on this particular dress just now.

Before, she had seen Zhou Cui'an as someone with a bit of financial capability. Customers like this, although not extremely wealthy, tend to be somewhat materialistic and would likely spend all their savings to purchase this dress.

Who would have thought that something like this would happen now? After all, she was the one who brought the dress for the customer to try on. If the other party continued to refuse compensation, the final burden of compensation might fall on her. Therefore, until the other party compensated, she would definitely not let them leave.

Even if it meant calling the police, she would ensure the loss was recovered.

The salesperson's interjection made Zhou Cui'an's face paler, and she felt increasingly embarrassed.

Especially when she turned her head, all she saw was Ye Leng'an's half-smile, as if she had seen through all her thoughts.

In an instant, she felt all her rationality vanish. She looked at Ye Leng'an and blurted out, "Leng'an, I really don't have that much money, can you help me? How about you just buy this dress? After all, this dress is no different from an ordinary outfit for you."

Seeing Zhou Cui'an's matter-of-fact demeanor, Ye Leng'an was almost dumbfounded. Her smile didn't disappear, but her tone grew colder. "Zhou Cui'an, do you even know what you're saying?"

Zhou Cui'an completely missed the coldness in Ye Leng'an's tone. Since she had already spoken her mind, she had nothing to hold back.

"Leng'an, this is just a small amount of money for you, isn't it? I'm not asking you to commit murder or arson. I'm just asking you to buy this dress. It's not difficult at all. We're all roommates, so it's only right for you to help me!"

Ye Leng'an was almost amused. "Are you saying that I should fork out over three hundred thousand just because you're my roommate? Well, your roommate seems quite valuable!"

Actually, if Zhou Cui'an had approached her nicely, she might have tried to help. But Zhou Cui'an's presumptuous attitude was quite off-putting. It was as if she was obligated to help.

In reality, they were just roommates, and they hadn't even lived together for long.

Zhou Cui'an wasn't naive; she naturally caught the sarcasm in Ye Leng'an's words.

Even before Ye Leng'an appeared, she had been dealing with the salesperson for a long time. Combined with her inner anxiety, she had been in a tense state.

She had initially thought Ye Leng'an's appearance would be a godsend, but now, she was met with mockery. This caused the string of rationality in her mind to snap. When she looked at Ye Leng'an, her eyes were filled with hatred and disdain. "Ye Leng'an, who do you think you are? Do you really think you're some rich girl? You're just someone supported by a man. What right do you have to look down on me? At least every penny I spend is earned by myself. You're just a gold digger; what's so great about that!"

As soon as she said that, all eyes in the room fell on Ye Leng'an.

Under the scrutiny of so many people, Ye Leng'an's eyes flashed with understanding. Her expression remained unchanged, and she calmly said, "Who told you I'm supported by a man?"

No wonder Zhou Cui'an's attitude was so strange when they met last time! So she had such thoughts! She just didn't know who had misled her.

As soon as the words were out, Zhou Cui'an regretted it. Because now Ye Leng'an was the only one who could help her, but she had offended her with her tactlessness.

However, even though she regretted it, she didn't mention Murong Yumeng.

Before, Senior Sister Murong had helped her a lot. She couldn't repay kindness with ingratitude by exposing her.

Chapter 863: Leaving With Grace

Hearing Ye Leng'an's probing, Zhou Cui'an found herself at a loss for words and could only choose to remain silent.

Observing Zhou Cui'an's silence, Ye Leng'an didn't express anger. Instead, she sneered a few times, said nothing more, and turned to leave.

Seeing Ye Leng'an's departure, Zhou Cui'an panicked. She stepped forward, attempting to reach out and stop her. "You can't leave. If you do, what will I do?"

She realized she had misspoken, but the words had already slipped out, unretractable.

Regardless, she couldn't allow Ye Leng'an to leave. If Ye Leng'an did, she would be in deep trouble.

"Why can't I leave?" Ye Leng'an dodged Zhou Cui'an's hand and looked coldly at her. "This is a public place. Why shouldn't I leave? You're the one who can't leave now. What's that got to do with me?"

"How can you do this, Ye Leng'an?" Zhou Cui'an showed clear anxiety. "We're roommates, and you know my situation. Do you know how hard it was for me to get to the capital from that small town? If we can't resolve this today, I'm done for. Perhaps you could consider it a loan? When I earn money, I'll repay you."

With Ye Leng'an refusing to pay, borrowing money seemed the only option. Though repayment would be tough, she was confident she could clear the debt after graduating from Capital University.

"Zhou Cui'an, are you overestimating yourself or underestimating me?" Ye Leng'an retorted as if amused by Zhou Cui'an's words. "Why do you think I must help you? Don't you remember what you just said? If you think my money is dirty and yours is clean, why ask to borrow this dirty money from me? Wouldn't it be better to maintain your noble stance?"

Realizing Ye Leng'an's sarcasm, Zhou Cui'an felt regret. She shouldn't have been so forthright; now, she had offended Ye Leng'an, who was unwilling to help her.

She could no longer afford to be aloof.

Zhou Cui'an took a deep breath, suppressing her disgust and disdain, and humbly said, "Leng'an, what I said wasn't genuine. I'm simply envious of your wealth. Please forgive me and lend a hand. I'll be grateful for life."

"No need for that."

Hearing Ye Leng'an's response, Zhou Cui'an felt hopeful. However, Ye Leng'an's next words shattered her optimism.

Ye Leng'an looked at Zhou Cui'an with a smirk. "Because I never intended to help you."

After saying that, she even gave Zhou Cui'an a malicious smile.

Having gone from hope to despair, Zhou Cui'an finally realized that Ye Leng'an had never intended to help her from the beginning.

Enraged and humiliated, she glared at Ye Leng'an. "Are you mocking me?"

"I'm not. From the start, I never promised to help you." Ye Leng'an shrugged. "And since you hold me in such disdain, what right do you have to ask for my help? Don't assume you're the smartest, and I'm no fool. I won't help someone who looks down on me."

With her hope of Ye Leng'an's assistance shattered, Zhou Cui'an could no longer contain her emotions.

Her face darkened, all traces of pleading vanished, replaced by sheer malice. "Yes, I look down on you, Ye Leng'an. After what you've done, do you still expect respect from others? Who are you to lecture me, someone who's sold themselves for money? I sought your help today, but that doesn't make me inferior to you. Since you refuse to help, so be it."

Zhou Cui'an's face twisted with malice. "Ye Leng'an, do you really think you can live this luxurious life forever? I can't wait to see your fate when your sugar daddy tires of you."

"Though I don't know where you heard those rumors," Ye Leng'an said calmly, "my money is mine alone. As for my future, that's for me to know and you to wonder about. If you don't resolve today's issue, your future won't be bright."

After that, Ye Leng'an directly reached out her hand, pushed aside Zhou Cui'an blocking her, and then left gracefully.

It was evident Zhou Cui'an's words did not affect Ye Leng'an.

Left behind, Zhou Cui'an was stiff. She wanted to call Ye Leng'an back, the only one who could help her.

But she had burned bridges with Ye Leng'an. Even if she swallowed her pride, Ye Leng'an would never help her.

Without hesitation, the salesperson called the police.

It was clear to her the girl couldn't afford the gown. With her last hope gone, calling the police was the only recourse.

There was no other option now but to ensure compensation. Failure to do so would result in severe losses for the shop.

With this realization, the salesperson regarded Zhou Cui'an as though she were a fool.

After all, only a fool would push away their only savior like this!

Chapter 864: Can You Do Me a Favor?

Zhou Cui'an stood there blankly, her thoughts a jumble.

When she snapped back to reality, she noticed that the police had already arrived at the shop. Instantly, her mood turned frantic.

Though she had anticipated the possibility of the store calling the police, she hadn't expected them to arrive so promptly. Now, with the sudden appearance of the police, her mind went blank, unsure of what to do next.

The police didn't take Zhou Cui'an to the station immediately. Instead, they attempted to mediate between the two parties first. After all, it was merely a consumer dispute. If they could come to an agreement, it would simplify matters. If not, they could always take her to the station later.

However, the mediation process proved challenging. Zhou Cui'an simply couldn't come up with over 300,000 yuan. Even if they continued negotiating, it would lead nowhere.

One of the officers turned to Zhou Cui'an and advised, "Miss, consider if there's anyone who can lend you the money for compensation. Continuing to resist isn't a viable solution. Ultimately, you're at fault here."

Zhou Cui'an looked troubled. "Officer, I truly have no means. I'm just a poor student from a humble family. Even after a year, let alone ten, we couldn't amass over 300,000 yuan."

"Don't lie."

Before Officer Wu could interject, a salesperson chimed in, unable to hold back. "With the clothes you're wearing, you've easily spent tens of thousands. If your family is truly impoverished, how can you afford such clothes? You're clearly trying to avoid compensation."

The reason she had been so attentive to the girl in front of her was precisely because of her attire. She believed that with the way the girl was dressed, she might be able to afford another dress or clothes if she pushed herself. Hence, her enthusiasm.

Indeed, the salesperson who spoke was the one who had been serving Zhou Cui'an. Since the mishap with the gown occurred under her watch, it was only fitting for her to clarify the situation.

With her statement, all eyes turned to Zhou Cui'an, and expressions of disdain surfaced on everyone's faces.

Under their scrutiny, Zhou Cui'an felt exceptionally embarrassed. She had only gone out to buy a gown today, hoping to avoid the disdainful gaze of the shop assistants by wearing her best outfit.

Little did she know, her immaculate appearance had become evidence against her.

"Miss, you can't act like this," Officer Wu advised sternly. "Since it's your mistake, you must take responsibility and find a way to make amends instead of making excuses. Furthermore, this matter isn't trivial. After all, the sum involved is substantial, over 300,000 yuan. Though it's a consumer dispute, going to court wouldn't be good for

you. I presume you're just a student now. If your family can afford to buy you a 10,000 yuan outfit, coming up with 300,000 yuan shouldn't be difficult. So, call home!"

Officer Wu's words felt like slaps to Zhou Cui'an's face, leaving her feeling profoundly embarrassed. She opened her mouth to defend herself but found herself at a loss for words.

Even if she spoke the truth now, nobody would believe her. They would only see it as her shirking responsibility, just as before.

Seeing Zhou Cui'an's silence, the salesperson grew anxious. "Officer, could you check which school this girl attends? Continuing this stalemate won't solve anything! Why not involve their teachers or even the dean to mediate!"

Her time was valuable, and she had already wasted too much on this matter. If this standoff persisted, she might spend the entire day here. She couldn't afford to wait any longer.

"No!"

Panic flashed across Zhou Cui'an's face at the mention of involving her school. "Please don't notify my school."

With the police present, discovering which school she attended would be easy.

If her school found out, how could she face anyone in the future? If word got out, she'd have no standing there anymore.

"Miss, if you truly don't want us to involve your school, then find a way to raise the money quickly!" Officer Wu urged sternly. "The store can't afford to lose this money for nothing! We need a resolution now that things have reached this point. Whether or not we can resolve this relies on you."

After hearing Officer Wu's words, Zhou Cui'an fell silent once more.

She struggled internally, but eventually, she spoke up. "Officer, let me call a friend now! She should be able to lend me the money."

Hearing Zhou Cui'an's words, Officer Wu breathed a sigh of relief.

As long as Zhou Cui'an was willing to actively seek a solution, things would be much easier. Continuing this stalemate wouldn't lead to anything productive.

Meanwhile, the salesperson sitting across from Zhou Cui'an rolled her eyes. She believed Zhou Cui'an's previous behavior was all an act.

Moments ago, she claimed she couldn't gather the money. Now, at the mention of involving the school, she suddenly said she could borrow it. Clearly, the girl was quite cunning. Everything earlier was merely an attempt to shift blame.

Unaware of the salesperson's thoughts, Zhou Cui'an grappled with her emotions. Finally, she took a deep breath, pulled out her phone, and dialed the only number that could help her.

The wait felt endless. When the person on the other end answered, Zhou Cui'an almost faltered. But upon seeing the expression of the salesperson, she spoke up, "Senior Sister Murong, I have a small issue here. Can you do me a favor?"

Chapter 865: IOU

Half an hour later, inside a café in the mall, Murong Yumeng and Zhou Cui'an sat facing each other, each with a different demeanor.

Murong Yumeng appeared calm as if it were merely a trivial matter, hardly worth mentioning. She leisurely sipped her coffee, exuding an air of contentment.

However, upon closer observation, occasional flashes of impatience could be discerned in her eyes.

In contrast, Zhou Cui'an seemed notably uneasy, not even daring to meet the gaze of the person across from her.

In truth, if she could avoid it, she wouldn't have sought out Senior Sister Murong. After all, she had inconvenienced her numerous times lately. Now, continuously seeking Senior Sister Murong's assistance, she feared the other might grow weary of her.

Observing Zhou Cui'an's silence, though Murong Yumeng's eyes betrayed hints of impatience, her demeanor remained gentle and calm. She made no effort to urge conversation, merely sitting quietly.

After a considerable time, Zhou Cui'an finally summoned the courage to lift her gaze. She met Murong Yumeng's gentle smile, causing her eyes to well up with tears. Voice trembling, she expressed, "Senior Sister Murong, I truly appreciate your help today. Without you, I wouldn't have known what to do."

She could almost envision the repercussions had she failed to produce the 300,000 yuan compensation today. Surely, the school would have become aware. In that case, her university life for the next few years would be spent under constant scrutiny.

Contemplating this, her future seemed bleak. She questioned her ability to endure such scrutiny. If she couldn't, her prospects would be ruined.

Thus, she harbored immense gratitude towards Murong Yumeng. Simultaneously, she harbored resentment towards Ye Leng'an, who had abandoned her.

"It's merely a trifle; there's no need to dwell on it." Murong Yumeng smiled, shaking her head. "Moreover, I'm glad to have been of assistance."

The gentler Murong Yumeng's demeanor, the more touched Zhou Cui'an felt. She couldn't help but lament, "Senior Sister Murong, you're truly kind. Conversely, there are some individuals who, despite being roommates, refuse to lend a hand when it counts. They're quite callous."

Hearing Zhou Cui'an's words, Murong Yumeng's eyes glinted briefly. Then, nonchalantly, she asked, "How did it go? Was there any trouble before I arrived?"

Though unsure of whom Zhou Cui'an referenced, intuition suggested the matter involved Ye Leng'an.

Facing Murong Yumeng, Zhou Cui'an concealed nothing, recounting the recent events in full.

Naturally, she tailored her narrative to favor herself, omitting any unfavorable remarks.

After all, she had gleaned Ye Leng'an's misdeeds from Murong Yumeng. Revealing them now would be self-defeating and jeopardize their trust.

Murong Yumeng listened quietly, withholding comment. She wasn't naive; she detected Zhou Cui'an's deceit. However, this didn't obscure the depth of Zhou Cui'an's hatred for Ye Leng'an.

This served Murong Yumeng's interests.

When Zhou Cui'an finished, she turned to Murong Yumeng, earnestly stating, "So, Senior Sister Murong, Ye Leng'an truly isn't a good person. Please be cautious. Don't give her the chance to harm you."

Frowning, Murong Yumeng hesitated. "Junior Sister Zhou, I doubt Leng'an is as you describe. Is there perhaps a misunderstanding between you two?"

"There's no misunderstanding." Zhou Cui'an's voice rose abruptly before she realized the inappropriateness of her volume. Hastily, she lowered her tone and continued, "Senior Sister Murong, I've experienced it firsthand today. I wouldn't lie to you. That Ye Leng'an is truly untrustworthy. You must be wary of her."

Murong Yumeng smiled and nodded resignedly. "Very well, I understand. I'll be cautious."

Observing Murong Yumeng's apparent indifference, Zhou Cui'an grew anxious but refrained from further comment. She feared excessive complaints might worsen Murong Yumeng's opinion of her.

However, she wouldn't let Ye Leng'an's behavior slide. If Ye Leng'an looked down on her, she'd show Ye Leng'an she wasn't one to be trifled with.

With this resolve, Zhou Cui'an's eyes flashed with determination.

Murong Yumeng, observing Zhou Cui'an's change in demeanor, couldn't help but smile subtly.

"Oh, Senior Sister Murong!" Zhou Cui'an looked at Murong Yumeng sheepishly, troubled. "Thank you for today. Regarding the money, I'll find a way to repay you."

Facing Murong Yumeng, she couldn't bring herself to request assistance with the gown. After all, Murong Yumeng had already helped her immensely. She felt too embarrassed to ask.

Murong Yumeng shook her head, smiling. "There's no need. It's a trifling sum. Let's not dwell on it."

"How could that be!" Zhou Cui'an retrieved a paper from her bag and pushed it towards Murong Yumeng, insisting, "Senior Sister, I'm already grateful for your loan today. I can't possibly expect you to help compensate! This is an IOU. I'll work hard and repay you."

Murong Yumeng's eyes flickered with an unknown glint. She sighed and accepted the IOU reluctantly. "Very well! If you insist, I'll accept this IOU."

With that, she took the IOU reluctantly. However, she continued to advise, "Junior Sister, there's no rush to repay me. Focus on managing your finances. As a student, you have many expenses. Your priority is self-care."

Chapter 866: I misjudged Her

Upon hearing Murong Yumeng's words, Zhou Cui'an was deeply moved. Especially when she considered the strikingly different attitudes of Ye Leng'an and Murong Yumeng, her admiration for Murong Yumeng soared.

"Senior Sister, you're truly kind-hearted," Zhou Cui'an couldn't help but exclaim.

"Meeting you is undoubtedly the luckiest thing in my life."

However, Murong Yumeng shook her head with a smile. "You're too polite. Since I'm your senior sister, it's only natural for me to lend a helping hand where I can."

At this point, Murong Yumeng paused and then lifted the bag beside her, passing it to Zhou Cui'an. "Junior Sister Zhou, since you insist on repaying me, consider this dress yours. I can't let you pay without receiving anything in return!"

Naturally, Murong Yumeng could discern what had happened with Zhou Cui'an earlier that day. The fact that Zhou Cui'an wanted to see the dress now indicated the impending banquet she had mentioned before.

However, Zhou Cui'an had clearly overestimated herself. Without the status to justify it, she still dared to try on the dress in such a place. She deserved what she got.

Nevertheless, it was opportune for Murong Yumeng to go along with it now. Presumably, Zhou Cui'an also needed the dress. Although it was slightly stained, it was not too noticeable. However, the dress couldn't be washed. What Zhou Cui'an did with it was not her concern. She was merely doing a favor.

As Zhou Cui'an's eyes brightened upon receiving the bag from Murong Yumeng, it was evident she was deeply moved by her words. However, a hint of hesitation lingered on her face. "There's no need, Senior sister. You've helped me today; I can't be so ungrateful."

Despite her words, Zhou Cui'an's gaze remained fixed on the bag in Murong Yumeng's hands.

After today's events, Zhou Cui'an was well aware that buying a suitable dress for the banquet was nearly impossible. Although the dress in Murong Yumeng's bag was slightly dirty, she could still wear it with some cleaning.

With this dress, she could confidently attend the banquet.

Yet, despite her intention to repay the money, she was just a student now. 300,000 yuan was a significant sum for her. Therefore, she naturally couldn't ask for the dress back.

Now that Murong Yumeng had offered, Zhou Cui'an was tempted. However, she felt taking it would appear too greedy.

"It's alright." Murong Yumeng pushed the dress towards Zhou Cui'an, smiling. "It's just a dress. It's of no use to me. Besides, you've paid for it. How can I take it back?"

After Murong Yumeng's repeated persuasion, Zhou Cui'an was ultimately moved. She nodded. "Thank you, Senior Sister Murong. It would be impolite of me to refuse. I'll remember your kindness and repay you in the future."

“Hehe, there’s no need for that.” Murong Yumeng smiled and shook her head. “It’s nothing. You don’t have to take it to heart. Besides, we’ve met so many times; we should be considered friends! Helping each other as friends is only natural.”

Observing Murong Yumeng’s sincere expression, Zhou Cui’an was touched. “Senior Sister Murong, it’s an honor to have you as a friend.”

Watching Zhou Cui’an’s touching expression, Murong Yumeng wore a smile on her face, but the occasional flashes of disdain and disgust in her eyes revealed her true feelings.

While Zhou Cui’an was completely taken in by Murong Yumeng’s kindness and didn’t sense her true feelings, Ye Leng’an’s mood was affected by Zhou Cui’an, prompting her to end her shopping trip and return home.

Upon her return, she found Huangfu Ruiling in the living room, her expression slightly surprised.

“Have you settled everything? I thought this matter might be a bit tricky!”

“Everything’s been taken care of.”

Huangfu Ruiling rose and joined Ye Leng’an on the sofa, asking casually, “And you? Weren’t you supposed to go shopping today? Why are you back so soon?”

Ye Leng’an recounted her encounter with Zhou Cui’an at the mall without hiding anything.

The more Huangfu Ruiling listened, the colder his expression became, emitting an icy aura.

Seeing his change, Ye Leng’an reached out and held his arm, smiling. “Don’t be angry. She was just talking nonsense. Even I, the one directly involved, am not angry. What’s there for you to be angry about?”

“Her life must be too smooth, so she has plenty of time to meddle in other people’s affairs!” Huangfu Ruiling maintained his composure, but each word seemed to freeze. “So, in the end, she’s just too comfortable.”

Ye Leng’an shook her head and then smiled. “Zhou Cui’an’s words shouldn’t be taken lightly. Someone must have been poisoning her mind in front of her. Otherwise, her attitude wouldn’t have changed so drastically.”

Thinking about it, Zhou Cui’an’s change wasn’t sudden. She had noticed Zhou Cui’an’s odd behavior before. However, she hadn’t thought much of it at the time.

Now it seemed someone had been speaking ill of her in front of Zhou Cui’an for a while, leading to her change in attitude.

If Zhou Cui’an hadn’t been pushed to her limit today and her psychological defenses hadn’t been shattered, she wouldn’t have spoken so recklessly.

Huangfu Ruiling furrowed his brow. “So you’re saying Zhou Cui’an was just being manipulated?”

“I don’t know if she was manipulated.” Ye Leng’an’s lips curled into a sarcastic smile. “But she’s not innocent. I initially thought she was a simple and honest person. After all, she came from a small place, and besides studying, she didn’t have many other

interests in life. She should've been quite innocent. Now I realize my judgment wasn't so good! I completely misjudged her."

Chapter 867: Her Only Ally

"Maybe you didn't misjudge her. It's just that the environment can easily change a person," Huangfu Ruiling remarked indifferently. "A person from a small place, if not firm in their beliefs, can easily be dazzled by the splendor of the big city. The Zhou Cui'an you mentioned is evidently such a person."

Ye Leng'an shrugged, her tone devoid of much anger or sadness, rather quite calm. "I had previously, out of goodwill, tried to advise her. However, it's clear she didn't take it to heart. Perhaps, she still believes I'm envious of her good fortune!"

"Don't dwell on it," Huangfu Ruiling continued. "Such individuals aren't worth any of your thoughts."

Ye Leng'an smiled wryly at Huangfu Ruiling's remark before responding, "You know what kind of person I am. I don't bother with inconsequential matters."

It was obvious Zhou Cui'an wasn't within her circle of concern. The reason for bringing it up today was merely due to Huangfu Ruiling's inquiry and she found the situation rather bizarre.

A hint of ruthlessness flashed in Huangfu Ruiling's eyes. "Zhou Cui'an's life has been too comfortable. Perhaps it's time to give her something to do."

"No need." Ye Leng'an shook her head. "Since she's inconsequential, there's no need to waste any thoughts on her. Besides, she's already been dazzled by the capital's allure. Her future doesn't seem promising. So, there's no need to deal with such a person."

She naturally understood Huangfu Ruiling's intention to deal with Zhou Cui'an. However, she felt it unnecessary.

Hearing Ye Leng'an's response, Huangfu Ruiling didn't argue further. Instead, he nodded, then continued, "Since you say so, let's forget about it this time. However, Zhou Cui'an better behave herself. If she targets you again next time, don't stop me."

Ye Leng'an chuckled. "In your eyes, am I some kind of saint? If there's a next time, I won't hesitate to act, and you won't either."

Huangfu Ruiling nodded before rising. He pulled Ye Leng'an up. "Well, it's getting late. Let's go eat!"

He hadn't anticipated Ye Leng'an's early return, so he hadn't instructed the hotel to prepare lunch. However, it would only take a phone call for the hotel to prepare.

Ye Leng'an pulled Huangfu Ruiling out, and the two of them planned to eat out for lunch.

Soon, they arrived at a renowned Sichuan restaurant.

Despite its name, it was actually a private establishment specializing in Sichuan cuisine. The owner, however, aimed for a high-class clientele, resulting in an elegant and comfortable ambiance.

This restaurant was well-known in the capital and favored by many elite families. Reservations were hard to come by, usually needing to be made a month in advance.

However, for Huangfu Ruiling, this posed no issue. A simple phone call before leaving was all it took to secure a private room.

Though the owner aspired to high-class clientele, he was flexible enough to always have a few private rooms available for top-tier individuals from elite families.

Of course, not just anyone had this privilege, typically restricted to family heads, matriarchs, or young masters.

These elite families referred to the four major families in the capital.

Thus, a phone call from Huangfu Ruiling was sufficient to secure a private room.

Ye Leng'an enjoyed spicy food, hence their decision to dine at a Sichuan restaurant.

Guided by the waiter, they quickly arrived at their reserved private room.

However, there was a small incident on the way. Ye Leng'an spotted two unexpected figures, causing her to momentarily hesitate. However, she quickly regained her composure, as if nothing had happened.

Once inside the private room, Huangfu Ruiling dismissed the waiter.

Both Huangfu Ruiling and Ye Leng'an preferred to dine without a crowd of attendants. They enjoyed each other's company, chatting and laughing.

After the waiter left, Huangfu Ruiling raised an eyebrow at Ye Leng'an curiously. "What did you see just now? You seemed surprised!"

"I wasn't exactly surprised, just caught off guard," Ye Leng'an replied with a smile, shaking her head. "I didn't expect to encounter Li Yiran and Li Yi here. Especially Li Yiran. I thought she would quietly await the outcome at the ancestral house!"

Earlier, she had merely glanced inadvertently. However, the other party hadn't noticed her.

If Li Yiran had indeed spotted her and Huangfu Ruiling, she should be feeling apprehensive now! After all, while Li Yiran and Li Yi's relationship wasn't significant, if it reached the ears of Huangfu Ruixiang, Huangfu Jingzhang, or Zhongyu Liuying, it would be another matter.

Especially at this critical juncture, where she had just exposed Zhong Yating's matter. If news of her private meeting with Li Yi were to emerge now, she might follow in Zhong Yating's footsteps.

Hearing Ye Leng'an's response, Huangfu Ruiling didn't express any surprise. Instead, he calmly replied, "Li Yi is Li Yiran's only ally now. So, even if it's risky, meeting Li Yi is quite normal."

Ye Leng'an nodded, her expression solemn. Then, she smiled and said, "I just wonder if Li Yiran's invitation today is a gesture of gratitude or if she has other intentions!"

As Huangfu Ruiling had mentioned, Li Yi was Li Yiran's sole confidant.

Li Yiran had initially believed she could vanquish Zhong Yating and rise to the top. Unexpectedly, things took a turn, with Zhong Yating being discovered pregnant. Thus, the outcome remained uncertain!

Chapter 868: A Turning Point

Huangfu Ruiling remained indifferent. “Li Yi is no longer part of the Li generation. Though not formally expelled from the Huangfu family, he’s practically marginalized. Yet, such a person can be manipulated by Li Yiran.”

Ye Leng’an sighed, feeling somewhat regretful. “Li Yi’s cultivation is decent, and his talent isn’t bad. It’s surprising to see him so blindly in love. He’s probably under Li Yiran’s tight grip now!”

Indeed, a classic case of valuing beauty over prospects. However, it was someone else’s affair and didn’t concern her much, just evoking a sense of pity.

Huangfu Ruiling chuckled, then remarked, “Li Yiran’s petty tricks are well-known. It’s just that everyone’s discontent with Huangfu Ruixiang’s wife, Zhong Yating, is being exploited. Even if Li Yi could help her dig up those matters, he couldn’t secure her position as Huangfu Ruixiang’s wife.”

Ye Leng’an nodded in agreement. “It’s clear your parents aren’t pleased with Zhong Yating. But even if she steps down, Li Yiran isn’t guaranteed to succeed. Especially after Zhong Yating’s scandal, they’ll be more cautious in selecting a wife for Huangfu Ruixiang!”

Clearly, Li Yiran hadn’t grasped this point, thinking that disposing of Zhong Yating would pave her way to marry Huangfu Ruixiang. That was a mere pipe dream. Before Zhong Yating emerged, Li Yiran wasn’t even recognized as a potential mother due to her son’s status. What made her think she could ascend now?

After pondering, Ye Leng’an suddenly asked, “By the way, Huangfu Ruixiang hasn’t made a decision yet, has he?”

Huangfu Ruiling nodded, adding a touch of sarcasm. “With Huangfu Ruixiang’s indecisive nature, he won’t rush to decide.”

“In that case, Zhong Yating’s chances of staying are quite high,” Ye Leng’an quipped, flashing a grin. “She’s always been cunning. If Huangfu Ruixiang were to promptly decide on a divorce, she might not stand a chance. But if he hesitates, Zhong Yating will surely find a way to stay. Especially now, with a crucial card in her hand – her unborn child.”

Meanwhile, in the ancestral mansion of the Huangfu family...

In a lavishly adorned room, a woman lay on the bed, alone in the room.

As the room grew unusually quiet, the woman opened her eyes suddenly, clear-eyed and alert. It was Zhong Yating. She had contemplated this moment earlier but refrained from facing others or formulating a plan, fearing a forced divorce.

Only when she ensured everyone had departed did she dare to open her eyes, exhaling a sigh of relief.

Yet, memories of recent events left her restless. She had strived relentlessly, even wagering her life, to wed into the Huangfu family. Now, she was being coerced into divorcing Huangfu Ruixiang.

Divorcing him meant losing everything. All her efforts would be in vain, a bitter joke.

This fueled Zhong Yating's deep-seated hatred towards Li Yiran. If not for Li Yiran's public exposure, she wouldn't be in this predicament. Regardless, she vowed not to spare Li Yiran.

Even if she eventually divorced Huangfu Ruixiang, she'd never allow Li Yiran to marry him. Li Yiran's actions were driven by a desire to wed Huangfu Ruixiang, right? Then she'd ensure Li Yiran never married Huangfu Ruiling, forever relegated to a shadowy mistress. Li Yiran's child would forever be deemed illegitimate, barred from the Huangfu family's family tree.

These thoughts stirred a ruthless glint in Zhong Yating's eyes.

Once the surging hatred subsided, Zhong Yating contemplated her next move.

Huangfu Ruixiang and his parents knew all she had done. They'd undoubtedly push for a divorce.

Yet, she couldn't afford to divorce. It'd spell the end of her stay. Even returning to the Hidden World wouldn't salvage her life. After all, she was just a minor outer sect disciple of the Huangfu family, lacking any status or wealth.

If she hadn't tasted luxury or envy from others, perhaps she'd accept a simpler life. But her current status barred a return to mundane, impoverished days.

Thankfully, though her actions had been exposed, she still held a crucial card.

This realization led Zhong Yating to caress her belly.

Previously, she'd wished for a child to secure her position. She hadn't anticipated it would come now. It offered a glimmer of hope.

While Huangfu Ruixiang and his parents might not forgive her for this child, it provided her a lifeline. Perhaps, she could buy time and strategize.

Meanwhile, in the study, Huangfu Jingzhang and Zhongyu Liuying sat on the sofa, facing Huangfu Ruixiang, his conflicted expression evident.

Though they were all present, silence reigned until Huangfu Jingzhang broke it. "Ruixiang, what are you truly thinking? Surely you don't intend to persist with Zhong Yating! You're well aware of her character now!"

"I..." Before Huangfu Ruixiang could respond, his words were cut short.

Chapter 869: I Agree

"No, absolutely not." Zhongyu Liuying was the first to object. "From the beginning, I was strongly against Ruixiang marrying Zhong Yating. It was only because of that life-saving favor and Ruixiang's insistence that I reluctantly agreed. Now that we know

the supposed life-saving favor was just a charade, Ruixiang cannot possibly continue with this deceiver. Moreover..."

At this point, Zhongyu Liuying looked at Huangfu Ruixiang, speaking with weight and solemnity, "Ruixiang, think carefully. Do you truly wish to spend your life with Zhong Yating? With your status, even if you can't find a lady from a prominent family in the Hidden World, it's more than feasible to find a wealthy heiress in the mortal world."

Although their relationship with Huangfu Ruiling wasn't close, in public, they were family, an unalterable fact.

Reluctantly admitting it, as long as Huangfu Ruiling was present, they commanded respect. Even though Ruixiang was remarrying, there would be no shortage of noblewomen eager to marry him.

After hearing Zhongyu Liuying's words, although Huangfu Ruixiang felt they made sense, he remained hesitant. "Mother, but she's pregnant now. Is it too much for me to bring up divorce at this time?"

"It's just a pregnancy, nothing to fuss about," Zhongyu Liuying scoffed. "Ruixiang, you're not lacking in children. Speaking of children, hasn't Li Yiran already given birth to a son for you?"

Huangfu Jingzhang spoke calmly, "If Zhong Yating truly wishes to have this child, it's fine. After all, the Huangfu family is prosperous. Having one more child, or even ten more, is affordable."

In the past, he might have considered having Zhong Yating abort the child. But now things were different. Since Li Yiran had already given birth to a child, having one child or two made no difference. Though he wasn't pleased with the child's mother, it was still Huangfu Ruixiang's child, a member of their Huangfu family.

"What about Zhong Yating then?" Huangfu Ruixiang remained undecided. "She's the child's mother. If she gives birth to the child, our relationship will continue to be entangled."

Huangfu Jingzhang's tone turned cold. "She's just a woman. If she wishes to stay, she can only be your lover, like Li Yiran. If she intends to leave, then give her some money and let her go."

He never saw Zhong Yating as a threat. Just a woman, nothing significant.

Whether in the mortal world or the Hidden World, Huangfu Ruiling was the patriarch of the Huangfu family. Huangfu Ruixiang was Huangfu Ruiling's younger brother, defining his status. Regardless of how many lovers surrounded him, many women would vie to become his wife.

"Your father's right," Zhongyu Liuying chimed in. "Zhong Yating isn't fit to be part of our family. If it weren't for her saving you, she wouldn't have married you. It was a privilege for her to occupy your wife's position for so long. Now that her deceit has been exposed, can she still have the audacity to remain in that position?"

Under the persuasion of Huangfu Jingzhang and Zhongyu Liuying, Huangfu Ruixiang resolved to divorce Zhong Yating.

“Very well, tomorrow when she awakens, I’ll discuss divorce with her,” Huangfu Ruixiang stated. “Regardless of her response, I’ll proceed with the divorce.”

Though he spoke confidently, he’d already reached a conclusion. Zhong Yating wouldn’t agree to a divorce.

After all, she’d done so much to marry him. How could she agree to a divorce so easily?

With this in mind, Huangfu Ruixiang’s demeanor wasn’t pleasant when facing Zhong Yating the next day.

As Huangfu Ruixiang stood by the bed, Zhong Yating smiled bitterly. “Ruixiang, there’s no need for this. I know it was my fault, but please believe me. I truly love you, which is why I did what I did.”

“Love me?” Huangfu Ruixiang scoffed as if hearing a joke. “You risked my life, and you claim to love me. You wanted to kill me!”

“Ruixiang, I never intended that,” Zhong Yating calmly replied. “I understand my actions led to our engagement. But seeing no intention from you to marry me, I panicked and resorted to desperate measures. But believe me, I never wished harm upon you. If danger arose, I’d be the one to suffer, not you.”

Had Zhong Yating been hysterical in her defense, Huangfu Ruixiang might have been annoyed. Yet, her composed demeanor made him feel uneasy.

She spoke the truth. Despite agreeing to the engagement, he’d never truly considered marrying her.

Shaking off his inner turmoil, Huangfu Ruixiang gazed at Zhong Yating and went straight to the point. “Zhong Yating, you understand the purpose of my visit today. We...”

“I agree,” Zhong Yating interjected.

Huangfu Ruixiang paused, startled by her sudden response. “Do you even know what I was going to say? I haven’t finished, and yet you agree?”

“I do.” Zhong Yating sighed. “You just want to divorce me. So, I agree.”

Huangfu Ruixiang was taken aback. “Zhong Yating, are you agreeing to divorce so easily? Do you have ulterior motives?”

He felt things were going too smoothly. Zhong Yating had resisted divorce before, but now she agreed too readily.

Chapter 870: The Strategy of Retreat to Advance

“Perhaps it’s because I’ve finally come to terms with it!” Zhong Yating lifted her gaze to Huangfu Ruixiang, her eyes concealing the love she struggled to suppress.

“Ruixiang, I love you. That’s why I want you to be happy. Marrying me clearly hasn’t made you happy, so I’ve decided to let you go. Ruixiang, I won’t deny the things I’ve

done in the past. No matter my intentions, a mistake is a mistake. So, if you can't forgive me, I won't argue. Now, since divorce is what you want, I'll agree to it."

Watching Zhong Yating, weak and frail against the headboard, her face still showing signs of illness, Huangfu Ruixiang couldn't help but feel a moment of confusion. Simultaneously, he felt that proposing divorce at this moment seemed somewhat heartless.

"Um, you..." Huangfu Ruixiang hesitated, not knowing what to say.

"Ruixiang, I'm truly sorry."

As Zhong Yating spoke, her voice trembled with tears, but her words were sincere. "Our marriage was built on deception. Since it began on the wrong foot, it's time to end this mistake."

If Zhong Yating had been hysterical and confrontational, Huangfu Ruixiang would have surely walked away. But seeing her now, a sense of pity involuntarily arose in his heart.

However, even so, his decision remained unchanged. It's just that his demeanor softened considerably. "Don't worry, I'll give you what's due. Even after the divorce, your life won't be impacted. As for the child..."

Before Huangfu Ruixiang could finish, Zhong Yating spoke nervously, "Ruixiang, can I keep this child? If you don't want to see him, I promise he won't appear in front of you. Since we're divorcing, I don't want anything, I just want to keep this child. I know you don't like me, but please, let me keep him!"

"Yating, don't worry." Huangfu Ruixiang stepped forward, gently supporting Zhong Yating. "I never considered asking you to abort this child. He's not just yours, but also mine. I wouldn't be so heartless. But, this child, I'm afraid you can't take him away."

If Zhong Yating wanted to keep the child, her parents would never allow her to take him. Though their marriage began with Zhong Yating's deception, it was still a fact, making the child legitimate and a part of the Huangfu lineage. Her parents would never let her take him away.

After hearing Huangfu Ruixiang's words, Zhong Yating's face fell, but she suppressed her sadness. "Okay, I understand. But I hope to see the child in the future. He's still my child, after all. I promise not to interfere in your life anymore, but I'd like to see him from time to time."

"Of course." Huangfu Ruixiang nodded. "You're the mother, it's your right. And..."

He glanced at Zhong Yating before continuing, "Do you have any other requests? As long as it's within my power, I'll agree."

For some reason, seeing Zhong Yating like this made him feel indebted to her. Hence, he wanted to make amends.

Of course, if her requests were unreasonable, he wouldn't agree.

"I have no other requests, just..."

Zhong Yating hesitated, then continued, "Can we wait until I've recovered before finalizing the divorce proceedings? This child wasn't easy to conceive. I'm afraid something might happen. Once the child is stable, I'll handle the paperwork with you immediately. Is that okay?"

“Of course,” Huangfu Ruixiang agreed without hesitation. “That’s only fair. Though I want a divorce, I’m not so urgent that I’d overlook your health. Plus, this child is mine too. I want him to be safe.”

Zhong Yating was moved by Huangfu Ruixiang’s words. “Ruixiang, thank you so much.”

After comforting Zhong Yating, Huangfu Ruixiang left the room.

As the door closed, Zhong Yating’s smile vanished, replaced by a cold expression. She knew Huangfu Ruixiang’s true nature well -gentle, but indecisive, easily swayed.

Just like how she once used every means to coerce Huangfu Ruixiang, but couldn’t soften him. However, now she was simply adopting a strategy of retreat to advance. After uttering a few conciliatory words, Huangfu Ruixiang’s attitude towards her had completely changed.

Though Huangfu Ruixiang’s attitude had softened, the decision to divorce remained unchanged.

Using this tactic could only delay for a few days. She had to use this time to plan. Otherwise, once she recovered, she’d have to divorce Huangfu Ruixiang.

And then, no one could help her.

With that in mind, Zhong Yating’s hand gently caressed her belly, a determined gleam in her eye.

Meanwhile, Huangfu Jingzhang and Zhongyu Liuying waited for Huangfu Ruixiang, already anticipating Zhong Yating’s refusal to divorce. So, they truly needed to put their heads together and figure out how to coerce Zhong Yating into agreeing to the divorce.