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Together Forever

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Introduction & Prologue

Together Forever (至此终年) — Introduction and Prologue

July 23, 2015 by hoju 65 Comments



The announcement of my next project. :) This one actually won't start until *Beautiful Bones* is done in approximately mid-October, but consider me an eager beaver.

My ramblings are at the beginning and the translated prologue is at the end of this post as a little teaser.

A student and her university professor. But she had seen him once before, long before he was ever her teacher. Back then, she was still only thirteen years old. He wore a white doctor's coat as he spoke harshly to her, on that night that changed both their lives forever. And now, they have somehow managed to find one another again, and they bring warmth and love into each other's lives.

I won't give you a longer description on this novel. My spoiler-riddled thoughts

are all over its page on SSB, so if you don't mind being spoiled, you can head over there for more details.

This is yet another novel by Mo Bao Fei Bao, my favourite author, and once again, is different from her novels that I have already translated on this blog. *Really, Really Miss You* is a novel for you to escape into just pure happiness. Every girl has fantasized about her idol declaring to the world that he loves only her. In *Beautiful Bones*, although the romance's progression feels down-to-earth, the story itself intrigues the imagination with the reincarnation theme and the eerie family background of Zhousheng Chen.

Together Forever, however, is firmly grounded in everyday life and reality. Our female lead, Tong Yan, is outgoing and optimistic and at first glance, you would not know she came from a broken family. Life has not been kind to her, and she shoulders many responsibilities. But there are many Tong Yan-s in this world. In fact, I see parts of myself in her. The male lead, Gu Pingsheng, is also an unsung "everyday hero." I won't reveal here why this is so, but Mo Bao Fei Bao created him specifically to honour real people from real life who have sacrificed themselves for others. This is what I wrote in SSB about these two:

Life has thrown a good share of unfairness at the both of them. The author does not use many words to describe their emotional turmoil, though (especially Gu Pingsheng). Often, it's an almost nonchalant one-liner description of the situation or a small minute gesture that gives away the pain. As a reader, I would read it almost just as nonchalantly as it was written, but then, upon second thought, realize the significance of what was written… The author slowly releases more and more background about each of them, and each time, my heart would ache a little bit more. And that heartache just seemed to build until I realized how emotionally invested I was in their lives.

This story, though, is not about life's difficulties. Rather, it is about how two people, who have had a good amount of hardships in their lives, come together and bring warmth and love to one another. They don't cry, "Why me?" or wallow in self-pity, but instead, they try to create the best life they can have. Yes, you will feel heartache and cannot help but pray that things will turn around for them, but more so, you will smile for them because they are smiling in their

circumstances.

Mo Bao Fei Bao, who does screenwriting and then writes novels on the side, says her inspiration for her novels is her own life, a way to journal what she wants to remember. In one of her earlier novels, 念念不想忘 the female lead, also a screenwriter who wrote novels on the side, described how she viewed novel writing:

你看痛苦的地方，痛苦就被潜意识放大，你只看幸福的地方，就幸福指数暴升。
"If you look at the painful aspects, then the pain will unconsciously be magnified. If you only look at the happy aspects, then your happiness meter will explode upward."

This is so characteristic of Mo Bao Fei Bao's writing, and this story very much demonstrates it. It is real, but it does not feel angst-y. The couple is sweet… and it is a happy ending. (Of course! I only do happy endings.)

Really, Really Miss You brought you the cute, sweet side of Mo Bao Fei Bao's writing while *Beautiful Bones* showed off her beautiful, exquisite, atmospheric writing. Here, you will read about wonderful, well thought-out characters. They are not perfect, and you may not necessarily agree with all their decisions, but I connected emotionally with them and I hope you do, too.

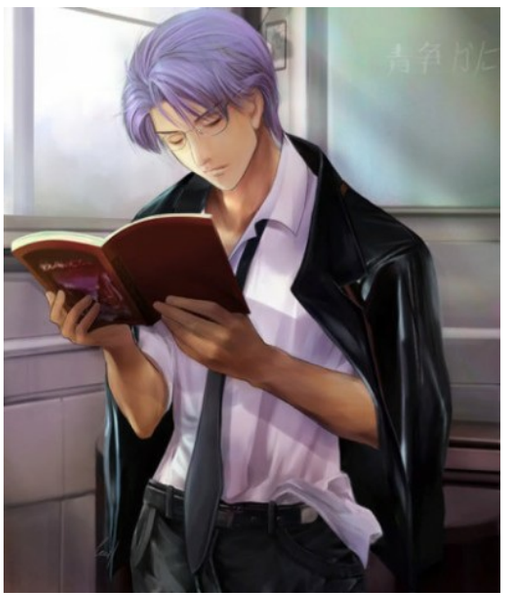
Together Forever was the first Mo Bao Fei Bao novel I read and instantly made me a fan. It holds a very special place in my heart, largely because of the emotional connection I felt as I read the novel. I have delayed translating this one time and again because, even though it's not as challenging as *Really, Really Miss You*'s online slang and ancient-style songs or *Beautiful Bones*' ancient language, more than anything, I just want to get this one "right."

So, consider this early announcement for the project my way of working myself up to it… and also committing to it before I back down again. (And also, in celebration of MBFB's fan club's anniversary, I posted this translated prologue on Weibo, so I wanted to make sure you guys here got to read it, too. I can't play favourites, you know. Hehe.)

(As an aside, the couple in this story did have a teacher-student romantic relationship, so if that is a trigger point for you, I will forgive you if you give it a

pass. *cough cough* Peanuts *cough cough* In all honesty, the teacher-student part of their relationship really only plays a small part of the overall story.)

And now, the translation!



Prologue

"I graduated from King's College London. I will be with you for an entire semester. You may call me 'Teacher' or you may also directly address me as Gu Pingsheng." He gripped the chalk loosely and on the blackboard, wrote out his name. The morning sunlight shone in through the window and seemed to envelop that light-colored figure. "I cannot hear. If you have a question, please face me and I will watch your lips and eyes to read what you say."

His voice had a slight mellow tone and was clear, bright, and gentle.

Everyone looked at him with sense of rue, and even their breathing fittingly became lighter.

King's College London. One of the top three law schools in the United Kingdom.

Prior to this Teacher Gu's arrival, all the teachers in the Law Faculty were either full suit-wearing pedants who had come back from studying at Waseda

University in Japan or were American PhDs, dressed in sport coats on top but paired ridiculously with jeans and sneakers on bottom, returning from Yale or something similar.

From a London university? This was a first.

All the third year law courses had switched over to teach international law using English, and many were looking forward to having this teacher, who would be the only one who had actually returned from London. They had wondered whether he would be gentlemanly, elegant and modest, or quiet and refined. His appearance, though, was somewhat not what they had expected.

The way he held the chalk between his fingers was very attractive, like a surgeon holding his scalpel. Of course, it was one of those glamorized surgeons from a television drama. He was very young, much younger than expected. He was wearing a soft, stylish white dress shirt and trousers, and his sleeves were rolled up so that a tattoo could faintly be seen on his arm…

One who did not know better would have thought that he was a fellow older schoolmate from the Faculty of Architecture.

He seemed to perceive everyone's sympathy but merely loosened his tie slightly.

And then… lowered his head, pulled off his tie, and undid the top button of his shirt. "This semester, I will be responsible for your course on International Commercial Arbitration Law. A very simple course. It will be taught in English. If anyone does not understand what you hear, you may raise your hand at any time and interrupt me." There seemed to be a smile on his face, and at the same time, there seemed not to be one. It was difficult to distinguish. "Remember, you need to raise your hand. Speaking up to interrupt me will not be any use."

Someone said in a lowered voice, "I'm willing to bet that he's in his twenties."

The voice was not overly quiet and every person pondered on this.

"In my class, you can whisper amongst yourselves."

Oh god, he actually saw that.

“But, I will likely be able to see it. Can we call attendance now?”

He smiled. His eyes were very calm and focused as he looked out at everyone. This sort of gaze caused all the girls present to want to avoid it. But immediately, they remembered that he needed to be able to see their lips. Nearly every single person obediently turned to look in the direction of the podium.

When Gu Pingsheng finished saying this, he lowered his head slightly and added, “I will call out one name at a time. When you are called, you may ask me one question.

Zhao Qian.”

“Teacher.” A female student in the front row rose to her feet. “What is your tattoo?”

With a slight smile, he answered, “The name of a woman.” He did not look at the list of names as he continued the roll call. “Li Dongyang.”

A male student from the back row of the classroom stood up and grinned, “Teacher, is it the name of your first girlfriend?”

He lowered his head again to read the next name. “No, it is my mother’s name.”

Silence fell everywhere. They surmised that must have touched upon a personal, off-limit topic.

He seemed unconcerned. “Wang Xiaoru.”

“Teacher, all the other teachers in our faculty have doctorates. Do you? You look really young.”

“Yes.

Zhao Xin.”

“Teacher, do you have a girlfriend?”

The class broke out into a ruckus. The person asking was their class prefect, but the problem was… he was a man.

The class prefect cleared his throat. “Teacher, I was forced to do it.”

Several female classmates behind him became indignant and collectively buried their heads.

With a smile, he picked up the class roster and placed it across his arm. “No.”

A roar of laughter sounded out from everyone, and the room buzzed with discussion.

Because the class prefect had started things off, every student that followed also began to purposely strategize to bring the questions in a more personal direction. They probed at his personal travels and his knowledge about King’s College, and he obligingly answered each one of the questions, occasionally even expanding upon them with many interesting stories or information. It was very enjoyable listening to him.

He could not hear? That was an enormous benefit. This way, so long as he was speaking to you, it would seem like he was gazing lovingly, devotedly only at you.

“God, does our school have any rules that bans romances between a teacher and a student?” The person who had just been called sat down again and murmured quietly.

His voice suddenly paused, and he lifted his head to allow his gaze to sweep the classroom. “Tong Yan.”

In the very back row of the class, a girl stood up. “Teacher, are you a northerner?”

Since the moment he had stepped into the classroom, Tong Yan could not really recover herself. His face was so familiar, so similar to a certain person. However, that person should have studied cardiac surgery, and he was not deaf either. But if it was not him, why would they look so much alike? Even the dimple on his right cheek when he smiled was the same.

In silence, he smiled until everyone found this moment rather peculiar. Finally, he nodded and answered, “Yes.”

It really was him.

In fact, they had only seen each other once, but they had each since remembered the other person’s name.

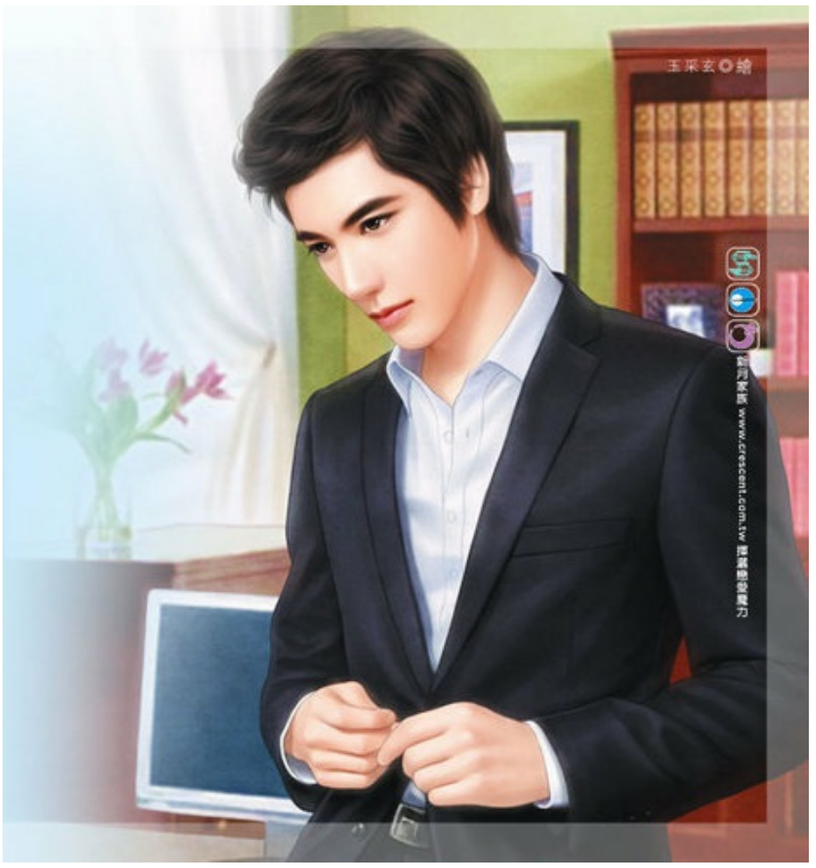
That night outside the emergency room, he, in his white doctor’s coat, was especially striking, but unfortunately, he had not been this warm and gentle.

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 1.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 1.1

October 24, 2015 by hoju 48 Comments



Welcome to my next project and a story that holds a very special place in my heart.

Before we begin, I have two requests: (1) Like *Beautiful Bones*, please help me keep comments spoiler free. Guesses and predictions are welcome. (2) The main couple in this story for a while do have a teacher/student relationship. I understand this may be a trigger point for certain people, and I won't be upset if you do not read this story for that reason. However, I do ask that any comments or debates regarding the ethics and morals of such a relationship be refrained from here. The love story is very beautiful and touching, and I hope that is what will speak to your heart. Thank you.

If you missed it, read through the prologue first before you jump in. Otherwise, let's start!

Chapter 1.1 – The Pretty Lady's Bane of Our Faculty (1)

Due to Gu Pingsheng's arrival, the Law Faculty suddenly came into the limelight.

As an academic institution known for science and engineering, the faculties of Telecommunications and Management had always been the leaders of the school, and the Faculty of Architecture and the various science faculties were also not to be taken lightly, despite their habit of remaining quiet. As for the few lonely faculties that belonged to the liberal arts category, they practically had no status in the school worth mentioning.

" 'Law school? This university has a law school? Isn't it only Fudan[1] that has one?'" Shen Yao indignantly read the heading of one of the threads on the school's BBS forum. "How dare they actually say that. They're looking down on us!"

Her eyes had been fixed on the online discussion board the entire afternoon and even lunch had been taken care of with only some instant noodles.

Because of a single photograph of Gu Pingsheng, though, the Law Faculty finally became famous.

The weather was very hot, and Tong Yan lay sprawled on her bed.

She was biting open longan shells with her teeth, and one by one, she ate the fruit while occasionally lifting aside the muslin bed curtain to toss the shells under the bed.



Longan fruit
(image credit)

"We're normally so low-key, but this week, we're practically catching up to *Super Girl*[2] in popularity. It's all Gu Ping— " Midway through, she realized she was actually addressing him directly by his name and immediately caught herself.

“… Teacher Gu’s fault.”

Shen Yao cackled with a “hehe” and corrected her, “The thing is, we’ve successfully trampled the Faculty of Architecture and now have the most beautiful teacher in the entire school.”

Tong Yan nearly swallowed her longan seed.

Gu Pingsheng’s face was relatively fairer in complexion and more slender, and relatively sharper and more defined, and every so often, his attire would be rather attractive and pleasing. But to use the description, “most beautiful” on a teacher of the Law Faculty was just… However, Gu Pingsheng’s ability to incite the masses was something she could not deny either.

This was apparent just by looking at this week’s three classes of International Commercial Arbitration Law. The students who sat in on the class just to listen, despite not actually taking the course, had filled the entire classroom, causing her and the class prefect, who were both late, to have no seats and only stand at the door, staring blankly.

A classroom that seated more than sixty people… And our faculty only had nineteen students in it for our year… Where did all these people come from?

It was fortunate that when Gu Pingsheng stepped in, he had quickly discovered that their territory had been completely overrun by outsiders[3] and had softly asked two girls sitting in the front row, “Could I trouble you…”

Before his question could be completed, the two girls had immediately jumped to their feet. “Teacher, it’s no problem. We’ll just stand.”

Tong Yan had been speechless. In this day and age, there were still people willing to stand to listen to a class lecture?

Luckily, he only came to the school three times a week.

In the end, to preserve the rights and interests of the students of their year, the class prefect had held a small internal meeting and established that no one should in any way divulge this semester’s class schedule or else that person would become the public enemy. They couldn’t make Teacher Gu sacrifice himself and his good looks every time to help them, right?

Tong Yan finished eating her longan fruit and then climbed down the bunk bed ladder to discover that Shen Yao had seated herself back in front of the computer.

The subject headings for every post on the entire screen were flashing with the words, “Law Faculty.”

“Risking My Life to Leak Law Faculty’s Timetable,” “Discuss the Abrupt Rise of the Law Faculty and its Journey to its Current Celebrity Period.” “Open Letter to the Leaders of Our School re: Waste of Educational Resources in Law Faculty,” “May I Ask Which One of You has Friends in the Law Faculty?”……

Shen Yao clicked the mouse and opened up a post with the subject line, “Strongly Against Teacher/Student Romances. Bring Back Our Pure, Clean Campus!’

“Wasn’t it, last year at the Faculty of Architecture’s graduation ceremony, there was a teacher-student couple that got married on that day? How come no one’s ever mentioned them? God’s finally blessed us for once, and we’ve suddenly stepped on everyone else’s toes.”

Tong Yan could not be bothered to pay attention to her, and alone, she left and went outside to attend her elective course. Because it was Friday and many people had selected their courses to avoid falling on this day of the week so that they could return home, there were not many students on the university campus. She walked along the pathway and was right in the middle of letting her mind go blank and feeling utterly fatigued, when someone unexpectedly called her name.

In that moment when she turned around, she was taken aback.

Facing the sunlight, she looked over to see Gu Pingsheng, who was extremely popular in the school by now, poking his head out from a Range Rover.

Because he was framed by a background of sunlight, she could not see his expression clearly and could only sense that his eyes were on her. For reasons unknown, she remembered that night when he had sat quietly on the ground outside of the emergency room. The occasional nurse walking by had not dared

to look at him.

Tong Yan walked up beside the vehicle, making an effort to slow her speech. “Teacher Gu, why are you here today?”

Gu Pingsheng watched her amusedly. “You don’t need to speak so slowly. It makes me feel like I’m watching a movie played in slow motion. Where are you going?”

His voice had much texture to it, but unfortunately, he could not hear himself speak.

The tone in which he spoke was like a very close friend and not like a teacher.

Smiling rather awkwardly, Tong Yan answered, “The library.”

She had thought she was just exchanging small talk with him and did not expect that she would end up sitting in Gu Pingsheng’s vehicle. He had said he would drive her there, but in reality, it was merely a three to four minute car ride. Still, she could not refrain from sneaking glances at him a couple of times. To be truthful, from the time they had met each other again, she had not dared look directly at him.

When it was time to get off the vehicle, he also stepped out. In this place where there was always a relatively large number of people coming and going, Tong Yan was still rather nervous about walking together with him. However, it would be inappropriate for her to say anything, and so, she could only cautiously probe, “Teacher, you’re here to borrow books, too?”

He locked his vehicle before turning to her and asking in return, “You don’t know about today’s special lecture?”

Tong Yan searched hard through her memory and seemed to remember that a certain well-known figure in international trade laws had been invited to the school. It seemed her class prefect had mentioned it to them on Wednesday. Now, she glanced over Gu Pingsheng’s appearance — a black suit and tie, a calm expression in his eyes, a smile that seemed imperturbable. Besides his small action of hooking his keys around his finger, he did indeed look much more stern and authoritarian than normal…

“Don’t tell me you’re the speaker?” She blurted out the question.

“It’s my friend,” he answered with a slight chuckle. “I’m here to check over the lecture hall. Have you eaten yet?”

“No.”

“It’s past six o’clock now.” He contemplated briefly and then suggested, “The lecture begins at seven. Time is a little tight. I’ll go buy some sandwiches and drinks and we’ll…” He took a glance at the lake called “Remembrance of Roots[4]”, which was in front of the library. “Let’s eat beside the lake.”

She had actually never intended on attending this lecture.

Unconsciously, her eyes flitted away. “I really want to go but I have a computers class this evening…”

“Would you be able to look at me when you speak?”

Her cheeks grew hot and immediately, she turned back to meet his gaze.

Smiling slightly, he explained, “I didn’t get a clear look at what you said just now.”

With his gaze on her, she did not dare say any of the fibs she had had prepared and could only reply, “I was saying, I need to go to the fifth floor to borrow some books. You might need to wait for me for a little bit.”

Because of Gu Pingsheng’s warmness and enthusiasm, she had no choice but to attend this unforeseen lecture.

Sitting down by the lake, the two of them hastily ate their dinner. As she took the first bite out of her sandwich, she glanced over at Gu Pingsheng, who was browsing through some papers. At the same time, he started putting away his materials and turned to look at her.

Tong Yan immediately adjusted her facial expression, and with a sincere and respectful look in her eyes, she waited for her teacher’s instructings.

“Your mother is well? How is her health?” He unwrapped his sandwich and took a bite.

“Very well.” She thought for a moment and then asked him a similar question.

“Your mother…”

“She passed away.”

She offered her apology. After she had finished her entire sandwich and was starting to take sips of her coffee, she finally asked the question that had been on her mind. “Teacher Gu, I remember you used to be a doctor.” And moreover, a cardiac surgeon at the Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

When she said this, two girls walked by in front of them, casting curious and envious glances.

Tong Yan was slightly embarrassed. Earlier, when Gu Pingsheng had made the suggestion, she had wanted to say that Remembrance of Roots Lake was known in the school to be “a lake for dates,” especially on nights like this one, where a gentle breeze was blowing. Every bench was occupied by snuggling couples…… She had already deliberately placed the books she had just borrowed between the two of them, but Gu Pingsheng was just too striking. All those stares of jealousy and envy were impossible to avoid, even if she tried.

“Technically, I couldn’t be considered a doctor. Back then, I was just doing an internship at the hospital my mother worked at,” he told her. “Later, because I could not hear, I could not work at an operating table anymore and so I switched to study law.”

“You were able to get your PhD so quickly?”

“I took my undergraduate studies in the U.S. Both law school and medical school require that you have an undergraduate degree before you are eligible to apply.” He smiled, ate the last bite of his sandwich, and then pulled out a package of moist towelettes, holding it up first to her. “At the time, I had completed two years of medical school and had not graduated yet when a mishap occurred. One of my [female, elder] cousins introduced me directly to her advising professor, and so I went to the U.K. to study law. So in fact, I actually did not waste too much time.”

She understood now. Pulling out a towelette from the package, she asked, “But, why did you come back to China? Wouldn’t it be good to stay at the college you graduated from?”

Gu Pingsheng also yanked out a towelette, and after wiping down his hands, he picked up his paper cup and took a drink of his coffee. “After I graduated last year, I came back to China for vacation, and one time during a dinner, I met the dean of your Law Faculty. He invited me to teach for one semester as a trial. I have a friend here in this university, and she also convinced me to come here. And so, I decided to give it a try to see if I could be a teacher.” He thought for a moment, then added, “I only signed on for one semester.”

“Just one semester?”

He nodded. “I may not even get used to being called ‘Teacher’ before I’ve left.”

Tong Yan gave an “oh” in response and then turned her head away, continuing to sip at the coffee inside the paper cup. She had never before had to casually converse under someone’s constant gaze, and even when they stepped into the library building together, she still was not yet accustomed to it.

Generally, guest lectures were not scheduled on Fridays because most students would have gone home and attendance would be poor.

However, when Tong Yan stepped into the large lecture hall, she gaped in astonishment. This lecture hall that seated five hundred was packed, with not a single empty seat, and even the aisles were filled with standing people… She reckoned, aside from the presentations held for fourth year students to aid them in finding jobs, this had never before been seen.

Luckily, Shen Yao had saved a seat for her ahead of time.

The entire evening, Gu Pingsheng took on the role of facilitator for the lecture.

This American friend also had celebrity status and he spoke fluent Chinese. He was lecturing away on trade laws when he veered off to talk about how, when he was in the Middle East, he had passed through gunfire and even personally rescued a girl. As they listened to his descriptions, the entire hall of people would again and again let out anxious cries. Occasionally, Gu Pingsheng would throw in a couple of sentences, and though his words were few, his comments were even more vivid and exciting than if he had personally experienced all this.

Later, when the banter between the two of them became too animated, the

American started to tell amusing personal stories of Gu Pingsheng. “Back in King’s, your Teacher Gu was definitely a “pretty lady’s bane[5].’”

The large, five hundred-person lecture hall instantly grew quiet… This American did not simply have “good Chinese,” he had mastered it to the point of perfection.

Gu Pingsheng shook his head and did not speak, merely smiling. When his American friend wanted to say more, though, he finally switched his microphone to his other hand and interrupted duly, “It is now time for questions, so do the students have any questions?”

A single sentence successfully caused the hall to liven up again.

Beside them, a Korean exchange student did not understand the meaning behind “pretty lady’s bane” but was truly curious. “The thing that American guy just said, what does it mean?”

Grinning, Shen Yao explained, “Beauty that causes ‘the moon to hide, the flowers to hang in shame, the fish to sink, and the wild geese to alight.[6]’ You understand that?”

The Korean student prided himself on having passed the Chinese language assessment examination and replied very seriously, “It means a woman so beautiful that she causes the fish and the wild geese to become so dazed that they forget how to swim and fly.”

Hearing this, Tong Yan wanted to giggle. The meaning was correct, but why did it sound so weird?

“That definition is about right. What that person is saying is, Teacher Gu is so gorgeous that even the pretty ladies are put to such shame they want to die.”

Not surprisingly, that night on the school’s BBS, the string of post headings that were lined up and down the screen had all become “Pretty Lady’s Bane.”

[1] 复旦. Fudan University is located in Shanghai (which is also the location of Tong Yan’s university) and is a highly prestigious institution.

[2] 超女 “chao nv.” Short for 超级女声, which has the English title “Super

Girl.” It was a television series that aired between 2004-2006 in the form of a female singing contest and was very popular during its airing.

[3] 鹊巢鸠占 “que chao jiu zhan.” An idiom that literally translates as “the magpies’ nest has been invaded by turtledoves” and is used to describe a situation where one’s territory has been usurped by someone else.

[4] 思源 “si yuan.” Literally, “remember the origin/source.” There is an idiom 饮水思源 that means, “when drinking water, remember the source from which it comes,” which is an analogy to remind people not to forget their roots.

[5] 美人煞 “mei ren sha.” 美人 “mei ren” means “beautiful woman/maiden” while 煞 “sha” means “an evil, deadly demon or spirit.” So, it means a very “beautiful” person whose beauty is so deadly he could either steal all the ladies’ hearts or put them to shame for not being as “beautiful” as him. I’ll translate this title of Gu Pingsheng as “Pretty Lady’s Bane” (as opposed to something like “Beautiful Woman’s Bane”) to keep with the joking tone.

[6] 闭月羞花，沉鱼落雁 “bi yue xiu hua, chen yu luo yan.” A saying referring to the “Four Great Beauties” of ancient China. Diao Chan was said to have been so beautiful even the moon would hide shyly when compared to her. Consort Yang (Yang Guifei) of the Tang dynasty was said to have shamed even flowers with her beauty. It was said that fish that saw Xi Shi’s lovely reflection in the water were so beguiled they forgot to swim and sank down in the water. And one day, as Wang Zhaojun played a tune, her music captivated the wild geese and when they saw her beauty, they forgot to continue flying and dropped to the ground.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

1 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 1.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 1.2

October 28, 2015 by hoju 37 Comments



If any of you are following along with the Chinese text, I'm going by the published novel, which surprisingly, has shown some noticeable differences from the online version. They're not drastic and don't affect plot or any of the scenes, but for example, more than once, entire sentences have been removed or added in the hardcopy.

Did I ever tell you guys I have a very serious weakness for c-novel doctors? Even ones that have switched over to law. <3

Chapter 1.2 – The Pretty Lady's Bane in Our Faculty (2)

Every Sunday, Tong Yan would go to work at her part-time job in a French sporting goods store.

This particular company actually had four or five different stores within Shanghai. In the beginning, when she first went for her interview, she had favoured this particular company simply because of its branch store that was near the university. However, she had not expected that shortly after she started her job, she would be internally transferred to another branch store that was

much further away. When she had received the call informing her of this, she had hesitated for three seconds and then still chose to accept the transfer.

As a result, every Sunday at five o'clock in the morning, she needed to force herself to crawl out of bed and travel by bus for two hours before she reached the store. The only benefit of this was that this particular store was near the Hongqiao area[1] and 90% of its customers were foreigners, so it was a nice opportunity to practice her spoken English while being a sales assistant at the same time. Except, the store's recent shipment of athletic pants had completely shattered that lovely dream.

These last several weeks, she had been sent directly into the storeroom where, like a machine, she would clip the pants onto the hangers. The biggest problem was, the metal clips were very stiff and the waist of the pants had to be pulled taut before they could be clipped. When she finished all of the more than five hundred pairs of pants, her fingers were swollen.

By the time the manager had completed inspecting her work, it was already past one o'clock in the afternoon.

She was starving, and her stomach rumbled as she walked out of the storeroom and ran with hands raised to the checkout counter. "Miao Miao, I'm going crazy. See how ridiculously swollen my fingers are?"

"Such a tragedy." Miao Miao shook her head. "It's a work-related injury, ah."

She growled in complaint, "Yeah! The first three fingers of both my hands have no feeling. Am I going to have to eat my lunch using my ring finger and pinky to hold my chopsticks?"

Miao Miao was about to banter a couple more sentences with her when she suddenly switched to put on a professional expression, shifted her eyes away, and addressed someone behind Tong Yan. "Sir, this checkout counter is closed already."

"That's alright," a voice answered from behind.

Teacher Gu? Tong Yan turned around in surprise. Gu Pingsheng was looking directly at her.

Could there be more of a coincidence?

Seeing the American professor beside Gu Pingsheng and that shopping cart that was crammed full of goods, she instantly understood. These two people were likely planning on driving themselves around on a self-guided tour. The cart was packed with things like tents and fishing rods…

“Your friends?” Miao Miao observed the two of them as he stared at her and she stared at him and quickly said, “Here, come here to pay. I’ll give you the 11% employee discount.”

After saying this, she immediately pulled the “closed” sign off her till and very keenly helped Gu Pingsheng pay for their items.

Seeing that she was standing off to the side with nothing to do, Tong Yan stepped in and helped her bag each of the items. This was work that she was accustomed to doing since early on, so very quickly, four large bags were filled. However, as she picked up the bags, she hesitated.

So heavy. Who should she hand them to? Forget it. Of course, she should take care of her own teacher. Without batting an eye, she handed the two lighter bags to Gu Pingsheng and gave the other two to the American professor. In any case, no one could tell the difference from just the size of the bags alone.

She had not expected that right when she handed the bags over, Miao Miao would grinningly whisper in her ear, “I’m going to have lunch now. You, have a nice lunch with your hot guy. I’m guessing you won’t even get to use your ring and pinky fingers. Just kind of take a couple of bites for show. When you’re all warm and fed, you tend to start thinking raunchy thoughts.”

A gasp of “ah” escaped from Tong Yan, and then before she could grab her back, that lass had already scurried away.

“Let’s have lunch together?” Gu Pingsheng spoke up at just the right moment.

Hence, Tong Yan somehow ended up eating lunch together with two university teachers.

Fortunately, she was eating curry rice, so she could use a spoon, which was easy to handle.

After the three of them had finished ordering their meals, Gu Pinsheng suddenly said to her, “Let me look at your fingers.”

Tong Yan paused in surprise. How was he going to look at them? She stretched her fingers straight upright in front of him. While she was still waiting nervously, he had already gently taken her fingers in his hand and pulled them closer to him. Tong Yan started in shock. It was rather inappropriate for Teacher Gu to hold a girl’s hand like this out in the open, right?

As he examined her fingers, the American professor put on a show of seriousness, glancing over at them and then bumping Gu Pingsheng on the arm. When Gu Pingsheng tilted his head to look at him, he grinned, “Hey TK, seeing that look in your eyes reminds me of when you were studying medicine.”

There was a seldom seen moment where Gu Pingsheng was taken aback before he smiled and let go of her hand. “Indeed, guilty again of acting out of occupational habit.”

Oh right, he used to be a doctor. To doctors, there were absolutely no taboos between men and women.

Secretly relieved, she pulled back her hand, took her straw between her fingers, and started sucking madly at her smoothie.

Those hands just a moment ago had radiated warmth, not the icy-coldness of many years ago. They were well-proportioned, slender, and completely without any flaws.

Seriously, like the hands of one of those idealized surgeons in American television dramas…

“Will you be continuing to work like that this afternoon?” he asked her before motioning to a server. “May I trouble you to bring me some larger chunks of ice?”

Tong Yan waited until he had turned back to face them and she was certain that he could see the motions of her lips before answering, “No, not this afternoon. This afternoon, I just need to work as a sales assistant, that’s it.”

“Why don’t you switch to work somewhere else?” He thought for a moment. “For example, tutoring?”

Tong Yan smiled, “I’m a student in the liberal arts stream. In general, it’s the science or engineering students who can find the tutoring jobs. Middle school and high school students usually hire people to teach math, physics, and chem. Very few ask for tutors in language arts.”

“Even if you don’t do tutoring, there are lots of other jobs.”

She smiled again, “Yes, but I actually want to work in something that doesn’t just involve sitting down, writing and drawing. I’m letting myself toil and sweat and experience personally how earning money isn’t easy.”

The American professor grinned at this. “That’s very understandable and normal. I used to also frequently work as a cashier or something. University students usually just sit in a classroom, and if your job is like that, too, it’d be no fun at all.”

She quickly nodded in agreement. “That girl who was here earlier graduated from a technical college and has worked for many years now. My very first day here, I was writing out a receipt for a customer, and I actually realized that I didn’t even know how to write out the numbers one, two, and three in banker’s anti-fraud characters[2]. It’s really simple for me to type out characters on my computer, but when it really came time to write them out with a pen, I discovered I was like an illiterate.”

Soon, the server had brought over a bucket of ice. Gu Pingsheng pulled out his package of moist towelettes, took one, and wrapped an appropriately shaped ice chunk in it before handing it to her. “Hold this in your hands. It should be a little better by the afternoon.”

She took it from him and clutched it in her hands, feeling slightly embarrassed. She was not that weak and fragile, you know.

In the afternoon, when she was back at work, Miao Miao’s eyes were like those of a wolf. “When the manager came back just now, she secretly told me that a man was holding your hand. Let’s not even talk about how romantic it is. I specifically asked whether it was the Chinese guy or the American. Good thing, good thing, it turned out to be that Chinese guy whose looks are enough to make people envious. Ha ha ha ha! Hurry now. Tell me the secrets behind successful

seduction.”

Tong Yan’s head was “covered with black lines[3].“ [speechless] “He’s my university teacher.”

Miao Miao was stunned. “A teacher and student romance? That’s wicked amazing!”

“He was just checking to see how my fingers were.” Tong Yan raised her hand and waved it right in front of Miao Miao’s eyes. “Did you forget about my work-related injury?”

Miao Miao continued with her surprised look. “Tong Yan, I remember you’re studying law, right? So your teacher should also teach law, right? At the very least, he should definitely have nothing to do with medicine.”

“He used to be a doctor and then later switched to teach law.”

“No wonder he’s a teacher at a prestigious school. So talented! So wickedly amazing!”

Tong Yan was simply speechless and decided to give up on trying to explain. She went over to greet a foreign couple and started her light and easy work as a sales assistant.

Due to all the physical labour of Sunday, on Monday, she successfully managed to sleep almost right up until the start of class and was dragged out of bed by Shen Yao. “Hurry and get up. Today is International Commercial Arbitration. There’s going to be a quiz.”

Her head still foggy, she opened her eyes and stared, unmoving, at that face in front of her for a long while before she suddenly sat straight up. “A quiz?!”

And it was in International Commercial Arbitration… Why was it Gu Pingsheng again?

She gnawed on the end of her pen and stared at those numerous and dense squiggles of English words in front of her. Normally, the thing that vexed her most was English comprehension problems. This time, just great, she not only had to read and comprehend, she had to thoroughly understand all of those

complicated law cases as well. Most importantly, she also had to analyze them… and write out her analysis in English.

This wasn't just a simple CET-4 or 6[4] English composition.

She cast a quick glance over at the quiz paper of the class prefect, who was sitting beside her. More dense squiggles of English words in handwriting that looked easy and confident. Basically, aside from "is," "are," and "here"… she did not understand any of it.

"Tong Wuji." Shen Yao's head was lowered as she called her name.

Her name was Tong Yan, like the idiom, "tong yan wu ji." ["Children's words are spoken without reservations or filters."] Her nickname: Tong Wuji.[5]

Shen Yao had not spoken quietly, obviously taking advantage of Gu Pingsheng's deafness.

From an unknown corner, a few chuckles could be heard followed almost immediately by more chuckles and quiet sounds of conversing coming from the front of the room. Without exception, everyone was staring down at his or her own quiz paper but murmuring with one another to compare answers.

Tong Yan stole a guilty look at the man sitting beside the classroom door and ignored Shen Yao.

Shen Yao continued to call her name from behind her, changing her voice in all sorts of weird and wacky ways until, at last, she shouted loudly, "Tong Yan!" Shocked, Tong Yan dropped her pen and once again glanced guiltily at Gu Pingsheng.

A gaze passed over everyone in the room and quickly caught hers. Tong Yan hurriedly lowered her head and fixed her eyes hatefully on her quiz paper. "What?"

Shen Yao's tone was especially fawning. "Tong Wuji, let me see your paper…"

"…… I haven't written anything either."

"Tong Yan." A voice suddenly echoed out, rather cold, like a deep pool of water.

In a state where she wanted to cry but was unable to, Tong Yan rose quietly to her feet and looked directly at Gu Pingsheng. “Teacher Gu.”

He gazed wordlessly at her for a brief moment, then walked over, picked up her quiz paper that she had only written a couple of sentences on, and looked again at her. “Don’t know the answers?”

“…… I don’t.” If she were to fib even now in this moment, then she would be digging her own grave.

Outside the windows, the cicadas were chirping incessantly, and the ceiling fan above her head was happily spinning away.

But inside the classroom, it was extremely quiet. Great Beauty Gu’s demonstration of authority was quite scary.

After a long moment of silence, Gu Pingsheng finally gave a long sigh. “It’s the first in-class quiz, and all of you may not yet be used to using English to do the case studies. How about this? Tong Yan, you answer one question from me. If you answer correctly, today, you will all be allowed to bring your quizzes back with you to do and your marks will still count like normal towards your overall grade.”

The class broke out in an excited uproar, and everybody immediately turned and fixed their eyes on Tong Yan, the intensity of their gazes stronger than even the blazing sun. Only Tong Yan’s face grew even paler.

“What is the general concept behind ‘international commercial arbitration laws’?” Gu Pingsheng asked her smilingly.

General concept?

“Holy cr*p!” Someone from a corner murmured, “Tong Wuji, if you can’t even answer that, expel yourself at once from our class.”

“Tong Yan, for our overall grade, yah!”

“Pretty Lady’s Bane is deliberately letting us off the hook, hey, Yan Yan.”

Tong Yan wished she could cry. If you’ve got the breath to say all that stuff… why don’t you just hurry up and tell me the answer?

“All of you, raise your heads and look at me,” Gu Pingsheng instructed with a chuckle.

Once his voice rang out, every person instantly shut his or her mouth. Obediently, they lifted their heads to gaze at Great Beauty Gu.

“Are you done thinking over your answer?” he asked.

Torn with agony, Tong Yan steeled herself and forced herself to bravely look at Gu Pingsheng. “ ‘International Commercial Arbitration Law’… is… laws that are… international… and commercial… and about arbitration.”

The members of the class collectively felt tears springing into their eyes. Sure enough, spoken true to her name — like children’s words, completely without filters. Not even the slightest bit of technique or skill in them.

[1] 虹桥 “hong qiao.” The Hongqiao area in Shanghai is one of the primary expatriate areas of the city with its location near the Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, presence of international schools and more Western style houses with yards.

[2] 大写”da xie.” There are actually two sets of ways to write out numerals in Chinese. The first is the standard way, which is what is used in everyday writing. The second is what is called “da xie”, which literally means “big writing” and is called in English, “banker’s numerals” or “banker’s anti-fraud numerals.” The latter was created to prevent forgery through alteration, since the standard characters are very simple and few in strokes.

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Standard	零 or 〇	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十
Banker’s	零	壹	贰	叁	肆	伍	陆	柒	捌	玖	拾

[3] Slang. Often in cartoons, emoticons, etc, little lines are drawn over the head of the character to represent cold sweat that broke out from hearing or seeing something that caused awkward embarrassment or a complete loss over what to say or do in response. Therefore, “black lines over sb’s head” has become a colloquial way to describe that feeling. In the absence of emoticons, sometimes you can see this represented by -_-|||

[4] 四级 literally means “fourth level” and refers to CET-4. 六级 literally menas “sixth level” and refers to CET-6. These stand for “College English Test” Band 4 and Band 6, respectively. The CET are nationwide English proficiency tests for non-English major college/university students in China. The CET-4 is a criterion of most universities in obtaining an undergraduate degree. The CET-6 is a similar test but at a higher level and is not mandatory for all degrees, although more and more, Chinese employers are looking for CET-6 certificates.

[5] 童言无忌 “tong yan wu ji.” This is a well-known Chinese idiom that means children speak what they wish to, innocently and without filters, and hence, there is no need to take offense. However, that also means they speak what is truth to them. The characters of Tong Yan’s name, 童言, are the first two characters of the idiom and mean “children’s words.” As a result, Tong Yan is also jokingly given the nickname 童无忌 Tong Wuji, which pairs her surname with the idiom’s last two characters 无忌 “wu ji”, which mean “without reservations.” Sometimes, Tong Yan is called by this entire idiom, too.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

2 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 1.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 1.3

October 31, 2015 by hoju 37 Comments



A little glimpse into that fateful day many years ago.

Chapter 1.3 – The Pretty Lady's Bane in Our Faculty (3)

Everybody was laughing. Gu Pingsheng, though, was not and simply calmly repeated her words. "Laws that are international, commercial, and about arbitration?" In that moment of such solemnity, Tong Yan was somewhat unable to make herself speak.

The person behind her raised a hand and lifted her head, asking, "Teacher, may I answer for her?" Shen Yao's conscience, at last, was feeling remorseful, and she decided to turn herself in.

Gu Pingsheng's lips were pressed together and turned up at the corner, but it was uncertain whether he was contemplating or smiling. In the end, he shook his head. "No, it's not necessary."

He walked back to the podium, opened the textbook, and began his lecture as if nothing had happened. However, when the bell rang signaling the end of class, he closed his book and stated, "Tong Yan, this afternoon, head over to

Administration and come to my office."

She was done for.

The instant Gu Pingsheng left the classroom with books in hand, all eyes turned toward Tong Yan, and the expression in every one of them said only a single thing: You're done for.

"It's okay." Shen Yao patted her on the shoulder. "Pretty Lady's Bane is specifically a bane to pretty ladies, so that just goes to show that your looks are very fine."

Tong Yan ground her teeth together, wishing she could eat her alive.

The end result was, that afternoon when she arrived at the Law Building, every administrative teacher would grin at her and ask, "International Commercial Arbitration, huh? You know now what the consequences are for not studying?"

And all the teaching professors would tell her in a grave and meaningful tone, "Tong Yan, you seem quite smart. Why is it your grades always are not high, but not low either? If you try just a little harder, you'd be able to get one of the slots to be an exchange student."

Tong Yan either smiled or provided a respectful response. Only after she had stepped into his office did she finally realize that he wanted to see her not just for that stupid International Commercial Arbitration class but for another reason as well.

He had said before that he "had a friend" in this particular school, but she had not expected that it would be Zhao Yin, one of the female teachers in the Faculty of Science. This teacher was also the Goddess of Nightmares in her first and second years of university. As a pure liberal arts stream student who had not taken physics since her second year of high school but was required to take university level physics after entering post-secondary, what sort of fate did this mean for her?

The fate of having to retake physics over and over again.

"TK, I'm going now." Teacher Zhao, whose voice was smooth and tactful,

smiled at Tong Yan. “Tong Yan, I had a look at your schedule just now. You didn’t register for physics this semester. You’re planning on taking it again next semester instead?”

In fact, this teacher was actually quite good, but Tong Yan just truly could not understand the things she lectured about.

With a very polite smile, Tong Yan answered, “I want to read up and study myself first during this semester. Next semester, I’ll throw myself into the battle again.”

Teacher Zhao did not say any more and left.

This was her first time in Gu Pingsheng’s office. She was uncertain whether it was his personal preference or whether it was a particular fondness of one of the administrative teachers but the décor of the entire office tended towards the colour white. Even the fabric sofa was a milky white colour. Only a lush corn plant in a large plant pot gave off a green luster under the sunlight.



Corn plant
(image credit)

His first words to her were, “You took physics four times?”

In that instant, Tong Yan felt as if she had walked into the wrong place. She seemed to have come here about International Commercial Arbitration, not university physics, right?

She decided not to answer this question. But she needed a very compelling conversation shifter…

“You guys… aren’t boyfriend-girlfriend, are you?” To decide his work location based on a friend’s wishes meant that they certainly could not have just an

ordinary relationship.

Gu Pingsheng was taken aback but then immediately chuckled.

In the end, he also did not answer this question and actually took advantage of her guilty mindset over asking it to dig up the reason why she had failed physics four times. Her summarization was very simple: “Talent is something that cannot be forced. Teacher Gu, since my first year in high school, I’ve known that I’m no good in physics.”

Gu Pingsheng took a drink of water. “Do you need me to give you some extra help sessions?”

Tong Yan’s heart gave a little skip but she did not reply. Instead, she sat down on the sofa and after some time, looked right at him and said, “Teacher Gu, can you just treat it like we never knew each other in the past?”

“Why?”

“I’m really doing quite well right now, but with all the extra care you’re showing me, it actually gives me the feeling like things in my life aren’t really all that good.” These words should actually have been said with her head lowered, but with him, she had no choice but to meet his gaze directly and take in every expression he showed. “Really, you can go over to the school’s cafeteria and take a walk around. You might run into a student or two who doesn’t have enough money for food and are waiting to eat other people’s leftovers… Those are the people who really need help. I just belong to the middle of the pack, and I don’t need to worry about whether I have food to eat or anything to drink…”

“Tong Yan,” Gu Pingsheng cut her off. “That year, in the hospital… I’m sorry. That was the only time I ever hit anyone.”

Why did he suddenly bring up such a serious topic? What Tong Yan had been trying to express was, my life right now is calm and uneventful, and you don’t need to look after me so much.

“It actually didn’t hurt at all when you hit me. It was just a little embarrassing.”

She was unable to forget that day.

There had been particularly few people outside of the ICU, and the lighting had been starkly white and cold.

The schoolbag she had worn was very heavy, and inside were many, many papers and books. The math problem her teacher had written on the blackboard earlier on was still racing through her mind. She could only see several people surrounding a middle-aged man as well as an extremely young man sitting on the floor, his back leaning against the snow-white wall, his one arm draped across his knees, and his hand holding a thin sheet of white paper.

The middle-aged man walked over to her and asked, “You must be Yan Yan?”

Although his voice had been intentionally made to sound warm and kind, a long-engrained habit of carrying a lofty and superior manner caused him to appear shrouded in a layer of coldness and detachment. Who she was was not of importance; what was important was that she was the only person, her mother’s only kin, who could sign to authorize her mother’s surgery. The surgery fee was not of importance; what was important was that written signature.

She really could not remember what she had been feeling at the time. But, she had refused to sign.

Even when the doctor had inquired whether she wanted to look in on or visit her mother, she had simply replied that she needed to go back to attend class.

The only things she could clearly recall were the strange looks in the eyes of the doctors and nurses. And then, someone had yanked up her hand and forced her to sign her name. It was someone who had nothing to do with the entire situation — Gu Pingsheng.

While she was struggling, she had bit down on his hand, so hard that even her teeth had ached, but still he would not let go.

In the end, he had slapped her across her cheek. It was very loud. The sound had echoed through the entire corridor. “In this world, you have the right to choose anything. The one exception is your parents. You cannot choose them and you cannot give them up.”

At the time, she had sobbed wretchedly. Now, as she looked back upon it, it had not hurt whatsoever.

Perhaps it had been his words that had caused her to completely breakdown. In this world, you could choose anything except your parents. Yes, she had no choice at all. Only afterwards, when many doctors came over and pulled him back, telling him, “Your mother has gone into cardiac arrest,” did he suddenly freeze and let go of her…

She remembered his name badge pinned on his chest: “Department of Cardiac Surgery. Gu Pingsheng.” She hazily recalled the memory.



“In this world, you have the right to choose anything… The one exception is your parents… And you cannot give them up.”

“Tong Yan?”

She pulled back her thoughts and raised her head to look at him. Such clear, distinct facial features. He had not changed at all.

She felt that if they continued along with this conversation, she would have no hopes of being able to properly take his class this semester. As a result, she hurriedly fell silent and thought of an excuse that would allow her to depart from his office.

However, as she was leaving, she still felt that the class had crossed the line today and, turning back around, she looked at him and said, “Our class is just normally used to joking around. They really did not mean any harm.” And weren’t deliberately picking on your handicap.

Gu Pingsheng picked up a glass, took a drink of water, and smiled, “I know.”

When she returned to the dormitory, the three girls inside were holding a bowl of melon seeds and munching on them while watching television dramas. Seeing that Tong Yan had come back, Wang Xiaoru immediately grinned and asked, “What’d Teacher Gu do to you?”

Tong Yan grabbed a handful of melon seeds. “He didn’t do anything to me.”

“Look at you all meek and submissive.” Shen Yao laughed, “We were just saying when we were having lunch earlier, how come your name seems to roll off Great Beauty Gu’s lips so easily? It’s always, ‘Tong Yan, Tong Yan.’ Don’t tell me the two of you have ‘taken a narrow, winding path and found your own little secluded haven[1],’ eh?”

Tong Yan flicked a glance over at her, then continued eating her melon seeds in silence. In reality, she understood that those memories of her past that she had never wanted to think back upon would certainly be pulled back up by Gu Pingsheng. Even if he never mentioned them, she would still eventually think about them herself.

She cracked open and ate her tenth melon seed before finally heaving a sigh. “We’ve had two weeks of classes already. Who can tell me how many weeks left until we’re off on winter break?”

“Nineteen weeks of classes in total, seventeen weeks left.” Shen Yao looked at her gleefully. “Are you trying to figure out how long you have left until you have to go back and re-take physics?”

Seventeen weeks. Another one hundred and nineteen days.

From that point on, she immediately gave International Commercial

Arbitration first and foremost priority out of all her courses, and all three successive in-class quizzes that followed were passed without any difficulty. Each time, she would arrive very early to class and sit at the very back of the room. Once the bell rang, signaling the end of class, she would dash straight out. Such a perfect plan. She wished she could set a countdown clock like she did for her National College Entrance Exams[2] years earlier.

Today, after class was over, she went into the restroom beside their classroom and washed her face. September weather in Shanghai always arrived so fiercely and unforgivingly. In the time span of just a single class, her entire body had become covered in sweat.

With a tissue, she haphazardly wiped off her face, and as she stepped out, she saw Shen Yao and several others standing by the door with wide grins. The moment they saw her, they grew mirthful. “Tong Yan Wuji, this guy’s looking for you. Do you know him?”

In front of all the girls stood a spectacle-wearing male student, whose build was neither tall nor short and whose appearance was neither attractive nor ugly.

Tong Yan caught the look of “there’s a love affair going on here” on their faces and immediately understood. “This is the class rep from my drawing and sketching class.” She walked over toward him. “What’s up? You’re looking for me for something?”

If her memory served her correctly, this person was from the Faculty of Science, the place where the ratio of males to females was severely imbalanced, and everyday, it was either formulas or else laboratory experiments. She reckoned he had probably never before been surrounded and stared at by several girls, and he stood there in embarrassment for quite some time before finally saying, “Last week, there was an assignment that needed to be handed in. You were the only one who didn’t go to class. I’m here… to collect your assignment.”

Ah, totally forgot. What did it mean by “caring for one thing but losing another[3]”? This, here, was it. She had only concerned herself with International Commercial Arbitration and had forgotten about the sketching assignment from her elective course.

Tong Yan smiled awkwardly, “I forgot to draw it. How about I bring it over to you tonight? Your name is…?” So sad. She didn’t even know what the name of this class representative was.

The male student felt even more awkward than her. “Shen Heng. You don’t need to bring it to my dorm. How about this? At eight o’clock tonight, I’ll be by the Upper Building, you know, right by Remembrance of Roots Lake.” Shen Heng hesitated but finally decided on a more noticeable and obvious location. “Forget it. Let’s just wait beneath the flag. See you there!”

Tong Yan was dumbfounded, but before she had even agreed, the boy had promptly left. She was not fast enough to call him back, and she did not even have his mobile phone number… Was she really going to have to go to the front of the school, at the most conspicuous landmark beneath that slowly fluttering red flag, to hand in an assignment?

Delighting in her misfortune, Shen Yao patted her on the shoulder. “I’ll say, Big Brother Wuji[4] attracted all the beautiful female celebrity figures of his era. How come you only manage to attract such rotten suitors? This one’s just absolutely one of a kind. He doesn’t take the initiative and volunteer to pick you up from your dorm and instead arranges to meet you beneath the flag? And, what kind of dumb excuse is that? Nowadays, do such dedicated class reps even exist anymore? Such a ridiculously rotten suitor.”

With Shen Yao putting it that way, Tong Yan could not even laugh. However, the assignment needed to be handed in. This was her grade for half the semester.

In the end, the other three girls in her dormitory were the ones who were exceptionally excited and insisted on hiding out around the area to watch in secret how she handed in her sketching assignment by the oh-so-great and amazing Remembrance of Roots Lake.

Unable to stop them, she could only steel herself and stand on the pavement of the tree-lined walkway beside the lake, watching the area beneath the flagpole from afar and waiting for that Shen Heng to arrive before she walked over there.

Her head was down and she was studying the wildly luxuriant growth of weeds in the flowerbeds when she saw two pairs of feet passing by in front of her. Judging from the shoes, it was a man and a woman, but why had they suddenly stopped here? Come on, this wasn't a good place for whispering a little private exchange, right? Oh please, don't kiss. Can't you see there's a live and kicking person right here?…

While her thoughts were still jumbled and everywhere, the pair of high heeled feet had stepped closer to her. "Tong Yan?"

This was a voice she had listened to for four semesters. It was the Goddess of Nightmares. As she lifted her head, the eyes of the other three girls by the lake widened in shock.

Two steps behind the Goddess of Nightmares stood Gu Pingsheng — that Gu Pingsheng who supposedly did not live or ever stay on the school campus and every week only came to teach three classes.

The pale amber light of the streetlamp shone upon him, highlighting and defining each feature of his face. His eyes were such a rich deep black… Pretty Lady's Bane, indeed. His deadliness managed to take down even the Goddess of Nightmares.

"How is your studying for physics going?" Zhao Yin asked out of occupational habit.

"I've got the basics now…" she answered, completely fibbing.

The instant physics was mentioned, Zhao Yin's smile immediately became warmer and softer, and she started to explain in a gentle tone why Tong Yan had failed last semester. She was not certain the reason, but Tong Yan felt extremely uncomfortable listening to her.

Right as she was about to find an excuse to slip away from there, Gu Pingsheng had already walked up to her. "Sketching?" Sketch paper was truly quite easy to recognize.

When Tong Yan nodded, Gu Pingsheng smiled and lowered his head to gaze at her. "Let me see."

Tong Yan handed it over to him. It was just a very simple still life sketch.

He untied the string, unfurled the entire sketch, and glanced it over. “It seems like there’s some issues with the perspective. Do you have a pencil?”

Tong Yan was taken aback. “Yes.”

Rummaging through her bag, she found her pencil case, pulled out a pencil and eraser, and handed them to him. He took them from her and erased away some places. Curling his pinky finger, he brushed away the eraser fragments and then started to… amend her assignment.

[1] 曲径通幽 ‘qu jing tong you.’ Imagine a narrow, winding little pathway suddenly opening up to a peaceful, enchanting, and secluded view. Shen Yao is jokingly insinuating that after a difficult process, the two have come together as a couple, like they have reached their secluded haven

[2] 高考 “gao kao.” Unified national examinations on various subjects held annually, usually for students in their final year of high school and are a pre-requisite for any post-secondary education at the undergraduate level.

[3] 顾此失彼 “gu ci shi bi.” Literally, “to care for this but then lose that.” An idiom that means, to be preoccupied with attending to one thing that another thing ends up being neglected.

[4] 无忌哥哥 “Wuji Gege.” Here, Big Brother Wuji is referring to 张无忌 Zhang Wuji, the main character in Jin Yong’s novel,《一天屠龙记》*Heavenly Sword, Dragon Sabre*. In the novel, four beautiful maidens, each having her own special status and abilities, fell in love with him. His given name, 无忌 Wuji, are the exact same characters as the “Wuji” in Tong Yan’s nickname.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
3 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 2.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 2.1

November 4, 2015 by hoju 27 Comments



Hahaha! Our leads run into a little awkward situation. I find it quite amusing.

Chapter 2.1 – Those Little Stories (1)

“Teacher Gu, actually…” Those three lasses were still keeping an eye on Tong Yan from a distance, and she did not know how to handle this.

There was no change at all to Gu Pingsheng’s actions, as if he had not heard anything… Wait, no, he really hadn’t heard anything.

At the same time, Zhao Yin also tapped his arm, and when he raised his eyes to look at her, she laughed, “What teacher shows such favouritism towards a student?”

Gu Pingsheng did not seem to find that there was anything inappropriate. “I’ve

always played favourites. Before, when I was doing my graduate studies and had to teach undergraduates students, I was the same."

Tong Yan shifted her gaze away and watched the streams of people coming out from one of the teaching buildings. A class that ended at this hour of the day could only either be for a course on Intro to Maoism[1] or else Marxism[2]. Sure enough, in the hands of two male students who walked by were copies of *Introduction to Maoism*… She stared intensely at those two male students, successfully managing to distract herself from the situation.

That was, until she caught a glimpse of someone coming toward them from beneath the flagpole. Immediately, she broke out in a sweat. She had forgotten about that class representative.

At the same time, Zhao Yin also spotted this student of hers and was quite surprised.

When Class Rep Shen saw the "goddess" teacher of his faculty, he was also dumbstruck.

Glancing over at Gu Pingsheng, who was handing the newly re-rolled sketch back to her, Tong Yan very gratifyingly made a discovery: judging based on psychological poise and composure alone, Law Faculty, win!

Tong Yan took her assignment from him, then immediately handed it over to Shen Heng. "Here you go. My assignment."

Only now did Zhao Yin realize what her student was here to do, and with a laugh, she noted, "Shen Heng, you're still taking sketching this semester? I seem to recall that next semester, you're going to London for a two-year exchange program. You shouldn't need to take any elective courses now, right?" Teacher Zhao's one remark hit the mark and exposed the secret.

Class Rep Shen was evidently more embarrassed than Tong Yan. Tong Yan, on the other hand, glanced very carefully over at Gu Pingsheng.

It was fortunate that Zhao Yin had been facing Class Rep Shen when she had spoken, and it seemed he had not seen.

“Teacher Gu, I have some questions I’d like to consult you on.” She decided she would make the first move to take the situation into her own hands.

Gu Pingsheng answered with an “alright,” and, turning to Zhao Yin, said with a nod, “I’ll go first, then. If you need anything, contact me by email.”

Tong Yan merely had not wanted him to see what that boy would say, but when the two of them left together, she actually did not know what to talk about. Gu Pingsheng was not hurried, though, and simply strolled with her along the tree-lined walkway beside the lake.

There were three teaching buildings beside the lake: the Upper Building, Middle Building, and Lower Building.

The Upper Building mainly consisted of lecture-style theatres that were large and spacious. However, although the classrooms were so open, it was unspoken knowledge throughout the entire school that the Upper Building was a place for couples to date and hangout, and nobody would go there to study at night. Hence, one really should not judge based on the building’s dark, unlit appearance from the exterior because in hidden and secret corners, there were actually quite a few “lively,” “vivid,” and “spicy” things taking place.

And now, Gu Pingsheng just had to choose to head into the main hall of the Upper Building.

She really wanted to hold him back, but it would be very awkward to have to explain the reason for doing so. While Tong Yan was wracking her brain, which was whirling rapidly trying to find an excuse, Gu Pingsheng walked up to a vending machine and felt around on himself for some coins. After several jingling sounds echoed out, two cans of ice-cold cola rolled out from the machine.

He turned around and handed her one of the cans before asking, “What did you want to ask about?”

“That… case study. That case study from today’s quiz.” Tong Yan tried hard to put on a smile.

“I already looked it over. You did very well.” Gu Pingsheng’s reply was concise.

Tong Yan caught sight of a faint, shadowy figure in the classroom to her right and became thoroughly disheartened.

“Teacher Gu, why don’t we go somewhere else to talk?”

Gu Pingsheng looked at her amusedly. “What’s wrong? Is there a problem here?”

Of course there was a problem. Especially since Gu Pingsheng was wearing simply a pair of black athletic shorts, a short-sleeved shirt, and a pair of beach sandals. He looked like a student. And furthermore, a student whom people would remember after a single glance and would even have a desire to turn back for a second look… Tong Yan also eyed herself over. Why did she have to wear a white dress today, and one that was super short, too? They looked like they were here to do naughty things.

She fell silent for three seconds, and then suddenly, an idea struck her and she had an excuse. “Haven’t you heard the ghost stories about the Upper Building? They’ve been floating around for a long time.” Seeing that Gu Pingsheng seemed to be interested, she carried on, “Teacher Gu, you’ve been here for three weeks now. Have you noticed that none of the floors of the Upper Building are ever lit up with lights? Actually… someone died here before.”

That time when they had passed by this place at night, right before Tong Yan was about to go into the restroom, in their pitch-black surroundings, Shen Yao had deliberately, in a slow voice, told her about this. She had been scared half to death, and when she came back out and discovered that Shen Yao was nowhere to be found, she had nearly started bawling.

The vending machine shed a pale, ghastly light. She surmised that Gu Pingsheng was standing in this particular spot so that he could see her speak, but it was also because of this light that she felt a chill down her back. Fortunately, not far away, the lakeside scene outside was still very bright, warm, and clear.

Inwardly reassuring herself, she continued, “In some unknown year, there was a male student who saw that there were too many people in the Middle and Lower Buildings, so he brought a candlestick with him here to the Upper Building and worked alone on math problems in one of the classrooms. Because the lights aren’t ever turned on in this place except for those few days during final exams,

that candle of his was especially noticeable… It gave off a faint glow… At first, two security guards came over and asked the guy why he was here. The guy said that it was quiet here. The security guards saw that he really was doing math problems so they didn't try to stop him. A little while later, a girl came by wearing a white dress…" She was stuck for words for half a second and was terrified herself. "The girl said in a gentle voice, 'Schoolmate, could you help me solve a math problem?'"

Gu Pingsheng gave a light laugh. "And then?"

Tong Yan gazed gloomily at him. "There was no 'and then.' The next day, someone came for class and discovered the boy dead in his seat, but the candle, surprisingly, was still not completely burnt out yet. And on his body, there was a paper with a math problem and its solution written on it. The problem was one of the school's final exam problems from ten years earlier. During that year's finals, there was a girl student who had committed suicide by jumping into the lake because she had failed her advanced math course, and the problem on that paper was the main question that had been on that year's exam…"

In the fastest speed possible, she finished recounting the tale, and then, unable to hold herself back, she asked, "When I heard this, I was scared to death. How come you aren't even showing any reaction?"

Gu Pingsheng took a drink of his cola. "Medical schools are the birthplace of ghost stories. The classrooms, laundry rooms, shower rooms, washrooms, cafeterias, and even each dormitory room, each bed — all have a ghost story that can be told about them. But did someone really jump into the lake and commit suicide for not passing advanced math? If that's the case, then your mental stability and strength are actually relatively good."

…… I only failed university physics four times, okay?

Finally remembering her original intention for telling the story, she said, "But I'm really scared. Could we go somewhere else to talk?"

Gu Pingsheng did not have any objections and walked with her along the corridor towards the exit. She had just breathed out in relief when all of a sudden, he halted his steps and asked in a low voice, "Did you see a shadow?"

All of Tong Yan's little hairs instantly stood on end, but quickly, she recovered

herself. Must be one of those unruly couples.

She told him softly, “Let’s hurry up and go. Maybe… maybe someone’s having an argument here.”

The problem was, there was no light where they were and he was also standing in front of her, so he had not seen her suggestion.

Right as Tong Yan established that the situation was not good, Gu Pingsheng was already striding into that classroom. Instinctively, she followed after him… And the end result, naturally, was that she witnessed a hot, lightning-striking, earthquake-inducing kiss taking place. There, in the pale moonlight, that scene could be called a prime example of being “completely immersed” and “completely uncaring of others around.”

Seeing this, Tong Yan’s face burned up, and she stretched out her hand and tugged on Gu Pinsheng’s arm.

He turned his head to look at her, but Tong Yan only stared fixedly into his eyes. You can’t see me speak, but you can see my eyes, right?… Teacher Gu, retreat, okay?

He seemed to give a light chuckle before turning his hand over and taking her by her wrist. Just as they were about to retreat from the classroom, a shrill, dire scream reverberated out, and it was apparent that it was because the two of them had frightened someone.

Naturally, he gave no reaction, and she apologetically turned back to explain, “Don’t be scared, don’t be scared. I’m human. A living, breathing human!”

Before she had finished speaking, however, he had already pulled her out of the classroom.



“Don’t… don’t… don’t be scared… I’m human… A living, breathing human…”

That night, when she dejectedly returned to her dormitory, she discovered three women staring at her, all with very peculiar looks in their eyes.

“What?” She had not done anything wrong, so why was she feeling like she was afraid of being found out?

With a “hehe,” Shen Yao laughed, “What did you and Great Beauty Gu go to do in the Upper Building?”

She put on a fake smile. “How’s that even possible? Why would I go to the Upper Building?…”

Shen Yao let her have the spot in front of the computer screen to allow her to read the post from the school forum that was currently open.

Tonight, I was with my boyfriend in the Upper Building and then unexpectedly… unexpectedly, a girl student wearing a white dress just charged right in. Freaked me out! I nearly screamed until my throat burst. Most ridiculous part was, that girl even said, “Don’t be scared. I’m human. A living, breathing human”…… Hey, that girl from tonight, do you know about the Upper Building’s ghost story? Uh, please, if you don’t then go study up on some school history. Next time you see some shadows inside a classroom,

don't come in, you know? And if you do come in, don't be wearing a white dress, k?

Lastly, let me add, her boyfriend is honestly so hot. Didn't get a clear look of his face but just the outline of his body is enough to make people…… totally go crazy…… And he was super chill. No matter how hard I screamed, he just held onto his girlfriend and pulled her out with him and did not look back at all……

With a pen, Shen Yao circled the two words, "held onto" and gave her a suggestive grin.

Tong Yan was put to silence, unable to respond with anything. As she sat there on her chair, no matter how they laughed and grinned at her, she simply put on an I-am-so-innocent expression on her face. Eventually, she pulled a physics textbook off the lowest bookshelf and started her depressing preparatory studying and practice homework.

The depressing part was, after she had left the Upper Building, she still had not come up with a reasonable excuse. And so, she could only say to him, "It's just, I thought about it for a long time and decided that I do need someone to tutor me in physics…" No matter what, though, this was something she could not let these lasses know about. Even though, she really, truly was innocent in all this… aaah.

Gu Pingsheng was very pleased with the fact that she, on her own accord, had accepted the extra help in physics and even left her his mobile phone number. He had nonchalantly informed her that for him, his mobile phone was used only to send and receive text messages and emails and was not for phone calls. He then told her to come find him twice a week for tutoring and that she could decide the time and place.

When he said this, it had been during the break time after the second session of classes, and at the time, there had been a letter lying on top of the lesson plan beside his hand. On a pale pink envelope, his name was handwritten in bubble-style characters. It was apparent it was an anonymous love letter.

With a serious expression, Tong Yan had nodded at him as her eyes flicked a

glance at the letter. She, too, had written this type of letter before, and in fact, one each day, continuing unbrokenly for three years. Unfortunately, the recipient of those letters was now married.

[1] 毛概 “Mao Gai.” Short for《毛泽东思想概论》[“Introduction to Maoism”], which is also the name of the textbook Tong Yan saw the male students carrying.

[2] 马思 “Ma Si.” Short for 马克思 “Ma Ke Si,” which is the Chinese transliteration of [Karl] Marx.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
4 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 2.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 2.2

November 7, 2015 by hoju 33 Comments



Tong Yan has expressed her “desire” for extra physics help. So many of the female students would kill to be in her position, but apparently, Tong Yan isn’t looking on that bright side.

Chapter 2.2 – Those Little Stories (2)

Of course, a person could not live in the past. Especially her.

During the school’s earlier years, there had once been many specially recruited students[1] for drama and theatre, and they had essentially been one of the most lovely sights of the school. This group of people had been bored from having too much time on their hands, so they had founded an association called Sunshine Theatre Society. And then, the association had been passed down and down and down until, eventually, it was passed into the hands of one of Tong

Yan's best friends.

Hence, when preparations began for the Welcome Celebration, which was an evening celebration to welcome new students, besides going to classes and working her part-time job, every week, Tong Yan had also been revising the script for the stage drama and watching people rehearse the play in the dance hall of the Student Centre. And now, one more task had been added: every week, she went to Gu Pingsheng's office for physics tutoring.

Suddenly, her mobile phone vibrated, and she picked it up to take a look.

Gu Pingsheng: *This week, I have some family matters to attend to at home. International Commercial Arbitration classes have also been moved to after the National Day holiday*[2]*. If you don't mind, you could come to my home for your physics lessons. TK*

Tong Yan froze in surprise, staring at her mobile phone's screen as she read the message three times. After some time, she finally placed her fingers on the keyboard and slowly typed out a few words. Very quickly, though, she deleted them. This was repeated several times before she finally decided to send the message: *Since Teacher, you have things to do, physics lessons can also be moved to after the National Day holiday.*

When she set down her phone, the several small groups of people inside the rehearsal hall had already started their acting, and lines of script that rose and fell in volume and expression echoed incessantly from all corners. Ai Mi, who had been beside her just a moment ago, was now already standing, arms folded across her chest, in front of several male students and was coaching them.

She watched blankly for a while. For some reason, her heart simply would not settle to allow her to carefully watch them rehearse.

Her phone vibrated again.

Gu Pingsheng: *Physics is different from law. Your foundation in it is not good, so it's best if you don't break the continuity between lessons. TK*

But, there's just something wrong with going to your teacher's home, you know? However, although Tong Yan was thinking this, she could not be so frank and say it outright: *It's no problem. This week, I'll just review and reinforce what*

I learned last week. I won't goof off.

Gu Pingsheng: *My home is very close to the school's main campus in the Xuhui District. It is very convenient to get here by the campus shuttle bus. Do you have any classes this Wednesday afternoon? TK*

Tong Yan felt awkward but hurriedly wrote a reply: *No.* He definitely did it on purpose. Every Wednesday afternoon, the entire university did not have class.

Gu Pingsheng: *Take the 3:30 campus shuttle. Forty minutes later, I'll be waiting for you at the library of the main campus. TK*

That tone of his. It was apparent the decision had been made. She sighed inwardly and gave an answer: *Ok*.

Four weeks had passed by now, and she had generally figured out his temperament — gracious, unassuming, polite, and without the airs one might have as a teacher. However, when it involved anything that had to do with intellectual or knowledge-related matters, he would right away resume his role as a teacher.

So serious it was ridiculous.

All of a sudden, she remembered that next week was the National Day holiday. She had planned very early on that she would go home to Beijing to see her [paternal] grandmother. He wouldn't grab her and make her have tutoring lessons during then, would he? This was perfect, then. This Wednesday, she would go to his home and first request the time off.

His home… Tong Yan heaved another sigh.

When Wednesday actually arrived and she was sitting on the campus shuttle, she suddenly grew a little anxious, though she did not know why. Traffic was rather heavy. She drifted off to sleep until the bus arrived at the stop and a kind person beside her patted her awake. Only after she glanced at her watch did she realize that the trip had taken an hour and a half, or in other words, she was a full fifty minutes late.

Oh no. She checked her mobile phone… And tragically discovered that it was

shut off. No wonder she had not received any text messages from Gu Pingsheng.

Fortunately, the location where the shuttle dropped them off was very close to the library, and after getting off and walking for a short while, she saw Gu Pingsheng's vehicle, a white Range Rover. That day, she had ridden in it the one time. She had once not known of this particular vehicle with the long English name. Later on, however, Lu Bei had liked this brand very much, and so she had followed his suit and remembered the name.

Walking over, she saw that his head was down to look at his mobile phone, and it seemed he was replying to emails. She knocked on the car door. No answer. Seriously, so focused. Tong Yan stood there beside the car window with her eyes fixed on him. The occasional students who walked by would all throw strange glances over at her as she stood there, not saying a single word and only staring at the good-looking guy inside the car…

Gu Pingsheng suddenly lifted his head, and just like that, their gazes abruptly connected.

Only the single layer of glass of the car window separated them. Her heart gave a thump. Awkwardly, she smiled at him. "I'm sorry, Teacher Gu, I'm late."

He smiled lightly and motioned for her to get into the vehicle.

When she had buckled her seatbelt, she finally asked curiously, "It's not really hot today. Why didn't you open some windows? Wouldn't it be better if you get some fresh air circulating through?"

He handed her a bottle of water. "All year round, I keep my windows closed. City air quality isn't good."

Oh, a little bit of a germaphobe.

After he had actually driven out through the university gates, though, quiet fell inside the vehicle again. He was very thoughtful and had turned on some music inside the car. Furthermore, the volume was at a comfortable level, likely because he had specifically asked someone before to set it.

Listening to music that only she could enjoy, Tong Yan watched as the vehicle soon turned into a very quiet street. The street sloped off into the distance, and there were enough London plane trees lining it to provide a covering from the

sun.

Both sides of the road were very clean but so unpretentious that not even a bus stop sign could be seen, and there were only one or two little shops. Only when their vehicle had driven into the community compound did she at last see the sign at the entrance. This road was called Hunan Road. Next time, when she got the chance, she really should get out of the car and walk around… So clean here. However, after stepping into his home, she truly understood what it meant to be clean.

As he bent over and pulled out a pair of slippers for her, a woman suddenly dashed out from the kitchen and, with a snowy white towel in her hand, greeted Tong Yan with a smile. “Hello. Wait just a moment. Once I’ve tidied up the living room, you guys can come in.”

Tong Yan stared in amazement at the spotless living room before turning her eyes to watch as the beautiful woman wiped down every corner with the towel in her hand…. Were they all germaphobes in his family?

He briefly introduced them to one another. “My older cousin, Gu Pingfan. This is my student, Tong Yan.” Gu Pingsheng put on a pair of slippers. “My cousin is now a surgeon, so my slight obsession with cleanliness was passed on from her.”

Before he had finished speaking, Gu Pingfan was already laughing and turning her head to protest, “If we’re really going to track things back, you used to be in medicine. How could it be me that passed it on to you? I used to be in law.”

Tong Yan was once again stunned. “Used to be in law?”

It should not be overly difficult for a medical student to switch over to study law. But medicine was definitely a field that you could not simply switch into just for fun. What kind of people were they in his family, huh?…

Gu Pingsheng seemed to understand what she was thinking and explained with a smile, “She had already completed her PhD in Law, but she suddenly felt that what she had studied was very useless and she needed to do something that would help people. So then, she started all over again, studying up from the undergraduate level. This year, she just finished her master’s degree and is now

doing an internship at Ruijin Hospital."

Smiling awkwardly, Tong Yan said, "I actually think that studying law is really useless, too." But to tell her to study medicine? Even just thinking about the words, "fresh, dripping blood" made her legs go weak.

"Yup." Gu Pingfan had at last finished wiping all the things that could be wiped. "At the time, I had obtained admission to the bar to practice law in both New York and California, but I suddenly didn't understand why I had taken law. Later, it suddenly dawned upon me. Healing and saving lives is the most direct way to help others."

Tong Yan felt even more awkward but still, she politely answered, "Yes. But to have that determination to give up all those years of studying and also those licenses to practice that you had to pass a bar exam for… And then, to start studying medicine from undergrad, that must have been hard, too, right?"

Gu Pingfan's eyes were squinted, similar to a cat. "It was no big deal. I helped introduce TK to his advising professor, so he had no choice but to teach me the basics, too. He's the best teacher." His cousin was very talkative, and in the end, Gu Pingsheng had to bring Tong Yan into the study before they were finally isolated from the increasing number of conversation topics.

The study was arranged and furnished in a very easy and relaxed style. The carpet was very thick and comfortable to step on.

When Gu Pingsheng first started teaching on the topic, her nerves had been taut, but gradually, her mind unconsciously began to wander. What was his reason for switching over to study law? If he wanted to be a teacher, he actually could have just stayed in medical school, and he would have achieved the same. It probably had something to do with his mother, right?… With her chin propped on her hand, her mind drifted for three minutes. And then, she had absolutely no idea what he was talking about.

The light from the sun that was nearing dusk caused the entire room to be somewhat dim. Looking at him from this particular angle, she could see from the chiseled side view of his face that there was a shallow dimple in his cheek. If a man had a round face with a dimple in it, he gave off a very fun, happy feeling.

But if the man's face was very slender and it had a little dimple like so, that truly made people feel very… So difficult to describe that feeling.

She was still trying hard to think of a suitable word when she discovered that he had tilted his head to the side and was looking long-sufferingly at her. "Tong Yan, can my face help you pass your exam?"



"Tong Yan, can my face help you pass your exam?"

Startled, she instinctively defended, "I was thinking about how to solve this problem…" However, as she mulled over his words, she could not help giggling. "Teacher Gu, maybe your face really can help me pass my exam." In the several thousand years since the time of Goujian[3], the "beauty trap" of the Thirty-Six Stratagems[4] had always been successful.

Gu Pingsheng had an ever so brief moment of puzzlement, but shortly after, he smiled, "Your physics teacher was the fiancée of one of my good friends. Later, because one wasn't willing to leave the country and one wasn't willing to come back, the two of them broke up on good terms. Nothing to do with me whatsoever."

She gave a hidden little grin. Right as she was about to say something, she saw Gu Pingsheng pick up a pen and begin speaking while he wrote out the problem. "On a smooth, horizontal surface, there is a fixed, semicircular barrier with a coefficient of friction, u. A ball with mass, m and velocity, v enters from one side along a tangent line…"

She watched as he swiftly finished writing and then stood up. Feeling slightly panic-stricken, Tong Yan asked, “Teacher Gu, you haven’t taught this to me yet, right?”

With both hands in the pockets of his jeans, he bent over slightly at the waist and smiled at her… A face so very close to hers. She could even clearly see that his eyelashes curled slightly upwards.

Her mind was having some problems processing, and she gazed blankly at his moving lips, hearing a voice say, “I want to first understand how strong your foundation is for this particular section. I’m stepping out to take care of some personal things and will come back in a bit.”

Finally, after the door had shut did she dejectedly turn back to stare at that piece of paper. This was absolutely, beyond a doubt his blatant way of getting revenge.

[1]特招生 “te zhao sheng.” These “specially recruited students” are usually exceptionally talented/high-achievers in a certain area that the school is specifically seeking after. Entrance to the school will often be made easier or more appealing (e.g. scholarships, lowered grade requirements, etc.) for these specific students in order to attract them. (It’s akin to athletes who have been scouted by a college and are offered sports scholarships.) In this case, Tong Yan’s university once specifically recruited students with achievements in drama and theatre.

[2] 国庆 “guo qing.” National Day is on October 1 and is celebrated from October 1 to 7 as a week off.

[3] 勾践 Goujian was the king of Yue around 500 B.C., during the Spring and Autumn period.

[4] 三十六计美人计. The Thirty-Six Stratagems is an ancient essay that contained numerous stratagems to be used in politics, diplomacy and war. 美人计 “mei ren ji,” which literally means “trap of the beautiful maiden” and is otherwise known as “the beauty trap,” was one of those. To bring down the enemy, send a beautiful maiden to (usually) the ruler or a senior leader of the enemy side so he becomes so enthralled by her he neglects his duties. One of the

classic examples of “the beauty trap” is when King Goujian gave the beautiful maiden, Xi Shi to King Fuchai of Wu. Fuchai was enthralled by her beauty, and Xi Shi took advantage of this to cause conflict and dissension in the Wu kingdom as well as spying and relaying state secrets back to the kingdom of Yue. (Xi Shi is one of the Four Great Beauties of ancient China mentioned in the footnotes of chapter 1.1.) Here, Tong Yan is joking that Gu Pingsheng could be a “beauty trap” that mesmerizes Zhao Yin with his looks to help her pass physics.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

5 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 2.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 2.3

November 11, 2015 by hoju 54 Comments



Schedule update: I've been needing to take a little bit of a rest, and yearend is also a very busy time for me. This next week, posts will still be as normal. However, beginning next week until the end of the year, I will be reducing my postings down to only once per week, on Tues evening/Wed morning. Normal posting schedule will resume back again in January. Thank you, guys for the understanding.

You only ever know as much about someone's life as they are willing to show you.

Chapter 2.3 – Those Little Stories (3)

When Gu Pingsheng returned, the paper was still blank. She truly did not know how to solve it. Afterwards, because it was getting late, Gu Pingsheng's cousin invited her to stay for dinner.

To be honest, the cooking skills of this former lawyer of the states of New York and California were really something that could not be praised. Tong Yan tasted a few of the dishes and then, without so much as batting an eyelid, she stretched her chopsticks over toward the easiest dish to make, shiitake stir-fried with bok

choy. Coincidentally, Gu Pingsheng also happened to pick up a bok choy with his chopsticks as well. A glance passed between the two of them as they put the food into their mouth, and then, at the same time, they both picked up their glasses of water…

Gu Pingfan was eating with great enthusiasm. “TK told me that the two of you had known each other in the past, and it was actually when he was working as an intern doctor?”

Tong Yan nodded and continued drinking more water. “We met only the one time.”

She did not know how much Teacher Gu had said, and she, naturally, was also happy to give a vague answer and let things be.

That incident was like a very private matter. She did not know whether, to Gu Pingsheng, that was the only time he had behaved uncharacteristic of himself, but to her, that was her one and only time she had ever exposed in front of someone else all those secrets that, even to this day, were otherwise hidden away.

In this day and age where morals had completed eroded away, many people simply did not even bother paying attention anymore to the existence of third parties in people’s relationships.

But what if your mother, the one who should be the most gentle and warm person, the one who was always patient and forbearing toward you, suddenly became the party who was wrecking someone else’s home and family? In a single night, the person you most depended upon from the time you only babbled and cooed and were learning to talk suddenly became the type of person that you most despised and shunned. To her, this form of hurt that had been brought upon her was destructive and devastating…

“What do your parents do?” Gu Pingfan suddenly asked her. Her smile was very warm and kind, and a dimple could also faintly be seen in her cheek. So very much like Gu Pingsheng.

Tong Yan stared at the reflection of the wall lamps in her eyes and, all of a

sudden, was somewhat at a loss for words.

It was actually Gu Pingsheng who carried on the conversation. “How much of the sugar and MSG in my house did you use in your dishes today?”

Gu Pingfan looked at him quizzically. “Not much. I mostly used salt.” At this point, she suddenly clued in. “You found the food salty? TK, the things you say are crossing the line more and more…”

Later, before Tong Yan had even come up with an excuse, Gu Pingsheng had already recommended that this week, they would have only this one tutoring session and they could discuss the following week about the remainder. He had driven her back to school and had said this as she was getting out of the vehicle on the road opposite the main entrance of the university.

She nodded at him through the car window. Then, she suddenly remembered, “I’m going home for the National Day holiday. That’s next week. I definitely won’t have time for tutoring lessons.”

Gu Pingsheng looked at her. “I will be going to Beijing next week, as well. If there’s anything you need, you can contact me any time.”

Smiling awkwardly, Tong Yan replied, “I won’t. Don’t worry, I won’t disturb your holiday.”

During the National Day holiday, it was difficult to get even a single train ticket. She had asked around for help from several of her senior schoolmates, both male and female, from Beijing before she was able to obtain one standing ticket.

Fortunately, it was only fourteen hours, but when she actually stepped into the train car, she was stunned. As far as the eye could see, it was filled with people, and there were already people lying underneath the seats. With great difficulty, she managed to squeeze her way up to the train door beside the bathroom and then, putting on her thick skin, she helped herself to a spot there.

She could see that, in the bathroom, there were even two children sitting on the sink, and she decided right there that this whole night, she would not have anything to drink and just endure through it until she could get off the train.

The sound of the train rolling over its tracks was very rhythmic.

Getting off the train early in the morning, she traveled on subway and bus, persevering for another full two hours before she finally made it to her [paternal] grandmother's home. She had just opened the door with her key when she saw the figure of that person she missed the most in the kitchen, busy preparing breakfast for her. "Yan Yan, you're back? I just made a mixed-grain porridge."

After suffering through hunger for an entire night, her head was now heavy and spinning as she headed over to her bed and collapsed straight onto it.

"Why are you so tired?" Grandmother asked her.

Pickled vegetables, porridge, and *youtiao* [savoury fried breadstick][1]. She felt she was going to die of happiness.



Youtiao (image credit)

"This time I was really lucky. I managed to buy a discount plane ticket. Only three hundred something yuan[2]. It's just that it was an early morning flight, and I'm so sleepy from taking it…"

But, she still obediently crawled up and off her bed, and under Grandmother's attentive gaze, she finished all the breakfast, leaving not even the tiniest bit behind, and drank a large glass of water along with it.

"Next time, I'll take you on a plane ride, when I've graduated. I'm just worried you'll get motion sickness on the plane. Oh right, and your ears will hurt, too." Her descriptions were made with all apparent seriousness. "This morning, when the plane was landing, my ears were aching so badly."

Grandmother listened smilingly, and every wrinkle on her face seemed to carry a sense of joy.

As she was talking away happily, Grandmother suddenly, with a mysterious

expression, took hold of her hand and said, “This year’s pension amount has gone up again. I’ve saved a full ten thousand yuan for you over these last few years. Can that pay back your student loan?”

Tong Yan started in alarm. “Didn’t I already tell you? I just need to pay it back within five years after I’ve graduated. Don’t try at all to save up money for me, please. I have a part-time job right now, and I’m also helping some journalists write news articles. I’m not short on money at all.”

“I’ve already withdrawn it,” Grandmother continued in a soft voice. All of a sudden, however, she remembered the meat that was still stewing in the kitchen, and hastily, she rose to her feet while saying to her, “It’s just under the couch. Hurry, take it out and put it away.”

As she stared after the outline of Grandmother’s back, her eyes inexplicably began to sting with tears. “How about this? I’ll take it out and deposit it into the account that you and I share. We’ll wait, and if ever I need to use it, then I will.”

When she left Beijing, she had deliberately opened a bank account, taking the bank card with her but leaving the bankbook with Grandmother. Therefore, if there was an emergency situation here at home that required money, Grandmother could immediately withdraw some.

From within the kitchen came Grandmother’s sound of agreement. She walked up in front of the couch and felt around under it for the secret spot used to store money. As a child, she had always been rummaging around everywhere and was well acquainted with this place for money storage.

But when she held the envelope in her hand, she suddenly detected that there was something wrong. The envelope and the contents within were very thin. Even the six thousand yuan of tuition she paid every school year was several times thicker than this… A notion flashed across her mind, and she abruptly felt as if someone had suddenly gripped the bottommost tip of her heart.

She dared not breathe, dared not move. She did not dare speak out the actual situation and could only pretend to nonchalantly ask, “These last few days, did my dad come visit?”

“Yes, and he even deliberately helped me change out the cooking gas tank.” There was an inconcealable joy in Grandmother’s voice.

Sure enough, it was him.

Tong Yan stared blankly at the envelope. This was not the first time, but this time, the amount was so large. Where am I going to get enough to make up for it?

Many jumbled thoughts were continuously flashing into her head, and all of a sudden, she felt as if her strength was drained.

Exhaustion of an entire night rushed up once again over here. She wanted only to cry. No matter how she tried, she could not stop her nose from tingling. As her vision started to blur with tears, Grandmother stepped out from the kitchen.

Tong Yan hastily stuffed the envelope into her schoolbag, pulled out a facial tissue, and pretended to wipe her nose with it, and soon, her tears were wiped away. “Why do I feel like I’m coming down with a cold?…” Standing, she quickly added, “It’s not safe to leave so much money in the home. I’m going to head out right now to deposit it.”

“There’s no hurry.” The voice sounding out behind her was cut off and left inside, behind the closed door.

She waited until she had walked to a far away bus stop before halting beneath the bus stop sign, opening the envelope, and carefully counting the amount inside — only two thousand yuan. Her tuition was normally paid for by student loans, and her living expenses came from the income from her part-time job and writing news articles. After accounting for her day-to-day spending, she had only managed to save two thousand yuan. So, in other words, she was still short a full six thousand yuan.

Six thousand yuan. This sum had to be deposited somehow. Although Grandmother knew how terribly disappointing her son was, she still carried a fanciful dream in her heart that hoped that one day, he would amend his ways.

There were an especially large number of people at the bus stop. Many were parents with their children, spending the National Day holiday together in a bustling, lively atmosphere. As the bus would pull into the stop, many fathers would pick their young child up into their arms, and some would even sit them

on their heads, for fear that the crowd would squash their darling baby… Tong Yan stood in that spot and watched for a long time. She had already lost track of how many buses had pulled in since she was here.

At last, she took her mobile phone in hand and stared down irresolutely at a list of more than twenty names.

Even such a good friend as Shen Yao did not know about her family situation. If she was in Shanghai right now, it would be easier since she could simply say that she did not have enough time to ask her family for the money… But right now, she was in Beijing, so she did not even have an excuse she could use to borrow money from her classmates.

In the end, after fixing her eyes on that list for a long time, it came down to only two people: Lu Bei and Gu Pingsheng.

One was a person who, without ever asking for a reason, had always agreed to every single one of her requests.

One was a person who had unwittingly seen some very true scenes of her life.

However, from when Lu Bei had married, she had vowed that she would never see him again. Regardless of the reason why their chance to be together had slipped by them, she had a very strong sense of and demand for pureness of morals, and she would never allow herself to do anything that might break up someone's home and marriage. And so, in reality, the only remaining option was Gu Pingsheng.

Hesitantly, she sent him a text message: *Teacher Gu, are you busy? I would like to ask you for a favour.*

Very quickly, he sent her a text message in reply: *Go ahead. TK*

Two simple words plus his name signed at the end. No emotion could be discerned from them. They actually did not know each other all that well, and if she out the blue asked to borrow money…… She inhaled deeply and then wrote her reply: *I was hoping to borrow some money. Only six thousand, that's all I need. It's urgent.*

A long time passed and still he did not return her message. Tong Yan suddenly very much regretted her action. Why did she ask her teacher to borrow money?

But the question had already been put forth, and it was too late to retract it. Uneasily, she stared at her mobile phone, praying continuously in her mind, “Teacher Gu, please don’t be offended. I really had no other choice.”

All of a sudden, her mobile phone rang. Gu Pingsheng was calling?

Tong Yan was somewhat stunned at this. She answered the call and was about to say hello when she immediately remembered that he would not be able to hear her. She then heard Gu Pingsheng on the other end of the line speaking to someone in English. It sounded as if the person was beside him.

Very soon, he spoke into the phone, “Tong Yan, my apologies. I was talking to one of the elder members of my family just now. Text your address to my phone. I’m driving over right now to find you.”

His voice was a little hurried, but it was still as warm and gentle as before. So warm and gentle it made you want to cry.

[1] 油条. *Youtiao*, literally meaning “oil stick,” is a strip of dough that is fried. While it is often referred to as the Chinese doughnut or Chinese cruller, it is a savoury food, lightly salted, and is often eaten for breakfast as an accompaniment for rice porridge or soy milk.

[2] 元 “yuan.” The yuan is the base unit of the renminbi, which is the official currency of China. It is also referred to colloquially as 块 “kuai.”

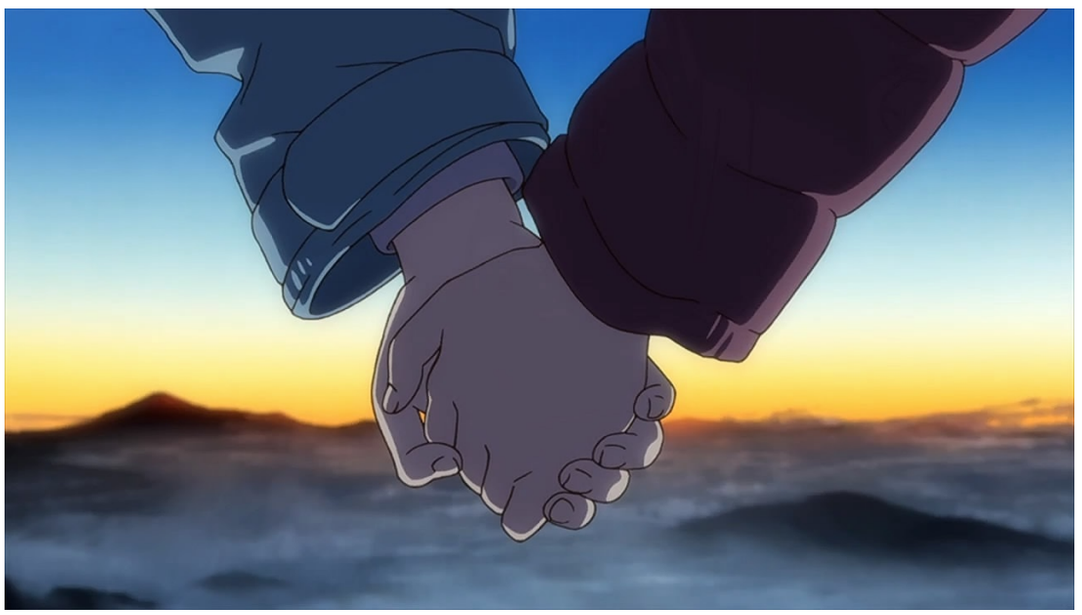
Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
6 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 3.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 3.1

November 14, 2015 by hoju 37 Comments



Have you ever been to the Great Wall of China? Simply breathtaking. Tong Yan, however, does not seem think so… Or maybe I should say, she finds it a little too breathtaking. Literally.

Chapter 3.1 – Are You Truly Real? (1)

When he arrived, Tong Yan was still beside the bus stop, sitting on the railing surrounding the flowerbeds alongside the street and staring, lost in thought, at the road. She had long since passed the age of trying to blame fate or people, or letting herself fall into despair and give up hope on herself. It seemed Gu Pingsheng's words years ago truly had affected her. "In this world, you have the right to choose anything. The one exception is your parents. You cannot choose them and you cannot give them up."

His face suddenly appeared before her eyes, and it was looking down at her.

As she raised her head to look at him, he was already handing her a bottle of icy-cold water. "It's really hot today." Taking it from him, she noticed that there

was some water on his palms, which should have rubbed off from the water bottle.

He pulled out a package of napkins and handed it over to her, motioning for her to wrap the bottle as she drank from it. “I took my friend’s car and I’m not very used to it, so I drove rather slowly.” The whole time as he spoke, he was smiling.

Right as he was about to open his mouth to say more, Tong Yan had already broken out into a little laugh. “Let’s agree first. You can’t ask me why I need to borrow money.”

Gu Pingsheng put on an expression of great surprise. “Student Tong Yan, I’m trying hard already to avoid that topic. Can’t you tell?”

“I can.” Tong Yan gave him a meaningful look. “I was just worried that Teacher, you’d keep trying to think of so many things to say to ease the awkward atmosphere, so I thought I’d just say it out bluntly.”

She had originally intended to get the money with Gu Pingsheng and then head straight to the bank to deposit it, but to her surprise, Gu Pingsheng handed her a card and directly told her the PIN. “There’s ten thousand yuan here. Take it for now.”

She looked up at him, somewhat startled. “I only need six thousand. That’ll be enough.”

He smiled, “I had assumed, since you said you needed to borrow six thousand, you likely had calculated in all your living expense money into that already. I don’t want you to come back to me three days later to borrow money to buy your train ticket and then, when you get back to Shanghai, you can only nibble on *mantou* [plain, steamed bun][1] everyday to get by.” He was joking, but he had indeed spoken the truth of the situation.

Tong had no choice other than to stretch out her hand to take it from him and say, “When I’ve saved enough, I’ll pay you back right away.”

However, immediately after she said this, he pulled the card back. “I don’t have anything to do today. I’ll take you to the bank to deposit it.”

Later, Gu Pingsheng not only accompanied her to the bank but also very

insistently volunteered himself to take her home.

When Gu Pingsheng stated the words, “teacher’s home visit,” she froze for an entire minute downstairs of her home before finally gritting her teeth and resigning herself to the reality that “good words are required of mouths that ate favours of food and tied are the hands that accepted favours handed to them[2].”

Since it was an old apartment building, it was not part of any so-called community compound.

It was a free-standing, five-storey building adjacent to the road, and right outside its entrance was a main street and a bus stop. Every time Tong Yan sat by the window and gazed out at the cars coming and going, she would admire herself again for her own foresight. It was fortunate that when the property values had first started to soar, she had taken the deed of this place and put it away. Otherwise, sooner or later, her dad would have secretly sold it, and then, she and Grandmother would not even have a home to live in.

She sat by the window, peeling cloves of garlic, one by one.

Grandmother had once been a primary school music teacher, but because her school later was merged into a centralized one[3], when it came time for her retirement, she did not actually have true, recognized teaching qualifications. As a result, her old-age pension amount was very low. This, though, did not affect Grandmother’s passion for teaching. The whole time since Gu Pingsheng stepped through the doorway, he had very patiently explored the advantages and disadvantages of “education based on personality types and learning styles” with the elderly woman.

From time to time, Tong Yan would sneak a glimpse of them before continuing with lowered head to peel the garlic. Without being aware of it, her hair had slid down in front of her eyes. She stretched out a hand and tucked the hair behind her ear, but her fingers happened to brush against the corner of her eye. Because there was garlic residue on her hands, this brief contact was enough to cause tears to stream down, and she could not stop them even if she tried.

“Need any help?” He walked up to her.

Seated there on a small stool, Tong Yan raised her head to look at him, her eyes glistening with tears.

Gu Pingsheng paused, dazed for an instant.

In this moment, the scene before his eyes and the night that they had first met each other seemed to completely superimpose themselves upon one another. The only differences were, at that time, her hair had been a short, ear-length style and perhaps because of her young age then, her eyes had been even bigger and brighter. But the only thing that could be found in those eyes had been an intense feeling of despair — that form of despair that had nothing to do with death and parting but was simply due to hopelessness in life and reality.

“Garlic.” Seeing the sudden still look in his eyes, Tong Yan, in contrast, actually grew panicked. “My eyes were just stung by garlic, that’s all.”

He, too, was momentarily taken aback. Grandmother hurriedly brought a wet towel out from the kitchen and handed it to Tong Yan, but in the end, Gu Pingsheng was the one who took it. When the elderly lady returned to the kitchen to continue cooking, he was already crouched down and wiping her eyes for her. She did not have the chance to refuse before she was closing her eyes amid his actions.

A very light, gentle touch combined with a warm towel carefully dabbed and cleansed around her eyes.

“It’s good now,” he said.

Tong Yan opened her eyes and then suddenly felt slight embarrassment. “Thank you.”

Before, in their dormitory’s chat sessions, they would always say that you should never find a boy from the Faculty of Medicine to be your boyfriend. He would be accustomed to seeing all areas of the human body and the boundaries that should exist between males and females would be very blurry to him. Therefore, it would be easy for him to fall into cheating or something along those lines… But she had interacted with Gu Pingsheng for five weeks, and besides noting that he did not have any taboos about physical contact between the

opposite sexes, she did not find him to be a person who was casual about physical intimacy.

She grabbed a handful of garlic. Such senseless and ridiculous thoughts. She did not know why those thoughts had even crossed her mind.

This was Tong Yan's third time eating with Gu Pingsheng… Halfway through her meal, she discovered that Gu Pingsheng had eaten a lot of plain, white rice, and she suddenly wanted to laugh. While Grandmother was in the kitchen ladling out some soup, she quietly said to him, "Teacher Gu, northerners' cooking tends to be salty. Sorry about that."

He gave her a little smile. "It's not a problem. Could you pour a glass of iced water for me, please?"

"We don't have any that's iced," she chuckled. "We don't use a water dispenser in my home. It's all water that's been boiled already."

The result, however, was that she had just poured a glass of water when Grandmother came out carrying the soup.

Seeing Tong Yan setting down a glass of cooled water, she at once chastised her in a serious tone, "Haven't I told you since you were young that you should not drink water when you're eating?"

Tong Yan immediately pointed at Gu Pingsheng. "Those of them who've come back after living abroad all have this habit."

She did not dare say that the dishes were salty, otherwise Grandmother truly would bring them all back into the kitchen and completely re-make them. Gu Pingsheng very cooperatively went along with what she said, offering an apologetic smile as he picked up the glass and took a large drink of water.

When Grandmother went out to the park to feed stray cats, only the two of them were left in the home, and she did not know what she could have Teacher Gu do.

The living room only had that one small couch. Was she going to have to sit there side by side with him and watch television dramas? Or read? This teacher's

home visit had not had a specific purpose to it at all, so she did not know what she was supposed to have him do.

Gu Pingsheng merely sat there and appeared to be looking at the old photographs that were beneath the glass top of the coffee table. Due to his height, he seemed more like he was sitting on a child-size toy sofa. “I’ve only lived in Beijing before for half a month,” he suddenly spoke up. “There are many places that I haven’t been to yet, such as the Great Wall.”

Tong Yan’s eyes brushed over the photograph he was looking at. It was one of her when she was a little girl, hands on her hips, standing atop the Great Wall.

A black and white photo. And her hair was done up in two little pigtails that stuck upwards.

“Then, Teacher Gu, you can take advantage of this vacation time to go around to a few more places and have some fun.” She very much wanted to take a book and cover up the photographs beneath the glass top. “From Beijing, there’s three sections of the Great Wall that you can go to. One is Badaling. This one you for sure should not go to during a National Day holiday. There’ll be as many people there as you’d see at a temple fair[4]. Then there’s the one at Mutianyu. The view there is better than Badaling, and there aren’t that many people there during the holidays, as well.”

Gu Pinsheng nodded. “And the other one?”

“The other?” Tong Yan prudently cautioned him, “Juyongguan [Juyong Pass], you absolutely should avoid. It’s so steep you need to use your hands and feet to climb it. So exhausting you could die. The previous two are about ‘walking’ the Great Wall. Only Juyong Pass is about ‘climbing’ the Great Wall.”

She had not expected that Gu Pingsheng was the type of person who, the more you warned him not to go, the more interested he would be in going. And since he expressed a great enthusiasm towards Juyong Pass, Grandmother was also very hospitable and instructed Tong Yan to accompany her Teacher Gu to climb the Great Wall.



Juyong Pass section of the Great Wall of China (image credit)

Since entering university, apart from her physical education class, she basically had not engaged in any other physical activity. On such a steep stretch of the Great Wall, after climbing for less than ten minutes, she was already unable to walk anymore.

An elderly man and woman, each carrying a backpack, calmly and easily passed her. The gray-haired old woman turned back and smilingly addressed Gu Pingsheng, “Young man, why aren’t you holding your girlfriend’s hand and helping her along. I think she’s physically drained.”

Tong Yan only felt that this voice was floating somewhere above the heavens, and before she could even grasp the essence of what had been said, Gu Pingsheng had already taken her hand in his.

So unexpected. Her heart silently quivered a couple of times. She utterly could not keep up with the pace that reality was moving at.

Instinctively, she lifted her head.

Because he was facing the sunlight, Gu Pingsheng’s eyes had squinted together slightly, but still, they carried a smile in them. “If I had known that it would be this steep, we would have gone instead to that Mutianyu you had mentioned.”

Panting, and with the heavy beating of her heart sounding in her ears, she gasped out, “Yeah… I… I told you this place was ridiculously steep. I… I’ll be fine… fine climbing by myself.”

The sun this day was especially strong. Where was the feeling of a golden autumn day? The sun was obviously even fiercer today than during the height of summer. While she was speaking, beads of perspiration followed the curve of her chin and dripped down onto the dark gray stone blocks.

Gu Pingsheng motioned for her to take a rest, and immediately, Tong Yan leaned her body against the stone wall to her right.

The mountain breeze brushed against their perspiring skin. It was very pleasant. Both of their palms were sweaty. Their bodies were cool, but their palms were getting hotter and hotter. Tong Yan was growing increasingly uncomfortable as her body would feel waves of coolness and then waves of heat, but she dared not move her fingers in the slightest.

After a long while, her entire arm was feeling numb, and she finally turned her head to the side to glance at him.

Gu Pingsheng happened to be looking at her as well. “Rested enough? Let’s go. Once we reach Banshan [“Halfway Up the Mountain”][5], it’ll be better.” And then, in a very natural manner, he started the climb upwards with her hand in his.

Tong Yan did not even have a chance to protest and could only focus her efforts on trying to keep pace with him. As he was much taller than her, this meant he was half-pulling her in their ascent, and naturally, his hand was gripping hers tightly. Halfway through the climb, he even switched to use his other hand.

All around them, they would occasionally pass by people who were stopping to take a rest. Two or three stone steps away, there was a couple, and the girl’s voice drifted over to them. “Look at how strong and fit that guy is. How come you’re so useless? You’re not even climbing up as fast as me…” For the remainder of the hike, Tong Yan was rather preoccupied as she climbed up. They should be so far apart, but suddenly, the distance between them seemed as if it had been shortened.

When she at last stepped up onto level ground, she immediately pulled her hand back from his. “Teacher Gu, would you like to drink some water?” From her

backpack, she pulled out two small bottles of water and had just handed one to him when she heard a text message alert tone.

Pulling out her mobile phone, she took a glance at it. It was the class prefect from when she was in middle school: *I called you. Why didn't you answer?*

Tong Yan wearily replied to him: *I'm in Beijing. At Juyong Pass. A phone call will be charged long distance plus roaming. If there's anything, text me.*

Another text was quickly returned: *Juyong Pass? Didn't you climb that enough before? Hey, by the way, I saw Lu Bei today. Why was there a girl with him? I never heard that you guys broke up?*

[1] 馒头 "mantou." One of the traditional staples of ethnic Han Chinese food. A yeast-based type of bun that is steamed and contains no filling. (The buns that contain a filling are known as 包子 *baozi*.) Having only mantou to eat would be akin to having to survive on dry slices of bread everyday.



Mantou (image credit)

[2] 吃人嘴软,拿人手短. When you have eaten food someone has given to you, then the words you speak about that person must be carefully chosen so as to never speak poorly about him or her. When you accept things that a person gives to you, then anything you do will need to be carefully thought through such that you take into consideration how it would affect the person who bestowed you the favour. So, in general, this saying is warning people to be careful, for when you accept favours from someone, as a repayment, you may need to do things for the person or at the very least, not do anything that reflects negatively upon that person.

[3] The school mergers is referring to a program brought about by the Ministry of Education in China that shut down small, local or village schools and merged

them into larger, centralized schools in more densely populated cities. The concept was that this would improve use of building and land resources, and also teaching resources by ensuring higher quality of teachers at the centralized schools. Grandmother was a teacher at one of the smaller schools and probably was not as qualified on paper as the newer, younger teachers with university educations, so she was not retained. Hence, when she retired, because on paper she did not have the formal qualifications of a teacher despite years of teaching, her pension took a hit.

[4] 庙会 “miao hui.” Temple fairs or temple gatherings are a traditional Han Chinese custom. They are usually held on specific major holidays or days of religious significance at folk temples in worship of Chinese gods and deities. In addition, there will be various activities, entertainment, and opportunities to purchase items and hence can be very busy and crowded.

[5] 半山. This means “halfway up the mountain.” In Juyong Pass, there is a pavilion called Banshan Pavilion 半山亭 [“Halfway Up the Mountain Pavilion”], also called 观景凉亭 “Scenic View Pavilion”, is the largest pavilion in the Juyong Pass section of the Great Wall.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

7 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 3.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 3.2

November 18, 2015 by hoju 29 Comments



Just a reminder that updates will be weekly from now until the end of the year.

An unplanned reunion, a birthday, a gift that stirred her heart…

Chapter 3.2 – Are You Truly Real? (2)

This beacon tower where they were was a rare section of level ground. Many tourists were gathered in small groups and resting against the wall while taking photographs in all sorts of different poses. Gu Pingsheng twisted off the lid on his bottle and took a drink of water. “Want me to take a picture of you?” When he finished saying this, he pulled out a light and thin, credit-card sized camera.

Quickly, she typed off a three-word reply: *We broke up*. She then put away her mobile phone and in a very dedicated and dutiful fashion, stretched out her hand to take the camera. “Let me take one for you. It’s your first time here.”

While the two of them were each still politely relinquishing the chance to the other person, two middle-aged, foreign women suddenly cheerfully offered in English to take a photograph of the both of them together.

This was the first time Tong Yan had ever encountered a situation where, without even asking, someone had already volunteered themselves up to help take a picture, and was somewhat astounded by this. She glanced at Gu Pingsheng, but he merely smilingly handed the camera to one of the persons and said thank you.

When they had taken the camera back, she swept a gaze over it and very much had an urge to delete the picture.

Before, when Shen Yao was a celebrity-chasing fan, she had said that you should never stand next to a celebrity to take a photograph together because it was basically a real-life version of Beauty and the Beast. Now, as she saw the photograph of herself and Gu Pingsheng, she had that same feeling.

The name, Pretty Lady's Bane was most certainly not given without reason.

Gu Pingsheng took the camera from her hands. With his back facing the sun, he examined it carefully and was very pleased. "This shot is quite nice." It's you, only, who looks "quite nice."



"No wonder they say that… you

should never stand next to a celebrity… to take a photograph together… Basically it's a real-life version… of Beauty and the Beast."

In the evening, as they headed back, Gu Pingsheng deliberately turned on the radio for her and told her to find a program that she liked listening to to pass the time. As she blearily started to drift off to sleep, she heard Gu Pingsheng call her. "Tong Yan, could I trouble you to please help me check my mobile phone to see who's looking for me? It's in the right pocket of my jacket."

She reached her hand over and slid it into the pocket, swiftly feeling for the phone.

One unread text message.

Tong Yan hesitated, then slid her finger over to unlock the screen before opening up the full message.

TK, I remember tomorrow is the anniversary of your mother's death. I've declined all the family activities and gatherings for you. Don't worry about anything and just rest. Pingfan.

Anniversary of his mother's death? Tong Yan was utterly stunned. Tomorrow was her birthday.

Of course, Teacher Gu would certainly not know that. If her memory served her correctly, October 3rd of that year was the date of their first meeting in the Peking Union Medical College Hospital. So, his mother truly had passed away on that day.

"Who is it?" He turned his head to look at her.

Tong Yan raised his mobile phone up before his eyes.

"Thanks." After glancing it over, he turned his head back and continued driving. Nothing out of the ordinary. From the look in his eyes to the expression on his face, everything about him was calm as always. When it was time to get

out of the vehicle, he still insisted on accompanying her all the way upstairs.

The apartment corridors were all installed with sound-activated lights. The light bulbs on the third and fourth floors, however, were burned out. As the two of them walked up past the second floor, Gu Pingsheng deliberately slowed his pace. “Tomorrow, I’ll buy a couple bulbs and while it’s daytime, replace the ones that are burned out. Otherwise, if your grandmother is walking around at night, she could easily fall.”

She wanted to tell him that he did not need to, but all around them, it was dark, so even if she said anything, he would not be able to see it. As the two of them approached the turn in the stairwell corridor at the fourth floor, finally, from the light cast down from the fifth floor, they could see each other’s face.

She halted her steps and said to Gu Pingsheng, “Teacher Gu, you can just leave me here. It’s really late, and you should go back to rest.” She remembered what he had said a moment ago about changing the light bulbs and quickly added, “I’ll go buy a few light bulbs tomorrow and just ask the neighbor next door to help change them out. There’s no need to trouble you to make another trip here.”

The light from the fifth floor was reflected in his eyes as he merely smiled and replied, “It’s no problem. I don’t really have anything going on tomorrow.”

All of a sudden, a very light sound was heard from the floor above. Tong Yan instinctively lifted her head, and Gu Pingsheng, following her movements, also turned his eyes up to the fifth floor.

Someone was leaning against the wall, silently watching them. His face and features were the same. Even the place that he waited was the same. Before, he had also been like this and had always liked to stand here to surprise her.

At that time, the love between them had not been difficult or tiring. Aside from having to avoid the preying looks of the school teachers, nearly every memory was a sweet one. In those days, the most widely talked about stories of early-age dating[1] in the school were the ones of her and him.

One was the chosen student of their school’s high school campus, selected for fostering and development of her high potential; the other, the middle school

campus's most problematic student.

It was one of the most common sights on the school bulletin board: on the left side, the good news announcement of the award she had won in a certain competition, while on the right side, the notice of the disciplinary penalty given to him for fighting… In the beginning, he had always stood at the front entrance of the school to wait for her, but later, because his grades had been too poor to be admitted into the high school campus of the school, he had ridden here on his bicycle everyday, over a long distance, to see her.

"Tong Tong." At last, he opened his mouth to call her name. Everyone called her Yan Yan, but he was the exception who felt that he should be a little special.

Tong Yan seemed as if she was startled out of a daze, and resignedly, she glanced over at Gu Pingsheng. "Bye Teacher Gu."

Gu Pingsheng smiled, "See you tomorrow." After saying this, he turned and walked back downstairs.

Amid the sound of those footsteps that were gradually moving further away, Tong Yan mustered up her courage and proceeded up the stairs, looking at that person who was getting closer and closer… She did not know what to say, and the quietness was such that it created a sense of unease. At last, she could only ask perfunctorily, "It's autumn and you're still wearing short sleeves? Aren't you cold?"

In that instant, Lu Bei seemed as if he had many things to say, but because of her laidback greeting, his brows and eyes quickly unfurled and relaxed. "No, not cold. Happy birthday." He held out a silver box.

She did not take it from him. "How did you know I was back?"

"My family and relatives gave me too much stuff for the holiday celebration, so I drove over here and gave a few boxes to your grandmother." While he was speaking, his hand was still holding up that silver box. "What are you planning on doing for your twenty-first birthday?"

In the end, when he left, she still had not answered this question of his. And his gift, she had not accepted, either. By the time she stepped in the door,

Grandmother was already asleep, but the table lamp in the living room was still glowing, left on for her.

Sure enough, in that space that was already not very large, there were seven or eight cardboard boxes. With the light from the lamp, she began, one at a time, to identify the designs and logos on the boxes. There were fruit and drinks as well as vegetables. This building did not have an elevator, so he likely had carried these up by himself. Pulling out a pair of scissors, she opened up each of the boxes and began to sort and put everything away. An image even floated up before her eyes of him, trip after trip, clasping the boxes against himself as he trudged upstairs.

A person who had once been so very lazy had now become someone so fond of physical labour.

Just now, he had noticeably been smiling when he said goodbye, but yet his voice had sounded the same as that time long ago when he had sobbed uncontrollably.

She could not forget how that night, he had sat on the side of the road, crying like a little child who was only a few years old, but still, over and over again, he had said, “Tong Tong, don’t go to Shanghai.”

Everyone there at the bus stop, irrespective of child or adult, had turned to look at them with looks of bafflement. She surmised that none of them had ever seen a young man cry like so.

And she, half-crouched there in front of him, had not shed a single tear.

Sitting now in the living room, Tong Yan discovered that her face was wet. She picked up her mobile phone to glance at the time and noticed that she had received a text message without her even knowing when.

It was from Teacher Gu: *How about tomorrow at noon, I take the two of you out for lunch? TK*

She wanted to decline, but as she remembered the significance of what tomorrow was to him, she hesitated for quite some time and finally replied: *Sure.*

The following day, when Gu Pingsheng arrived, Grandmother was especially surprised and asked Teacher Gu how he knew that this day was Tong Yan's birthday. Gu Pingsheng was also taken aback and looked over at Tong Yan.

"I normally don't really celebrate my birthday." Tong Yan could only explain it in this way.

The end result was that dinner that night was particularly sumptuous. When the Peking roast duck[2] was served, Gu Pingsheng, in very natural motions, wiped his hands clean and then personally wrapped up a serving for her. "Birthday girl, happy birthday."



Clockwise from top: Image credits 1, 2, and 3

She took it from him and took a bite. The sweet bean sauce, intermingled with the aroma of the roast duck, caused one's heart to become warm. Very quickly, he had wrapped another one and while he was dressing it with condiments, he attentively asked Grandmother, did she like spring onions? What about minced garlic? Or julienned radish?

That expression in his eyes and tone of his voice truly were like those of a doctor — one of those warm, gentle doctors.

"Tasty?" he asked as he turned back to her. "Pingfan said the Peking duck here is better than Quanjude[3]. It's my first time here also."

“It is quite tasty.” She hurriedly picked up one of the pancakes and piled four or five slices of duck on it before rolling it up and handing it to him. “Thank you, Teacher Gu.” Perhaps because it was a holiday, the nearby tables all consisted of family dinner gatherings, and the entire restaurant had a happy, warm atmosphere.

It had been such a long time since she had last had this feeling. Although every time she came back she would bring Grandmother out for dinner, with only the two of them, there was always a sense that it was not lively enough, and in fact, the quietness seemed even more emphasized.

At the end, when the server asked them if they would like to take the duck carcass with them, Gu Pingsheng seemed to remember that Grandmother had the habit of feeding stray cats. He specifically asked the server to wrap it up so that the elderly woman could bring it back and let those strays have some meat.

When he took them back home that night, Grandmother very cordially invited him to stay for a while. “Yesterday, one of Yan Yan’s schoolmates brought over some fruit. I’ll go wash some and bring them over.”

Elderly folks all enjoyed exciting and lively atmospheres, especially the ones who had once been teachers.

Grandmother was busy in the kitchen washing fruits while, at the same time, chattering on endlessly. The general idea of her words was that Yan Yan’s schoolmate was so very kind and every holiday or festival, he would drive over and give her many boxes of various things as gifts.

“At first I had felt bad taking all of it, but that boy would always just say that Yan Yan used to tutor him and had helped him out many times. And he would tell me that every year, his family would give him many things and if he couldn’t finish eating them all, it would be a waste anyway….”

Gu Pingsheng suddenly asked her, “The person waiting for you yesterday was your schoolmate?”

With a glance at the figure in the kitchen, Tong Yan fell silent for a moment before answering quetly, “It was my ex-boyfriend.” Once she finished saying this,

she felt that her tone had sounded too dejected, so she immediately joked, “I used to be a student that gave teachers headaches. My early-age dating was well-known throughout the whole school.”

He looked at her, as if absorbed in thought. “Did I say something wrong?”

It turns out, feelings of sadness and loss are things that cannot be hidden.

Tong Yan gave a little smile. “Yup, you pulled up my sad memories. What are you going to do?”

She had replied offhandedly, wanting only to swiftly pass over this topic. She had not expected that Gu Pingsheng would very apologetically take a sip of water and say, “I’ll give you a piano piece. Consider it as my birthday present to you.” His gaze fell on the piano beside the window.

This was the largest piece of furniture in Tong Yan’s entire home. One of Grandmother’s former students had come back to China and had specifically sent this as a gift to her. In reality, with Grandmother’s mere skill level of a primary school music teacher, she mostly only knew how to play songs like “Yellow River Cantata[4],” “The Internationale[5],” or others along those lines, and those were already considered quite difficult, plus the opportunities to play them were not many at all…

Tong Yan stared somewhat disbelievingly at him. Then, she watched as he set down his glass, walked over, and sat down at the older-style piano by the window.

In this day and age, eight out of ten people knew how to play piano. Simply looking at the people around her, Shen Yao was a first round national pick piano player who had specifically been recruited into the school to be part of the school orchestra. Hence, this instrument had long since lost its ability to stir her.

Yet, when she heard Gu Pingsheng say he was going to play, it was still very unexpected. He could not hear, but he played very well. Unfortunately, she did not play and was not very knowledgeable either. But seeing him there, playing the piano, her eyes inexplicably began to tingle with tears. His world was one of utter silence. Regardless of how outstanding the music flowing from his fingers was, he was unable to hear any of it.

[1] 早恋 “zao lian.” What I have called “early-age dating” is, in China, dating under the age of 18 and especially when still in school. It is generally highly frowned upon.

[2] 烤鸭 “kao ya.” This simply means roast duck but the full name of this dish is 北京烤鸭 “Beijing roast duck,” more commonly known in English as Peking duck or Peking roast duck. Tender roasted duck with a thin, crispy skin is sliced into thin flakes and served with steamed pancakes, spring onions/scallions, and sweet bean sauce. There may be other condiments accompanying it, mainly vegetables and the most common one being sliced cucumber. The dish is eaten by spreading a pancake with a thin layer of sweet bean sauce and placing pieces of duck, spring onion, and any other condiments on top before rolling it all up together.

[3] 全聚德. Quanjude Roast Duck Restaurant is a restaurant chain in China that dates back more than 100 years, since the Qing dynasty. The original Quanjude restaurant was established in Beijing and gained fame because of its Peking roast duck. To this day, it is still recognized as one of the top restaurants serving the dish. There are now multiple branches, some even outside of China, but the first Quanjude restaurant still exists at its original location.



The original Quanjude restaurant, current day (Image source: http://www.quanjude.com.cn/)

[4] 《黄河大合唱》”The Yellow River Cantata” was composed in 1939 for a patriotic Chinese poem written by Guang Weiran, which became the lyrics of the song. Its popularity is enduring in the country and is known widely by the Chinese people. It describes elements such as the Yellow River and the battles

the people living along its shores had with it, as well as the fighting spirit of the people against invaders during the Chinese Sino-Japanese war.

[5]《国际歌》"The Internationale" is recognized as the anthem of socialism and communism. Originally written in French as "L'Internationale," it is well known and has been translated into many languages.

Additional Comment:

Something is stirred in me whenever I read those last two sentences of this chapter. Sorrowful? Not quite, although there are hints of sadness. Perhaps regret? I can somehow feel what Tong Yan is feeling. I can't help but imagine Gu Pingsheng, as his fingers dance over the keys of the piano, playing as he must have practiced and listened to himself do countless times long ago. But now, though his fingers still do what they did before, what surrounds him is only… silence.

Food for thought: Did you catch that Tong Yan was actually once a top student? Does it pique your interest as to why she is now an average one?

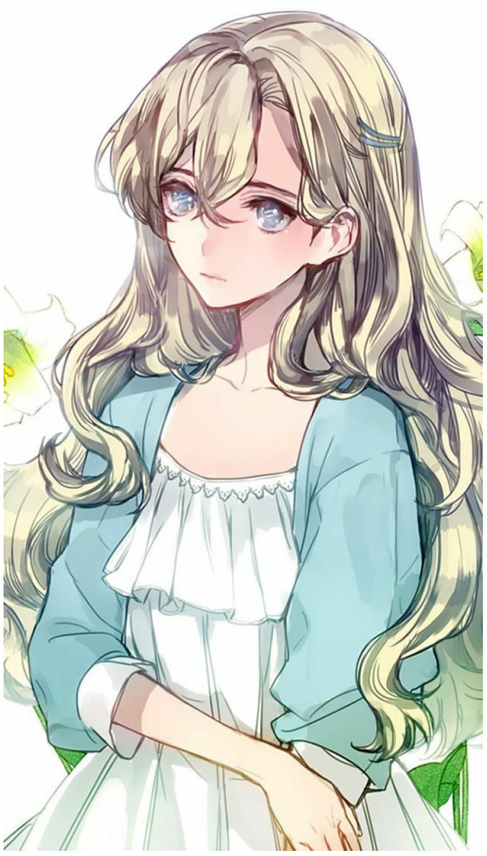
Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
8 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 3.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 3.3

November 25, 2015 by hoju 35 Comments



What are friends for? Some news for Yan Yan…

Chapter 3.3 – Are You Truly Real? (3)

When she returned to school, her dormitory was empty of people. Shanghai's climate was humid. She had left for only seven days, but her clothing inside the closet all looked as if they had been sprayed with water. In the end, she had no choice but to toss them all into a plastic bucket and head to the laundry room.

"Tong Yan!" Outside the window, Ai Mi was gripping the metal security bars and excitedly calling to her. "I've got one piece of good news and two pieces of bad news. Which do you want to hear first?"

Last night on the train, Tong Yan had once again stood the entire night, and

she was unbearably exhausted right now. Hearing these words, she only had one urge: to take the entire bucket of dirty clothes and smack it upside down over Ai Mi's head. In the two years she had known her, so long as Ai Mi made an appearance, irrespective of whether it was "good news" or "bad news," it was always news that meant bad things in store for her.

Sure enough, without waiting for her reply, Ai Mi continued to prattle on and revealed, "The good news is, for this year's Welcome Gala, an open vote in the school was taken and the nominee with the most votes for male emcee was your faculty's…" She deliberately dragged out the last vowel. Several girls standing inside the laundry room had perked up their ears to listen in, and now, they heard three words that made their blood boil with excitement. "… Great Beauty Gu."

Tong Yan was astonished. "He's a teacher. How can he host the Welcome Gala?"

"Why can't he?" Ai Mi was grinning like a blooming flower. "Don't forget, our new university president is known for being a maverick. Didn't he even chat anonymously with students on BBS? A mere teacher of the Law Faculty of course can be sacrificed, then."

When Ai Mi spoke the word, "sacrificed," there were many layered meanings contained in it.

Poor Teacher Gu…

"What about the bad news?"

"Because of the specialness of Great Beauty Gu, the Students' Union's fine arts department decided that another experienced emcee needed to be chosen, and on top of that, that person needed to be able to work well and be in sync with Great Beauty Gu… And that person is you."

"I resigned from Students' Union after I finished second year."

"Yup. That's why the president sent me to come do so mental work and prep on you. You've emceed a Welcome Gala, the school's Youth Talent Competition, and a school Christmas party. You have the most experience. Plus," Ai Mi gave her a woeful look and said, "you know that an emcee has to be able to handle all

sorts of bad things that crop up. Are you really going to be so cruel to make us find a rookie instead, and then Great Beauty Gu won't be able to come in properly with his lines and will be humiliated?"

She remembered her first time on stage, she had gotten her lines wrong, the microphone had not worked, and the audience had burst out laughing… The most hated incident was the time the performers had knocked over the background scenery flats. She could not even imagine what would happen if Teacher Gu, who could not hear, encountered these types of situations.

"So, for the sake of your master of ceremonies career, the last piece of bad news is, you can't take part in the play's rehearsal anymore." Ai Mi let out a long sigh. "Yan Yan, I've done a disservice to you. You can't even personally be involved in the play you wrote the script for…"

Tong Yan shook her head wordlessly. After some time, she nodded again. Her entire brain was focused on the matter about serving as masters of ceremonies for the evening gala and could not be bothered at all about some stage play right now.

"I'm done saying what I need to say, eh." Ai Mi was very pleased that Tong Yan had not refused. "Tonight, five o'clock in the main auditorium, we're having the first meeting. Supposedly your faculty's Great Beauty Gu just arrived in Shanghai. Such a coincidence, really."

As she reflected on those few days of interaction in Beijing and that Gu Pingsheng truly had helped her out a great deal, her heart ultimately softened and she gave in.

A significant number of people were already surrounding the doors of the main auditorium when she arrived that evening. People from all the various associations of the school were gathered there and conversing. Inside the main auditorium, the Students' Union was holding a meeting, and these associations that were going to be participating in the various performances were all waiting to rehearse.

When many of the third year students who were also key people in the Students' Union saw Tong Yan, they had gleeful grins from delighting in her

misfortune. “Tong Yan Wuji, I already said it, our Students’ Union president, dear, respected Mr. Zhou Qingchen wouldn’t just let you off the hook. See? You’re back again.”

The evening breeze blew ever so gently. Everyone’s wicked cackles sounded out ever so delightedly. She put on an expression of misery on her face and stepped into the auditorium.

The university’s main auditorium consisted of two levels and could seat 3500 people.

Since it was only an internal meeting of the program committee and things were still in the rehearsal phase, the lighting for the seating area inside remained dim. Off of the stage, there were only twenty-odd students, but surprisingly, many teachers were present.

The instant she stepped in through the back door, she spotted Gu Pingsheng standing in the middle of several teachers. He still wore a simple, white button-up shirt paired with casual, warm-brown trousers. Because of the distance, she could not make out his features or expressions.

Imperceptibly, his presence caused people to unwittingly take notice of him.

Tong Yan suddenly felt this was remarkable. Within the last seven days, she had traveled from Shanghai to Beijing and back again, and Teacher Gu had done the same. They had had brief interactions in Beijing, and then, after returning here, he was still the teacher who stood upon the podium and she was still the student who was plagued with anguish over university physics.

“Tong Yan.” The main floor seating area was open and empty, so when this name was hollered out, the sound rippled through the auditorium and echoed continuously.

Tong Yan hurriedly walked down past row after row of seats until she was in front of the stage. “Teacher Du.” This was the supervising teacher for the Students’ Union, the one known as “Du Half-A-Beat” because everything he did and said was always slow by half a beat.

Tong Yan glanced over at Gu Pingsheng, but before she had a chance to greet him, she heard Du Half-A-Beat say to him, “This is the female emcee that we

have trained up these last two years. She is very experienced and is also one of the top students in the Law Faculty."

He merely smiled and replied, "I know. She is my student."

Immediately, she went along with his words. "Teacher Gu, long time no see. Did you have a good holiday?"

Gu Pingsheng gave a nod and looked placidly at her. "Very good, thanks."

"Oh, right." When Du Half-A-Beat heard this, he at last realized with a start, "Teacher Gu, you're a teacher in the Law Faculty. You happen to be teaching Tong Yan this semester?"

Gu Pingsheng nodded. "Yes. Such a coincidence. This semester, she is in my class."

Behind the two of them, all the students and teachers had expressions of relief, as if a weight had been taken off their minds.

Gu Pingsheng's specialness had made them feel, from the beginning, that they were making an unreasonable demand of him. But if the two masters of ceremonies had already had several weeks of interaction, then this certainly was as if Heaven had created this wonderful opportunity and intended on helping them achieve their desire. Later, after hearing an explanation from Du Half-A-Beat, Tong Yan finally understood why Gu Pingsheng had agreed to this. This year was the university's 110th anniversary, and in celebration, the school was going to hold an evening gala, a concert, and a grand party and reunion of its exceptional alumni. Due to the significance of this particular year, the Students' Union decided to combine the Welcome Gala with the university's Anniversary Gala celebration.

With such an occasion, it was no wonder they were able to persuade someone of Teacher Gu's level to participate.

"Tong Yan." Du Half-A-Beat personally twisted open a bottle of spring water and handed it to her. "Normally for this type of evening gala, we should hire a professional master of ceremonies, but the president's wish is that we stay in touch with the people. So, the anniversary concert and alumni reunion party will be hosted by a professional emcee, but by giving the responsibility of the evening

gala to the student body, the event will be more memorable.”

Tong Yan understood now. She had been duped into a trap.

Since she and Gu Pingsheng were to be the masters of ceremonies for that night, they needed to attend all the rehearsals, and this included appraising each association or private group’s program. The two of them sat in the last row and watched the stage from a distance. Aside from the evaluators in the first row and the performers on stage, this auditorium that seated 3500 people was empty.

Tong Yan took a sip of her water and inconspicuously tilted her head to peek at Gu Pingsheng. And then, completely unprepared for it, her eyes locked with his.

“Teacher Gu, have you emceed before?” she instinctively found a topic of conversation.

“I did when I was in the University of Pennsylvania. It wasn’t for the university’s anniversary celebration, though. It was a party hosted by the School of Medicine.” Gu Pingsheng’s eyes were on her as he spoke. “But that was a long time ago, when I was still a student in med school. And it did not have all these…”

“All these rules and restrictions?” Tong Yan understood what he meant. “Yeah, it’s a real pain. The university’s school-wide galas are getting bigger and bigger with each time. I feel like they’re practically like the Spring Festival Gala[1].”

As she finished saying this, she seemed to think of something and immediately began flipping through the program flow for that evening. Oh man, they were so dead!

Dismally, she tilted her head to look at him. “Yup, just like the Spring Festival Gala. We’ll be reading out all the various messages of congratulations and good wishes from alumni around the world…” The scene even floated up in her mind of the three lasses from her dormitory all chortling hysterically in the audience as she read those.

Gu Pingsheng also found it amusing. “If you don’t want to read them, you can give them all to me.”

She gave him a grateful smile and then continued to focus on studying the

gala's program for the evening.

After a little while, she suddenly seemed to remember something and tapped his arm.

When she saw Gu Pingsheng turn his head to the side to look quietly at her, she actually hesitated, but in the end, she still could not refrain from asking, "Teacher Gu, you studied medicine in Penn. Why, then, did you go back to Beijing to do your internship?"

"My mother, at the time, was a surgeon at Peking Union Hospital." This was a seldom seen time where he actually was not looking at her when he spoke and had simply turned back to watch the stage. "Back then, I went there to do my internship only because I wanted to spend time with her." He did not look at her again, which was a polite indication that this topic had come to a close.

Her head lowered, Tong Yan carried on looking through the event program, but after staring at it for a long time, she still was not able to remember a single word of what was written.

"Tong Yan." Zhou Qingchen had appeared at some unknown time and suddenly called out to her. "Did I hear right? Teacher Gu studied medicine at Penn?"

With an "mm-hmm," Tong Yan asked, "Why?"

It seemed this Students' Union president was studying medicine, right? It seemed that's what it was. But her impression of the University of Pennsylvania was limited to what Shen Yao repeated everyday about it, about some business school there.

"The number three-ranked medical school in all of the U.S.…" Zhou Qingchen's face was flushed, and the look he had was one of a person who was about to meet his idol. "An illiterate like you would never understand. Tong Yan Wuji, do you even know how hard it is to get into Penn's med school? In order for me, in a roundabout way, to accomplish saving the nation, I even have to first study some darn laws to get a visa before I can get into that med school… Hurry, let me chat with my future senior fellow schoolmate. Future schoolmates, you know."

She was taken aback for half a second before she abruptly sat up straight,

deliberately putting herself between the two of them. “I’m warning you, Zhou Qingchen, don’t you go harassing my teacher.”

She was now certain that period in his past when he had studied medicine was something Gu Pingsheng did not want to talk about. Therefore, she was determined that she would not allow Zhou Qingchen to ask anything that might bring up those memories. And so, after Tong Yan’s desire to “protect her own” had flared up for a full minute, Zhou Qingchen was finally driven away.

Gu Pingsheng happened to turn back right at that moment, and seeing a student glumly leaving, he asked, “Does he need us for something?”

Tong Yan put on an innocent smile. “No, he just came over to ask us whether we wanted to order boxes of takeout to eat.”

[1]**春晚** “Chun Wan.” The common abbreviation for **中国中央**电视**台春**节联欢**晚会**, The Chinese Central Television Spring Festival Gala (or New Year’s Gala) is the yearly special New Year’s program shown on Lunar New Year’s Eve. Its viewership is in the hundreds of millions.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
9 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 4.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 4.1

December 2, 2015 by hoju 24 Comments



Yan Yan feels the pressure from co-emceeing with Great Beauty Gu. Don't worry, though. Teacher Gu always takes good care of her.

(Reminder that I'm following the published book. This chapter actually had quite a bit of filler material that is in the online version but was edited out when it went to the printing press.)

Chapter 4.1 – Those Beautiful, Little Things (1)

To her surprise, Gu Pingsheng's experience as master of ceremonies was much better than what he had described of himself. After several rehearsals, they had already developed a good rapport with each other. On the day of the official dress rehearsal, Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng were sitting in the waiting room backstage, and from outside their door, all sorts of cries and squeals of "Where's my costume?" "Where's my prop?" or similar were echoing up continuously. Her

script in hand, she could not hold back her giggles.

Suddenly, someone charged in in a state of panic, then paused in surprise before immediately uttering sorry over and over again and hastily retreating from the room.

Both of them found this humorous and exchanged a look.

The assistant stage manager soon arrived to notify these two masters of ceremonies that the dress rehearsal was beginning.

The two of them walked onto the backstage area to stand just behind the huge curtain. Peeking out at the two or three rows of leaders and executives of the university, Tong Yan all of a sudden grew anxious.

Her heart was beating more and more rapidly, and her palms were starting to heat up… She instinctively glanced over at Gu Pingsheng. In that dim lighting, he seemed to detect her abnormal behaviour and lowered his head to gaze at her. “Nervous?”

Tong Yan nodded. So humiliating. All that talk about her being “very experienced” and that she could assist and support Gu Pingsheng in this. Why, then, was she nervous with just the first formal dress rehearsal?

Hearing the opening music begin to play, she took a deep breath. Not nervous, not nervous at all. It’s just twenty or more executives of the school, right? She silently recited to herself the mental trick that worked every time: *The audience members are all just a bunch of big winter melons. Just winter melons that only know how to grin at you…* Suddenly, someone squeezed her hand. Not too light, nor too heavy but with just the perfect firmness.

A warm palm. A familiar feeling… She did not dare even to breathe, let alone turn to look at him.

The music in her ear had lowered slightly in volume, and soon, the hold on her hand loosened. Gu Pingsheng’s voice was heard saying, “It’s alright. You still have me. If you forget your lines, just look at me.”

In the previous few informal rehearsals, she had established a system and understanding with him. Each time he was required to speak, she would look at him in advance while she finished saying her last couple of sentences to allow

him to pick up his lines and continue.

“Tong Yan,” Zhou Qingchen addressed her from within her in-ear monitor. “Go.”

She immediately recovered herself. In this particular event, as master of ceremonies, she was required to be even more careful and attentive as all the programs and performances had to go through her to communicate with both the masters of ceremonies. If she made any mistake, Gu Pingsheng would not even have a chance to help her fix or cover up for it…

As a result of this pressure on her, Tong Yan’s performance was completely off during this official dress rehearsal.

Every time she looked over helplessly at Gu Pingsheng, she would see an obvious smile on his face before he quickly covered up for her mistake. His voice sounded as if he had had professional training before, for what echoed out from the microphone was completely different from his voice normally when he was carrying out class lectures. It was very clean and somewhat low.

It was like pure and refreshingly sweet spring water.

Great Beauty Gu’s performance was simply too good and served even more to emphasize how terrible hers was.

Even Zhou Qingcheng said to her, “Tong Yan Wuji, I had highly recommended you to emcee this, eh. How come it feels like you’re a rookie? Your voice is even trembling…”

Helpless, she covered her face with her emcee script and moaned in a sobbing tone, “I need to de-stress. The instant I think about the fact that I’m carrying the responsibilities of two people, I start getting anxious.”

Du Half-A-Beat was actually much more forgiving and relaxed. “It’s not a problem. This is just the first formal dress rehearsal. There’s still another two. Let yourself gradually get used to it.” When he finished speaking, his eyes shifted to cast a look behind Tong Yan. “Zhou Qingchen, go with Tong Yan to buy a new dress. This time, it’s the university’s Anniversary Gala, so let’s not have her wearing an old evening gown left behind by previous students.”

After he finished saying this, everyone looked towards Tong Yan’s dress. Sure

enough, because she was so slender, a dozen or more silver pins were stuck close together across the back of the dress to secure the waistline that had been taken in.

Zhou Qingchen nearly bit his own tongue at this. “Teacher Du, my girlfriend would beat me to death. She even keeps a record of every time I just talk to another girl…”

Tong Yan was also feeling so awkward she thought she could die. “Teacher Du, as long as Students’ Union agrees to let me make alterations, I’ll just take it back, pull out the seam, take it in, and re-sew it.”

Many of the evening gowns belonging to the Students’ Union were actually once private property that had been specially left behind by former students who had served before as masters of ceremonies. Hence, most of them fit to the original owner’s measurements. It was not just Tong Yan. It would be the same situation for anyone who was given a dress, and they were all long since accustomed to this. Fortunately, Du Half-A-Beat did not continue to insist on his suggestion.

Once the two of them finished the dress rehearsal, they hurried together to class.

As Tong Yan took a seat, Shen Yao immediately began mocking her in delight. “Tong Yan, you don’t need to be so brazen about it, eh. The entire class is waiting for just you two. It’s been several weeks like this already. Even my gossips cells are exploding.”

Tong Yan gave her a vicious glare. “How about you take my place?”

While they were talking, the other students in their class were also blatantly cracking jokes and making some strange noises to tease Tong Yan, who was trying to put on a calm, unruffled front. After all, Great Beauty Gu could not hear them anyway, so they could even more rampantly have their fun.

“Tong Yan Wuji, in order to help bring you and Great Beauty Gu together, we’re even attending class on Saturdays.”

“Yan Yan, we’ve got to keep the good things within our own[1]. That’s the

teaching of our ancestors, you know."

"Tong Wuji, do you know how to write the word, 'jealous'? Please look at my face…"

She picked up her book and used it to block her face. She had rehearsal everyday and was already absurdly tired. She could not be bothered with responding to this bunch.

Due to the frequent rehearsals for the gala, she was late again and again for her part-time job on the weekends. Luckily, Miao Miao had been holding down the cash register duties for her the whole time. When Miao Miao saw her dashing in, the first words she said were, "Tong Yan, hurry, hurry. I've been telling our manager that you have diarrhea and were in the bathroom."

Tong Yan was very grateful to her and at the same time, did not know whether to laugh or cry at the excuse. She was a full hour late. That French manager probably thought she had fallen into the toilet.

After several successive days of heavy rain, there was not really anyone in the store. She persevered until lunchtime, when she began to lower her head and tidy up. She was planning on randomly grabbing something to eat when, out of the blue, she heard a familiar voice calling her. The person she saw when she raised her head for a look, however, was completely outside of her expectations.

Gu Pingfan, Teacher Gu's older cousin.

The greatest surprise was when she placed a paper bag on the checkout counter and then, from within, pulled out a royal blue evening gown. "This was what I wore during my graduation ceremony. TK said we have very similar builds and told me to bring it here for you to try."

Tong Yan was basically frozen in astonishment. Gu Pingfan spoke again with a smile, "It's used. Hope you don't mind. I only wore it once."

Of course she would not mind. Or perhaps Teacher Gu had actually been worried that she would refuse to accept this and that was why he had deliberately sent over a used gown?

“Do you need me to go with you to the bathroom and change into it to see how’s the size?” Gu Pingfan looked at her smilingly.

“No. Thank you, though.” Tong Yan hurriedly said thank you several more times, finding herself slightly at a loss for how to handle such a situation.

Owing to that dress, she was in somewhat of a daze for the entire afternoon.

That evening, while she was crammed inside the metro train, she finally remembered that she still had not expressed her thanks. Immediately, she with great difficulty pulled out her mobile phone from her schoolbag and sent Gu Pingsheng a text message: *Thank you, Teacher Gu.*

She felt she should say something behind those few words, though, so she quickly added another line: *I got paid today at work for this month. Tomorrow I’ll first pay you back five hundred, is that ok?*

Very soon, a text message came back in reply: *It’s no problem. I remembered that Pingfan had worn that dress before. Royal blue should really complement your complexion. As for the money, there’s no hurry. TK*

Gazing down at that little row of words, she contemplated for a long time but did not know how to reply. Without even realizing it, her inbox had already been overtaken by the name, “Teacher Gu.”

Her eyes fixed themselves on her mobile phone, and she inexplicably stared at it for a long while. Then, she opened up one text message after another and re-read each one of them.

A “ding” rang out. The speakers in the metro train car were starting to announce the next station. Abruptly, she pulled her mind back together.

Not good, Tong Yan. The way you’re headed right now is very dangerous.

[1] 肥水不流外人田. Literally, this translates as “the fertile waters should not be allowed to flow into other people’s fields,” which basically means you should keep the good stuff within the family or your inner circle and not give others the opportunity. So here, they are joking that Tong Yan should “take” Gu Pingsheng

as her own and not let someone outside of their faculty have him.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

10 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 4.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 4.2

December 9, 2015 by hoju 31 Comments



Isn't this chibi utterly adorable? It was drawn by an online Chinese artist as part of a *Together Forever* series. I actually forgot about these earlier and have gone back to include the ones I've missed in some previous chapters (1.3, 2.1, 2.2, and 3.2) so you can check them out.

Remember how it had said earlier that an emcee needs to be able to handle all sorts of bad things that tend to crop up?

Chapter 4.2 – Those Beautiful, Little Things (2)

The university's Anniversary Gala was at six o'clock. By three o'clock, everyone was already beginning the preparations.

To allow the masters of ceremonies to have a peaceful and quiet atmosphere,

the dressing room that she and Gu Pingsheng were to use was set-up inside the backstage waiting room. When she stepped out, Gu Pingsheng was leaning against the makeup table, reading a book. He had removed his silver-gray suit jacket and placed it on the empty chair beside him. Perhaps because he had seen Tong Yan out of the corner of his eye, he now raised his head to look at her. Tong Yan, however, hurriedly shifted her gaze away.

Since last Sunday on the metro, when she had discovered her little fancies and feelings, she was behaving more and more abnormally. The most obvious thing was, she had started to pay attention Teacher Gu's every little movement and gesture.

She discovered that when he was driving, he liked to hold the steering wheel with his left hand while resting his right hand on top of it. Such a pleasant sight to look at. She discovered that every time he held his microphone, he was very relaxed about it and would hold it loosely, unlike her tight grip on her own microphone. She discovered that the tattoo on his arm truly was an English name, and furthermore, it was written in his own handwriting…

Several girls, all junior schoolmates, suddenly ran up to their doorway, prattling on together at the same time and grinning, "Senior sister, senior sister, when you graduate, will you leave this dress behind?"

"Senior sister, may we come in just to watch?"

Before Tong Yan could reply, Gu Pingsheng had leaned over so that he was precisely blocking their view of more than half of her body, and then noiselessly and without drawing any attention, he helped her cover up for a little error of hers — he pulled up the open zipper that was at the waist of her evening gown.

It only took the space of two seconds and then seven or eight junior, female schoolmates came charging in. Tong Yan gazed dazedly at Gu Pingsheng, but he had already leaned back again against the edge of the table, picked up the book on it that was written in the language of some country she could not determine, and carried on with his reading. His expression seemed as if he was deep in contemplation…

When the two of them were standing in the wings behind the stage curtain,

waiting for the event's start, Tong Yan at last looked at him and said, "Just now… thank you."

Seeing that a slight red had risen up in her cheeks, Gu Pingsheng tapped her on her head with his rolled up script and deliberately used a lighter tone to reply, "Student Tong Yan, there are some things that you need not, and should not, say thank you for."

Tong Yan had already been feeling embarrassed, and now, his little action caused her face to grow even hotter.

Fortunately, the opening music that by now they had listened to more than a dozen times was already echoing out. The auditorium that just a moment ago had still been bustling with boisterous activity, instantly quieted down. The quietness of 3500 people. Shutting her eyes, she allowed herself to set aside all other thoughts that might distract her.

"Tong Yan." In her in-ear monitor, Zhou Qingchen's voice sounded somewhat tight. "Go. Tonight, you're the prettiest."

In that moment when she opened her eyes again, the stage was already completely dark.

With one hand, she lifted up the skirt of her gown slightly and finally stepped out from behind the curtain. Under that dazzling spotlight, she could not see anything. Only the sound of Gu Pingsheng's footsteps behind her were still very clear and very distinct.

A total of twelve steps, no more, no less. And then she saw the silver tag that had been taped down onto the stage floor.

She came to a standstill on that spot, smiled, and exchanged a look with Gu Pingsheng before eventually turning her eyes to the front…

"Distinguished guests, teachers, fellow students, as well as all alumni who are watching this live via the Internet, a good evening to you all…" After getting through saying all the cumbersome wording, she secretly breathed out in relief and proceeded into the main topic of the night. "I am Tong Yan and I'm from the Law Faculty's class of students who were admitted in 2008. Standing here by my side is my teacher and also my co-host for the night." Tilting her head to the

side, she smiled and looked up at Gu Pingsheng. “Gu Pingsheng, our Teacher Gu.”

Before she had finished speaking the last word, the entire auditorium had already erupted in excitement.

Gu Pingsheng only spoke three words: “Good evening, everyone.” As his voice echoed out from the speakers, it unexpectedly contained a slight, understated elegance and sensuousness.

“Oh my god,” Zhou Qingchen’s voice sighed in her in-ear monitor, “that is the real voice of Teacher Gu…”

Tong Yan was also quite astounded. In comparison to their dress rehearsals, this truly was of a professional caliber.

It was fortunate that the lines that followed were all Gu Pingsheng’s task. She simply stood there beside Gu Pingsheng, listening in on the repeated sighs of admiration coming from the control booth. The final remnants of her tension all dissipated, and now, she was so annoyed she wanted to curse at someone.

“Give me a word to describe the voice of my future fellow senior schoolmate.”

“Magnetic.”

“That’s tacky!”

“Sexy.”

“Also tacky!”

“Nice-sounding.”

“You must be studying physics, right? You don’t even know any adjectives.”

This continued until the spotlight dimmed and the control room was thrown into its next segment of turmoil and clamour as it began to conduct the change into the next program. Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng could not return backstage and could only sit off the stage to the side and rest.

When Tong Yan turned to look at him, Gu Pingsheng had just taken a bottle of spring water from the assistant stage manager, nonchalantly opened it, and

taken a drink. “What’s up?”

“Teacher Gu, have you actually practiced or maybe been trained in speech and broadcasting and hosting?”

He did not deny this. “More or less. I studied it a bit.”

As she took a sip of water, a voice was already speaking in her in-ear monitor. “ ‘Without You’ is up. Zhao Jianan get ready.”

The current program that was performing was the school’s symphony orchestra. It was therefore not required for them to introduce “Without You” as the next act because once the orchestra’s performance came to an end, it would simply continue directly into providing the accompaniment for Zhao Jianan. And so, she needed only to listen and continue to rest.

“Sh*t!” Zhou Qingchen suddenly burst out a swear. “We’re screwed. Tong Yan, we’ve got a big problem. You need to fill in.”

Her heart gave a thump, but her monitor only allowed her to listen so she could not even ask what had happened. Out on the stage, the curtain was slowly being lowered, signaling that this particular program had reached its conclusion. When the view of the orchestra was completely hidden by the curtain, it would be the beginning of the next performance…

“Tong Yan, the next two performances aren’t ready yet and it’s too late to let the orchestra know. You sang this song in last time’s singing competition, so you’re subbing in.”

She was utterly stunned. The curtain had already come down and the musical introduction on the piano quietly rang out. The musical notes seemed to skip forth, each one landing on the deepest reaches of her heart.

“Come on, go.”

When she had finally steeled herself and risen to her feet, she had already missed the first line of the song. On the other side of the stage, Shen Yao seemed to have detected that no one was singing, and she immediately improvised and added another few bars to the introduction. Then, she imperceptibly transitioned back into that soothing rhythmic chording she had played at the very beginning—-

“No I can’t forget this evening…”

With her microphone raised, Tong Yan did not have enough time to even to step onto the stage before she had sung this first line. Stillness instantly fell over the backstage. Nobody knew what exactly had happened, and everyone was in a state of shock.

“Or your face as you were leaving,
But I guess that’s just the way…”

In the darkness, Tong Yan seemed to see Gu Pingsheng’s eyes. It was only for a brief instant, though, for then, she had already stepped up onto the stage. In that moment, as a single, silvery spotlight shone down, the hall also grew quiet.

Half a second later, the entire auditorium was flooded with a deafening roar of screams, surprised shouts, and applause that nearly drowned out the musical accompaniment.

The event program had been released very early on. No one had expected that, in the end, the gala’s host and master of ceremonies would personally perform this piece.

“I can’t live…”



But, right as she sang out the first half of this line of the chorus, a clear and melodious male voice echoed through the whole auditorium.

“I can’t live
If living is without you
I can’t live
I can’t give anymore…”

In disbelief, Tong Yan turned around and watched as Gu Pingsheng walked out from the other side of the stage. At some point in time, he had taken off his suit jacket, looking now just as he had that first day he strode into the classroom, and even his tie was removed. His microphone was held relaxedly in his hand.

He merely smiled as very, very slowly, he walked out from the shadows and towards her.

Those deep black eyes were fixed unblinkingly on her… He made a subtle gesture, and instantly she understood.

Lowering her own microphone, she quietly stood in that brilliant circle of the spotlight and gazed at him there, partially illuminated and partially still veiled in darkness. As the chorus came to its end, all the accompanying instruments faded out, leaving Shen Yao alone to continue playing, perfectly blending with Gu g’s voice.

No I can’t forget this evening…”

ly, he had transitioned in to take the lead vocal line.

other gesture from him, she raised her microphone and quietly ed with his singing. After each line was sung, she would echo it again in

d it mean to “go crazy”? The students who had long since erupted in on and those ceaseless squeals and screams, that’s what. She finally sonally experience the meaning.

ire time, he stood outside the illumination of the spotlight, gazing at the very last chorus when he at last extended his hand to her.

ld not remember how she had stretched out her hand.

As if she had been bewitched, just like that, he was tightly holding onto her hand.

"I'm crazy, I'm going crazy!" After Tong Yan stepped off the stage with her hand still enclosed in Gu Pingsheng's, Zhou Qingchen finally managed to exclaim this out in a voice that was quivering terribly. "Did you see that? Those two are what you call professional emcees. Did you all see that?…" In her in-ear monitor, there were peals of lively and excited laughter that filled her ears. But as for her own voice, she seemed to have lost it somewhere…

"Tong Yan Wuji!" Ai Mi suddenly threw her arm around her. "Was I good or not? I mouthed the words to lead your Great Beauty Gu to keep with the beat. Totally flawless and unnoticeable! So perfect!

When the jokers who made up the Sunshine Theatre Society saw the two emcees coming down, they immediately headed up onstage and smoothly announced their own performance.

Successfully, they transitioned the program into the next act.

Onstage, the resounding sounds of impassioned theatrical voices had started up by now, but backstage, pandemonium had broken out.

Everyone was elated, as if they had personally been the ones to save the production by filling in for the act. Standing beside her, Gu Pingsheng handed Tong Yan a bottle of water. "Good thing the song was an oldie. Otherwise, I would only be able to watch and do nothing."

Additional Comments:

One of the most recognized covers of "Without You" is probably the one by Mariah Carey (which I personally love), but I needed to search for a male-female duet. There's only one I could find. While it doesn't quite follow the author's described arrangement of the song, hopefully, it'll still help you imagine.

(Actually, I can't imagine how this is possible. Gu Pingsheng can't hear, and

even if we assume he has perfect pitch, how can he know what key to come in on? Maybe Ai Mi told him the key it was being sung in and then, because he has perfect pitch, he could come in right on key? … Aaaah! … I'll just ignore that detail.)

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

11 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 4.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 4.3

December 16, 2015 by hoju 21 Comments



The aftereffects of that blood-roiling performance… A good thing, or a bad thing for our leads?

Chapter 4.3 – Those Beautiful, Little Things (3)

Ai Mi handed her coat to her, then took advantage of the opportunity to express to Gu Pingsheng, “Teacher Gu, I ‘white part of the scallion’ [cōng bái] you.” After saying this, she left with chortles of “hee hee.”

Gu Pingsheng was silent for a moment before asking Tong Yan, “What did she say?”

“She said she idolizes [chóng bài][1] Teacher Gu, you.” She had finally found her voice again but it was still somewhat raspy. Luckily, he could not hear it.

“When you did that, weren’t you afraid you might sing something wrong or off?” She looked at him.

“I have a bit of a musical foundation in vocal studies, and I’m also very familiar with that song.” He motioned for her to put on her coat. These last few days, the

temperature had fallen somewhat, and it was rather chilly backstage. “But I still couldn’t be certain that I could completely complement you. Good thing you and Shen Yao are both very astute.”

He spoke nonchalantly about this, as if a moment ago, he had been singing in a karaoke bar and not performing in front of several thousand people. And the main point was, in those circumstances, he had been required to go onstage and sing.

Piano, vocal studies, speech and broadcast… As she pieced together all these things about him, she gradually came to the realization that his family had actually intentionally trained and fostered abilities in him. Even if one were to disregard the profession he had once studied, simply these things alone were enough to make one feel a sense of regret and a twinge of sadness in the heart. Heaven had richly blessed him with many talents, but unfortunately, he no longer had an arena for him to demonstrate them.

By the time the evening gala came to an end, Tong Yan nearly collapsed from exhaustion.

Because they needed to remove their make-up and change their clothing, she and Gu Pingsheng were almost the last to arrive at the post-event celebratory feast. Students’ Union had reserved the entire Haijingge Restaurant, and inside, boisterous noise and loud laughter stirred the eardrum.

The two of them had just stepped inside when Zhou Qingchen immediately clapped his hands together, indicating that everyone should quiet down. “Hurry, hurry, bring the alcohol. Tonight, our mission is to get our two emcees hammered with booze until they fall over.”

Before Tong Yan had a chance to say anything, a brimming glass of beer was stuffed into her hand. Her alcohol capacity was such that she would pass out after three glasses, and she had never before been the subject of a focused effort to get her drunk. However, judging from the atmosphere here tonight, she reckoned that unless they drank themselves unconscious, they should not even think about exiting through those main doors …

Gu Pingsheng glanced down at the glass in his hand, sensing that he could not

back out of this now. “My friends and students here, do you need to take into consideration the virtue of respecting your teacher?”

“Teacher Gu,” everyone suddenly shouted in unison, “we ‘white part of the scallion’ you.” It was a resounding sound, and even the serving staff who were carrying trays around jumped with shock.

Tong Yan suddenly felt very, very touched and she turned her head to look at him. Though he could not hear, he could still see the words they had spoken.

Everyone’s lips moving in unison, everyone’s excited expressions caused many emotions to flood up into that pair of eyes — an intensity that flashed very briefly before it was gone.

In the end, contrary to everybody’s expectations, they were the ones who were all finished off by Gu Pingsheng instead.

Everyone was transported back on bicycles ridden by dormmates who had all been summoned over from their various dormitories to help … Only she, the one who had joined forces with Gu Pingsheng against their “common enemy,” very clearheadedly looked toward Gu Pingsheng and said, “Oh no, they’re all drunk. There’s only us left to pay the bill.”

Smiling, the restaurant owner wagged his hand at them. “No need, no need. Your Students’ Union President Zhou will come back tomorrow to pay the tab.”

Tong Yan secretly exhaled in relief. Gu Pingsheng was now the people’s idol, and she did not dare force him to pay the restaurant bill.

In the beginning, she had still been carefully totaling up how much he had drunk, but later, she utterly lost track. At the end, even she had started to suspect whether Teacher Gu actually had ancestral roots in northeastern China[2] and had started drinking *baijiu* [traditional Chinese alcoholic drink][3] to pass the day when he was still a babbling baby learning to talk.

As the two of them walked back together along the tree-lined boulevard that was relatively empty of people, there was not much conversation between them. Perhaps he was a little tipsy, too. When they arrived in front of the girls’ dormitory building, someone gave a loud sigh of admiration. Instantly, numerous

gazes coming from the laundry and boiler rooms[4] were thrown in their direction. And then, more joined in from the balconies … Heads furtively poked out from at least half of the forty-odd balconies on this side of the building, all trying hard to locate Gu Pingsheng, the person who, only a little while ago, had amazed an entire audience.

“Teacher Gu.” Tong Yan could not handle this much longer. “I’m going in first now.”

He seemed to have perceived that standing at the foot of the girls’ dormitory building was not a wise thing to do to. “Go ahead.”

Tong Yan turned away, but just as she stepped up onto the first step, she suddenly turned back again. “Teacher Gu, you drank. Make sure you don’t drive.”

“I don’t drive anymore.” He could not hold back a laugh. “I’m planning on settling down to live in Shanghai, so I can’t continue using the driver’s license I was originally using. Nowadays, there are regulations and restrictions around hearing ability when obtaining a drivers license within the country, so lately, I’ve been riding the campus shuttle or taking a taxi.”

Tong Yan had not expected, however, that when she pushed open the door to her own dormitory room, she would be greeted with a different sort of scene. Shen Yao and Wang Xiaoru were sitting facing one another, both wearing very grim expressions. So grim it was rather scary.

“What’s going on?” Even when Tong Yan shut the door, the two did not turn their heads.

Shen Yao shrugged. “I’m looking at the person who is now famous school-wide for being a third party, the culprit who caused us to nearly be humiliated tonight at the gala.”

Tong Yan could not quite understand. Wang Xiaoru merely smiled, “I’m heading out.” After saying this, she grabbed her mobile phone and keys and strode straight out the door.

“What’s going on?” Tong Yan asked again.

“Do you know why Zhao Jianan suddenly didn’t go up on stage?” Shen Yao heaved a lengthy sigh. “Let me give you a brief summary of what was happening backstage while I was shaking in fear and accompanying you and Teacher Gu on the piano.” Tong Yan tossed the paper bag containing her clothes off to the side and motioned for her to speak.

“I’m sure in your Students’ Union celebration feast, no one dared tell you the truth, but when we, the band were out at our own dinner, it was a complete uproar. Apparently, at the time, Zhao Jianan had already changed into her outfit, but one minute before she was supposed to go onstage, she suddenly started bawling and ran away with her phone in her hand. Everyone backstage at the time was stunned. Someone eventually revealed the gossip that Zhao Jianan had found out Prez Zhou was actually cheating on her with another girl. She was so mad she didn’t care about anything else and just bawled, saying she’d rather die before she went out onstage, that she wanted to completely screw up the gala so that Prez Zhou would be disciplined …”

As she listened up to this point, Tong Yan suddenly realized that, indeed, it did seem that no one had mentioned tonight why such a big slip-up had occurred

“And so … it’s Xiaoru?”

Shen Yao let out another long sigh. “Xiaoru is just too ruthless. She nearly ruined all of us.”

Tong Yan was somewhat unable to believe this was true. “Doesn’t she have a boyfriend already?”

“Prez Zhou has an offer from the University of Pennsylvania and also has a job offer from the Singapore government. Whoever’s with him won’t have to worry about taking an exam for this or trying to get into that anymore.”

Yet another love story that crumbled after a single strike. Tong Yan had no desire to ask for more details, and Shen Yao also could not be bothered to say any more. Instead, she grinningly began showing Tong Yan the current hot topics on the school’s BBS. Without a single exception, they were all related to tonight’s “Without You” performance. She only needed to look at the subject headings of the posts before she wanted to start laughing.

“Begging on my knees for a recording of tonight’s ‘Without You.’ Will

treat you to Xinjiang big plate chicken[5]!!!!”

*“Oh cr*p! So freaking annoying. My computer crashed while I was streaming it live!”*

“[Shocking appearance] Perverted old dude impersonating Pretty Lady’s Bane beside Remembrance of Roots Lake!”

“Latest campus shuttle bus schedule (Gu Pingsheng version)!”

……

“I’ll show you two that are exciting.” Shen Yao opened up two windows on her screen and read out the subject line. “ ‘Any Penn alumni out there? Have you heard of the stories about Gu Pingsheng when he was in med school?’ Hurry, look, look.”

With an expression of adoring worship, she stared at Tong Yan, as if she could see through her to the far away University of Pennsylvania over in the United States…

“I can’t believe Great Beauty Gu studied medicine and that he’d actually been in the School of Medicine at Penn. Tong Yan Wuji, I can’t take it. That’s the home of Wharton School of Business — my goal for next year, *aaah* …”

Tong Yan gave a couple of “mm-hmms” and remained silent out of a guilty conscience.

“There’s more. There’s this one, too.” Shen Yao clicked open another window.

She took a glance and was truly taken aback this time.

“I can’t take it, can’t take it! Huge, earth-shaking scandal! The girl in white who nearly scared me to death that time in the Upper Building was the female MC from tonight, ah ah ah ah! And that, that, that, that backside that totally enchanted me was definitely Gu Pingsheng! I’ll bet a cartload of cucumbers that these two for sure have a teacher-student romance going on!! Just look at their eyes. I watched the video 19 times and couldn’t even find one second where their gazes separated …”

A post that had been posted half an hour ago already had twenty pages worth of replies. Someone was even incessantly posting screenshots, analyzing each

little movement and each expression the two of them had shown during every line of lyrics they had sung…

“God, besides in the American TV series forum, I’ve never seen anyone take screencaps and analyze everything so painstakingly before.” Chortling, Shen Yao turned around to see a speechless Tong Yan, so she comforted, “Don’t have such bad composure. It’s the era of universal entertainment.”

Shen Yao’s mobile phone abruptly started to ring, and she hurriedly stepped out onto the patio to take the call.

Tong Yan continued to read line by line through the replies, and very soon, she stopped at one that was actually extremely technically sound. Someone had actually totaled up the number of teacher-student romances in each of the faculties over the last ten years. The final conclusion was, although their university did not explicitly stipulate a stance in regards to such scenarios, behind closed doors, they certainly tried to break up the loving couple. At the very least, during the period the student in question was still studying at the school, the pair should not dare — and must not — brazenly be romantically involved.

There had been a total of seven pairs, but in the end, the only romance that came to fruition was last year’s couple from the Faculty of Architecture that had wed after the graduation ceremony. The others had stirred up a merry ruckus, but the end result was either the teacher leaving the school or else the student moving far awa y…

She was engrossed in reading when out of the blue, Shen Yao swatted her on her shoulder. “Read anything fun or interesting?”

“No, just pointless stuff.” Tong Yan closed the computer screen window.

[1] Ai Mi was doing a play on similar sounding words, where 葱白 “cōng bái,” which means “white part of the scallion,” is quite similar sounding to 崇拜 “chóng bài,” which means to idolize/look up to/worship.

[2] People of northeastern China are reputed to be big drinkers with large alcohol capacities.

[3] 白酒 “bai jiu.” *Baijiu* literally means “white alcohol.” This traditional Chinese alcoholic beverage is technically classified as a spirit and is made from sorghum and other grains. Those who did not grow up exposed to *baijiu* will often, on their first taste of it, describe it with adjectives such as “strong,” “fiery,” “harsh,” “biting,” *etc.* It has a high alcohol by volume (ABV), typically in the range of 40-60%. (For comparison, a typical wine is ~9-15%, vodka is 40%.)

[4] 开水房 “kai shui fang.” Literally meaning “room for boiled water.” This boiler room is not the basement room or ship compartment with large tanks and heating equipment that we usually associate with this term. In Chinese university dormitories, boiled water for drinking is located in a separate room called the boiler room, and students may go there to fetch their drinking water.



Boiler room in a Chinese university (image credit)

[5] 大盘鸡 “da pan ji.” This literally means “big plate chicken” and is a Chinese chicken stew that originated from Xinjiang area.



Xinjiang big plate chicken (image credit)

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

12 of 66 Main story segments

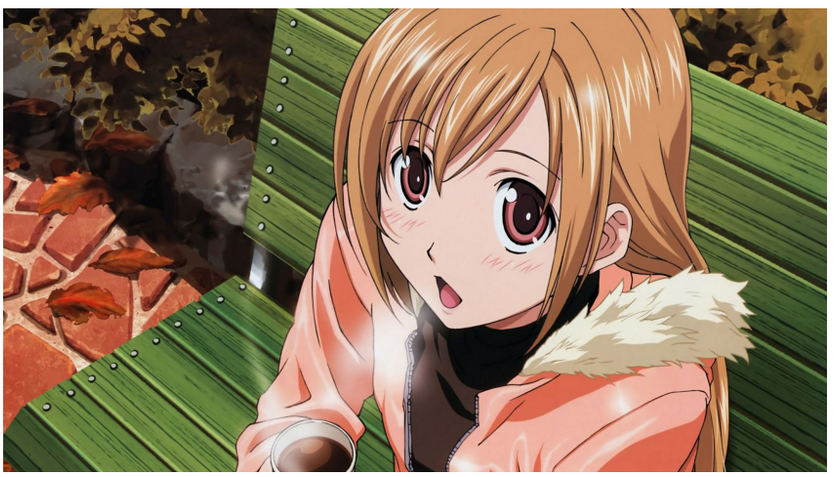
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 5.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 5.1

December 23, 2015 by hoju 29 Comments



With Christmas just around the corner, I'd like to wish all our readers and supporters of the blog a very Merry Christmas!

The overall atmosphere seems to have taken a change. What do you think has caused it?

Chapter 5.1 – The Real You and Me (1)

One week after the gala, it was the week of midterm examinations.

By now, it was approaching late autumn, and the classrooms were frightfully cold. Consequently, the library, which was fitted with year round central heat and air, had naturally become a high-demand piece of turf.

Tong Yan's upper body was slumped on top of the table as she studied for Jurisprudence, and her head was spinning from all the Latin terms. The teacher for this particular course insisted that if one was to study law, then one must learn Latin. He had directly handed out a self-written handbook that consisted completely of Latin terms with the corresponding English equivalent, proclaiming that half the final examination would be in Latin. Hence, Tong Yan had no choice but to plow through that handbook until she was about to go nuts.

"Philosophy, philosophia. This stupid one here cannot figure out the

difference.” Tong Yan sighed, “Why is it that, even as I’m being tortured by the CET-6 English test, I have to memorize Latin, too?”

Shen Yao was sprawled on the table as she worked on advanced math practice test problems. “I think the most unlucky law students in the entire country must be us. Have you ever seen any law students have to re-take advanced math over and over again?”

Wen Jingjing pulled her head out from the International Commercial Arbitration textbook. “And let me add: out of all the law schools in the whole country, how come ours is the only one that teaches completely in English from third year onwards? I haven’t even passed my CET-4 yet …” After saying this, she rubbed away at her tears of misery.

When Tong Yan’s eyes caught sight of the textbook for International Commercial Arbitration that Wen Jingjing was holding, she unexpectedly thought of Gu Pingsheng. Last week, he had again said that there were matters to attend to in his family and had not given her any physics lessons.

Her gaze inexplicably brushed over the textbook in Wen Jingjing’s hand again, and suddenly, she really wanted to send a text message to Teacher Gu and ask him whether he was going to tutor her this week … But after taking a glance at her phone, she grew hesitant again.

Maybe, he was very busy.

The place they were seated was separated from a staircase by only the wooden railing, so when all of a sudden, a large number of people upstairs started walking down, their gazes were naturally drawn in that direction. It seemed that they were all teachers, and in groups of twos or threes, they chatted as they walked.

“Hey, isn’t that Tong Yan’s Goddess of Nightmares? She knows Teacher Gu?” Shen Yao’s eyes were sharp and swiftly caught sight of the potential for a love affair.

When Tong Yan looked over, Gu Pingsheng was walking side by side down the stairs with the Goddess of Nightmares, Zhao Yin. From somewhere within the

crowd, someone called out, “Teacher Zhao.” Zhao Yin tapped the back of his hand lightly, motioning to him that somebody was looking for her.

As Gu Pingsheng looked over at Teacher Zhao, he also happened to see the three of them as well. But, it was only a brief, single glance.

After quiet was restored at the staircase, Shen Yao also put away her advanced mathematics papers. “I have advanced math at three o’clock this afternoon. I’m heading out first.” Wen Jingjing also abruptly took a look at her watch and then cried out that she was going to be late for her elective class.

Soon, they had both left, and Tong Yan was not in the mood to stay here any longer either. While she was considering going back to the dormitory room, someone suddenly set a paper cup down beside her hand. A cup of purified water with a faint white cloud of steam rising from it.

She turned around. It was someone who should have been long gone by now — Gu Pingsheng. It seemed as if, regardless of when or where, he always liked to give her water. Such a very healthy habit.

“Memorizing Latin terms?” He cast a glance at the handbook in front of her.

She nodded. “Our Jurisprudence exam questions are going to have Latin in there for sure. Not memorizing is not an option.”

He took a seat beside her. “Just now, I was letting Zhao Yin know about your progress. She’s agreed to help me out and continue your physics tutoring. Do you have her contact details? Email, or phone?”

Tong Yan was taken aback for a moment, but quickly, she answered, “Yes, I have her email.”

With a smile, Gu Pingsheng told her, “In terms of proficiency and qualifications in this field, she is the true physics teacher. Plus, every teacher has her own way of doing things. You’ve taken her class for such a long time now, and if you get her one-on-one help, next semester, you should pass easily.”

Because he needed to speak to Tong Yan, he had turned slightly to the side. He was completely swathed in the sunlight shining in through the window, which softened and blurred the outlines of his features.

Nodding, she said, “Thank you, Teacher Gu.”

Then, the two of them had nothing more to say.

Speedily, she put her books away. “I still have class this afternoon. Teacher Gu, if there’s nothing else, I’m going to go first.”

Gu Pingsheng nodded, then suddenly chuckled, “Remember, learn and study diligently, and not just for my course.”

When he said this, he had used a seldom-heard serious tone. Tong Yan gave an “mm” in reply.

As the two of them finished their conversation, they both rose to their feet at the same time. However, when they discovered the other person was leaving, they simultaneously halted their actions. For some reason, she sensed a strange awkward atmosphere between them. Fortunately, someone behind them addressed Gu Pingsheng, which gave her the chance to say quietly, “Bye, Teacher,” and dash down the stairs, hugging her books to her chest.

She ran very quickly, and her heart was beating very quickly, as well. But, she dared not reflect on the reason for this.

On the last step of the stairs, though, she unexpectedly tripped over herself, and her entire body tumbled onto the marble tile floor. The books in her arms scattered everywhere. This mishap that rose so abruptly stunned her, and for a long moment, she did not snap out of her shock.

A hand reached out and pulled her back up. “Hey, missy, what are you thinking about?”

Sighing, Ai Mi set down her own pile of books and began to help her gather her fallen ones. “Falling here in the library? Are you waiting for a hero to come rescue the fair damsel in distress?”

Tong Yan rose to her feet, rubbing her knees as she explained, “I suddenly tripped on myself.”

Ai Mi handed her books back to her. “I haven’t seen you in a long time. Hey, celebrity of the moment, what have you been up to these days?”

“Studying. Diligently studying.”

“I really admire you.” Ai Mi gave another lengthy sigh. “That night at the gala, it felt like a drama being acted out and, morever, definitely one of those trendy idol dramas … But now, everything’s back to normal. Everyday, besides going to class, it’s taking tests. Do you ever feel like it’s really hard to get used to?”

She laughed, “I’ve been used to it for a long time. It’s not as if that was my first time up on stage emceeing.”

“Not the same. It was not the same as any of your other times.” Ai Mi made an effort to examine the expression on her face. “Tell me in secret, do you and your Teacher Gu have especially good ‘rapport’ and click especially well with each other?”

“That day, we were co-emcees. Of course we needed to have rapport.”

Ai Mi put on a mysterious grin, gently pinching her arm as she whispered, “Just now, when I saw you fall and ran down here, someone else also ran down the stairs. Such a pity … You didn’t see.”

She felt an inexplicable sense of guilt, like she had been found out, but she forced herself to pretend not to understand. “Someone else?”

Ai Mi shushed her. “It was Great Beauty Gu.”

Right as Tong Yan wanted to say something, Ai Mi placed one hand on each side of her face and turned her head so that she could see, not far away, Gu Pingsheng just stepping out of the revolving glass doors. “I was correct, right? It’s Pretty Lady’s Bane, isn’t it?”

Within the revolving glass door, there was the glow of refracted sunlight as well as that very familiar figure.

Answering with an “mm-hmm,” she bowed her head to look at the books in her arms, wanting to inspect them to see if she had missed any. Her mind, however, was already in a slight state of chaos. From when he had stated that he would not tutor her any longer, to when she had taken her fall a moment ago, to Ai Mi’s teasing tone now, she had felt unsettled the entire time and did not know what she should actually be thinking.

Ai Mi carefully eyed her over, and then, her tone suddenly grew serious. “Tong Yan, a joke’s a joke. Don’t scare me for real. Five or six years ago, a teacher-student romance was definitely a taboo thing. Even though nowadays, the overall tone of the school is a lot more open, if you can avoid it, then avoid it. Didn’t you notice that, the couple in the Faculty of Architecture, their relationship didn’t come out in the open until graduation? And even so, the school wasn’t too happy about it and terminated the contract with that teacher.”

Tong Yan’s heart lurched, and she kicked Ai Mi’s foot. “Don’t talk nonsense. I still want to graduate without any hitches.”

Another eleven weeks to go. Seventy-seven days. Half of the semester was over already.

On Saturday, the university held a conference on international environmental law.

The invitees were from internationally famous law schools or were part of the United Nations Environment Programme. Simply the list of participants was enough to cause the people in their class to clamour over one another for the chance to be a guide and host to the esteemed guests.

Naturally, with Shen Yao’s gift for languages, she easily obtained one of the dedicated host positions. For two days straight, she had had her eye on the person from the United Nations Environment Programme, planning on, by the end, having things completely taken care of with an academic recommendation letter in hand to provide to universities.

She had now turned her nose up at Wharton School of Business. Law — more precisely, only the law program at Yale Law School — was now Shen Yao’s dream.

Tong Yan was happily watching everything when she saw Gu Pingsheng, dressed in a very simple sport coat, accompanying several people and talking cheerfully with them as they walked into the conference area. She could not hear what they were saying, but from his expression, she knew that they must be his good friends.

When lunchtime arrived, Shen Yao very loyally ran out to keep Tong Yan company at the reception table, where they ate their boxed lunches together.

In reality, her job here was the most arduous, yet also most thankless one. The four students who knew two foreign languages had all been selected to be dedicated hosts and guides and could have direct contact with the various honoured guests. All the remaining students had found excuses to turn down the odd, little tasks. She, however, had been wheedled by the class prefect into being an unimportant receptionist in charge of check-in and registration.

The class prefect's original words had been, "The conference centre is in the middle of a garden, so of course, the reception table will be set-up in the bamboo grove. It'll set such a nice mood." Sure, a rainy day in November had such mood that people could die from the cold.

"I'm telling you, this afternoon, when there's nothing really going on at the reception table, you hurry on back to the school, head to the bathroom, and take a warm shower. The air in this bamboo grove is so damp and chilly, and you're wearing a skirt, too. The class prefect wasn't worried at all about you freezing to death, it seems." Shen Yao's shoulders were hunched forward from the cold as she very unashamedly took her chopsticks and plucked out an entire soy-sauced pork chop from Tong Yan's boxed lunch. "Tell you some gossip. There are two people inside who know Gu Pingsheng. They say they're his old friends. When people were chatting just now, I heard them say, the tattoo on Teacher Gu's arm, he did himself with his left hand, and he didn't even apply any anesthetic."

Tong Yan was eating the soy sauce-stewed egg from her boxed lunch. The yolk was somewhat dry, and she grabbed her bottle of mineral spring water and took a drink. But then, the little bit of heat she had finally managed to accumulate in her body was forced back down again by this one mouthful of cold water.




Left: 红烧**大排** Soy-sauced pork chop. Floured and pan-fried pork chop with a soy sauce-based sauce (image credit). Right: 卤**蛋** Soy sauce-stewed egg. Hard boiled egg, shell removed, that has been stewed in a soy sauce-based liquid (image credit)

While Shen Yao was chewing away on her meat and sighing exaggeratedly, Gu Pingsheng happened to step back outside, seeming as if he was looking for someone.

Noticing the two sitting at the reception table, his gaze halted. “Why are you eating out here? There’s a buffet meal in the dining room.”

“I’m keeping Tong Yan company.” Shen Yao immediately took a drink of water. “She has to stay here and keep watch the whole lunchtime. Poor us, eh? Teacher Gu, considering that the three of us once collaborated on a song together, you should provide some feedback to the school and tell them to give us some extra credits or something for this …”

He glanced around at the bamboo grove, which was rustling sounds from the wind blowing through it, then looked over at Tong Yan. Before he could speak, however, she hastily jumped in, “It’s no big deal. There’s no real reception work that needs to be done this afternoon, so I’ll be heading back to the school.”

As she said this, a nipping wind suddenly gusted up. Her bare legs were pale from the cold.

He took a glance at his watch and said, “At this sort of hour, you don’t need to stay here anymore. I’ll take you both to have something hot to eat.”

Hearing this, Shen Yao instantly set down the boxed lunch that was still more than half uneaten.

Gu Pingsheng quickly stepped back inside, likely asking someone to call a taxi.

Tong Yan tugged on Shen Yao’s arm. “If you want to eat, just go inside and have the buffet. Why do we need to specifically go out somewhere to eat?”

“You’re so cold your bones are about to turn to ice. Buffet food won’t warm you up. The soups and other stuff in Chinese cuisine are what can warm up a

person.” Shen Yao snatched the boxed lunch out of Tong Yan’s hands and tossed it into a paper bag. “In the future, whoever ends up marrying Teacher Gu can be considered to have no regrets in life. He’s so thoughtful.”

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

13 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 5.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 5.2

December 30, 2015 by hoju 28 Comments



As of this coming Friday, it will be the New Year! That also means, I will be back to two updates a week, so yes, there will be an update this Friday evening, N. American time (Saturday morning for anyone separated from N. America by an ocean).

Ah, Teacher Gu is just too nice, a lamb for the slaughter in Shen Yao's eyes. Actually, this is one of those chapters where you'll probably come back to and understand behaviours after you've read a little further.

Chapter 5.2 – The Real You and Me (2)

Gu Pingsheng was not very familiar with Shanghai, so Shen Yao immediately volunteered to lead the way.

When they were near their destination, Tong Yan finally recognized that they were on Huaihai Road[1] near Shen Yao's home, and she whisperingly asked, "Why'd we head over here to Huaihai Road? Are you trying to viciously swindle Teacher Gu with this meal?"

Her impression of this place: Expensive. Very expensive.

“The places open at three in the afternoon. I want to go home and change. Too bad you’re ten centimetres shorter than me; otherwise I’d lend you a pair of pants to change into.” With a wink at her, Shen Yao said, “The great beauty is offering himself up. If I don’t swindle him, it’d be such a waste.” Once she finished saying this, she turned around and addressed Gu Pingsheng, “Teacher Gu, my home happens to be nearby. Would you like to go there for a bit? I’m not dressed very warmly, and I want to go home to change.”

Gu Pingsheng had just taken the change the taxi driver had handed him. Casually slipping his wallet into the pocket of his trousers, he glanced over at the lane she was pointing to and gave a nod.

Shen Yao’s home was an old, four-level house that was built prior to the Liberation[2]. On Huaihai Road where “an inch of land is an ounce of gold,” its value was already sky-high.

They opened the narrow, red front door. On the first floor were the kitchen, dining area, and a bedroom. The two of them walked up the old mahogany staircase, following Shen Yao past the bedrooms on the second floor as she took them directly to the living room on the third level.

“Wait a moment.” Shen Yao made a cup of tea for each of them. “I’ll be back really soon.”

After saying this, she went back down the stairs with sounds of “thump, thump, thump,” leaving the two of them in the living room.

Since this was an old house, the room was not large and could only hold one sofa.

Side by side, they sat on it. Utterly bored, she could only focus her attention on the DVDs that had been thrown haphazardly on the table.

The topmost disc was *Black Book*, directed by Paul Verhoeven. Tong Yan remembered she had watched it before on Shen Yao’s computer. It was about a Jewish woman who infiltrated the Germans as a spy during the Second World War but ended up falling deeply in love with a Nazi officer. In the end, when the Second World War ended and the Germans were defeated, she could only watch

as the one she loved was executed. It was the inspiration for Ang Lee's film, *Lust, Caution*.

"You've watched it?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes." She picked it up and looked it over. It was the German edition. She reckoned Shen Yao used it to practice her languages. "It's really good. I watched it before on Shen Yao's computer. When I finished, I was really touched, and it made me reflect on how the Jews truly were worthy of pity. So many of them died in World War II, but actually, they are a very smart and hardworking people."

"Yes, the Jewish people are very smart." He told her, "Before, when I was studying for my master's degree, the person whose grades were better than mine was Jewish. Chinese people are also very smart. When I graduated from high school, there were more than two hundred people in my year, of whom nine were Chinese, but Harvard accepted only one person — a girl, Chinese. The person accepted into Yale was also Chinese. The other Chinese students went to Columbia, Cornell, and Duke, all very good schools."

There was one other one. He went to the University of Pennsylvania.

She silently added that in her mind before replying with a smile, "So, smart nationalities have to endure relatively more trials and hardships."

She was actually still talking about that movie, but she suddenly felt she seemed to be referring to him.

"Actually, for old movies, my taste is very uncultured. I like *Legally Blonde*." Hurriedly, she changed the topic.

Leaning back into the couch, he pondered for a moment. "A story about a girl who cares only about clothes and dressing up, but because her boyfriend gets admitted into law school and breaks up with her, she miraculously gets accepted into Harvard Law School wearing a pink Barbie dress and goes to win her boyfriend back?"

Promptly, she corrected him, "The boyfriend is just a jerk. She and her university teacher end up together. I love this movie, and I've watched it more than ten times. Back then, I vowed I had to study law …"

She abruptly cut herself off. An old-fashioned grandfather clock suddenly sounded a deep, dull chime, reminding them of the time.

What sort of stupid topic was this? … Today was definitely not a day suitable for having a conversation.

"It would seem idol dramas sometimes can also be inspiring." Gu Pingsheng soon rose to his feet and stepped out onto the balcony. "When we got out of the car just now, I noticed that this place looked very familiar. Is there a road nearby called Yandang Road[3]?"

Secretly breathing out in relief, she immediately stood also. "It's just on the opposite side over there." She pointed out the window. "The perpendicular one is Yandang Road."

A fine, delightful pedestrian leisure street that, if you followed it down, consisted completely of vintage dark gray, Western-style buildings. She remembered Miao Miao had once said that her wedding photographs in which she had worn a cheongsam[4] had all been taken along this road. It was a pity that the rain was pouring down in torrents, and they could not see any sort of view or scenery besides umbrellas of all colours floating within the misty rain …



Yandang Road (image credit left and right)

"Then this should be the place. Her family's financial situation must be quite good, considering that she lives here."

"Her grades are quite good, too." Tong Yan sighed, "Since I've been in university, I've come to understand something fundamental: not every person who comes from an underprivileged background will end up astounding people with just a single achievement, and those with privileged backgrounds are not all ignorant and incompetent either."

See? Those inspirational novels weren't always true.

His right hand rested on top of the railing, and he turned back again to continue staring out at the endless streams of traffic beyond the balcony. "In terms of learning and studies, passing is something that can be accomplished by hard work, but to truly be able to astound everyone in just a single achievement, that does indeed depend on individual talent."

"Are you just describing yourself?" she muttered under her breath.

He seemed to detect that she was speaking, and catching her off guard, he turned to her and asked, "Were you talking to me?"

Instantly feeling guilty, as if she had been found out, Tong Yan smiled sheepishly, "Yup. I'm hungry. Teacher Gu, what sort of food are you planning on treating us to?"

He suddenly chuckled, "I'm guessing that's something I don't need to think about. She should have already thought of the place where she will significantly lighten my wallet in order to reward you." As he said these words, his eyes once again shifted to fall on the sights outside.

She suddenly recalled how, during their dormitory's late-night conversations, they had discussed Gu Pingsheng's handicap and praised it. It was so good how, when he spoke to you, he would look directly at you and would focus his attention on you only.

But, if he did not want to talk to you, it was very easy to do as well.

He needed only to move his gaze away.

Sure enough, Shen Yao lived up to everyone's expectations by heading straight for Yandang Road and selecting a steakhouse.

The restaurant was a small, standalone Western-style building. No thought was even necessary to know that this place would indubitably be expensive. Before she even stepped through the door, she questioned Shen Yao, "Didn't you say you wanted to have Chinese food?"

"It's no problem. I'll order you two orders of mushroom soup. I guarantee you

that those will warm you up.” Shen Yao squeezed her hand with a look that seemed to say she was doing this for Tong Yan’s good. “Women need to eat beef. It’s good for the body. This place isn’t too expensive, just two hundred yuan on average per person. In Shanghai, that’s definitely not expensive. Trust me …” She stole a glimpse at Gu Pingsheng after saying this, then carried on, “Plus, I’m the one who’s swindling the teacher, not you. What do you have to be scared of?”

Walking ahead of them, Gu Pingsheng closed his umbrella and handed it to one of the hosts of the restaurant.

As she stared at his back, Tong Yan silently said the question in her mind: Why shouldn’t she be scared? He was now her biggest creditor. Have you ever seen someone who not only did not return money owed but also tried with all her might to swindle her creditor?

When the menu was in her hand, she utterly wanted to cry. Just a random mushroom soup was 138 yuan. How could it possibly be an average of 200 yuan per person?

He started with ordering appetizers first and then did not stop, as if he really was a lamb resigned to being slaughtered … Each time he said the name of a dish, Tong Yan would immediately peek at the menu and then throw a vicious glare at Shen Yao.

“T-bone, eight ounces.” He looked over at Tong Yan. “This young lady here will have a filet mignon, five ounces, cooked medium well. Shen Yao, what are you having?”

Her eyes speedily swept over the menu she was holding. A filet mignon was seventy yuan per ounce, and she, alone, was going to eat five ounces?

Under Tong Yan’s dagger-like glower, Shen Yao calmly stated, “Filet mignon, eight ounces, cooked medium rare.”

“You’re a blood-thirsty animal?” In a rare instance, a joke was heard from him before he closed his menu.

Shen Yao gave an embarrassed little grin. While he was confirming the sides and desserts, she whispered to Tong Yan, “Teacher Gu made a joke, did you see?

When he jokes, the look in his eyes just melts your soul."

Gritting her teeth, Tong Yan fumed at her, "Otherwise what? You want him to hug his wallet and cry?"

"I'll add another order of filet mignon, eight ounces, cooked medium," he told the server.

Tong Yan and Shen Yao exchanged a glance. Who else was coming?

"Zhao Yin — your Teacher Zhao — lives around here, too." After the server had left, he provided them with a reasonable explanation. "So, I asked her to meet up with us."

Tong Yan understood now. Picking up her glass, she took a drink of her hot water.

"Goddess of Nightmares?" Shen Yao's question slipped past her lips. "You're kidding, right, Teacher Gu? If you'd told us she was coming, we would have just taken care of our own lunches."

Gu Pingsheng looked amusedly at Shen Yao. "You've had to re-take physics, too?"

"No." Shen Yao shook her head. "The crux of the issue is, our school's Teacher Zhao Yin was involved in revising the entire school's physics learning materials, which all the students have to use. So, Teacher Zhao is absolutely the whole school's Goddess of Nightmares …"

Two glasses of red wine were brought over, and he motioned that one should be set down in front of him and the other by the empty plate beside him. "It would seem I'm teaching the wrong subject. I've never seen all of you so scared of me before."

Seeing that he had even specially ordered red wine, Shen Yao's nosy nature completely exploded forth. "Teacher Gu, may I secretly ask you just one question of gossip? Is Zhao Yin our future *shimu* [teacher-mother][5]?"

Tong Yan had all along been listening to their conversation, and after Shen Yao asked this, she cast a glance at Gu Pingsheng. Indeed, they were true best friends. Shen Yao asked the same question she had also once posed to him.

“I recall, at the beginning of the school year, I gave each of you a chance to ask me any question. That doesn’t mean, though, that you can ask me any question at any time and any place.” A smile was on his face the entire time he said this.

“Oh, got it.” Shen Yao swiftly turned her head away, and with her hand propping up her head, she murmured to Tong Yan, “That’s indirectly admitting to it.”

Tong Yan did not utter a sound. Sensing that he was looking in their direction the whole time, she only nibbled on the edge of her glass and continued to hold her silence.

The instant Zhao Yin arrived, she and Shen Yao dared not joke around anymore, and setting down their glasses, they respectfully greeted her, “Teacher Zhao.” Ever since Gu Pingsheng had handed her over to Zhao Yin for her tutoring, she had fixed times twice a week when she would go to Zhao Yin’s office. However, though she could not offer an explanation why, she simply could not get close to this female teacher.

Since it was not a workday, Zhao Yin’s attire was considerably more casual than normal. But although it was casual, in subtle and indirect ways, there were indications that great care and attention had been paid. It was apparent that Shen Yao had experienced psychological trauma from Zhao Yin as well. The atmosphere, which previously had been lively and fun, had now grown quiet after this additional person joined them.

Overcome with boredom as she ate, Shen Yao offhandedly asked Tong Yan, “I still have to go back to the conference venue this afternoon. How are you going to get back to school?”

Without even needing to think, Tong Yan replied, “Take Line 1 of the metro, transfer over to light rail, and then walk the rest of the way back.”

“It’s heavy winds and rain out there. After you get off the light rail train, it’s still going to take fifteen minutes to walk to the school’s main gates, and then from the main gates to the dorm, it’s at least half an hour. You were freezing for the whole morning already. If you walk back like that, even if you don’t die from it, you’ll end up making yourself half-crippled.”

“I’ll be returning to the school this afternoon. You can come with me,” Gu Pingsheng suddenly spoke up.

“Sure.” Shen Yao accepted the favour on her behalf first. “Thanks, Teacher Gu.”

Zhao Yin lightly touched Gu Pingsheng’s hand. Waiting until he had turned his head toward her, Zhao Yin reminded him with a smile, “Don’t forget the alumni party tonight.”

Shen Yao immediately pinched Tong Yan’s arm and whispered in her ear, “Look, she’s touching his hand.”

Tong Yan wanted to cry in exasperation, but because she could not allow herself to show any expression here, she simply hissed back, “That’s because Teacher Gu can’t hear.”

With wide eyes and her voice still lowered, Shen Yao countered, “It’s not like you’ve never dated anyone before. Is the hand something you can just touch if you feel like it? Would you touch Teacher Gu’s hand? At most, you’d just pat him on the arm.”

Tong Yan suddenly remembered, at Juyong Pass …

“Oh right, you have touched Teacher Gu’s hand,” Shen Yao was still carrying on.

Tong Yan’s heart gave an intense jolt, and she pressed her lips together nervously.

“You guys held hands that night at the gala,” Shen Yao clarified. “But that doesn’t count.”

Gu Pingsheng could not hear, but that did not mean Zhao Yin was deaf, too. Although Shen Yao’s voice was very light when she spoke, Tong Yan put on a serious manner and gave her a glare, warning her silently that she should not continue with her senseless chatter.

[1] 淮海路 “Huaihai Lu.” Huaihai Road is often referred to as the most beautiful road in Shanghai. It is a very busy road with offices, food,

entertainment, and shopping, including luxury brands such as Hermes and Louis Vutton as well as high-end department stores.



A section of Huaihai Road
(image credit)

[2] 解放 “jie fang.” This is literally translated as “the Liberation,” and is the term used in China to refer to October 1, 1949, when Mao Zedong proclaimed the creation of the People’s Republic of China. This signaled the end of the civil war known outside of mainland China as the Chinese Revolution of 1949 between the Communist Party and the Nationalist Party (also known as Kuomintang). In mainland China, this war is referred to as the Liberation War.

[3] 雁荡路 “Yandang Lu.” Yandang Road is a side street off of the main Huaihai Road, and both are in the former French Concession of Shanghai. It was one of Shanghai’s first pedestrian streets. The boutiques and cafes and tea bars as well the restored historical architecture evoke a European atmosphere.

[4] 旗袍 “qipao.” A form-fitting, one piece dress, commonly called “cheongsam” in English although occasionally, you may see it referred to as “qipao. This piece of clothing originated from the dress of the Manchu women during the Qing dynasty and was gradually modified over time.



Cheongsam

[5] 师母 “shi mu.” Literally means “teacher-mother.” The wife of one’s teacher.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

14 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 5.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 5.3

January 2, 2016 by hoju 27 Comments



It's still January 1 where I am, so happy New Year to everyone! Wishing all of you the best in 2016!

I'm sure most of you caught the strange, awkward atmosphere between Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng the last couple of chapters. This can be considered a turning point chapter, or at least, a turning point in mindset for our Teacher Gu.

Chapter 5.3 – The Real You and Me (3)

The alumni party that evening, simply put, was actually just a small, private gathering. More than twenty people were present but only five or six were fellow alumni of the University of Pennsylvania.

"TK, China is still the best. Everywhere you go, there're black hair and black eyes that give you this near and dear feeling. And there's also the Chinese language, with all its multitudes of variations." Luo Zihao put his arm around Gu Pingsheng's shoulders. "Nong ho. Le se va?" ["Hello. Pretty awesome, eh?" in Shanghainese dialect][1]

"I'm sorry, I couldn't understand the last part of that." He was sitting on a sofa

near the balcony.

Luo Zihao was his good friend since childhood. After graduating from high school, Luo Zihao was accepted into Yale University, but less than one year later, he withdrew himself from the school. At the time, Yale was planning on forcibly discharging a Chinese female student from the university on the grounds that this particular student's English was not as good as an American. As someone who had a strong sense of patriotism, Luo Zihao immediately joined in with the protesters of this. When it was finally arranged for the individual with the grievance to transfer departments and continue her studies to obtain her doctorate degree[2], he, however, withdrew from the school with just a wave of his hand. He then turned and went to the University of Pennsylvania and ended up staying there.

And then, he met Zhao Yin and got engaged to her. And then after that, his affections shifted to someone else. All his talk about not wanting to return to China simply was his guilt speaking. He wanted to wait until Zhao Yin had married before he dared come back. But he did have some merits, considering that all the former torments and troubles between them had come to a point where now, when they met, a single smile exchanged between them had erased all the love and grievances of the past.

Outside, the rain was still coming down furiously, but out on the balcony, silhouettes could be seen.

From here, looking out through the floor-length windows, the Garden Bridge[3] was seen sparkling down below. The silhouettes on the balcony were a pair, and occasionally they would embrace one another and other times, they would separate again. He suddenly remembered that pair of eyes in the taxicab this afternoon.



Garden Bridge (also called Waibaidu Bridge) at night (image credit)

“Let me ask you, how come you and her still aren’t together yet? I miss the great land of my fathers — my homeland’s water, my homeland’s clouds. I’m just waiting for you guys to blissfully tie the knot and then I‘ll be able to truly come back to my home country with honours.”

“With whom?” he asked.

“Zhao Yin.” Luo Zihao handed him a glass of wine, but seeing him shake his head, he immediately waved down someone for a glass of iced water for him. “Didn’t I already tell you a long time ago? At the start, she had actually liked you, but she had no choice but to settle for second best and, in a moment of blindness, ended up choosing me. The end result, however, was us breaking up and going our separate ways. As her former boyfriend, I’m going to be very responsible and tell you, she’s been single these last three, four years.”

Luo Zihao’s parents were northerners, and hence, he spoke very quickly. With some difficulty, Gu Pingsheng managed to keep up with the pace of all of his words, and then, he smiled and did not say anything.

“Don’t just be silent.” Luo Zihao’s hand that was not holding his wine glass naturally wrapped around Gu Pingsheng’s shoulders, and when he saw Gu Pingsheng turn his head to the side to look at him, he continued, “You returned to China and on top of that, came to Shanghai. Isn’t that just showing your ‘desire to love but with a pretense of refusal[4]’ [you like her but you’re pretending to reject her]?”

“Have you ever seen me ‘desire to love but with a pretense of refusal’?” Gu Pingsheng automatically ignored the random, useless tidbits in his words.

Luo Zihao felt around in his pocket for his cigarettes, and clamping down on one between his lips, he stated in a muffled tone, “My heart is feeling plagued with guilt. You guys are the true match made in heaven.”

In this sort of lighting where he practically could not see facial expressions and words being formed, Gu Pingsheng did not want to discuss this with him. Back when he had not yet withdrawn from the University of Pennsylvania, he had once specifically attempted to communicate with Luo Zihao on the topic of male/female relationships.

His memories of that occasion were indescribably painful. Environments mould people, especially their views on marriage and relationships.

Leaning back into the sofa, he watched Luo Zihao speak for another little while before turning back to look out at the nightscape.

The couple that had been outside earlier was nowhere to be found. Thoroughly bored, Luo Zihao patted him on the arm. The instant he saw Gu Pingsheng turn towards him, he started to continue with his jabber again.

“So, the children of my motherland nowadays, are they fine to teach?” He was starting to ramble randomly, searching for anything to talk about.

“Their aptitude is quite good.”

“Any whose looks are quite good, too?”

And there he went again … Not even three sentences and he had jumped straight to his main topic again. Gu Pingsheng’s interest was waning.

“Out of all the women in the world, Chinese women are still the most beautiful. When you look at them, it’s like you’re looking at a subtle ink-and-wash painting[5]. Their noses aren’t too high, their mouths aren’t too big, and their eyes aren’t like you’re looking at a skeleton’s skull, where they’re so deep and sunken that if you saw them in the middle of the night, you’d think you were seeing a ghost.” Luo Zihao’s patriotic spirit erupted forth once again. “Did you know? Wait, no, you should know. I’ve said before the type of woman I like the most. For her eyes, the separation between the whites and her black irises should not be overly distinct. Right here,” he said, using his unlit cigarette to point at the inner corner of his own eye, “needs to curve deeply inwards. When

she smiles, her entire eye will curve into a crescent shape. So wonderful."

Tong Yan. He could only think of her. She seemed to be the type that Luo Zihao was describing.

"Have you ever fallen for your own student?" he suddenly asked.

"Oh yah. Can't hold back your own feelings, you know?" Luo Zihao was about to launch into another recollection, but Gu Pingsheng had already risen to his feet. "Eh? You're not going to listen?"

Luo Zihao was not exactly sure what this odd quirk of his was, but he especially enjoyed talking about women with this person who was overly cautious about male/female relationships and intimacy. He was certain that his own preferences were towards that soft and fragrant opposite gender, so why was he so stubbornly absorbed with Gu Pingsheng on this particular matter?

"I just remembered, I need to go back to the school to grab a book."

"In this downpour? You're going back to the school? Isn't your school out in the suburbs?"

Before Luo Zihao had finished speaking, Gu Pingsheng was already politely bidding his farewells to the other people, and then quickly, he left.

When Tong Yan returned to her dormitory, she received a phone call. It was from her father.

Since entering university and leaving Beijing, she had not received a single call from her father. The general theme of this call was to borrow money from her. She presumed Grandmother had told him that she had found a part-time job, so in the ears of her father, that became another source of money.

The entire time, she was not willing to say much, and after stating that she still had classes to attend, she hung up the call.

Inside the dormitory room, there was only herself and Wen Jingjing. Jingjing was facing her computer screen, chatting online, and her typing was lightning-fast. As Tong Yan listened to it, she felt more and more miserable until finally, she left the room and strolled idly around the campus to help take her mind off

her cares.

Due to the rainstorm, there were not many people out on the walkways. It was pitch dark, and everywhere was water. Later, the downpour simply became too heavy and even her skirt was basically soaked through, so she had no choice but to take shelter in Teaching Building No. 5. This was a newly built teaching building that was not open for students to use at night, and as a result, none of the lights in the building were turned on.

Closing her umbrella, she exhaled a lengthy sigh, and by the light of the moon, she said aloud to herself, “What should you do, Tong Yan?”

She really was not so strong that she could overcome any obstacle.

She merely made herself choose to selectively ignore some of the unfairness of life.

The sound of the rain was very loud, and she could not even hear her own murmurs to herself. But this noise also unexpectedly gave her a somewhat sense of security. She suddenly stepped out into that curtain of rain and yelled to herself, “I’m going to make money, lots and lots of money——“

Before she was finished, she had already burst out into chortles. Tong Yan, can you get any better than that?”

The rain was truly intense, and in mere moments, she was thoroughly drenched through. Her mind also immediately cleared.

“Alright, Tong Yan.” She retreated back beside the column inside the entrance hall of the teaching building, and grinning, she reminded herself, “We need to pass physics first.”

With the mention of physics, her thoughts suddenly turned to Gu Pingsheng.

She could still clearly remember his eyes from several hours ago inside the taxicab, including the expressions they had held, from an inquiring look until they finally became tranquil. Throughout that whole process, however, he had wordlessly held his gaze on her.

What had he been thinking?

“What are you doing here?”

All of a sudden, a voice could be heard coming from beside her. Letting out a piercing shriek, she leapt away from the column that she had been leaning against. Her heart seeming as if it was going to pound its way out of her chest, she could scarcely believe her eyes.

It was Gu Pingsheng.

Many years later, as Tong Yan thought back upon this rainy night and this scene in Teaching Building No. 5, she would still find this very remarkable.

While your heart was silently thinking of a person, he suddenly appeared before you.

“… Teacher Gu?” Tong Yan’s breathing was ragged, and her chest was starting to ache from the fright she had received.

“I need to head over to the administrative office to grab a few books.” Gu Pingsheng’s hand was also holding an umbrella and water was dripping down off of it. “From afar, I thought it looked like you in here, so I came over for a look. What are you doing here so late?”

“I’m not doing anything …”

While he spoke, he pulled out a package of tissues from his pocket and held them toward her. “Why wet and rained on even though you have an umbrella?”

Feeling slightly embarrassed, Tong Yan took the package from him, pulled out a tissue, and wiped at the water on her face.

“This campus is too big. At such late hours, try not to go to teaching buildings that have nobody in them,” Gu Pingsheng told her. “It’s really dangerous.”

Nodding, she said, “I’ll head back, then.”

“Anything pressing you need to do?”

She looked at him puzzledly. “No.”

“If you don’t have anything pressing, then wait until after I’ve gone to Administration to get my books, and then I’ll walk you back to your dorm.”

She was taken aback for an instant. Gu Pingsheng’s expression was natural and

at ease as he explained, “From here to Administration is just a three minute walk. It’ll take twenty minutes to get to your dorm, and there won’t be many people along the way. It’ll be safer if I walk you back.”

Very reasonable.

There really was nothing Tong Yan could say to that, and obediently she followed him to his office.

She had had several weeks of tutoring sessions with him here and was very familiar with each one of the furnishings in this place. When Gu Pingsheng went to get his books, she even started to think about the fact that she would not be having any more sessions with him and felt a little sad because of this.

“Teacher Gu,” she addressed him, putting on a nonchalant front as she looked at him, “why did you suddenly stop tutoring me?”

Smiling, Gu Pingsheng closed the glass door of his bookshelf and with his back to her, he answered, “My health has not been very good lately. All my additional time outside of class time, I need to go to the hospital, and I was worried this would hold up your tutoring progress.”

He spoke very simply. Tong Yan had not expected at all that this would be the answer. She very much wanted to ask further but did not know as whom and from what status could she do so.

The two of them left the Law Building, and then along the way, because they were each carrying an umbrella, there was not much exchange between them. When they reached the downstairs of her dormitory building, Tong Yan closed her umbrella, ran up the steps, and turned back to look at him.

Under that very wide, black umbrella, Gu Pingsheng was wearing a clean, white, button-up shirt, and nothing at all wrong with him could be perceived. Maybe … what he meant by “health has not been very good” was simply a cold or flu? Or maybe it was … an excuse?

But subconsciously, she was willing to believe that he had been telling the truth.

“Hurry and go in.” He could not help laughing. “Remember that there’s Commercial Arbitration tomorrow morning. Don’t be late.”

Perhaps due to the humid weather, his voice was surprisingly gentle and soft.

She gnawed lightly on her own lip and, with some hesitation, thought for a while before saying, “It’s quite hard to catch a cab from the school’s west gate. There are more cabs over at the east gate.” She paused briefly before finally saying what she most wanted to say. “Teacher Gu … Be careful on your way back.”

“Alright.” Gu Pingsheng gazed into her eyes as he said, “Goodbye.”

When she was back in her dormitory room, Tong Yan was still in a fluster, simply because of the one sentence she had said.

Back during middle and high school, dating was not allowed, but her whole heart and mind had been set on throwing herself into her early-age dating.

Now, she was in university and at last could rightfully and openly date, but she discovered that she had fallen for her own teacher … Tong Yan, can you get any better than that?

[1] 侬好, 来噻伐. Luo Zihao was talking about how wonderful and varied the Chinese language can be. He suddenly switched over to speak in the Shanghainese dialect (which, my readers of *Beautiful Bones*, is a Wu dialect), to say hello, and then complimented himself on how awesome he was. Unlike Mandarin, which is the official dialect of China and has a standard system called pinyin of transliterating Mandarin into the Latin alphabet, Shanghainese has no such system. The phonetic Romanized spelling I used here is just one version, and you may see different transliterations of Shanghainese.

[2] In 2005, a grievance was brought against Yale University for discrimination against a Chinese national. Xuemei Han, who at the time was in the Ecology and Evolutionary Biology deparment, had been asked to leave the university, her funding taken away for “bad academic standing” despite having passed all requirements and language tests. Protests occurred at the university, and in the

end, Han retained her fellowship funding and was transferred over to the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. You can refer to here and here for more information.

[3] 外白渡桥 “Waibaidu Qiao”. The Waibaidu Bridge, more commonly known by Westerners as the Garden Bridge, is a landmark piece of architecture in Shanghai. Built in 1906-1908, it was the earliest all-steel bridge in China and is also a symbol of old Shanghai.



The Garden Bridge during the time of old Shanghai (image credit)

[4] 欲迎还拒 “yu ying huan ju.” In a literal sense, this translates as “desiring to have/take/welcome [someone] but yet rejecting.” It describes a situation where one has feelings for a person, but because one is not willing to directly express those feelings, a façade of rejection or refusal is put on.

[5] 水墨画 “shui mo hua.” Ink-and-wash painting is a traditional form of Chinese painting done with a brush and ink. Ink of varying consistencies can be prepared, depending on how much water is added, and therefore, shading, contrast between brightness and darkness, texture, coloring, *etc.* can all be accomplished with the ink.

Additional Comments:

I’ve been trying to not colour your perspectives of this novel and call attention to things because I personally was impacted by how nonchalantly details about the characters were slipped in and only after the fact did I realize the importance of that detail.

However, I am going to draw attention to this one line from this chapter: “Environments mould people, especially their views on marriage and relationships.” This was Gu Pingsheng’s thought, and it very much holds true in this novel for our leads, especially for Gu Pingsheng. Keep it at the back of your mind as we progress through the story together.

I’ve said before I can relate to Tong Yan, and it’s in more ways than one. She says that she is not strong enough to overcome every obstacle … And it’s true. No one is. One of my favourite quotes comes from Hua Xu Yin, chapter 11.2 and was translated beautifully by hamster. “Crying doesn’t mean you aren’t strong. After crying your heart out, you can still stand up and know which way to take or what things to do …” That is what courage and inner strength are to me. Faced with burdens that she truly should not have to bear, she allows herself a moment to relieve her feelings, to get them all out, and then she stands up and takes life one small step at a time again. The next step: pass physics. Tong Yan is written realistically. She has flaws, some of which you will see later, but whether it be out of survival mode or any other reason, she undeniably carries an inner strength in her.

As for Teacher Gu, a couple things:
“ ‘Have you ever fallen for your own student?’ ” He’s acknowledged it to himself. “She could still clearly remember his eyes from several hours ago inside the taxicab, including the expressions they had held, from an inquiring look until they finally became tranquil, but throughout that whole process, he had wordlessly held his gaze on her.” Something went through his mind that caused the expression in his eyes to shift and change until it finally settled and became tranquilness, peace, like he had arrived at a conclusion. And that whole time, he had gazed at Tong Yan. Shift in mindset, yes? What do you think he was thinking?

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
15 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

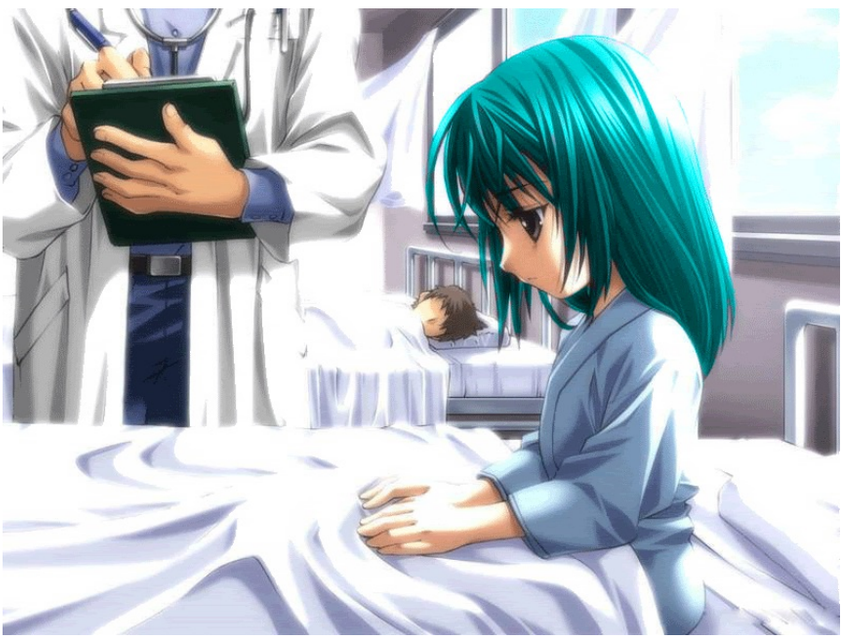
Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao,

Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 6.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 6.1

January 6, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



Hmm … Probably a bit of an uninteresting chapter, but it does give more insight into Tong Yan's character by providing a foil. In the romance department, wait a bit. The next chapter or two will see some progress.❤

Chapter 6.1 – Quietly Advancing and Retreating (1)

Today was Friday.

After this weekend, there were nine weeks remaining. Sixty-three days.

The entire week, it had been raining on and off, and the classrooms were damp and chilly.

She clasped her hands together to warm herself and then started to copy down Gu Pingsheng's notes on the blackboard.

Gu Pingsheng had very beautiful blackboard writing. When she was in primary school, she had intensely practiced her calligraphy, and she recognized that he was writing in slender gold script[1] style. At the time, she had only felt that this particular script was free and unrestrained and carried its own type of charm.

“Those who like to write with this type of script are usually people who tend to display their abilities ostentatiously.” Her calligraphy teacher had once stated this.

But in no way could he be associated with the idea of “displaying his abilities ostentatiously.”

At this moment, his right hand was in the pocket of his trousers and his left hand was loosely grasping the white chalk, fluidly writing out a row of Chinese characters while using English to give the introduction for today’s class.

Gu Pingsheng was the only teacher this semester willing to teach his course as a bilingual one. Even those teachers who had returned from Japan still persisted in writing their blackboard notes in their out-of-practice English.

In fact, when the university was enrolling students after their college entrance examinations, specific attention and importance had been placed upon their grades in English. At the end of her second year, there were only three people in their class who had not yet passed their CET-6 English tests yet. He did not at all have to go to such trouble for so few people. But, in these small, insignificant details, he still always put careful thought and consideration.

“Liu Yi.” After finishing the introductory words for today’s class, he turned around to look at the class prefect. “Where’s Shen Yao?”

The class prefect choked on a response for a long while and turned his eyes to Tong Yan. Those girls in Tong Yan’s dormitory room were all experts at playing hooky. Most Fridays, they were not around. Who knew where they had gone today?

“Teacher Gu, Shen Yao’s rehearsing with the school orchestra and requested a leave of absence from today’s class,” Tong Yan braced herself and fibbed.

“What about Wang Xiaoru?” Gu Pingsheng’s voice was very neutral.

“Wang Xiaoru … had something suddenly crop up in her family and also got a leave of absence.”

His eyes scanned over the classroom once, quickly distinguishing between

those who were simply sitting in to listen and those who truly belonged to this class.

"Wen Jingjing did not come either?" His gaze was on her again. This time, even the students who were simply sitting in on the class were starting to whisperingly discuss this.

Tong Yan gripped her pen, not even able to avoid his gaze. She was the only one from her dorm room who had come to class, yet she was the one who had become the target of attack …

She could feel that her cheeks had grown a little hot. "Wen Jingjing is sick." She really wanted to stress that this one was the truth and she was genuinely sick.

"Next Monday, have the three of them head over to Administration and go to my office." His tone remained unperturbed.

Tong Yan's heart dropped. Oh man, they were in trouble this time.

After class, the class prefect, who had also broken out in a cold sweat of fright, walked over and said to Tong Yan, "Even a rabbit will bite when it's cornered. Teacher Gu can already be considered to be really good-tempered, and your dorm still managed to force his anger out."

Class Prefect was brandishing a textbook in his hand and nearly hit Gu Pingsheng, who was walking by.

Gu Pingsheng merely raised his arm slightly to block the incoming book, but Class Prefect's temper was in the midst of flaring and he immediately whipped his head around and barked, "Class meeting, now!" And then, the classroom fell into total silence.

Those who had only been sitting in on the class froze in shock before quickly grabbing their books and leaving.

Gu Pingsheng was also slightly taken aback, and in a soliciting tone, he asked him, "Need me to participate?"

"N-n-no." Class Prefect immediately shut down his firepower.

With head lowered, Tong Yan packed up her own books. Out of the corner of

her eye, she saw him walk past her desk and then out of the classroom.

She went to the library to study and did not return to her dormitory until the sky was dark.

This morning, as she walked out the room, the curtains had been pulled shut, and now, they were still as they had been when she left. She called out “Jingjing” once, but nobody made a sound in response. Feeling slightly concerned, she removed her shoes and climbed onto Wen Jingjing’s bed, only to discover that she was still asleep with her covers pulled up completely over her.

She stretched out her hand to touch Wen Jingjing’s forehead. Burning hot.

As she retracted her hand, it brushed against the pillow. Why was it so wet? Had she sweat that much?

Tong Yan patted Wen Jingjing awake, helped her change her clothes, and got her off the bed.

Finally, after an arduous bicycle ride, she brought Wen Jingjing to a hospital off the university campus. This was one of the university’s designated hospitals, and because it was not in the core of the city, there were very few people there at night.

The doctor on duty was very young but very attentive, and at the end, when Wen Jingjing started her intravenous treatment, that doctor even specifically came over to check on her and ask a few questions about her condition. As Tong Yan watched him, she suddenly wondered, if Teacher Gu had not changed careers, would he have been like this as well?

Inside the intravenous treatment room, there was only a mother and son pair — a forty plus year old son with his old and feeble mother.

If Grandmother suddenly fell ill in Beijing, what should she do?

She all of a sudden felt a sense of unease. Every so often, this type of unsettled feeling would arise in her, and she would not be able to shake it off.

“Yan Yan, thanks.”

She pulled her attention back. In her arms was a small bag of mandarin oranges she had bought outside the entrance to the hospital. Pulling out a larger one, she peeled it and stuffed it into Wen Jingjing's hand. "You had such a high temperature. Why didn't you text me?"

Wen Jingjing held onto the orange and after some time, finally said, "Yan Yan, Jia Le broke up with me."

Tong Yan paused in surprise. "Haven't you guys been together for six years?"

She remembered that boy. Very plain and unassuming, and when he smiled, he looked a little shy.

"He's in his fourth year of university this year and looking for a job. He's really stressed out, and we were always fighting." Wen Jingjing told her, "Yesterday, he was quarrelling with me over the phone again, and then he said my family doesn't have much money and I still have a pair of twin younger brothers in high school waiting for us to provide for them …"

She did not finish and Tong Yan did not press further. Tong Yan had more or less discerned the situation in Jingjing's family. Thinking that this topic had come to a close, she lowered her head and continued peeling oranges.

"I feel like life is particularly unfair." Wen Jingjing spoke up unexpectedly. "My English isn't good. I finally was approved for doing a double major with the second major in Japanese, but I couldn't even pass my midterms. But just look at Xiaoru. She never goes to class but can still effortlessly get first-class scholarships. Yao Yao's the same. In the entire class, she's the only specially recruited literature and art student, but she does even better than me in all the academic courses."

Tong Yan raised her head to look at her.

"And then there's you, Yan Yan. Every time I see you emceeing or singing, I'm so envious." Wen Jingjing's complexion was showing the paleness that comes after a fever has subsided. "Even Teacher Gu treats you so well. I would always see him in his office browsing through physics teaching materials, and then I found out later that he was tutoring you in physics.

"Yan Yan, where I'm from, I was the only one who got into a top-ranked

university. But now, my old classmates are all starting to apply to master's programs abroad while I'm still here struggling to get through my undergrad. I have two younger brothers who are going to be taking their college entrance exams soon. They're actually not very mature or sensible, and their grades are really bad … Yan Yan, when I think about all this, I feel like even if I continue with my studies, it won't change anything. Even if I endure all the way to the end, the result will still be the same. Where I came from is where I'll still have to go back to."

The intravenous treatment room was very quiet. Wen Jingjing was not speaking loudly, and her tone could not get any flatter than it already was.

Tong Yan split apart her mandarin orange and ate a segment. Due to the cold weather, the orange was ice-cold inside the mouth when eaten. It was sour and icy and really could not be considered tasty.

She had never once poured out her heart like Jingjing was doing to anyone before, nor had she ever dared to. The pain and sorrow that had been accumulating since she graduated from primary school, that feeling that she had completely lost her dignity and self-respect, and that family that caused her heart to quiver in pain simply from thinking about it — how could she possibly speak out about these?

"My ex-boyfriend's parents are both high school teachers. Because he was pampered on and spoiled, he never put any efforts into school and was extremely rebellious. But, he was especially good to me. One winter, there was a day where my stomach hurt so badly I couldn't even walk. Without saying a word, he ran out and bought me a bowl of noodles from somewhere by the front of the school and forced the person to sell him the bowl that the noodles came in, too. That day, it was really cold, and just like that, he walked with a bowl of noodles in his hands from the front gate of the school all the way to the door of my classroom. I'm guessing he probably had been walking really hurriedly because the soup had sloshed out and his hands were covered in it. But no matter how good our relationship had been, we still ended up breaking up."

She remembered, that bowl of noodles had cost something like six yuan. At the time, she had thought that was so expensive. But later, when she went to eat it again, it did not have that same taste anymore.

[1] 瘦金体 “shou jin ti.” Slender gold script is one of the many different types of Chinese calligraphy. It was developed by Song dynasty Emperor Huizong and was named as such because the thin brush strokes of this type of calligraphy resembled twisted gold filament. This script has been described with adjectives such as “floating,” “flowing,” “artistic,” and “dancing.”

Additional Comments:

Wen Jingjing and Tong Yan are both young girls who have been left with the short end of the stick for many things in life. Both have realized the law that, no matter what sort of life you may have, life goes on. They have both been abandoned by important people in their lives, whether it be her parents in Tong Yan’s case or the boyfriend she was with for six years in Wen Jingjing’s life. They both have to bear incredible financial burdens and support their loved ones. For Wen Jingjing, it is her family and two younger brothers who will require her provision for them to go through school. For Tong Yan, it is an elderly grandmother whom she is trying to finish school to provide for. Both girls actually have low self-esteem, but Wen Jingjing lays it bare while Tong Yan hides it very successfully.

The difference to me is, Wen Jingjing has given in, choosing to cry out at life’s unfairness but then just accept her lot. I’m not arguing that Tong Yan is a saint or views life as rainbows and daffodils. She said herself last chapter that she merely chooses to selectively ignore some of the unfairness of life. But I believe that because she realizes that even in life’s unfairness, life still goes on, then, like we saw in the last chapter, though she will allow herself to experience those moments of pain, she doesn’t let herself throw in the towel and give up hope. She may not have wild hopes and dreams for the future, but she has not written off her own future either. She will pick herself up and keep going, one step at a time.

Actually, I re-read what I wrote above, and I realized I may have come off sounding harsh on Wen Jingjing. I am not saying Wen Jingjing is making a bad

choice, either; she is merely making her choice. In the c-novel, “Elite Lover,” it said somewhere, and I paraphrase, that oftentimes, you simply cannot categorize life as being “successful” or “unsuccessful.” It is simply, “life.” Wen Jingjing’s choice is to let things be and go back to her lifestyle that she believes had previously been laid out for her. Many people have probably done similar things and lived happy lives. What will deem it to her as “successful” or “unsuccessful” is only her perception. At the moment, it sounds like a future she is not happy with, but who knows what she will think in the future? I believe she is here in the story not to make Tong Yan look better or worse but only to contrast and emphasize the differences so we better understand Tong Yan.

(That’s it on Tong Yan for now until you all read further into the story.)

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

16 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 6.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 6.2

January 9, 2016 by hoju 22 Comments



Alright, if a couple of chapters ago, it was considered a turning point in mindset, this chapter is just a turning point. Period.

Chapter 6.2 – Quietly Advancing and Retreating (2)

“So, Jingjing,” she said, holding the last segment of orange up to Wen Jingjing’s lips, “there’s nothing about me worthy of your envy. I also lose in love, also get sick, and also have lots of secrets that I don’t want others to know about.”

She tilted her head upwards and took a glance. There was not much left in this bottle, but on the IV pole’s metal hook, there was still another full bottle that need to be finished tonight.

“I remember, one time when I was a kid, we needed to run eight hundred metres in gym class. Someone stepped on my shoe from behind, and I took a huge tumble. There should have been about three or four classes right then that were having gym out on that sports field, and they all saw. At the time, I felt so humiliated. How could I have such awful luck? So terrible, practically like the sky had fallen. But now that I think about it, it was just a fall, right?” She stood and was about to go find the on-duty nurse.

“You must have felt something like that before when you were a kid, like the sky was falling on you. Jingjing, five years from now, when you look back, it’ll also just simply be like you took a fall. Pull yourself back up, change into some clean clothes, and treat it like nothing ever happened. Family and background, natural talent — there’s so many things that you’re just born with. Just like anyone can be envious that Liu Xiang[1] won the World Championships, but it’s only just envying for a bit.”

That night when she went back, Tong Yan started to show signs that she had caught a cold. By Monday, it had completely turned into a bad case of the cold.

There were not many people at the on-campus medical clinic during noontime. After she was prescribed some cold medicine and was walking back down from the second floor, someone unexpectedly tapped her on her shoulder. Turning, she discovered it was that Shen, um… Class Rep Shen. He was standing beside another boy. When Tong Yan turned around, that boy’s eyes immediately flickered away, and he beamed, “I’ll go out and wait for you.” After saying this, he gave a wicked grin and darted away.

Shen Heng unconsciously pushed up his glasses. “You’re sick? Is it serious?”

Tong Yan smiled, “It’s just a cold.”

“That night’s Anniversary Gala, I watched the live broadcast inside my dorm room.” Class Rep Shen seemed to be searching for the right words, and he paused briefly before saying, “You did such a good job emceeing.”

“Thanks.”

If it were any other time, she would have said a few more casual words to help pass through the moment. However, the whole previous night, her nose had been stuffed up so she had not slept well, and now, she simply did not have any energy to talk.

Fortunately, this boy was quite shy, and he walked down the stairs with her in silence. At last, when they were standing by the doors of the university medical clinic, he finally hesitantly asked her, “You really don’t look so good. How about I take you back to your dorm?”

He spoke this in a very polite manner, with a slight sense of probing in his voice.

“No, it’s alright. I still have to wait here for my classmates.”

Putting on a look as if she was waiting for someone, Tong Yan watched as Shen Heng and his classmate left, and then she breathed out in relief. She felt in her pocket, pulled out a pile of neatly folded toilet paper, and began to wipe her nose …

All of a sudden, she received a text message.

She reckoned that it was likely from Shen Yao. Those three girls had left the dorm at the same time as her, and they should have been in Gu Pingsheng’s office just now receiving their chastisement. She had not expected that, when she pulled out her phone, it was actually a text message from Gu Pingsheng: *You’re sick? Is it serious? TK*

These exact same words, Shen Heng had asked just a moment earlier.

But now that it was him asking them, her lips unconsciously turned up in a smile.

Those three girls from her dormitory must have mentioned her when they were being reprimanded in order to try to change the topic. The last text message in her inbox was actually the one he had sent her three weeks ago.

Standing there at the doors of the medical clinic entrance, she hesitated for three seconds and then, for some reason, as if guided by a supernatural force, she wrote this message back: *Mm-hmm … It’s a little serious. The school doc said it’s best if I go to a hospital off campus … But it’s so far. Don’t want to go.*

When she sent it, her heart suddenly started thumping hard — thumping her straight into a fluster.

Every time Shen Yao was in a phase with a boy where she was wondering whether she should start a romantic relationship with him or not, she would always probe like this, trying to feel out, did he care about her? Would he get anxious for her? If the boy was all anxious and concerned, that meant there was room for them to progress the relationship further. If his reaction was calm and lukewarm, then she would act as if nothing had ever happened.

Each time she saw Shen Yao beaming while she was text messaging with an amorous expression on her face, Tong Yan would find it very funny. But now, she, too, was waiting nervously for his response.

Several of the school doctors walked past her, chatting and smiling and looking as if they were going for lunch. When that group had exited the main doors and had walked far enough away that she could not even glimpse their shadows, her mobile phone still lay in silence. There was not a single reply. Feeling somewhat dejected, Tong Yan tucked her mobile phone into her schoolbag and walked back along the walkway by the medical clinic.

Lunchtime was the period when there was the most people out on campus. She hesitated over whether she should go have some lunch or head straight back to the dormitory and make a pack of instant noodles instead. All of a sudden, someone slapped her on the back from behind her.

Tong Yan turned around and looked up into Shen Yao's grinning face. "And here I was saying that we should go back to the dorm to find you. Teacher Gu said he's going to treat everyone in our dorm room to lunch. Why is your phone dead?"

Standing not far behind Shen Yao was Wang Xiaoru and Wen Jingjing, as well as … Gu Pingsheng.

There was no International Commercial Arbitration class today, and so his attire was slightly more casual. Light blue jeans with faded white marks and a casual black top. Plain and simple. He did not look at all like he had come deliberately to give these three girls an admonishment.

Wen Jingjing was speaking to him right then. He gazed directly at Wen Jingjing until she finished speaking and then said something to her in response before turning his head to look in Tong Yan's direction.

"Teacher Gu."

He nodded in acknowledgement but did not speak. He was behaving as if he had never sent her the text message and never received anything either.

When Shen Yao brought up that Gu Pingsheng was treating them to lunch, her

entire being was completely radiant. Tong Yan knew that she was thinking again how she could swindle an expensive meal out of Gu Pingsheng, and immediately, she grabbed Shen Yao by the arm. “Let’s just go eat in the east dining hall. My head’s all heavy and dizzy. I don’t want to go too far for lunch.”

Shen Yao let out an “ah,” but before she could say anything further, she was dragged directly into the university dining hall.

Originally, Shen Yao had wanted to order some feature dishes or a mini hot-pot or something along those lines, but Tong Yan expressed that she and Jingjing were still sick with colds. And as a result, she successfully managed to lower the class of the meal by another level, such that it really was not all that different from what they would normally do, where everyone simply each ate their own food. The only difference was, Gu Pingsheng, the one who was like “sunny spring days and white snow[2]” [exceptionally handsome in a clean way], was with them.

Throughout the entire meal, Shen Yao was especially loquacious. Gu Pingsheng only managed to take a couple of bites at the very beginning, and then very soon, he set down his chopsticks and quietly watched them speak. In the end, Tong Yan could not stand watching this situation any longer. Tugging on Shen Yao’s arm, she reminded, “You’ve been talking the whole time. How is Teacher Gu supposed to eat?”

“Huh? Ah!” Shen Yao all of a sudden clued in. “Teacher Gu, go ahead, have more to eat. You don’t need to watch me talk the whole time.”

He told her that it was alright and then began drinking his water in large swallows.

Tong Yan scanned his meal that was in front of him. It practically had not even been touched it. She had eaten with Gu Pingsheng a few times now. Compared with other men, the amount he ate most certainly could not be considered a lot, but neither was he like some girls who would eat so little it was like a little kitten taking two or three nibbles.

Shen Yao wanted to say more, but after raising her wrist for a look, she yelped, “Only another five minutes until one o’clock. Time for class! I’m doomed! Why am I always late when it comes to advanced math class?”

She picked up her bag and started to run, taking two or three strides forward before doubling back to say, “Teacher Gu, ‘listening once to your wise words is more valuable than ten years of studying.[3]’ So now, I’ve finished the ‘studying’ part. It’s time to go do some math problems. Farewell, farewell.”

And after saying this, she hastily raced off.

With her departure, everyone else could only put down their chopsticks, contemplating how they could take their leave as well.

“You guys go first. I need to discuss some things with Tong Yan.” He finally set down his glass of water.

When everyone had left, Gu Pingsheng finally truly looked at her. “I’ll take you to the hospital this afternoon.”

So he had received the text? She continued to poke and stir at her noodles with her chopsticks. There were actually just a few strands left, mingled with some chopped scallions inside the soup.

“If you got the text, why didn’t you reply?” she murmured under her breath.

“Tong Yan?”

She raised her head. “It’s okay. I just went and filled a prescription for some medication. I’ll go back and take some, and I’ll be fine.”

“Let me see the meds you were prescribed.” From her bag, she pulled out several medications, handing over two boxes and one bottle of cough syrup. He took them from her, turned the boxes over to the back, and fixed his attention on the rows of small print.

Tong Yan was quite perplexed over what he could be looking at, but unfortunately, she was sitting in front of him and could not sneak a peek.

He was truly so focused and serious in his reading, and Tong Yan, unable to restrain her curiosity, eventually reached over and waved her hand in front of his eyes. “What are you looking at?”

“I’m looking at the composition of these meds,” he answered. “When you got the prescription, did you specifically request the doctor to give you these

particular medications?”

Startled, she nodded. “I get colds and coughs really easily. I got used to taking medications, and now, only if I take these few brands will I get better.”

He smiled, “I noticed. These ones you asked for are all ones given to patients with serious conditions.” He picked up the cough syrup. “The codeine content in this one is relatively high.”

Tong Yan stared blankly in surprise. Recalling that Shen Yao always liked to say that cough syrup could be addictive, she asked, “You’re talking about the type that can cause people to become addicted? Shen Yao always says that if I take cough syrup, I’ll definitely develop an addiction to it one day.”

“It’s not that serious.” He gazed amusedly at her. “But if you drink several dozen bottles of them a day, that might be possible.”

They were sitting at a long rectangular table that could seat more than a dozen people, and each seat was directly opposite another one.

When the start time for class had passed, there only remained the two of them, sitting in the seats closest to the floor-length windows, and another couple sitting in the far outside seats.

Sunlight shone through the thick glass and cast a comfortable warmth upon their bodies. Demonstrating a spirit of learning, Tong Yan asked several more questions about the topic. The two of them chatted casually with no real specific topic to their conversation.

By the time one of the wait staff came over and took away the plates on their table, they had already been talking for a long time.

“Teacher Gu, what did you want to talk to me about?” She remembered his initial reason for asking her to stay behind.

“I had originally wanted to take you to the hospital.” He put away her medications. “If it’s just a simple cold, then don’t be in a rush to take meds for it. Drink lots of warm water. Usually, you’ll be better within a week. Tomorrow, I’ll go get some appropriate medications for you, and if you’re still not better after a

week, then you can take them.”

Tong Yan nodded, her heart suddenly seeming to beat rather softly.

Ever since she was a child, she was the type of person who would only report good news and would hold back any news that was unpleasant. For a long period during middle school, she had lived with her mother, and she had always simply rummaged through the medications in the medicine cabinet herself, read them over to know basically which drug was anti-inflammatory, which was for colds and flus, *etc.* and then would just indifferently find one to take until gradually, she got better. She had only ever gotten simple fevers, colds, or flus and never any serious illness, so she had always felt that she could take care of everything herself.

This was the first time anyone had ever taken her medication from her and even carefully read through the specific composition.

When she returned to the dormitory room, she was the only one there.

Tong Yan pulled out her charger and charged her mobile phone. The instant she turned her phone on, six or seven text messages all came in at once. One was from Gu Pingsheng and the remainder all came from a number she was not familiar with.

She first opened up a text message from the unknown number. It turned out to be a notification message informing her she had a missed call. This particular function had actually been included for free from her mobile services provider, but she had never used it before and had long forgotten about it.

There was one missed call from Shen Yao. The remaining five missed calls were all from Gu Pingsheng.

If it had been a normal person, after hearing the operator prompt stating that the mobile phone he was dialing was turned off, he would definitely not call again.

Sitting there on a chair, she stared at her mobile phone. She could even imagine Gu Pingsheng, who could only keep his eyes fixed upon his phone’s screen to determine whether she had answered the call or not, but unable to

hear the voice inside the receiver saying over and over again, “I’m sorry, the phone number you have dialed is currently turned off …”

From out in the hallway, bursts of laughter could be heard, but inside her room, it was unusually quiet.

Only after a long time had passed did she carefully and hesitantly open up the one and only true text message. There was only a short row of words: *Don’t be pouty*[4]*. I’ll take you to the hospital. TK*

[1] 刘翔. Liu Xiang is China’s former 110m hurdler and is both an Olympic gold medalist (Athens 2004) and World Champion (2007). He is now officially retired from the sport.

[2] 阳春白雪 “yang chun bai xue.” Literally, this means “sunny spring and white snow” This is a saying that actually is used to describe literature and art that is exceptional, cultured, and sophisticated. In modern, colloquial language, it is used to describe women who are beautiful, pure, elegant, and refined, like the sunlight that shines on a spring day or pure, white snow. Using this saying on Great Beauty Gu is a way of complimenting his clean, exceptional handsomeness in a joking way by using a saying that is normally reserved for women.

[3] 听君一席话，胜读十年书. A Chinese idiom. “A single conversation with a wise man is more valuable than ten years of studying.”

[4] 撒娇 “sa jiao.” To “sa jiao” is to act pouty like a little child would. However, it usually does not carry negative connotations. Instead, it is describing someone who is pouting in a cute way to get what he or she wants. A young child can pout and act cute to adults to win them over. A grown adult can still “sa jiao” and pout cutely to her own parents. A girl can pout cutely to her boyfriend/husband, and in such a relationship, can be a form of flirting.

Additional Comments:

Let’s talk more about my footnote [4]: being “sa jiao” or being “pouty.” Like I said in the footnote, saying someone is pouty in this way is not negative. The

important piece is, you can only “pout cutely” to someone who actually will dote on you. That person implicitly grants you the right to do so because he or she views you with affection and finds this type of pouting endearing and adorable. You would most certainly not pout like this to your teacher, no matter how he or she likes you as a student, unless there is something else to the relationship. Therefore … *drumroll*… For Gu Pingsheng to tell Tong Yan not to “sa jiao” or “be pouty” means he is indirectly stating his endearment and affections (and attraction!) towards her .❤

And *that* is why this is a turning point chapter.❤❤❤

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

17 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 6.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 6.3

January 13, 2016 by hoju 20 Comments



Technically, the time stamp on this post is past Peanut's birthday, but over on my side of the world, I can still party for her. So, happy birthday to Peanuts!!

And now, the follow-up to that text that was like an indirect confession. Let the sweetness begin!

Chapter 6.3 – Quietly Advancing and Retreating (3)

Tong Yan contemplated for another long while before sending her text in reply: *My phone battery might have died when I left the hospital, so I didn't see your reply.*

A text came back very quickly: *No problem. I understand. TK*

A very normal response, but coming from him, she could not help mulling repeatedly over it.

As she thought about those five phone calls, she quickly sent another text: *As long as my phone is on, I will always answer any calls. Next time, if the screen doesn't indicate that the call's been answered, that means my phone must be shut off.*

Gu Pingsheng: *Alright. TK*

Such a concise reply. He was probably busy? She set her mobile phone down on her desk and pulled out a textbook to read, only to discover that the one she grabbed was her International Commercial Arbitration Law textbook. Fine, arbitration it was, then. She would treat it as early reviewing for her final exam. Right as she was about to settle into serious studying, her mobile phone unexpectedly vibrated again.

Have you drunk warm water yet? TK

Yup.

Is your throat sore? TK

A little …

Tomorrow morning, if it's still sore, send me a text and I'll go get you some antibiotics. TK

Mm.

When she finished typing this one word, she could not refrain from adding another question: *Teacher Gu, you're home now?*

But after she had written "Teacher Gu," she suddenly deleted it again and changed it so that she simply wrote, "You're home now?"

I'm still in Administration. I'm talking to the dean about the courses I'll teach next semester. TK

Next semester?

Next semester, Maritime Law. TK

Tong Yan remembered, he had once said that he might only be teaching for this one term. Now, however, he was discussing his courses for next semester, so that meant he would be continuing to stay in Shanghai and continuing to stay in their school? Oh, why was she all of a sudden feeling so happy?

After several days, this news had basically spread throughout the entire faculty, and the ones most thrilled about it were the students. During

Wednesday's Commercial Arbitration class, a few of the female students simply could not hold it in any longer and forced the class prefect to personally ask Gu Pingsheng.

At the end of class, Class Prefect grinningly raised his hand. "Teacher Gu, one last question."

Gu Pingsheng was holding a black thermos flask and drinking water from it. Seeing his raised hand, he nodded at him to speak.

"Teacher Gu, we want to know, what are you teaching next semester?" Class Prefect seemed to feel that his behavior was a little too eager and so, with a very proper expression, he added, "It's so we can buy the learning materials in advance."

"Maritime Law. But you guys don't need to get any learning materials. Next semester, I intend on printing out the materials, so you will not need to buy any additional textbooks."

From down below, a string of "whoa, yeah, whoa" rang up from the class in low cries of approval.

Since first-year university, for each course, the teacher would provide in advance a list of any required textbooks or references. Those who had the money would go buy them and those who did not would borrow the books to photocopy. In reality, they discovered in the end that it really did not make much of a difference whether you had the books or not because there were the notes taken in class anyway … But, out of respect for the teacher, they still needed to make the preparations.

It seemed that only courses like Marxism or Intro to Maoism would have the same textbooks year after year that were passed down as if they were antiques.

For the specialized courses, a teacher like Gu Pingsheng who provided all the learning materials himself was absolutely a marvel and an oddball.

Tong Yan lowered her head and kept her eyes fixed on her class notes, as if she was checking for errors or omissions.

"You don't even know, yesterday, a few girls in our faculty from a lower year were asking me about Commercial Arbitration." Shen Yao lamented in a quiet

voice, “I even told them, what was their rush? They still had two semesters to go. But …” she sighed, “but looking now at Pretty Lady’s Bane, I really can’t bear the idea of him teaching other people. The good thing is, he doesn’t need to sub in to teach the double major students or those law courses open for non-law students, so at least he belongs solely to our faculty.”

Resting her hand on her chin, Tong Yan replied with an “mm” as she caught a glimpse of him still continuing to drink his water.

“Such a pity, though.” To the left of them, Wang Xiaoru also gave a seldom-heard sigh. “Next semester is our last term. We’re going to be on internship for our whole fourth year.” Turning her head to the side deliberately so that she was facing the outside of the classroom, she raised her voice and announced, “Fellow classmates, whoever has a secret crush on our teacher, you’d better hurry up and profess your love. There’s not much time left. Don’t give away this benefit to the girl classmates coming up after us.”

After this Sunday, there were only another five weeks. Thirty-five days.

With her pen, Tong Yan crossed off Saturday on her calendar. As she stared at the row after row of black pen markings, she suddenly realized that she did not need to count down the days to Gu Pingsheng’s departure anymore.

Since that day she had her bad cold, he had text messaged her everyday in concen and asked about her symptoms. Then, they had arranged to meet privately, and he had brought her many different medications. Gradually, the two of them began to send text messages to each other to simply chat casually. But today, from when class finished this morning to now, he still had not sent her any messages …

When Shen Yao saw that the lights had turned off, without prompting, she also shut off her music.

Tong Yan had just started to fall into a muddled, half-asleep state when the ring of a telephone suddenly sounded out. It was the middle of the night, yet the landline phone in the dormitory room was actually ringing … Right as she was about to pull her covers over her head and continue sleeping, she heard Shen Yao call her. “Yan Yan, Yan Yan, dearie, phone call for you.”

Shen Yao dragged the telephone receiver over to Tong Yan's bedside and, with a peculiar expression on her face, handed it to her.

Taking the receiver from her, Tong Yan said a "hello" into it.

"Tong Yan, don't sleep. Wake up, wake up."

That voice sounded so familiar. She pondered for a moment and then remembered who it was — her high school classmate and also Lu Bei's best friend, Cheng Yu.

"Mm. Go ahead, talk."

Cheng Yu first said some polite niceties, stating that he was planning to come to Shanghai this Christmas and while he was here, he wanted to get together with Tong Yan.

Without even needing to think about it, Tong Yan declined his invitation. On the other end of the line, there was a long silence before he said, "Tong Yan, I promised Lu Bei I'd keep you company over Christmas. What's the deal? Is it because, now that you've been accepted over to Shanghai, you're looking down on the people who went to Hunan University? I seem to recall that our law faculty is supposed to be better than yours." Cheng Yu deliberately used a joking tone.

For a long moment, she was quiet before finally saying, "Don't try to force me. You know me."

After getting her mobile phone number from her, Cheng Yu soon hung up the call.

While she was trying her best to bring back the sleepy feeling, Shen Yao had already put the telephone back, walked over to stand beneath Tong Yan's bed, and arched her head back to look up at Tong Yan. "Tong Yan Wuji, I'm in love." Tong Yan stared perplexedly at her. With an expression that showed she was reveling in her thoughts, Shen Yao continued, "I've fallen in love with that man's voice. You've got to play matchmaker for us. I can't stand it. I'm honestly in love with him."

Tong Yan was thoroughly awake now.

“Is he a university student? An old classmate of yours?”

Tong Yan was at a loss over whether she should laugh or cry at this. “Yes. In the law school at Hunan University …”

“Oooh, one with a long historical standing … Definitely much better than our law school that’s only been around for three years.” Shen Yao’s eyes were sparkling. “Did he say he was coming to Shanghai for Christmas? Can you bring me along?”

“You listened in on my call.”

Tong Yan had not finished speaking, though, before Shen Yao had already kicked off her slippers, climbed up the ladder onto Tong Yan’s bed, and lifted up the covers to huddle together with her under them. “Hurry and give me all the details about him. You don’t even know, earlier on, when he just said hello, my heart leapt out of my chest. How can there be a man who sounds soooo nice when he talks?”

Under Shen Yao’s persistent pursuit for more information, Tong Yan, who was squeezed up against the wall, began nonstop to answer all sorts of different questions. However, she purposely avoided anything related to Lu Bei.

Shen Yao was wearing a serious expression that indicated she had plans to carry out a long talk through the entire night, and resignedly, Tong Yan picked up her mobile phone to glance at the time.

To her surprise, there was an unread text message.

“What does he look like? Do you have a picture?” Hugging a pillow against herself, Shen Yao leaned herself up against the wall. “You know I don’t really ask for anything in terms of looks. I just want to know what he looks like.”

It was not only looks that she did not really ask anything of; she basically did not have any requirements for anything. That was opposite to Xiaoru, who measured everything up against her set criteria.

“No photos, but he’s really quite good-looking. I’d give him a score of eighty or more.”

Inconspicuously, she opened up her text message inbox.

Gu Pingsheng: *Are you asleep? TK*

Tong Yan: *Not yet. I'm chatting with Shen Yao.*

Gu Pingsheng: *I'm chatting with Pingfan, too. TK*

Tong Yan: *Don't tell me it's about relationship issues, too? Shen Yao just answered a call for me … She said she's fallen for the boy who called. It's just one phone call. That's too fast.*

"Tong Yan Wuji!" Shen Yao slapped her firmly on her arm. "This is about the future happiness of the rest of my life. Can you treat this more seriously? Who are you texting with, smiling so lustily?"

After saying this, she immediately leaned in closer to Tong Yan.

Panicked, Tong Yan clutched her mobile phone to herself. "You keep trying to look and I'll kick you down off of here." Shen Yao soon yielded and simply continued prattling off all kinds of questions.

Tong Yan discreetly changed the name "Gu Pingsheng" in her mobile phone to "TK." But after thinking about it, she decided it still was not good enough and eventually changed it to her own name, "Tong Yan."

This way, no matter who happened to see, they still would not be able to guess whom it was.

A reply soon came back from Gu Pingsheng: *Perhaps it has to do with personality. Some people are cautious and will assess and weigh out everything. Some people tend to simply throw caution to the wind. TK*

It could have been because it was late into the night, or perhaps it was because Shen Yao had out of the blue fallen into a baffling romance, but their conversation had somehow managed to slip into this type of topic. Over these last two weeks, although they had communicated frequently, it had all been on very ordinary subjects.

Tong Yan talked to Shen Yao for another little while before she finally mustered up the courage to, in the most nonchalant tone possible, ask him: *What about you? What are you like?*

Quite a length of time passed before he replied with a sentence written in English:

The longer you have to wait for something, the more you will appreciate it when it finally arrives. TK

"Eh?" Seeing an open opportunity, Shen Yao swiftly took advantage of it and swept her eyes over the message. Instantly, a suggestive grin spread across her face. "Who's that, huh, saying he's going to wait for you?"

Tong Yan immediately stuffed her mobile phone under her covers. "Off the bed, off the bed. I need to sleep."

"Calm down, calm down." Shen Yao quickly raised her hands in surrender. "I didn't see anything."

Another text message seemed to have come in on her phone, but she dared not read anything in front of Shen Yao anymore. Afterwards, Shen Yao continued another long stretch of talking, but she only absentmindedly responded to her. Over and over in her mind, all she could think about was that one sentence.

When she was at last lying back down on her bed, she pulled out her mobile phone again. The glow of the phone's screen was especially prominent against the darkness: *To put it a little simpler, the longer you wait for something, the more it deserves to be cherished when you get it. TK*

Additional Comments:

I know the very last message from Gu Pingsheng seems like it's just a repeat of what he said earlier. That's because, well, actually it is. He sent that message over in English, and then later, he followed up by restating it again in Chinese to make sure that Tong Yan was clear on what he meant. I struggled over that last text trying to rephrase it so that it sounded a little different and communicated the meaning a little differently, but… LOL.

Anyway, I don't know if you guys are familiar with that English saying, but

there is a latter half that is often seen with that quote:

> *The longer you wait for something, the more you appreciate it when you get it, because anything worth having is definitely worth waiting for.*

(There's actually a longer version of that, but this is the most commonly quoted one.)❤ To Gu Pingsheng, Tong Yan is worth waiting for …

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

18 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 6.4

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 6.4

January 16, 2016 by hoju 27 Comments



A long chapter. Now that Gu Pingsheng's sorted things out in his mind, he's actually not that slow in progressing their relationship. But unfortunately, Tong Yan has to first deal with Shen Yao's good intentions but terrible results.

Chapter 6.4 – Quietly Advancing and Retreating (4)

Her fingers held between them the mobile phone that had already grown dim, and she unconsciously slid them over the screen and keys. Because her electric blanket had been heating it, her phone was a little hot, like this row of words that was silently burning into her heart.

After a long while, she at last began to type out a text in response.

But she had only just inputted the word, "I" and then unexpectedly, her bed began to shake. Shen Yao had crawled up onto it again. "This won't do. I forgot my electric blanket again this week. Tonight, the two of us will squeeze together and share a bed, okay?"

Tong Yan started in alarm and ended up sending off the text message as it was …

“Go over to Xiaoru’s bed to sleep. Her bed has an electric blanket on it.”

“No. I’m so hyped up I can’t sleep.” Shen Yao slipped under the blankets, and like an octopus, she clung onto Tong Yan. “Who sent you that text just now? I seem to remember I saw that sentence in some movie? That person’s so romantic.”

With a bunch of “mm-s” and “ah-s,” Tong Yan managed to sidestep this subject.

As a result, it was not until early the following morning when Tong Yan awoke that she finally had the chance to clarify that very weird text message she had sent. Shen Yao was deep in slumber with her back facing her. Quietly turning onto her side, Tong Yan pulled out her mobile phone from under her pillow.

Yes? What’s wrong? TK

The time sent was one o’clock in the morning.

Tong Yan gloomily typed up her text message: *Last night, Shen Yao interrupted me. I actually wanted to say …*

She did not even know herself what she wanted to say.

After quite some time had passed, she finally continued typing*: I may not have passed my CET-6 yet, but I can still understand the meaning of that sentence.*

She had just sat up to go get some clothes when her mobile phone vibrated again.

“Who is it? So early …” Shen Yao rolled over and instinctively felt around for her phone.

“It’s my phone, not yours.”

While saying this, Tong Yan glanced at her inbox: *I just stepped off the campus shuttle. Interested in joining me for breakfast? TK*

He did not have any classes to teach today. Why did he come to the school? Wearing a thick down jacket, Tong Yan pondered on this while she walked towards the dining hall on the west end of campus. Soon, she saw Gu Pingsheng standing alone by the campus shuttle stop, his two hands in his pants pockets, reading the newspaper that was pinned up on the news board.

It was eight o'clock, the time the first class of the day started. Those who did not have class during this period were mostly still sleeping in. This time of the day was when there were the least people out on the campus grounds.

She was about to walk up to him, but at that moment, a student happened to come over to change out the newspaper on the news board. The person unlocked the glass covering over the board while, at the same time, sneaking glances at Gu Pingsheng. Feeling guilty, as if she was caught doing something bad, Tong Yan stayed standing at a distance not too far away until the student had finished changing out all sixteen of the display panels. And the entire time, Gu Pingsheng had stared at the newspaper in the first panel and had not moved his eyes away. After the student changing the newspapers had left and walked far away, she finally stepped up behind Gu Pingsheng.

It was a news article on a medical mishap.

Before she could read through it in detail, Gu Pingsheng had already noticed her presence. "What would you like to eat?"

Tong Yan thought for a moment. "Just go to the dining hall. It has everything." She quickly added, "Let's go to the west dining hall."

The east and south dining halls were both near many teaching buildings. There would be too many students in those ones.

When the two of them arrived at the dining hall, many students who were late were dashing hastily out the door with a bun or something between their teeth. Tong Yan looked over at the row of windows. Feeling that it would be inappropriate to send Gu Pingsheng to personally buy pan-fried pork buns, savoury tofu pudding, or other things along those lines, she selected a remote table beside a window and asked him, "Teacher Gu, what are you used to eating? I'm more familiar with how it works here, so I'll be able to buy it faster."

In a relaxed tone, he answered, "Whatever you like to eat, just buy me the same." He was relaxed, but Tong Yan was not able to relax.

In fact, there really was nothing novel or unique to eat in the university dining hall, but in order to take into consideration that there were students from both

the northern and southern parts of the country, there was a great variety of foods. In the end, she still simply bought the few most common ones – sweet ones and salty ones, healthy ones and unhealthy ones …

Looking at those plates of varied sizes in front of him, Gu Pingsheng instantly chuckled, “Is it, after we’re done eating all of these, we won’t need to have lunch?”

Sheepishly, she grinned, “I just wanted to let you have a taste of everything.”

“I don’t like wasting food.”

After he said this, he seemed to sense Tong Yan’s discomfiture, and in an unhurried voice, he added an explanation. “When I was younger, I was actually particularly wasteful with food. If I didn’t like to eat it or if I didn’t feel like eating, I wouldn’t force myself. Later on, I saw lots of people who wished to eat but didn’t have the money to, as well as people who had lost the physical ability to eat, and I learned to not waste food anymore.”

When he finished speaking, he wiped his hands with a moist towelette, and then after handing the package to her, he began quietly eating his breakfast.

After hearing a person who seemed almost perfect in terms of moral character say these words, her little bit of nervousness suddenly faded.

“I was the same.” She took a bite of pan-fried scallion pancake. “In primary school, I was especially picky. Breakfast every morning was eggs cooked in milk, but later, I had eaten it so much that I really didn’t want to have it anymore. And so oftentimes, while Grandmother wasn’t looking, I’d pour the milk into the toilet.”



葱油饼 “cong you bing.”
Pan-friend scallion pancake.

Also known as green onion pancake, pan-fried Chinese pancake. (Image credit)

He pretended to heave a sigh. “Indeed, what a waste.”

“But,” she smiled, “I wasn’t like you where you saw a lot of things of the world. I just grew up and naturally, became more mature.”

Now, every time she thought of how she used to wrack her brain to try to find ways to get away from Grandmother, she would feel awful.

With a spoon, Gu Pingsheng took bite after bite of his savoury tofu pudding.

Earlier, when she had bought this one, she had specifically instructed the server to put extra dried shrimp in it, and now, seeing that he seemed to very much enjoy eating it, she fell into an unexplainably good mood.

The sun was also shining brightly today and gave a nice, warm feeling when it landed on people’s bodies.

Only when she saw him raise his head did she instinctively shift her eyes away. In her peripheral vision, she could see him looking at her.

She had thought he would soon move his gaze from her, but he did not. Therefore, she had no choice but to hold on like this for a little while longer before eventually pretending that she had not seen anything. Turning back to him, she asked. “Taste good? I’ve always felt that the tofu pudding from the school’s dining hall has a very authentic, local flavor.”

“It tastes very good.” Amusedly, he exposed her by saying, “You like to look at people using your peripheral vision, don’t you?”

Tong Yan straightaway denied, “No, I don’t.”

But the red glow that instantly flooded her cheeks exposed her fib.

“When I was a little, I had peripheral vision phobia.” He was taking great pleasure in his eating as he casually chatted with her. “I would always feel that I was doing things poorly and people were looking at me because of that. For a long period of time, I would carefully observe the people in my peripheral vision, and I’d have problems concentrating.”

Tong Yan looked at him in shock. “Peripheral vision phobia? Now that you mention it, I seem … to have had it when I was a kid, too.”

Always unable to have a settled mind while doing anything and unable to control herself from observing with her peripheral vision the people around her.

Gu Pingsheng brought out his moist towelettes again and handed them to her. “Don’t worry. Lots of people have had it during their adolescent years. It’s often caused by insecurity and caring too much about what other people may think.”

He spoke about this in a completely unconcerned manner. Tong Yan pulled out a moist towelette and began to wipe her mouth and hands thoroughly.

So, he also had times when he was insecure. But he came from a very good, well-off family, and he was so talented and outstanding himself. He should have been that type of person who had a great sense of self-pride. Why would he be insecure? Tong Yan set her towelette down on the tray and watched him wipe his hands.

Teacher Gu … Gu Pingsheng, Teacher Gu …

Her face suddenly began to heat up slightly, and as a result, she propped her chin on her hand and once again turned to look out the window. There, in that position where he could not see her from his angle, the corner of her lips curled upwards.

After a little while, she finally asked him, “Teacher Gu, why are you here today?”

He finished off the remainder of his tofu pudding and then continued on eating, picking up a pan-fried pork bun with his chopsticks and dabbing it in some vinegar. “I was worried about you, that there might be something wrong, so I came here directly.”




Left: 生煎包 “sheng jian bao.” Pan-fried

pork buns (image credit). Right: 豆腐脑 “duo fu nao.” Savoury tofu pudding (image credit). Tofu pudding can be eaten savoury or sweet, but for breakfast, it is usually a savoury version.

Might be something wrong? Tong Yan suddenly realized what he meant. Feeling apologetic, she explained, “I accidentally fell asleep afterwards.”

Breakfast time had passed, and there were not many people inside the dining hall anymore. The two of them chatted aimlessly until, eventually, he was the one who glanced at his watch, said that he still had some matters to attend to that morning, and ended this simple breakfast.

Tong Yan walked with him alongside the dining hall building for quite a long ways until she at last came to a stop. “I want to go check something out in the library.”

In reality, she really wanted to walk with him all the way to the campus shuttle stop, but she was worried that her classmates would see them.

He did not say much to this, and only as she was turning away did he seem to suddenly remember something. “Next Friday is the CET-6 exam?”

Tong Yan turned back again. “Yes, I’m taking my CET-6 that afternoon.”

He actually did not need to ask so far ahead of time about next week. After all, there were three Commercial Arbitration classes in between.

“What time does it end?”

“It starts at 3:00 in the afternoon and finishes at 5:30.”

After answering the question, she remembered what that particular day was: Christmas Eve. This year’s scheduled time for the CET-4 and 6 examinations … very much deserved to incur the wrath of gods and men.

“You will have missed the times that the campus shuttles run, then.” He said to her, “When you’re finished your exam, take a cab to come find me. I’ll reimburse you for it, how about that?”

She paused in surprise but then quickly said, “It’s no big deal. I still have my living expense money. Plus, last time, you…”

“It’s just for that day,” he smiled. “I actually wanted to drive over to pick you up, but traffic will likely be very bad. If I come over to the campus first and then drive back out to the core of the city, it may end up being very late before we get there.”

Just for that day … Tong Yan finally nodded. “Alright. After I’m done and out from the exam, I’ll send you a text.”

Could this be considered … their first date?

Tong Yan opened Shen Yao’s computer and searched “peripheral vision phobia” on Baidu[1]. In a very focused and serious manner, she began to read through the various descriptions and explanations.

All of a sudden, there was a slap on her shoulder.

“What are you looking at?” Shen Yao swept her eyes across the computer screen. “You switched over to study psychology?”

Jumping in surprise, Tong Yan twisted her head to the side to look at Shen Yao. “It’s Sunday today. How come you haven’t gone home?”

The look in Shen Yao’s eyes could definitely kill someone. “Don’t you remember, I already arranged with you that next week, I’m going with you to see dear Cheng Yu?”

“Christmas, right? But, isn’t that next weekend?”

“I’m pumped, okay? This week, I’m not going to go home.”

……

Tong Yan had thought that after she woke up, she would snap out of it herself. But now, seeing her genuinely besotted expression, she finally understood that Shen Yao was utterly serious. Hence, the anxious mood that had been brewing in her just moments ago completely dissolved away with Shen Yao’s intrusion.

Unable to prevail over Shen Yao’s wheedling and pestering, she helped her

empty out her entire wardrobe and kept her company as she tried on each piece of clothing, arranging them again and again into different outfits …

She had to continually provide all sorts of opinions until, eventually, she was thirsty from all her talking.

She poured a cup of water and held it between her palms.

Many years later, Tong Yan would still remember this day.

On that cold winter day inside their dormitory room, her good friend, who had bafflingly fallen in love with a voice, was shivering incessantly as she changed into all sorts of outfits and freely imagined the upcoming first meeting. But as for herself, she simply held that cup of hot water in her hands and breathed in the hot, steamy air rising up out of it, quietly concealing in the deepest reaches those feelings of love she had just discovered.

Teacher Gu. Gu Pingsheng.

To her, the meaning behind those had started to evolve to something different.

For the entire week, he carried out his lectures for Commercial Arbitration as normal.

The maddening part was, she spent more than half of the time taking notes and did not dare at all to lift her head and meet his gaze. In the end, she even glumly started to grumble silently, why had they set the day of their date so far ahead of time?

On the day of the examination, she finished writing her test half an hour earlier than the set end time.

After repeatedly checking over her multiple choice answer sheet and essay, she did the unprecedented by handing in her test paper early. She had just walked out of the examination room and turned on her mobile phone when she saw a countless number of text messages flood in. They were all from Shen Yao.

“Oh god! I was sleeping when Cheng Yu showed up downstairs of our

dorm. Oh god! His looks totally appeal to me."

"I can't take it. The way he talks is so cute. I'm going to lose my mind."

"How come you're still not done your test?"

"Hurry up, hurry up. I'm waiting for you at Remembrance of Roots Lake, on that open field next to the library."

"Tong Yan … hurry."

Uncertain whether to laugh or cry, Tong Yan deleted each message one at a time, clearing out some space in her inbox. The last message she received, however, left her somewhat mystified: *Cheng Yu and I have prepared a huge surprise for you.*

Surprise? She and Cheng Yu? They didn't need to progress their relationship that quickly, did they?

Following the walkway beside the lake until she reached the front entrance of the library, she saw Shen Yao beaming and talking to two boys. She and Cheng Yu had been high school classmates for three years, so naturally, he was easy to identify. That other slender, tall figure, though, caused her footsteps to come to a halt.

At the time, when she had been accepted to come here to Shanghai, she had felt that 1400 kilometres was a great distance and would allow her to temporarily be far away from her parents and Lu Bei.

So then, how was it that he had suddenly showed up here on the campus of her university?

She stared at him as if he was a hallucination.

Because of the lack of any explanation from Cheng Yu, Shen Yao was completely regarding Lu Bei as Tong Yan's real boyfriend and was being ridiculously warm and friendly to him. Tong Yan was unable to find an opportunity to talk to him, so when Shen Yao suggested that they all head into the city core together, she could only intentionally walk a little slower with Lu Bei. Shen Yao and Cheng Yu hit it off straightaway and did not seem to pay

attention to them anymore. Tong Yan at last found her chance. “This time, you’re here … with Fang Yunyun to have some fun together in Shanghai?”

Carrying a very large paper bag in his hand, Lu Bei walked side by side with her but did not give any response to her deliberate reminder.

There was a long period of silence before he finally said, “Tong Tong, I’ve worked really hard over this last year. I had actually wanted to tell you this in Beijing during the National Day holiday. I’ve improved my student records[2], and this year, I’m in first year at CUPL [China University of Political Science and Law]. Wait for me, until I graduate from university, okay?”

Though she did not speak, she still was surprised by this.

He, the one who had always hated studying, had finally come around? But he had skipped three years of high school. Would he really be able to finish university?

Seeing that she had not spoken, he handed the paper bag to her. “They all say that Shanghai doesn’t have interior centralized heating, so it’s really cold. I bought a down jacket and a cashmere blanket for you.”

She did not take it from him.

“Tong Tong.” He called her name.

Shen Yao all of a sudden turned around and grinned, “You guys having a quarrel? That’s not something that can be made okay by just giving some random gift. Say some nice, flattering words. I’ll take all of you to Xintiandi [New World district][3] to go drinking, my treat. We’ll get Tong Yan drunk and then everything will be easy to take care of.”

It was wintertime in late December. The sky had already grown completely dark.

The street lamps happened to turn on right at that moment, illuminating Shen Yao’s beaming face and also casting their shadows beside each of them. Tong Yan adamantly refused to accept the gift, and right when they were both refusing to yield, an alert abruptly sounded out from her mobile phone.

For a moment, she stared blankly, before suddenly remembering her promise

to Gu Pingsheng.

Sure enough, after she pulled out her mobile phone to check the time, she saw it was already 5:40 pm: *Did your exam go well? TK*

[1] 百度 Baidu.com is a Chinese web services company, similar to Google, with services such as a search engine, images, *etc.*

[2] 学籍档案 “xue ji dang an.” Student records for students in China contain information such as grades, rewards and punishments received during your entire duration as a student, the ideologies the student expressed, and just an overall assessment. Lu Bei was a rebel in high school, so he would have had poor grades and assessments of him. For him to have changed his student record means he probably did something to upgrade his grades and improve his overall performance.

[3] 新天地. Literally, this means “New Heaven and Earth,” although this place is often referred to by its name in pinyin, Xintiandi or by the English name, New World district. Xintiandi is a pedestrian only shopping and entertainment district in Shanghai. The area is very affluent and bustling and is often listed as a “must visit” location for visitors.

Additional Comments:

I just had to gush over how sweet Gu Pingsheng is. Tong Yan’s reply to his text from the previous chapter where he had stated he had waited for her and cherished her, was cut off. This worried him enough that he came to the school first thing in the morning to make sure she was okay.❤

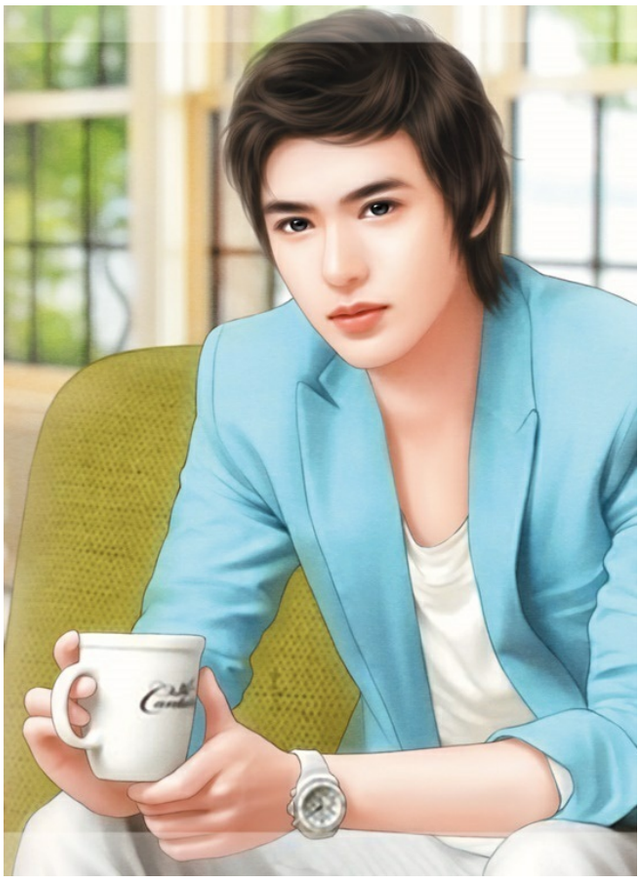
Completed:
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Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 7.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 7.1

January 20, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



We finally get to read about Gu Pingsheng's perspective and thoughts. And then, there's also what happens after Shen Yao's blunder.

Chapter 7.1 – The Person I Like (1)

This was his first Christmas Eve in Shanghai.

Although he had grown up in a Catholic school system, this was only because the teaching in it was more strict and rigorous and not because he was a true Catholic. Gu Pingfan, on the other hand, was a devout believer through and through, and tonight, she would most certainly be going to church to celebrate Midnight Mass. Hence, he had very early on arranged a time with Gu Pingfan to go shopping together.

But, he had not expected that there would be so many people.

Looking around at all the young women's fashions that were near and far, Gu Pingfan asked somewhat uncomprehendingly, "What are you here to buy?"

He pondered momentarily. "Young women's clothing."

Gu Pingfan's eyes swept him up and down. Just as she was about to throw out a couple of mocking sentences, she suddenly understood. "It's for that student of yours? Tong Yan?" While she was speaking, she stepped out of the way of several girls who looked to be students.

"Your build is really similar to hers, and your taste is also passable …" He did not deny anything and merely felt that, standing here among this crowded swarm of young women, he seemed to stick out. "Help me buy some clothing that would be fitting. I want to give them to her as a Christmas present." Raising his arm, he glanced at his watch. "I'll wait for you in the Coffee Bean downstairs. Twenty minutes?"

On the surface, he seemed to be asking for a favour and his tone was gracious and courteous, but it left absolutely no opportunity for refusal.

Gu Pingfan was accustomed to this manner of his that he had always had since he was a child. She could not even be bothered to say anything and instead, proceeded directly to dutifully force her way into the horde. He went downstairs to the Coffee Bean, which was also packed with people, and ordered a cup of Earl Grey tea.

Luck was on his side for when the tea was ready and carried out, there happened to be someone in the corner leaving. Near him, a young couple wearing school uniforms was laughing happily, when unexpectedly, the boy pulled out a box. When the girl opened it, whatever was contained inside caused her to instantly throw her hands over her mouth and, with an exaggerated expression on her face, let out a high-pitched squeal.

"Ten minutes." All of a sudden, a bag obstructed his view. Grinning, Pingfan stated, "A down jacket and a scarf. Both are in a style I like. Seeing that you praised my taste, I bought them based on my preferences."

Pulling the paper bag open, he glanced inside. The items were, yet again, a

royal blue color. “How is it that all this time, you’ve made no progress? You’ve liked this particular color for seven, eight years now, haven’t you?”

Gu Pingfan took out her wallet to go buy some water. “That night when you came back, you said that Tong Yan looks really nice in this color.” Once she said this, she stood and went to buy a cup of coffee before returning to where they were sitting.

Their seats were in the furthest corner, and when Pingfan came back carrying her coffee, she nearly tripped over all the additional chairs that had been stuffed haphazardly in the space. After overcoming numerous obstacles and countless perils to finally take her seat, she looked at Gu Pingsheng, who was leaning back in his armchair, and suddenly she pursed her lips and eyed him over.

Detecting her gaze, Gu Pingsheng tilted his head slightly to the side and motioned for her to speak plainly if she had something to say.

“You and your student …” She mulled over her word choice but ultimately decided to be direct and to the point. “Are you guys together now?”

After a very brief silence, he answered, “We just started.”

Gu Pingfan raised her brows. With a sip of her coffee, she suddenly brought up a topic that, all this time, they had never talked about and could even be said to be taboo.

“I was talking to a few of the cardiac surgeons in Ruijin Hospital a few days ago and mentioned your mother’s name. I never thought they would still remember this once well known doctor in the field of cardiac surgery.” She took another drink of her coffee and continued, “So many years have passed, yet even completely irrelevant people still remember Auntie [maternal aunt]. TK, you haven’t forgotten in the slightest bit, have you?”

Without answering, he picked up his teacup. The tea was a little cold.

“Even though you’ve never said it, I’ve always sensed that you love your mom very much,” Pingfan said. “Auntie graduated from Penn, so you insisted on going to Penn to study. I know very well that at the time, you actually had even better options to pick from. Auntie was in cardiac surgery, and in the end, you went

into cardiac surgery, too … And even your name, TK. Tongke. Gu Tongke[1]. Everywhere in your life, there's shadows of Auntie."

Still, he did not speak.

Finally, Pingfan seemed to feel, too, that this topic really was not a pleasant one.

She gave a hidden sigh. "What I'm actually trying to say is, you need to think through carefully. Is it also because of your mother that you are having a teacher-student romance? Here, it's not like it is overseas. You know very well that teacher-student romances are not really accepted. Or maybe it's because that girl's name is Tong Yan[2]?" Speculating, she asked her final question. "Maybe, it's because what she's gone through is very similar to your own experiences?"

The white ceramic cup that had already been raised to his lips inexplicably paused.

Watching while he continued to drink his tea, Gu Pingfan came to the thorough understanding that this was merely a one-sided discussion. Just as she was about to abandon the idea of carrying on this conversation, he unexpectedly gave her a response. "Are they playing any songs here? If they are, which song is it now?"

Gu Pingfan paused in surprise. She listened for a moment, but then shook her head and said, "I can't tell. It should be a really new song. Most of the stuff that kids listen to nowadays, I've never heard."

"Never heard?"

"Never heard."

"Every time I meet new friends, I will have this same feeling: unfamiliar. I've never heard their voice before, and probably, will never have the chance to hear them." He looked into Pingfan's eyes and said, "You and I grew up together, so when you talk to me, I can still remember the expressions and tones you use when you speak. Now that I think about it, only a few years passed between when I fell sick to now, but even Zihao's voice, I've nearly forgotten already."

This time, it was Gu Pingfan who remained silent.

“As for female voices, there are actually not many that I remember. But that day, when I saw Tong Yan again, I could still clearly remember her voice.”

More accurately, it was her voice when she was thirteen, fourteen years old.

“It was a sense of familiarity.” As he spoke, a few of his fingers tapped rhythmically and lightly against his cup. Perhaps, in the beginning, it was all because of this rare sense of familiarity.

His tone suddenly changed. “And then? Who can clearly say?” His hair obstructed the view of his eyes. Beside the window, under the soft glow of the sunlight, his smile was warm and harmless. “If it was possible to clearly explain that feeling, God would not have used the story of a rib to humour mankind and describe love.

Gu Pingfan laughed indignantly, “Don’t be disrespectful about my faith.”

“No disrespect at all intended,” he said. “I very much agree with a part of what you believe in.”

“Such as?” She looked at him in amusement.

“Such as, marriage is a gift from God, and it is sacred. Or, such as, God created sex and gave it as a gift to mankind, but only in marriage is it the most intimate expression of love. Outside of marriage, any type of sexual act is wrong.” Truly spoken as someone who came out of a Catholic school. He had not even needed to think it over. “These are things I sincerely believe.”

When it was nearly 5:30, only he remained.

He remembered the times that Tong Yan had told him, and he had intended on waiting here until 5:30. Unfortunately, plans are made to be disrupted. Luo Zihao was in Xintiandi and doggedly sent him multiple text messages and emails, insisting that he had to see him in person.

Gu Pingsheng was not very familiar with Shanghai and had planned to take Tong Yan over to the Xintiandi district to have dinner there anyway. Unable to endure Luo Zihao’s hunt down of him in text message form, he headed over to Xintiandi first.

He had reserved the table at Din Tai Fung Restaurant[3] far in advance.

“The stuff here is pretty good.” Luo Zihao had just taken a seat when he caught a glimpse of the paper shopping bag beside the table and the obviously feminine colour clothing inside … “TK, are you meeting up with Zhao Yin?”

“Could you please keep me out of whatever is between you and your ex-girlfriend?” He waved down someone and requested a drink menu.

Luo Zihao grinned at him. “Don’t tell me it’s for a date with your girlfriend? Have I seen her before?”

The server brought over the drink menu, and Gu Pingsheng motioned for it to be handed to Luo Zihao.

“I think you haven’t seen her yet. But, she will be here very soon.”

Luo Zihao nearly burned his fingers with the cigarette butt that was between them. It felt as if an entire lifetime had passed since they had last seen each other. Otherwise, why had things changed so greatly?

Since receiving the text message, she felt as if she had done something bad.

But all along the way, Shen Yao would whisper in her ear, begging her to stay with her for dinner and not giving her any chance at all to refuse. In the end, with a guilty conscience, she had no choice but to send a message to Gu Pingsheng telling him that she might be a little late. Very quickly, he returned her text: *No worries. I’ll wait for you. TK*

Clutching her phone in her hand, she began in her mind to calculate out how the time would work.

They would arrive in the city core a little past six o’clock. If she ate a little faster or perhaps left halfway through the dinner, she should be able to get to where he was by some time past seven o’clock.

Shen Yao had not expected that this meet-up would work out so smoothly and, hence, had not made reservations ahead of time. She simply said that she wanted to take good care of the two guests who were visiting from the north and let them try some Shanghai cuisine, so she chose the Din Tai Fung that was

in Xintiandi. However, the result was, when they arrived at the restaurant entrance, they discovered that there were already nearly one hundred parties waiting to be seated. Merely looking at the crowd gave Tong Yan a slight headache.

They were about to leave when Shen Yao unexpectedly stopped. “Tong Yan, look. It’s Teacher Gu.”

Her heart gave a sudden lurch, and she was thrown into a slight panic. She turned, and through the full-length glass wall, she saw Gu Pingsheng sitting at table that was in a very conspicuous location. Coincidentally, he also caught sight of them at that same moment.

Shen Yao waved furiously at him through the glass, so she could only follow Shen Yao’s lead and raise her arm mechanically in a show of greeting. And then, she watched as he pulled his gaze away again and continued his conversation with the person across from him.

“Your teacher looks like one of those types that’s a ruffian in the guise of a gentleman,” Cheng Yu laughed. “He doesn’t look like he’s a teacher of law.”

Shen Yao linked her arm through Tong Yan’s. “The first time he showed up, I was shocked, too. He completely overturned my impression of what someone who studied law should look like. Forget it. There are just too many people here. I’ll take you guys to eat somewhere near my home. I forgot that today was Christmas Eve, and if you don’t have connections or friends at a place, there’s no way you can get a spot.”

Shrugging, Cheng Yu said, “I’m easy. On your turf, I have to listen to your orders.”

Tong Yan’s thoughts were in disarray. Countless excuses crossed her mind, but still she could not find a reason for her to leave.

Therefore, she could only, with a disquieted heart, follow Shen Yao back down the stairs. Because it was a holiday, they were unable to wave down a taxi, and they walked for a full thirty minutes before they arrived at the destination Shen Yao had mentioned.

“What are you thinking about?” Shen Yao asked her in a low voice after ordering their dishes, “How come you’ve been all distracted since you saw your boyfriend? I think he seems pretty good. Quarrels add a little spice and enjoyment to the relationship, but when it’s about enough quarreling, you need to be reasonable and give him an out.”

Sipping her chrysanthemum tea, Tong Yan replied softly, “He’s my ex-boyfriend. And now, he has nothing to do with me.”

“Ex-boyfriend?” Shen Yao’s eyes widened, and immediately, she stretched out her hand and grasped Lu Bei’s in it. “That’s not easy for you, eh. In a situation where your future is uncertain, you still had the courage to cross 1400 kilometres and chase her all the way to Shanghai. I support you!”

Lu Bei likely had never before seen someone who could joke and play around so much. He exchanged a look with Cheng Yu, wanting to laugh but keeping a straight face.

“Oh right. ‘The longer you have to wait for something, the more you will appreciate it when it finally arrives.’ That’s a pretty good line.”

Lu Bei paused blankly for a moment, then looked inquiringly over at Tong Yan.

Under the table, Tong Yan yanked on Shen Yao’s arm, but before her warning message could get out, Shen Yao had already blurted, “It wasn’t you who sent that text? Said you’d wait for Tong Yan?”

“Tong Tong?” The expression on Lu Bei’s face was rather strange as he looked at her.

With her lips pressed together, Tong Yan hesitated for several seconds before finally stating, “Yes, there is someone I like now.”

A stillness fell over the private room they were in. Shen Yao slowly came to a realization of what she had done.

Cheng Yu suddenly gave a light cough. “Shen Yao, come out and keep me company while I have a smoke?” In a rare instance of astuteness, Shen Yao immediately followed him outside and left the other two persons alone.

The entire time, Tong Yan did not look at Lu Bei, and he did not speak either.

His hands gripped his cup forcefully, as if he was using all his strength.

She continued drinking her chrysanthemum tea. “Maybe, if you just give it a try, you’ll discover that she’s … not a bad person. Not wearing your wedding ring, not living together, coming here to find me on Christmas Eve — all of these change nothing. You are married. How can you, a student at China University of Political Science and Law, not know marriage laws?”

After barely managing to put together such a sentence, she was unable to say any more.

It had been Fang Yunyun who, back then, had come in and separated the two of them. Tong Yan could work hard on forgetting Lu Bei, but she could not make herself smile and wish happiness on Fang Yunyun. If it had not been for that car accident, what would this Christmas Eve have been like?

No more words were spoken between the two of them, and soon after, she left that private room, telling Shen Yao, who was outside the door, that she had matters to take care of and needed to go.

Shen Yao was somewhat dazed, not expecting that this would be the end result of her matchmaking all along the way …

On the return trip, Tong Yan walked at a faster pace and arrived at the door of Din Tai Fung in less than thirty minutes. The entire way, she had wanted to text him, but she did not know what she should say.

He might have already left? If he had, what should she do?

It was eight o’clock already, but the loud drone of voices still filled the restaurant. That table was very noticeable, and he was still there. His friend had already left.

His coat hung across the back of the chair beside him, and he wore only a light gray, cotton button-up shirt. From her angle, she could see the brilliantly colourful glow of the lights of the Xintiandi district shining up from the outside ground level. And he, with his back facing this scene of floating lights and fleeting shadows, was holding a book in his right hand, half-resting it on top of the table as, one page at a time, he flipped through it.

[1] The name of Gu Pingsheng's mother was 顾童柯 Gu Tongke. Pinyin rules would have the pinyin of her given name, 童柯 written as "Tongke," but individually, the pinyin of the characters are "Tong" and "Ke." Hence, Gu Pingsheng selected his own English name to be "TK," after his mother's Chinese given name.

[2] The first character of Gu Pingsheng's mother's given name 童柯 **Tong**ke is actually the same character as **Tong** Yan's surname, 童. Gu Pingfan is speculating maybe the similarity of Tong Yan's name to his mother's given name might have something to do with Gu Pingsheng's attraction to her.

[3] 鼎泰丰. (Note: the standardized pinyin of this is actually "Ding Tai Feng" but the restaurant chain's official name is Din Tai Fung.) Din Tai Fung is a restaurant chain originating from Taipei, Taiwan but now has branches in many countries. It was made famous by its xiaolongbao soup dumplings. The Din Tai Fung in Xintiandi of Shanghai has a chic interior in its second floor location. Its "luxury" dumplings and other menu items come with a corresponding relatively hefty price tag.

Additional Comments:

Notice that Gu Pingsheng took his mother's surname? And his opinions on marriage and sex … "Environments mould people, especially their views on marriage and relationships." Remember this line from chapter 5.3.

Just thought I might toss in my 2 cents on Shen Yao.

When I first introduced this novel, one of the things I mentioned was that the characters in it feel real. Whether it be Tong Yan or Gu Pingsheng, or even Lu Bei or Shen Yao, they have their strengths and qualities that you can admire, and they have their flaws.

How would I summarize Shen Yao based on what we've seen so far?

Straightforward, simple-minded, unaware, frank, loyal.

Gosh, yes, Shen Yao is utterly oblivious at times and definitely is unaware of what's going on around her. Perhaps there's a degree of self-centredness, but I also believe it's because she is someone who is not very emotionally intelligent, for lack of a better way to describe it. Her inconsiderateness really stems from her inability to step back and assess the whole situation. At the very least, it's not out of malice or even self-gain, just acting on the emotions that she feels at the moment. You can see here that she was quite shocked and mortified once she realized the mistake she had made. Still, that doesn't lessen the awkwardness that one feels when she does things like what she did to Tong Yan. In all honesty, if it were myself in Tong Yan's place and Shen Yao did that, unwittingly or not, to me, I'd have probably lost it on her (then gone back to apologize after).

There's a line in an old HK drama, where someone was describing a girl very similar to Shen Yao, and it goes along these lines: "I like straightforward, simple people. Even though sometimes, they can make you feel very awkward or put you in very awkward situations, what they do and say are always real." There is a flip side to Shen Yao's oblivious, simple-minded nature. She is genuine. Tong Yan has been basically discarded by both her parents and, regardless of the reason, the boy she once loved left her. Once again, "environments mould people, especially their views on marriage and relationships." (See what I mean when I said this line I said this idea might keep popping up?) Tong Yan seeks sincere love and care (which she doesn't get from her absent mother), someone who has no ulterior agenda (like her money-seeking father), and stick with her (which Lu Bei was not able to do), simply for the fact that she's Tong Yan. Shen Yao is loyal and will hang out in the freezing cold with her when she has to stand duty at an outdoor reception table. Shen Yao will climb into bed and share the joys of her heart with her, and though Tong Yan may be tired and wanting some private time, I think she treasures the moment of closeness because she doesn't get that from many people.

So, yes, Shen Yao's actions are annoying at times, but Tong Yan is willing to accept the awkward negative side of them because what comes with it is the simple, genuine relationship that she craves. (That, in itself, can be both a

positive trait and a character flaw for Tong Yan.)

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

20 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 7.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 7.2

January 23, 2016 by hoju 23 Comments



Hehe … Grinning at Gu Pingsheng's "lack of experience." That's an interesting thing to suggest for the second half of their first date.

Chapter 7.2 – The Person I Like (2)

Near and far, girls and women were all bedecked in fancy dress. People meeting up on this day should all be couples out on a date. Tong Yan suddenly felt a little hesitant.

She did not have a lot of winter clothing and therefore was not able to put together hundreds of different outfits like Shen Yao could. The high heels she was wearing were the ones she had kept in preparation for whenever she had needed to be a gala host … And because she had needed to take her exam, she had not dared put on make-up either.

"Miss, do you have a reservation?" one of the wait staff politely inquired when he saw this girl at the entrance, wavering between whether to enter or not.

She nodded, finally stepping inside.

Only after she had taken a seat did he close the book he was holding. He was accustomed to using his left hand. She suddenly discovered that he was like her and could use both hands, but he was more accustomed to using the left one.

“I’m sorry.” Tong Yan decided that she would first be honest and admit to her wrongdoing. In a very sincere manner, she explained, “Do you remember that night, I told you Shen Yao had fallen for a boy’s voice? That boy is my high school classmate.”

The server came over and handed her the drink menu. Opening it up, she took a glance — all very expensive.

“If I could trouble you to just please bring another teacup, that will be good.” He suddenly stated, “You can serve up the dishes now.”

After the server had left, he looked back at her again, smiled, and said, “Continue what you were saying. It sounds very interesting.”

Interesting … From his tone of voice, he did not really seem angry, and Tong Yan could finally breathe out in relief. “Today was the first time they were actually meeting in person, and Shen Yao asked me to stay with her for a little while longer so it wouldn’t be too awkward.” She smiled embarrassedly. “I’m the type of person that can never refuse a friend. Earlier on … that was actually just because I was keeping Shen Yao company.”

Perhaps it was because, growing up, there were very few relationships she could actually be reliant upon. Consequently, she always seemed to place a strong dependence upon her friends, especially her good friends. As long as a friend made a request of her, regardless of how unreasonable it might be, she instinctively would want to fulfill it. At times, even she could not stand this trait, and she had even read some psychology books for it.

“It’s alright.” He picked up the teacup that was on the server’s tray, set it down in front of her, and poured some tea for her until it filled more than half the cup. “At least, for me, that’s very normal. I never refuse my friends either.”

She gazed at him in surprise. She remembered, the books said that this was a “childhood lack” condition, that most of these cases were a result of lack of

familial love and trust during childhood, and hence, the persons would find means to try to gain more love as a way to compensate themselves.

But, why would he have lacked love? With such a background and environment in which he was taught, his childhood years should have been ones in which he was surrounded by people who supported him, like a myriad of stars clustered around the moon.

“Don’t you think it’s a very bad thing?” With her cup held in both her hands, she tentatively asked him this.

“Every person will more or less have some shortcomings in his or her character. For instance, I had once seen a female patient who had an unexplainable dislike for the color red. Every time she saw it, she would become depressed and irritable, and later, it started to seriously affect her life, to the point that, even when she got married, she was opposed to seeing any red. Later on, one of my friends used hypnosis on her and was finally able to find the root cause of this.”

“What was it?” She was truly curious.

“She has a younger brother. When she was only several years old, her mother gave a red scarf to her brother but did not give one to her. In reality, her mother had never shown favouritism, nor had she abused her, but she was simply too young back then and did not understand, so it left an impact on her psychologically.”

“Just for that reason?” A little too fragile, wasn’t that?

“Just for that reason.”

He smiled wordlessly at her. Seeing her gazing at him with eyes that were sparkling, he found this very fun. “If you’re interested, I will go and systematically give you some psychology lessons. Right now,” he said, flicking his eyes to the server who was bringing over their dishes, “we need to eat first.”

He had not ordered many dishes, just enough for two people to eat until full.

Along the way back just now, she had been thinking that the instant she saw him, she would first apologize. And what if he had left already? She would definitely go look for him and give an explanation to him in person. If he gave her

a sullen face, then … she would put on a pitiable look. After all, he was so much older than her; he wouldn't be so petty, right? And plus as a teacher, he should be more tolerant and forgiving.

She had not expected, however, that he would so easily accept her explanation, and morever, he showed no indication at all that he was angry. Biting down lightly on the tip of her chopsticks, Tong Yan watched him as he told her all sorts of funny and amusing things. She remembered the words she had said earlier.

"Someone I like."

The person I like is sitting here in front of me, eating, and talking to me.

Her heart suddenly seemed to soften, and, without realizing it, even her voice also softened along with it … though he could not hear this change.

Her mobile phone unexpectedly vibrated.

An unfamiliar number, but a familiar tone: *I'll be heading back on a morning flight tomorrow. Tong Tong, I'll wait for you tonight at your school, ok?*

A single text message swiftly chilled away all the little warmth she had been feeling. She clenched her mobile phone in her hand, not knowing remotely how to reply.

Finally, she hardened her heart and pressed the power-off button.

"Where do you want to go to walk around? But it does seem that everywhere is packed with people today." He suddenly asked her this only after the two of them had strode out of the restaurant and were standing there, in that pedestrian street lined with twinkling trees and brilliant lights.

Having no clue at all what to do, she shook her head.

There, amid a very strong night wind, Gu Pingsheng also seemed as if he did not have any ideas, and with his hands in his pockets, he exhaled a long breath. "Lack of experience. I did not plan any activities ahead of time." He glanced at the colorfully lit scene of entertainment and pleasure before them. "Would you like to go to a bar?"

When he said this, it so happened that off to his side, there was a gigantic two-storey poster.

It was a poster advertising the latest fashions for this season. The model on it was also a man, and he also was standing with both his hands inside the pockets of his coat. Tong Yan very unabashedly noticed that Gu Pingsheng was even better looking. It was just that, the white paper bag hanging from his arm spoiled the picture somewhat.

As he looked toward her, she abruptly shifted her eyes to avoid his gaze.

But, she soon recalled that, in front of Gu Pingsheng, this action was something that could not be done … Therefore, she could only turn back to face him with crimson cheeks and feign composure as she replied, “Let’s not go to a bar. If we go in now on a holiday like this, we’d definitely be crammed and squished to death.”

And moreover, bars always tended to have program after program of singing performances. Not suitable for him.

He laughed, “You know a lot about bars?”

Tong Yan also blew out a lengthy breath. “The very first time you saw me, I was actually still … very much a girl who had issues.” If she were to divide her life into two periods, it would just so happen to involve him.

Before she met him and after she met him.

A weight was suddenly felt on her head. He had reached over and gently patted her head. “I was not a rule-abiding person before, either, and the stuff I did definitely would have caused more headaches for people than what you might have done.” He helped her pull her scarf up higher so that it covered more than half her face. “How about I take you to a church to hear Mass? Pingfan is over at St. Ignatius Cathedral[1]. It starts at 11:30, so if we cannot catch a cab now, we can still take our time and wait.”

Hear Mass? She did not really understand what this was.

But “cathedral” and stuff like that should mean that it was some sort of Christmas activity put on by a church. Somewhat embarrassedly, she pulled down her scarf so that her mouth was showing. “I’m an atheist.”

“So am I.” He was not surprised in the least. “To believe or not is a personal choice. We only need to respect them, and then that’ll be fine.”

Perhaps God really was looking after them, for in such a bustling, lively place, they were still able to wave down a taxi.

When they arrived outside St. Ignatius Cathedral, Pingfan was there, her arms wrapped around herself and so cold that her breath could be seen. Seeing them, she hurried over and with a smile, gave Tong Yan a hug. “So happy you guys came.” Laughing, she whispered into Tong Yan’s ear, “TK grew up going to Catholic school, but to date, he’s still an atheist. When I got his message just now, I thought I must have read wrong.”

After saying this, she slipped her arm through Tong Yan’s and, while lining up along with the crowd, explained to her in a low voice what Midnight High Mass was.



St. Ignatius Cathedral (image credit: left and right)

The entire High Mass took nearly two hours. Gu Pingfan needed to stay to attend the Christmas Mass at dawn, so only the two of them, side by side, walked out of the cathedral.

It was past one o’clock in the morning, but this downtown street was still thronged with lines of vehicles and crowds of people everywhere.

Next to the cathedral were many commercial office buildings. In this midnight hour, the lights in the shopping malls were all turned out, and when they walked by the display windows, they could see their own reflections in them.

“Merry Christmas.” He stopped and handed the white paper bag to her.

She had speculated what might be inside and had even prayed that it would not be a gift for her because she had not prepared anything to give to him …

After she stepped out from where she had been with Shen Yao, there had been a brief instant where she had thought about getting him something. At the time, however, she was too rushed, and it had merely been an idea that flashed through her mind.

She had only anxiously hurried back in the direction she had come, worried that he might leave.

She hesitated for a moment but still reached her hand out to take it from him. “Thank you. Merry Christmas.”

Stretching his arm forward, he placed his hand on top of her head and gently gave it a rub. “It’s really late. I’ll take you back to the school.” After he said this, he started to survey the several intersections near the pedestrian bridge, searching for a spot that would be easier to catch a taxi.

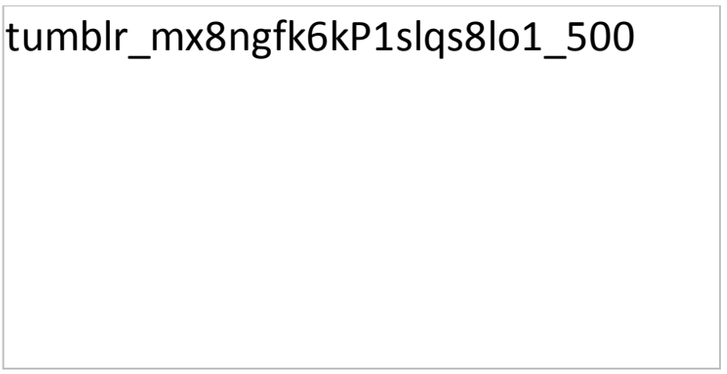
Tong Yan suddenly remembered Lu Bei’s text message, and immediately, she tugged on his arm. When she saw him turn back toward her, she said, “The doors of the dorm are locked at midnight. Would it be okay if tonight … I don’t go back?”

In actual fact, she only needed to knock and then she would be let in. But based on Lu Bei’s personality, it was certain that he would wait the entire night at the university for her. If she did not want this entanglement with him to continue, she had no choice but to harden her heart, to force herself to be completely callous and not allow his wait for her to come to fruition.

Surrounded by the noise of vehicles coming and going, he very quickly made a decision. “Let’s see if there is a cinema nearby that is open all night. If there is, we’ll watch movies until tomorrow morning. You can go to my home to rest for the entire day and then go back to the university in the evening.”

When he finished this, he very naturally completed two actions.

He took the paper bag from her. And, he took her hand in his.



[1] 徐家汇天主堂. St. Ignatius Cathedral (also known as Xujiahui Cathedral) is located in Shanghai's Xujiahui area, one of the main commerce centres of the city. The current building, built by French Jesuits, dates to 1910, although the church itself has a much longer history.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

21 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 7.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 7.3

January 27, 2016 by hoju 20 Comments



thump thump thump That's my heartbeat. *silly grin* Waaaaah! I like this chapter. I think you guys might like it, too.

Chapter 7.3 – The Person I Like (3)

In the end, they found the Shanghai Film Art Centre[1] by Fahuazhen Road.

The all-night Christmas Eve movie line-up had already started, with three movies that would be played back-to-back beginning from eleven o'clock. As they were stepping through the dark corridor into the cinema, Tong Yan could hear the song from the ending credits of the first movie.



Shanghai Film Art Centre
(Image credit)

After they had taken their seats, Tong Yan finally breathed out a long sigh of relief. Using the glow from the cinema screen, she mouthed to Gu Pingsheng, “Good thing. The first movie is a really bad one, and now we don’t have to watch it.”

On days like Christmas or Valentine’s Day, the movie line-ups for the all-night shows were all Hong Kong romance films. New ones, old ones — all types were brought out and shown. Gu Pingsheng had been the one to purchase the tickets, so she did not even know what was going to be shown next.

“Which movie was it?” he asked her in a lowered voice.

The volume of his voice was truly very low. Looking into his eyes, the thought suddenly came into her mind that, after he had lost his hearing, he must have put great efforts into controlling and practicing his speaking volume. That process would certainly have required someone’s aid … It must have been very awkward.

“ *I Really Want To Be With You*[2],” she answered.

With a hint of a smile, Gu Pingsheng gazed at her. “Really?”

“Of course.” Tong Yan scrunched her nose slightly. “It honestly sucks. Online score for it is only a six out of ten …”

She abruptly halted her words, her lips pursing together. Teacher Gu, how can you behave so inappropriately for your older age[3]?!

“I meant …” she clarified, forming and articulating each word clearly, “the movie that just finished showing is called ‘*I Really Want to Be With You*.’”

He nodded. “I know.”

The lights suddenly illuminated but then, the next instant, they were turned off again. In that brief period when brightness was followed immediately by darkness, the program had already moved forward into the opening song of the next film. And in that span of time, he had already turned his face away and was watching the opening song with focused attention.

Halfway through the movie, a few more people left from the rows up ahead. In the entire cinema, only two or three couples remained, and all of them were blatantly cuddling and making out, as if in this sort of time, this sort of place, of course “something” should be done … And they were sitting in the last row, so even if they did not want to look, it was not possible to avoid doing so.

Tong Yan fixed her eyes straight ahead on the subtitles, remembering that last time, in the Upper Building, she and Gu Pingsheng had also witnessed a hot, lightning-striking, earthquake-inducing scene.

She snuck a peek at Gu Pingsheng, who was watching the film very intently. Drowsiness tugged at her eyelids until finally, she was unable to last any longer. She pulled the hood of her down jacket up like a pillow behind her head, intending on catching a quick nap. She did not expect, however, that after she closed her eyes, she would fall completely into sleep …

This slumber was very deep and also very peaceful.

It lasted until someone patted her on the face lightly a couple of times, and only then did she hazily hear the sound of the movie playing once again. She was still too sleepy, and instinctively, she nuzzled her face against that soft, fluffy hood of the down jacket. After a while, she finally had the strength to pry open her own eyes. All around, it was still dark.

The movie was still playing.

“Do you want to go back to get some sleep?” His voice seemed as if it was drifting somewhere.

“What time is it?” She worked hard to formulate words, so drowsy she wanted to close her eyes again.

“Nearly five o’clock.” He glanced at his watch. “From what I’ve watched of the plot, it should be over soon.”

“You’ve been watching the whole time?” A Hong Kong romance film, and he was still watching it with such seriousness?

“There’s nothing else to do anyway.”

She gave a very guilty smile. At the same time, she noticed that the people in the third row had — *ahem ahem* — not pulled away from each other at all.

Because her reaction time was half a beat slow and her gaze was moving too sluggishly, he ended up following her eyes and looking in that direction as well. And then, they both simultaneously shifted their gazes away again.

“In the winter, the sky doesn’t light up until very late.” He turned to her and continued, “It’s going to finish up here before six o’clock.”

She gave an “mm” in answer, feeling short on words for a moment. Of course, he did not hear her almost coquettish “mm,” and naturally turned his head away again to continue watching the Hong Kong romance movie.

With her index finger, she poked his hand lightly.

He turned his head back. “What’s wrong?”

“Last night, you really weren’t mad?” She still ended up asking the question.

“At first, I was a little.” She had not expected he would be so forthright. “But I’m one who is rather able to regulate my own emotions, and after I read for a little bit, I was fine.”

Read for a little bit …

“Is everyone who studies medicine so psychologically healthy and self-aware?”

She unconsciously adjusted her position again, curling her legs up against herself so that her entire body was now leaning sideways against the back of her seat while she stared at him with curiosity.

He fell into a moment of inexplicable silence before eventually answering, “No, it’s because of my mother. Since I was two or three years old, she would often say to me, ‘Mama is a little upset right now. Let Mama sit and be by herself for a little bit.”

She gazed at him as he carried on, “Later, when I was older, she would tell me that your mood is actually something that is constantly in a state of flux. Cheerfulness and gloominess are always alternating with one another, just like day and night. It’s a law of nature. Since this is so for everyone, then we should learn to control it. When we are angry, we should first learn how to calm down.

Remaining calm is the best way to regulate our emotions."

The dialogue of the movie was still carrying on while he slowly spoke these words she had never before heard.

The flickering and shifting glow of the light from the screen was reflected on the side of his face … Tong Yan initially was very envious that he had such a sensible and rational mother, but later, she felt an unexplainable sense of pity for him. What sort of childhood would his have been if he had learned since young how to regulate his own emotions?

She could not help sweeping her eyes over the third row again. Still being very cozy and lovey-dovey. Suddenly, she realized that her own position, as well as the position he was in so that he could speak to her, could easily cause people's imaginations to fire.

It had now changed to a night scene in the movie, and hence the entire cinema naturally became much darker.

"Do you want to go back?" Possibly because it was dark and he could not see, or perhaps for some other reason, he had moved a little closer to her again.

She glanced at the screen where Andy Lau was delivering a long emotional passage of lines and then looked back at him. "Let's finish watching …" Actually, she honestly did not know what the movie was about, but he had watched for so long already, he should at least see the ending, right?

"Let's finish watching, then." When he finished these words, his face suddenly leaned in closer, and then, lowering his head, he brought his lips directly to hers.

In her ears, she could still hear Andy Lau's voice saying, "Regardless of whether you believe or not, I believe …"

Was he Gu Pingsheng, or Teacher Gu? Right now, right here, who knew? There were several seconds of only stillness, and then, he tilted his head slightly, enclosing her lips completely in his. This setting that beguiled the senses burned away her ability to think.

She stretched out her arms and folded them around his neck. On his tongue, there was a hint of sweetness as well as a trace of astringent bitterness, like the taste of black tea. It was from the drinks they had bought at the door earlier

when they had first walked in. He, the healthy person, seemed as if he would never be able to change this habit of his …

As her little, disjointed thoughts flitted through her mind, she focused her attention on continually responding to him in that constantly shifting glow of lights. And then, with his one arm wrapped around her waist, she was half-lifted up into the air and brought in front of him so that her body was pressed against his.

The background music softened, and Shu Qi began speaking a long monologue: “When I was a kid, I heard on the radio that happiness is like a crystal ball. When it falls to the ground, it shatters into many little fragments … No matter how hard you try, you will never be able to pick up all of them, but so long as you try, you will always be able to pick up some …”[4]

Listening to this, Tong Yan could not hold back her giggles. So cheesy. But, truly so touching.

Gu Pingsheng detected her action and finally pulled himself away from her lips to look at her. “What?”

She honestly did not want to repeat such Snow White-esque lines to him … Right as he was about to lower his head again, the lights in the cinema suddenly illuminated.

The movie had ended.

Tong Yan hastily sat herself up properly. Her new jacket had fallen to the ground, and she retrieved it and stuffed it into the paper bag.

Only when the cinema lights had turned on did she notice that the only people remaining were that particular couple and them. After spending the whole night entangled together in passion and intimacy, that pair of lovebirds at last broke apart, and the girl cast them a meaningful glance. Tong Yan also woodenly returned her look. The only thing that popped into her mind was one sentence: her reputation just got flushed down the drain, after all these years[5] …



“Let’s finish watching, then.”

It was past five o’clock in the morning when they left the movie theatre, and outside, it was frightfully cold.

The sky was still completely dark and there were not many people around. As they climbed inside a taxi cab, the driver, who likely had worked through the entire night, looked at them with dark circles under his eyes and chatted with them, “So romantic. You guys watched movies the whole night?” Tong Yan answered with an “mm,” all of a sudden discovering that things were really good this way.

He could not hear, so he would not … feel awkward.

She gave Miao Miao a call very early in the morning to ask for time off from work, so today, she did not go to the store.

On this rare weekend where she did not need to work, she ended up simply sleeping in Gu Pingsheng’s guest room until dusk.

That evening, when he took her back to the school, she deliberately requested the taxi driver to stop somewhere nearby the dormitory building and would not let him get out of the vehicle, instead walking alone back to the dormitory.

When she stepped in the door, Shen Yao, who thought she had just returned from working her part-time job, hesitated for a long moment before stating, “I

was wrong.”

Laughing, Tong Yan kicked her on the foot. “Shoo, shoo, shoo. It’s all good. We don’t even need to say those sort of things between the two of us.”

Shen Yao breathed out in relief. “I knew it.”

Upon saying this, she immediately grabbed her mobile phone and began ardently texting back and forth, a broad grin on her face.

Without needing to ask, it was obvious whom she was texting.

Tong Yan began organizing her books for this semester. Seeing this, Shen Yao suddenly wailed in anguish, “My advanced math!” At the same time, she tossed aside her phone, dug out a stack of papers, and began cramming for her course.

In the glow of the lamplight, the side profile of Shen Yao’s face as she did her practice problems made her want to laugh. After her books were all put in order, she automatically picked up her mobile phone to glance at the time, and she discovered then that it was still powered off.

“Yesterday, after you finished dinner, where did you go?” she asked Shen Yao out of the blue.

“Where’d we go?” Shen Yao did not even raise her head. “I brought them to my older brother’s bar, but some time after midnight, ‘that guy’ left. This morning, I ate breakfast with Cheng Yu and then took him to the train station.”

Shen Yao deliberately downplayed any talk of Lu Bei, but Tong Yan knew where he had gone after midnight.

Lu Bei’s text showed up on her phone shortly after she turned it on.

It had been past six o’clock when he sent it: *I brought your favourite foods, the ‘candied ears*[6]*’ and yellow pea cake*[7] *from Xinjiekou Opening*[8]*. I’ve left them with that auntie, the staff at your dorm. I’ll come see you again next time.*

Lu Bei style tone and temperament. Or perhaps it should be said, to her, he was always exceptionally good-tempered.

Just like when they first met.

At that time, Tong Yan was still a very strange-tempered person, and he was one grade lower than her. That day, it was her turn on student duty, and she happened to be responsible for the discipline of the seventh grade students. Wearing a red armband, she had patrolled back and forth on that entire floor.

She remembered, that morning, he had been late, and with his bag slung diagonally across his back, he had come running up. And then, she had stopped him, pointing at the top of the stairs and stating, “The school discipline for being late for morning self-study is to remaining standing until you’re released.”

He was taller than her by nearly twenty centimetres. Tilting his head, he looked grinningly at her. “Hey, tiny Big Sister, have mercy on me. If a teacher sees me, I’ll have to repeat my grade again.”

She did not even lift her eyes. “Take your standing punishment or else have five points deducted from your entire class. You choose.”

Before she had even finished saying this, the back door of his classroom was pulled open, and from the back row, guffaws burst out from several students who were all repeating the grade.

Silently, Tong Yan sat there and deleted the text message.

The next message was from Gu Pingsheng: *Rest earlier. Good night. TK*

What followed was the long period of final examinations. Wang Xiaoru had at last fully returned to join them in preparation for taking on this lengthy, wearying exam season. The following week was the final examinations for all the multi-discipline common courses, but from their dorm, only Shen Yao had one she needed to attend.

And so, on Monday morning, to review advanced mathematics, Shen Yao crawled out of bed shortly past six o’clock in the morning and began working on practice exam problems. When Tong Yan awoke, only a single small lamp was turned on. Outside, the sky was already lit, but for fear of waking the rest of them, Shen Yao had not opened the curtains.

Flipping on her table lamp, she planned on studying for a while inside her warm blankets. All of a sudden, Gu Pingsheng sent her a text message: *Are you awake? TK*

The corner of her lips could not help turning up in a smile as she sent a reply: *Mm-hmm. Awake.*

Try opening your curtains. TK

Her dormitory room was on the ground level, and her bed happened to be beside the window. She had told him this before.

And, when she slept, her head pointed toward the window …

She reached over, lifted open the curtain, and looked out the window.

In the rays of the early morning sun, he and the dean of the Law Faculty were strolling side by side, crossing the road outside of the dormitory building. The elderly man was walking very slowly, and each step he took wobbled. His gaze passed over the elderly man's head and looked towards here, where she was.

Seeming to see that the corner of the curtain had been lifted up, he quickly brought his right index and middle fingers together and touched their tips to his forehead.

In a half-joking manner, he had used … an American military salute[9] to wordlessly say hello to her.

[1]上海影城. Shanghai Film Art Centre is a multiplex cinema that hosts the Shanghai International Film Festival every year. It is approximately 2 km away from St. Ignatius Cathedral where Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng were attending Mass.

[2]《很想和你在一起》. The actual English name of this movie is *Happily Ever After*, but I did a literal translation of the Chinese title so that it would make sense in the context of the dialogue of this scene. This is a 2009 Hong Kong film, starring Ken Hung and Michelle Wai.

[3] 为老不尊 "wei lao bu zun." This is a saying used to describe an older person, usually an elder, who doesn't show himself respect and demonstrates

poor behavior that should not be seen from a person of his age.

[4] This is from the movie,《游龙戏凤》*Look for A Star* (2009), starring Andy Lau and Shu Qi.

[5] 晚节不保 “wan jie bu bao.” Technically, this saying should be translated as “one’s moral integrity was lost in one’s later years.” Kissing in a public cinema showing an all-night movie run – an atmosphere that makes people automatically conjure up “not child friendly” thoughts – and then being associated with a couple who truly did those things of the imagination causes Tong Yan to feel like “I can’t believe I just did that.”

[6] 糖耳朵 “tang er duo.” A snack food of Beijing. It is a sweet bread, twisted into a shape that looks like an ear that is fried.



Beijing snack food, candied ears (image credit)

[7] 豌豆黄 “wan dou huang.” This is a sweet cake with a dense texture. It is made mostly from mashed, yellow split peas and is also bright yellow in color.



Beijing snack food, yellow pea cake (image credit)

[8] 新街口豁口 “Xinjiekou Huokou.” Xinjiekou is a subdistrict in Beijing. In the 50’s, a portion of the old Beijing city wall in this district was torn down to allow easier flow of traffic. The area where this “huokou” or “opening” was made is called the “Xinjiekou Huokou” or what I’ve translated as Xinjiekou Opening.

[9] 美式军礼. Actually, the U.S. military salutes with a full hand. The two-finger salute is the salute of the Polish military, but I’ll just preserve the original text and not correct that.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

22 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 8.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 8.1

January 30, 2016 by hoju 31 Comments



Gu Pingsheng ups the sweetness in this chapter … literally! It's been years since I've had White Rabbit candy. I want to try red bean flavour, too.

Chapter 8.1 – To "Wash Her Hands and Make Soup"[1] (1)

Since the semester had now entered into the weeks of final examinations, most classes were finished.

Tong Yan had spent this entire week inside the library. She and Gu Pingsheng both tacitly agreed that as much as possible, they would not have any noticeable interactions when they were at the university. People would talk, and gossip could be a frightening thing. She had never encountered such a situation yet, but she could imagine the consequences.

Her mobile phone suddenly lit up. A text message had noiselessly come in: *Done your reviewing? TK*

6:10 p.m. The time the two of them had agreed to. Everyday, from 8:00 to 11:00 a.m. and 12:00 to 6:00 p.m., she needed to review and study, and text message communication between them was banned.

She picked up her mobile phone. Because she had been copying out concepts and notes, her fingers felt a little fatigued and weak. Still in this state, she began

very slowly to type on her keyboard: *Mm. Done studying now. What are you doing?*

I'm waiting for you to finish studying. TK

Where are you?

Behind you. TK

Tong Yan paused in surprise and automatically turned her head to look back. Sure enough, she saw him sitting three rows behind her at the end of the table, except he was not looking in her direction. Instead, he was half-propping his head up with his hand while looking at the textbook the class prefect was holding up to him …

In the same instant she turned around, the class prefect also caught sight of her and said a few words to Gu Pingsheng. Then, Gu Pingsheng turned his head as well, his eyes filled with mirth as he looked at her, and nodding at the class prefect, he also spoke a few brief words.

Only after the two of them had walked over to where she was and had seated themselves next to her did Tong Yan grasp that their dear, respected class prefect was carrying out a great and worthy undertaking: attempting to find out final exam questions. From the moment he had taken his seat, Class Prefect had repeatedly signaled at her with his eyes, and the meaning behind it was very clear. He wanted Tong Yan to team up with him to try to get Gu Pingsheng to reveal in the conversation as many examination questions as possible …

"Tong Yan." Class Prefect flipped through the Civil Procedure printed study material she was holding. "Tong Yan Wuji, don't study procedural law now. The National Judicial Exam[2] is a long ways off still. We have this rare opportunity where we've run into Teacher Gu. Let's ask a few more questions about this semester's Commercial Arbitration."

Tong Yan stole an inconspicuous peek over at Gu Pingsheng. His right elbow was resting on the table, and leaning sideways against it, he also took a glance at her.

"Teacher Gu, I personally feel that this particular concept is especially important." Grinning, Class Prefect set down Tong Yan's study material and

continued with their previous topic.

“It is very important.” Gu Pingsheng also picked up the Civil Procedure study material and looked over the notes Tong Yan had written inside. While Class Prefect was waiting in eager anticipation, he added, “Actually, if you carefully review, you will discover that everything I talked about is very important.”

Tong Yan giggled in secret, watching as the class prefect opened and closed his mouth speechlessly and looked at her with a gaze of helplessness.

She had no choice but to put on an innocent, harmless front as she gave Gu Pingsheng an embarrassed smile. “Sorry, I still haven’t gotten around to reviewing for Commercial Arbitration …”

Class Prefect was utterly crestfallen now. Seeing that he had spoken to Gu Pingsheng for such a long time, yet still had not managed to glean any useful information, he very glumly gave the excuse that he needed to go for dinner and then left the both of them.

He set down the study material and then nonchalantly picked up her notebook.

“Preparing for the National Judicial Exam?”

She first gave an “mm-hmm” but then quickly added a nod of her head in answer. “I didn’t register to take it this year. I’m thinking of taking it in my fourth year of university. After spending four days reviewing for final exams, today I wanted to switch up what my brain was thinking on, so I pulled out Civil Procedures to read.”

He continued looking over the various notes she had written.

She had spent an entire afternoon studying already, and now her brain was rather sluggish. Sprawling herself over the table, she rested her head on her arm and watched him.

“In general, how many times do you need to read each article of law?” He pointed at the book of laws that was as thick as a brick.

She raised a solitary finger, proudly stating, “Once. I have a very good memory.

For the more complicated ones, I'll copy it down while I read, and for the most part, I won't forget it for the next three or four years. If I come across something really important, I can even immediately state which specific book it came from and which page."

There was amazement in his eyes, and she smiled even more proudly.

This sense of pride was different from the one that came from competition between fellow students. It was more similar to the time when, after memorizing her multiplication tables up to nine times nine, she, as a very young child had recited them to several mathematics teachers in the primary school Grandmother was teaching at, and then, she saw the smile within Grandmother's eyes. The desire to be outstanding was only because she wanted the ones closest to her to be proud of her.

"Born to be a liberal arts student." He made no attempt to hide his commendation.

Tong Yan smiled gently, bringing her hand down to secretly place it on top of his that was resting on his thigh. The instant she made contact, though, his hand turned over, caught her hand in his palm, and held it there firmly.

Behind him, there were still several male students who were studying. Even though, from this particular angle, the table was blocking their view so they could not see, she still felt extremely anxious. This action had originally been done in a half-joking manner … Gu Pingsheng was behaving as if nothing had happened, and with one hand, he continued to flip through that book filled with various laws.

"Which month is the exam going to be taking place in next year?"

"September." Tong Yan's heart was beating somewhat erratically. She tried to pull her hand back, but it was in vain. "Haven't you taken it? It's the same time every year … Shouldn't have changed, right?"

He shook his head. "I've never taken it, and there seems to be little need for me to take it, either."

Tong Yan remembered then that he was simply a university professor, and it seemed there was no requirement for him to have passed such a thing.

“I obtained bar admission to practice in three different states in the U.S., but now that I’ve come to China, there isn’t much use for that.” He seemed to think of something humorous and, with a chuckle, added, “Pingfan also had bar admission for two American states, but when she took China’s National Judicial Exam, she didn’t pass on the first try either. I think she had to take it twice.”

Tong Yan tried hard not to laugh but still was unable to contain her giggles. “Are you trying to help me not be anxious? …”

The entire time, he carried out a casual conversation with her. Subtly, Tong Yan shifted her fingers. She seemed to see him smile at this, but there was no indication that he intended to loosen his hold.

Normally, very few people would chat inside the library, but perhaps because it was dinnertime, both far and near, there were people conversing and laughing in low voices. Distractedly, she sat for another several minutes before finally begging for mercy. “Weren’t we going to have dinner? I’m hungry.”

He gazed amusedly at her. “No more putting up a fight?”

“No more …” She raised her white flag in surrender. Regardless of whether they were competing for the one with the greatest inner composure or the thickest skin, she was completely trounced.

The two of them deliberately went to a place that was relatively further from the university, and only when they were nearly finished eating did she at last state the equivalent reward she wished to have for her one week of longsuffering studying. “I’ve been studying the whole week. I shouldn’t have anything to do tomorrow.”

It had been a full week since they had seen each other, so Saturday, she could just rest and spend some time with him. But in the end, though she believed she had thought through everything, she had not considered the possibility that she would merely be changing the location of where she would be studying. While she memorized from her books, he sat beside her and read.

He suddenly stretched out an arm to nonchalantly unwrap a milk candy[3], and holding the wrapper with the candy still on it, he fed the milky white sweetness

into her mouth. “After we have dinner tonight, I’ll take you back to the school.” He seemed to notice that Tong Yan was happily enjoying the candy, so he unwrapped another one and popped it into his own mouth. A short while later, he said approvingly, “It does taste quite good.”

She threw a glance at the wrapper still in his hand. “What flavor did you eat?”

“I think it’s red bean.” He unfurled the wrapper and took a quick look at the name. “Since she was a kid, Pingfan has always liked eating White Rabbit candy. I remember that they were all white-coloured. I never knew that there were red ones now, too.”

She, too, had eaten them since she was a child, but she had never tried red bean flavor before … Turning around, she searched through the glass dish on the desk for a long time before giving him a resentful look. “You ate the last one. There’s yogurt and original flavour here but no red bean.”



White Rabbit milk candy (counter-clockwise from top): unwrapped milk candy (image credit), red bean flavour (image credit), examples of various flavours and packagings (image credit)

Smiling, he leaned against the edge of the desk. “No problem. You still have me.”

After saying this, he pulled her over to himself, encircled her in his arms, and, lowering his head, began with great earnestness to help her “flavour” her lips …

They had both just finished eating milk candy, and their lips and teeth were coated with a saccharine sweetness. How could she possibly distinguish any flavour?

This place was not like the cinema. There was no beguiling lighting, nor a rapidly thumping heart that felt as if it was going to burst through the chest … Here, the two of them simply exchanged kisses, back and forth, enveloped together in that intense sweetness, with sometimes open eyes, sometimes closed eyes, but eyes that were filled only with the other person.

The sky had gradually fallen into darkness, and the entire room had grown dim.

Her lips were pressed together in a smile as she twisted her head away to the side. “I think I should go.”

“I bought a lot of food and ingredients yesterday evening. We’ll eat here at home first, and then I’ll take you back.”

Surprised, Tong Yan asked, “Who’s going to cook?”

With a chuckle, he countered, “You don’t know how to?”

“I do … but it doesn’t taste great.” Who springs a surprise like this on someone?

“No worries. It should taste better than whatever Pingfan cooks.” He finished saying this, but then added, “My cutting skills are very good.”

Who doesn’t know how to cut stuff up?

However, when she saw on the cutting board the julienned potato strips that were completely equal in width, thickness, and length, as well as the identically cut thin shreds of meat, she at last understood what he meant by “cutting skills are very good” …

“I’m used to using my left hand. Before, in order to improve the dexterity of my right one, I would purposely do some training.” Holding a relatively thin, long knife, he began to swiftly pare the skin from a luffa sponge gourd. “Everyday, I’d julienne twenty potatoes. That way, when I performed a surgery, I would be able to use both my left and right hands simultaneously to do things.”

His hands were very quick. Tong Yan thought of the sponge gourds she had pared in the past and how they had all been bumpy and irregular. But the skin of this light green one in his hand had been evenly removed, and it looked just right and completely flawless.

He had readied the ingredients for many dishes, but they ended up only cooking a small number of them.

After imperceptibly testing him by asking him a few questions, Tong Yan discovered that he, indeed, only knew how to do the cutting work and was not so all-competent that he could cook as well.

According to his own words, in the past, when he really wanted to eat Chinese cuisine, he would buy some hot sauce or something along those lines, throw it in with the other ingredients to cook, and that would be his dinner … But sometimes, when he came across Mexican chili peppers, his dinner would be much spicier than the spicy foods eaten in Chinese restaurants.

“At the time, I could taste absolutely nothing, just spiciness. Plus, there are a lot of hot sauces that have pepper extracts in them to make them even hotter.”

Listening to him as he spoke, she was not certain why but she felt that he very much needed someone to take care of him …

But yet, he plainly had so many outstanding qualities.

He was not a wasteful person and ate until all the dishes were completely clear of food before finally setting down his chopsticks.

Deliberately putting on a nonchalant front, Tong Yan began clearing the dishes while looking at him and saying, “From now on, every Saturday, I’ll come here and cook for you.”

He was about to pour her some hot water when he saw her say this, and abruptly, he halted his action.

“But I want to buy the groceries myself.” Though he could not hear, Tong Yan still unconsciously lowered her voice. “The things you bought are all stuff I’m not good at making …”

[1] 洗手做羹汤. The title of this chapter actually comes from the poem《新嫁娘词》*Words of a Newly-Wedded Wife* by Tang dynasty poet, Wang Jian. The poem describes a woman, newly wedded, making her first meal for her husband and his family. The English title is a literal translation of a line from the poem, but this line (and hence, this title) is supposed to evoke the joys you feel when cooking for and taking care of the one you love.

[2] 司法考试. The National Judicial Examination is a two-day, unified entry examination required in China by all legal professions (lawyers, judges, public prosecutors, and notaries) and is held each year in mid-September. Since Tong Yan is still only in third year and has her internship the following year before she might be practicing, she has the option to take it but it is not necessary yet.

[3] 奶糖 “nai tang.” A candy similar in texture to toffee or nougat. It is made from heating a basic mixture of milk and sugar, and then allowing it to cool and harden. One of the more popular Chinese brands is 大白兔 “White Rabbit,” which has many flavours including original (milk/vanilla), yogurt, red bean, corn, strawberry, coconut, mango, chocolate, *etc.*

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
23 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 8.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 8.2

February 3, 2016 by hoju 21 Comments



“Rest assured … So long as I’m here … there will not be a day that you will have to cook for yourself.”

I want an all-competent treasury of knowledge for myself like the one Tong Yan has, too!

Chapter 8.2 – To “Wash Her Hands and Make Soup” (2)

When the final examinations for the multi-discipline common courses had ended, the Law Faculty took a one-week break.

Shen Yao took advantage of this one week of vacation time to fly directly to

Changsha and spend a romantic week with Cheng Yu, leaving Tong Yan alone in the dormitory. Everyday, aside from studying, Tong Yan would go online to look up recipes, and after eliminating and discarding many, by Friday, she had gathered seven or eight different ones. None of them were very difficult, and building on her own foundation of cooking skills … her results this time should be a little tastier.

She had not expected that on Saturday morning, as she was preparing to head out, the door of their dormitory room opened.

That person who had rushed to Changsha for the sake of love had returned early.

“Why are you back? Didn’t you say you wouldn’t be back until Monday?”

“We had a quarrel.” Shen Yao’s lip turned down in a pout. “Where are you going? It’s Saturday today, isn’t it?”

With a vague answer that she was going to the library, Tong Yan picked up her bag and was about to run when Shen Yao unexpectedly pulled her back and looked at her grinningly. “Don’t rush off. I’m not questioning you.”

When she finished saying this, she pulled out a Nuan Bao Bao [Warm Baby] adhesive heat patch from her bag, ripped open the packaging, and, lifting up Tong Yan’s sweater, affixed it directly onto the blouse over Tong Yan’s stomach. “It’s so deathly cold outside. One of these will keep you warm for a whole day.”

Shen Yao liked to wear skirts and shorts in the winter, and she relied on this particular item to keep her warm and drive away the cold.

She had seen Shen Yao always use this. However, the price it sold at in the supermarkets was not cheap, so she had merely thought that it was interesting and had never considered using the item herself. Now that it was adhered onto her, though, she discovered that it actually was very warm and made a person feel much more comfortable.





暖宝宝 Nuan Bao Bao adhesive heat packs. Images from nuanbaobao.com

On and off, rain fell for an entire week, and truly, it was extremely chilly.

The supermarket, though, was very lively.

Pushing a shopping cart, Gu Pingsheng walked beside her, and as she looked at the vegetables and fruit, he nodded at everything she showed him. After they had bought all the necessary ingredients, he very quickly led her over to the snack section.

Red, orange, yellow, and green packages. In the entire supermarket, this section was the most colourful.

The candied fruits and candy were sold at a separate counter.

An old Shanghainese lady stood there in front of a square display cabinet, and very enthusiastically she took a pair of scissors, cut the dried, salted dark plum in her hand, and handed the pieces towards Gu Pingsheng and Tong Yan. “It tastes very good. Hurry, give it a try.”

Seeing that she had already cut it, Tong Yan felt bad if she did not have any, and so, she took a small piece in her fingers and put it in her mouth.



盐津乌梅 “yan jin wu mei.” Dried, salted dark plums (image credit)

“Little girl, it tastes good, yes?” the old woman asked her.

With a querying look, she glanced at Gu Pingsheng and watched as he ate one and then answered offhandedly, “It tastes pretty good.”

His words were spoken calmly and lightly, but his eyes were filled with obvious mirth. Tong Yan recalled the scene brought about by the White Rabbit candy and her cheeks flushed slightly, but before she could say anything, the old lady had pulled out a piece of dried mango and snipped off a corner for him to eat.

Ones that could be soaked in water, ones that could be eaten dry. He watched the elderly woman speak for a while and then, just like that, he weighed out seven or eight bags of candied fruit …

At his home, Tong Yan had basically not seen any snack foods, and she had not expected that he would actually like to eat these sorts of things. Tugging on his arm, she said, “I think that should be about good … There should be enough for you to eat for several months.”

“I’m buying it for you.” He could not hold back a chuckle. “I usually don’t eat these candied fruits or other candies. These last few days, when you were studying, didn’t you say you couldn’t absorb what you were reading? Eating these candied fruits, which have an intense flavour, can stimulate your sense of taste and will help improve your focus and concentration.”

She stared in surprise at the seven or eight bags of candied fruit in the cart. Ever since she was a child, she, too, had never had the habit of eating snack foods, and there were so many here that even when she graduated from university, they still would not be finished off.

“Young man.” Looking as if she was presenting a treasure, the elderly woman pointed at a glass box of lollipops and said, “This one has been selling really well lately, and they are all young girls who like to eat it. It’s made of brown sugar. When young girls eat it, it helps enrich and nourish their blood[1] and improves their energy. There’s also *huamei*[2] [preserved plums] inside, so it’s a little sour, perfect for helping your girlfriend stay alert and refreshed when she studies.”

“Sure. Could you get me a jar of them?”

Gu Pingsheng took it directly from her and placed it into the shopping cart.

As she stared at that jar packed full of lollipops, not knowing whether she should laugh or cry, Tong Yan discovered that he was actually very easily roped into buying things people were trying to sell to him.

They had come here to buy ingredients to cook, but the end result was a cart filled with snack foods. While Gu Pingsheng was not paying attention, though, she truly could not stop herself and pulled out one or two items, randomly stuffing them onto shelves.

Unexpectedly, there was a couple that, like them, was also shopping without restraint. The boy was doing the same thing as Tong Yan, stealthily slipping a box of potato chips onto a display cart of items that were on discount, while the girl was looking nonstop at the fresh snack foods and placing some into their shopping cart.

Tong Yan and the boy glanced at one another, exchanging a smile, before she turned her head back to look at Gu Pingsheng, who was standing beside a shelf with lowered eyes and reading over food descriptions.

Such a stubborn fanatic who was so serious about things, such that, for everything, he liked to carefully read over their compositions. With someone like that around her, she reckoned that, after a long enough time, her own ability to think would probably decline.

Was this habitual dependence? Her heart all of a sudden seemed to soften. Walking over to his side, she suddenly spotted, underneath the shelf, a can that had an obvious, slight bulge, so she picked it up and tossed it into their cart.

Gu Pingsheng looked at her.

“It might have gone bad. I’ll take it to the front counter and have them recycle it.” She had a sudden desire to show off her knowledge. “A bulging can indicates that the food has already oxidized and gone bad, and it can’t be eaten anymore, right?”

When she read the newspaper in the past, in a corner, there would always be something written on general knowledge of everyday life, and she would occasionally remember the odd sentence or two.

However, he only smiled. “Do you want me to say you’re right, or that you’re not right?”

She paused in surprise. “That can’t be wrong, can it? I read it from the

newspaper …”

“It is indeed unsafe for consumption.” He placed an attractive-looking package of whole-grain crackers into the shopping cart and very naturally began pushing it with both hands, explaining to her as they walked, “However, it is bulging outwards because of gas production from bacterial growth, and therefore, it is unsafe from a microbiological perspective and not because of oxidation causing the food to deteriorate.”

“Teacher Gu, are you all-competent?”

Patting her on the top of her head, he answered concisely, “I can’t cook.”

While they were lining up to checkout, the previous young couple coincidentally was standing in the adjacent line, their cart filled with snacks and frozen foods as well as beverages. The two were continuously selecting and picking items up and, amidst their little bickers and squabbles, continuously placing all sorts of jars and cans in an empty cart.

In the end, the boy glanced over in their direction and hissed, “Look at those people. They actually cook. We’re just buying frozen dumplings …”

The girl also took a glimpse at the shopping cart in front of Gu Pingsheng and giggled, “Then you go learn. When you were courting me, didn’t you say you’d make Sichuan dishes for me to eat?”

The two continued to murmur between themselves, and Tong Yan listened in on them, finding them amusing. Gu Pingsheng’s arm was around her shoulder as he mouthed the question, “What are they saying?”

Half-tilting her head up, Tong Yan grinned and also silently formed her words back at him. “The girl is forcing the boy to learn how to cook.”

Gu Pingsheng’s lips pressed together and curled up on one side as he put on a helpless expression. “Don’t force me.”

Gazing at the look in his eyes, Tong Yan suddenly felt a sense of accomplishment in herself, and slipping her arm through his, she copied his expression, saying, “Rest assured. So long as I’m here, there will not be a day that you will have to cook for yourself.”

During middle and high school, Grandmother's health had not been very good and frequently had to stay in the hospital, but prior to her stays, she would leave a fridge full of food and ingredients for her. They were all things that could not possibly be any simpler to prepare and cook. At the time, the elderly woman loved to tell her that she must learn to cook so that when she was married, she would not be spurned. But back then, Lu Bei utterly spoiled her, and any time she mentioned cooking, Lu Bei had always said, "I'll do it. I'll do all the cooking."

She had had no qualms or guilt about it then. Who does not like being spoiled and doted on? Now, though, she discovered that, to be able to spoil someone was actually a very nice thing also.

Before they left, she also deliberately picked up a soymilk machine and hugged it in her arms while unashamedly letting Gu Pingsheng pay for it.

When the two of them were finally home, it was already past one o'clock in the afternoon. There was not enough time to cook lunch, so she ripped open a plastic package and cooked some noodles that had been made fresh onsite at the supermarket.

Two heaping bowls of noodles were served up, each with plenty of Lao Gan Ma [Old Godmother] Spicy Chili Crisp sauce and green vegetables added in, as well as an egg and some luncheon meat. Watching him eat and seeing that the food seemed to appeal to his tastes, Tong Yan made up an excuse, saying she could not eat any more. With her chopsticks, she took plenty of her own noodles and put it into his bowl.



老干妈 Lao Gan Ma Spicy Chili Crisp sauce (image credit)

The end result was, she was not full, and her studying did not even persist until four o'clock before she started to take the soybeans, which had been soaking for the last three hours, and put them into the soymilk machine. Grabbing one of those lollipops that supposedly enriched the blood and nourished the skin, she popped it into her mouth to help cut the hunger cravings.

After she had finished sautéing Sichuan peppercorn, star anise, and some other ingredients and had begun stewing the beef, she finally trotted back to the study to check in on Gu Pingsheng.

He was looking at his computer and reading some documents and reference materials.

Stealthily, Tong Yan snuck over, and from behind one side of him, she leaned forward over his shoulder to look at what he was reading. Because she was still holding her lollipop in her mouth, the white plastic stick on the end accidentally brushed against his ear. And then … she was caught.

"What are you cooking? It smells so good." He casually pulled her onto his lap.

"Beef stewed with potatoes. Didn't you say you like to eat spicy stuff? I'm making it the way they do over in Sichuan." Her lollipop in hand, she could not help giving it another lick. "I don't know if it'll taste good or not, but at least when I was sautéing up the ingredients, it smelled really good."

He seemed to be very interested, and since Tong Yan was also in the midst of preparing a table full of dishes and was terribly excited about it, she went ahead and gave a detailed description of what was on the menu for the night. It sounded very enticing, but at the very end, she added a caveat: "It's my first time making them. I don't know if they'll taste good or not."

She said this diffidently, but the person who was being treated like he was a lab rat was listening with great interest. As he adjusted her position on his lap slightly, his arm happened to rest across her stomach.

She was about to say more, but his brows suddenly creased together and he interrupted, "Right here, you seem to have something that's emitting heat."

She did not comprehend and looked at him puzzledly. It was only when he patted her on her stomach did Tong Yan suddenly clue in. "It's a Nuan Bao Bao

heat patch. It's for … for girls to stick on themselves. In the winter, they're used to withstand the cold and keep warm."

If he had not mentioned it, she would have already forgotten about this thing that had given her warmth for an entire day.

He seemed to be amused by what he heard. "May I have a look?"

Sure, he could have a look … But it was just a thing that looked like a white, medicinal patch stuck on top of her blouse … There really was nothing worth looking at.

Tong Yan lifted up her sweater self-consciously to reveal the Nuan Bao Bao heat patch adhered to her blouse. And it was a white, heat-emitting … little medicinal patch-like thingy.

When his palm covered that entire white area, however, she gave a start.

In this quiet room, for him to suddenly do this type of action … Tong Yan pressed her lips together. If he wanted to …

"How long have you had this on?" His tone unexpectedly changed, and he looked at her as he asked this.

"A day." Her thoughts were still drifting and without much focus, she gave an estimate. "About ten hours."

"Next time, if you're really cold, stick it on this spot." Gu Pingsheng had soon peeled off the heat patch and re-adhered it at a position below her left shoulder, explaining the reason in way that was easy to understand. "All your blood passes by this location as it flows out from your heart to the rest of your body. That's why, if this spot on you is warm, your entire body will slowly start to warm up, too."

She had read the instructions on the packaging of Shen Yao's several large packs of Nuan Bao Bao heat patches, but they had either recommended the lower abdomen or the bottom of the foot. None had ever recommended adhering it onto this position.

Tong Yan gazed at him with a worshipful look. The all-competent treasury of knowledge was beginning to demonstrate his charm and allure again.

While her idolization of him was still continuing its upwards spiral, he suddenly reached out his arm in a very natural motion and lifted up the bottom of her blouse … Her belly instantly felt cool. All she could feel, however, was her entire body's blood rushing up to her cheeks, and she nearly leapt off of him.

"It's a little red." His voice was warm and gentle and also somewhat resigned. "Next time, don't keep it on for so long. At this sort of temperature, it's very easy to get a low temperature burn …"

He logically spoke a few more sentences, his manner utterly and ridiculously solemn.

Embarrassed, Tong Yan sat there on his lap, and even when he had lowered the bottom of her blouse again, she still remained properly seated, her entire body stiff.

Other thoughts truly had not even crossed Gu Pingsheng's mind, but seeing her eyes constantly evading his, he found this rather fun and amusing. "When you go to the hospital for your check-up, don't you often have to remove your clothing?"

Was that even the same?

His teasing left Tong Yan even more tongue-tied, so she simply bit down on her lollipop and swiftly fled the scene. "It's about time. I'm going to go check on the beef." But she had just taken a single step when, unexpectedly, he pulled her back.

His voice was there beside her ear, low, and somewhat coaxing and reassuring. "Don't go thinking in the wrong direction."

[1]补血 "bu xue." In traditional Chinese medicine, blood deficiency can occur (with many symptoms, some of them being poor memory, anxiety, dizziness, tiredness, poor appetite, etc), and when this occurs, you need to "bu xue" or nourish and replenish the blood. Blood deficiency is more commonly seen in women.

[2] 话梅 "hua mei." *Huamei* are dried plums preserved with salt, sugar, and some herbs. They are a traditional Chinese snack food and are known to be

especially popular with women. Their sour flavour is said to refresh the mind as well as the mouth, and in traditional Chinese medicine, they also have many benefits.



Huamei (image credit)

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

24 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 8.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 8.3

February 6, 2016 by hoju 26 Comments



An early Happy Lunar New Year to everyone!

Any surprise that there's more sweetness in this chapter? But sprinkled between the sweetness is a little bit more about Teacher Gu's past and its effect on him …

Chapter 8.3 – To "Wash Her Hands and Make Soup" (3)

Aromas from the kitchen came wafting in in waves.

Turning her head away to the side, she stared at the light of the kitchen and murmured under her breath, "You clearly just did something bad, and then you go pretending to be innocent."

He let his chin rest upon her shoulder and then exaggeratedly breathed in the aromas. "What are you saying behind my back?"

She shook her head, also feigning innocence.

Gu Pingsheng suddenly sniffed at the air again. "I think I smell something burning."

Tong Yan cried out in alarm, and when she dashed over, she discovered that, sure enough, the beef was burnt.

And so, just like that, her first time stewing beef ended up as an offering to the garbage can.

Originally, she had wanted to simply remove the burnt sections, and, though it would be scraping by, there would at least still be some left. Gu Pingsheng, though, very adamantly educated her that eating burnt food could cause cancer, thereby successfully crushing all her thoughts of being able to manage the home diligently and frugally.

Fortunately, there will still a few other dishes.

In particular, there was something she was certain he would like.

Soft, silken tofu pudding with cilantro sprinkled on top and mixed with a “thousand year sauce[1].”

Tong Yan set it down in front of him. It definitely tasted pretty good. She had secretly had a taste.

Smiling, Gu Pingsheng picked up a spoon and ate a couple of spoonfuls. Then, he ate another couple of spoonfuls, all the while not lifting his head. Hence, she was not able to ask him anything and could only pull over a chair to take a seat and watch him in eager anticipation.

From this angle, she could see he was smiling, his dimple etched deeply on his cheek.

She propped her chin up on her hand and gazed at him until he had finished eating his entire bowl of savoury tofu pudding. When he lifted his head to look at her, she finally could ask, “Taste good?”

“Tastes very good.” He pulled out a napkin and wiped his mouth. “Extremely good.”

A single affirmation of “tastes good” caused her to be exhilarated for a long time. Even after they had finished dinner, when she was watching him wash the dishes, she still could not help secretly delighting in it.

Gu Pingsheng's home was not far from the store where she worked her part-time job. 'On Monday, he had already suggested to Tong Yan that she stay over at his home on Saturday night, and that way, she could sleep in a little longer on Sunday morning.

In the beginning, she had felt a little shy about this, but after thinking it over, she concluded that it was not a big deal.

However, when she was actually standing in his bathroom, hugging her clothing to herself and getting ready to take a shower, she at last realized that it really was a big deal. So nervous. Honestly, so nervous. Fortunately, the water temperature was warm enough, and he had prepared all the necessary things for her.

The entire showering process basically went smoothly, and no unexpected incidents occurred.

Only after she had put on all of her clothing did she face the mirror and breathe out in relief.

A foggy layer of condensation covered the mirror, and because the temperature of the room was very high, there were no indications at all that it would be dissipating. Stretching out her hand, she randomly drew a couple of scribbles on the glass, and then, somehow, as if guided by a supernatural force, she wrote the character of his surname, "Gu."

Before she had the chance to actually admire her own calligraphy, in an instant, blackness fell before her eyes, leaving her in shock.

A power blackout? In this day and age, there were still power blackouts?!

Instinctively, she called out, "Teacher Gu," but then immediately, she understood that it would be no use. After several seconds, her eyes adjusted to the darkness, and she moved to open the door. When her hand contacted the handle, knocking suddenly sounded out on the door. "Tong Yan?"

His voice was rather loud, and it seemed to contain a slight anxiousness in it.

Hurriedly, she opened the door and then saw, in the darkness, him looking at her.

“There might be a power outage,” he said.

“Can you see me speaking?” she asked.

It was quite dark here, and there was no natural light. It should be very difficult.

As predicted, when he realized that she was speaking, he at once told her, “Let me find some things that have a light source. Right now, if you speak, I won’t be able to see you.”

She nodded with a large, exaggerated motion, then turned around, picked up the towel on the bathroom counter, and wrapped it around her dripping wet hair.

In the same vein as how, in this day and age, power outages do not occur, most people also do not keep candles on hand anymore.

He searched for a long while but was unable to find any source of light, and finally, he could only pull out his mobile phone, turn on the flashlight function, and set it on the coffee table.

“Would you like me to get you some more dry towels?” He could see that her hair was still wet.

She had originally brought a hairdryer, but since there was no electricity, she could only rely on the most primitive method now. “Sure. One or two will be enough.”

In the end, Gu Pingsheng brought over one very large, white bath towel.

She took it from him and began very meticulously rubbing her hair, trying hard to remove all the water content. Due to the overcast sky, outside, it was shadowy and moonless. Inside, there was only the light from his mobile phone. While she massaged her hair dry with the towel, he simply sat there and stayed with her.

“Come, let me hold you,” he suddenly spoke up.

Tong Yan paused momentarily in surprise, then very obediently set down her towel, shifted over until she was beside him, and stretched out her arms to encircle his waist.

In the darkness, Gu Pingsheng took her into his arms. Tong Yan could hear that his heartbeat was somewhat uneven, but her heartbeat was possibly even more erratic than his. Slowly, the sound of the beating heart beside her ear started to become more regular, steady, and strong.

Separated from her by only a single shirt, his body temperature, which gave such a comforting feeling, and his scent, so faint that it almost did not exist, also caused her heartbeat to gradually quiet down.

“I was thinking about my mother.” The tone he used was rather neutral, but within his voice, a tinge of sorrow could be heard. “On the day of her mishap, I actually could have discovered even earlier that something was wrong. If I had been just a bit more aware, a bit more attentive, if I had truly listened carefully to the sounds that were coming from her room, perhaps she may not have left this world so early.”

He spoke very vaguely, omitting many of the details.

The sound of knocking at the front door rang out, and from outside the door, someone inquired, “Is Mr. Gu there?”

Tong Yan instinctively shifted slightly. Detecting her motion, he asked her, “What’s the matter?”

She hesitated for half a second before lifting her face to look at him. “Nothing.”

Upon saying this, she lowered her head again, burrowing her face against his chest and hugging his waist tightly.

For some people, to stir a chord in them such that they will open up and speak what is on their hearts is very difficult. Tong Yan felt that both he and she were such people. And so, she had not wanted to interrupt what he was saying.

The building’s management personnel continued to knock on the door a couple more times. It seemed someone was saying that Mr. Gu had returned home this afternoon and was likely asleep already, or something along those lines. Very soon, quietness was restored.

“From now on, when you’re here at home, if you’re in a certain room, turn on its light. Then, if you feel unwell or if there’s an emergency, just press the light switch. Once I see there is no light, I will come over,” he told her, changing the subject. “Okay?”

Something in her heart seemed to silently melt. Using her index finger, she wrote on his back, “OK.”

“Are you sleepy?” He seemed to be amused as he asked softly, “How come you’re not even bothering to lift your head and talk?” Tong Yan nuzzled her cheek against his shirt, not speaking.

He touched her hair. It was still wet. “I’ll help you rub your hair some more. If you sleep with it wet like this, it’s easy to get migraines.”



Still, she did not speak. She felt one of his arms loosen its embrace on her, and picking up the towel that had been tossed off to the side, he began to massage her hair with it. She was the one who was obviously being cared for right now, but echoing repeatedly through Tong Yan’s mind were the brief words he had spoken on that topic about his mother.

Unable to hold back a sense of heartache, she at last sat up slowly from his embrace.

He, too, had just taken a shower, but due to his hair’s short length, it was nearly dry. Because he was tilting his head downwards to look at her, his hair fell down softly across his forehead and partly concealed his eyes.

She remembered, many years ago, as he sat outside the doors of the ICU, it

had been the same. Perhaps because he had been younger at the time, his hair had been even longer, completely concealing more than half his face, and no expression could be seen. .

The “him” sitting before her seemed to superimpose itself on the “him” of the past.

Suddenly, she reached forward and cupped Gu Pingsheng’s face between her hands, closing her eyes and bringing her face up to kiss him.

But what followed after was somewhat of a blur in her memory. She had been the one to initiate the kiss, but in the end, his arms were wrapped around her waist and, with her body snug against his chest, he had taken all her breath away in a deep kiss.

There was the fresh taste of toothpaste in his mouth — mint — and even after they briefly separated, she could still feel a slightly cool tingling on her own lips.

“What are you trying to do?” Meticulously, he brushed kisses around the outline of her lips, as if he was having candy.

She only smiled, extending out the tip of her tongue and entangling it with his for several seconds before leaning back into the couch and breathing out heavily. “Don’t go thinking in the wrong direction.”

The same sentence he had spoken this afternoon she now threw back to him in its entirety.

“Alright, I won’t think in the wrong direction.” Gu Pingsheng was also smiling. He then took her into his arms, brushed the firm tip of his nose against hers, and, tilting his head to the side, brought their lips together, continuously deepening the connection. Tong Yan’s back was pressed against the couch, and the sounds of their two heartbeats blended together. She surmised that there was no force that could settle this tumultuous sound.

She was sharing a room with him, and hence, she dared not turn over in bed too much and was also unable to sleep. Suffering all the way through until past six o’clock, she finally managed to doze off for half an hour. However, before she had even seen the Duke of Zhou’s[2] shadow [truly fallen into a good sleep], he

was already waking her up again …

The next day, while Tong Yan was sitting in the corner of a dining area eating leftovers from the previous night's meal, she recalled something that he had said.

They had actually only been together as a couple for a very short period of time, but everything had happened so naturally.

Their first date. Their first kiss.

Last night, she had even thought that he really would do something.

But in the end, he had only let go of her and went to pour a glass of water. Only when they were about to sleep had he finally brought up that, although he was not a Christian or Catholic, he very much believed in one of their statements.

When she curiously asked him further, he sat down on the edge of the bed and in the darkness, told her this:

"God created sex and gave it as a gift to mankind, but only in marriage is it the most intimate expression of love. Outside of marriage, any type of sexual act is wrong." He had given her another deep kiss before saying quietly, "Unless you very much want to … But at the very least, we still need to wait until you are no longer my student."

Even as Tong Yan thought about it now, a slight warmth rose into her cheeks, and she stabbed at her rice with her chopsticks.

Have I ever shown that I very much want to? …

[1] 卤汁 "lu zhi." *Luzhi*, called either a master stock/sauce or "thousand year sauce/stock" in English, is a stock that is reused repeatedly for poaching or braising meats. The base ingredients are water, soy sauce, rock sugar, and Chinese cooking wine and then individuals add their own variations of seasonings such as star anise, Szechuan peppercorn, ginger, *etc.* The base stock is used as the braising or poaching liquid for meats, but when the cooking is finished, the stock is retained, stored, and later, reused over and over again. With each use,

the flavor of the stock intensifies and becomes bolder. This stock can be handed down for years, even generations; hence the name, “thousand year sauce.”

[2] 周公 “Zhou Gong.” The Duke of Zhou was a statesman of the Zhou dynasty, a man of significant political achievements and influence on the Chinese culture. He is credited with writing the *I Ching* and the *Book of Poetry*. There is also a well-known dream interpretation dictionary《周公解梦》*Zhou Gong’s Book of Auspicious and Inauspicious Dreams,* to which he is attributed. He is known sometimes as “the god of dreams” and, according to the folk stories, the Duke of Zhou will visit your dreams to tell you of anything significant that will be happening to you. Hence, there is a saying that you will “dream of the Duke of Zhou.”

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
25 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Additional Comments:

The published copy actually has quite a few areas where there are noticeable pieces of text added or removed compared to the online version. (And I’m generally okay with the changes.) In the last part of this chapter, Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng are in the guest room and no, they did not even share a bed. The online version explained that, because of the power outage, Gu Pingsheng was a little worried and decided to stay in the guest room with her, sleeping on the couch. I don’t know why the editor would want to cut that clarification out, but a few chapters later, Tong Yan states that she has never seen Gu Pingsheng’s bedroom, so the intention here definitely is still that Gu Pingsheng was 100% the gentleman.

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao,

Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 9.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 9.1

February 10, 2016 by hoju 27 Comments



Anyone have cavities yet? And there's still more sweetness, even when they're not together.

Chapter 9.1 – I Can Hear You (1)

During that last week of examinations, more and more people began to leave to head home.

Every year, for the winter and summer breaks, someone from the Beijing Students' Association would be in charge of booking tickets back to Beijing, and so, a large part of the train car would be filled with familiar friends and people, all talking and laughing until the next morning.

This year, she had also reserved her ticket in advance. When Gu Pingsheng asked her whether she wanted to go back to Beijing together with him, she suddenly realized that he was returning to the same city as her.

With her pen, she crossed off the last day of this semester.

Nineteen weeks. One hundred and thirty-three days.

When Gu Pingsheng arrived, it had been the first day of a new semester and the first class of the morning.

She could still remember, that day, the weather had been very nice. The morning sunlight had shone in through the window, and he had been completely enveloped in its glow. Casually, he had held the chalk and written his name: Gu Pingsheng.

The tip of her pen slid over her yearly calendar and stopped inside one of the small grids. Inside the square for December 24th, she drew a heart, then used her pen and colored it in.

"Is Tong Yan there?" Someone suddenly knocked on the door. It was Wen Jingjing.

Shen Yao initially had grumbled about Wen Jingjing's request to move to a different dormitory room, but eventually, it faded from her mind.

University was unlike middle and high school where they would all study together everyday from morning to night. Shen Yao and Xiaoru were both the type who did not really attend class, and as a result, because they were not staying together in the same room with Wen Jingjing anymore, they gradually drifted apart from her. In contrast, because of that night's conversation where she had poured out her troubles, Jingjing was still very close to Tong Yan.

Tossing down her pen, Tong Yan opened the door and looked at her with a smile. "How did you know I'm here?

Wen Jingjing put on a mysterious, knowing smile. "Aren't you like this every year? You always leave here a little later than other people."

"I leave together with the people from the Beijing Students' Association, so of course I have to wait until everyone has finished their exams." Tong Yan turned around and walked back into the room. Rummaging around on her desk, she pulled out some tasty snacks. Right as she turned around and was about to hand them to her, she saw Gu Pingsheng and the teacher who was the sponsor of their class walk in together …

"Class Sponsor wants to check on and convey his regards to fellow students

who haven't left yet. He happened to bump into Teacher Gu, so they came together," Wen Jingjing explained.

Though he was called the class sponsor in charge of their class, in fact, he was one of the former graduate students of their faculty who had just graduated and had remained at the school as one of the faculty administrative teachers. A boy with a shy smile, but yet, he walked in here now with an air of seriousness, inquiring on how she was doing. Tong Yan was holding a handful of lollipops and did not have a chance to set them down, but yet she also felt it would be inappropriate to give them to Jingjing right in front of Gu Pingsheng.

Gu Pingsheng's manner was serious and proper as well, and he merely removed his black, leather gloves and casually slipped them into the pocket of his coat.

Tong Yan seemed to suddenly remember something. Hastily, she stuffed the lollipops over to Wen Jingjing, gesturing to her that it was for her to eat to quell any cravings. Then, she casually leaned against the desk, feeling around behind her until she found her own pair of light blue gloves and dropped them into the drawer.

These two sets of gloves were actually a matching his and hers pair and were a New Year's gift from him.

"Your dormitory room … has always been this messy?" Class Sponsor cleared his throat, asking his question very discreetly.

Tong Yan's eyes surveyed the room. When those two girls had finished their packing and left, they had also left behind an awful mess. Slippers had been thrown haphazardly everywhere, and the clothing they were not planning on wearing was piled on top of a chair. There was even an open thermos flask with its plastic stopper tossed on the table, and it was not known when the flask had been filled with the water that was currently inside …

"They left in a hurry and didn't get a chance to tidy up."

After she said this, she hastily stuffed a few articles of clothing into Shen Yao's closet.

This was completely a raw, unedited shot of the scene immediately before the holidays. She was already long accustomed to it, but to have this sight seen by two male teachers was still very inappropriate — especially when he was one of them.

She supposed that the class sponsor had never been in a girl's dormitory room before, and after talking for three minutes, he stood and said he needed to go look in on other dorms. As Jingjing and the class sponsor stepped out the door, Gu Pingsheng told them in a very neutral tone to leave first because he needed to head over to Administration. Tong Yan glanced calmly at him and after very politely stating, "Goodbye, Teachers," she closed the door. However, she left it so that it was not completely latched.

Before ten seconds had passed, the door was pushed open again. She was still standing there in the same spot, beamingly watching as Gu Pingsheng closed the door behind him.

Smiling, he stretched out his arm and touched her face. His hand was so cold.

Tong Yan's lips parted in a grimace from the chill, but she did not try to evade his hand. "Is it that cold outside?"

"Your phone's not on?" he suddenly inquired.

"No, that can't be, can it?" Tong Yan turned around to get her mobile phone, but he pulled her back and lifted her straight up into his arms. Scared of falling, Tong Yan threw her arms around his neck while her legs wrapped around his waist so that she hung from him like a koala.

"No need to look. Your mobile phone's battery must be dead again." He continued, "I've been standing outside for an hour, and your classmates have been taking turns asking me about their final exam marks. Aren't you curious?"

"Lower your voice a bit. There's just a single door." She was nervous someone on the other side of the door would hear them, and in a quiet voice, she replied, "Even if I ask, it'd be no use. You definitely won't be more lenient on me."

He laughed, his dimple clearly visible.

"But, I studied very hard for your class." Filled with confidence, she gazed directly at him. "It's definitely ninety percent or higher."

“Ninety-four percent.” Sure enough, he lowered the volume of his voice.

“Really?”

“Really.” While he was speaking, he had already walked further inside and set her down on top of the desk. “I specifically added up your marks a second time. It is indeed ninety-four percent.”

“Specifically added them up a second time?”

With an “mm,” he told her, “Don’t forget, in my class at the start of the school year, you didn’t even know what the general concept behind ‘commercial arbitration’ was …”

Because they were worried people outside the door would hear, their voices were very soft. As he spoke, he examined the random little decorations she had on her desk, and with great interest, he picked up a picture frame. This was a frame Tong Yan had made herself, and on it were seven or eight photo stickers of herself …

Looking at one of them where she had short, ear-length hair, Gu Pingsheng asked her, “How old were you in this one?”

“Thirteen. It was the year I met you.” He peeled that one off and pulled out his wallet. Inside, there was a photograph of Gu Pingsheng, and he stuck that childish photo sticker of her onto it.

Tong Yan was rather curious and taking it from him, she studied that picture of him. Lifting her head, she asked, “This was when you were in university in London?”

“It was when I was in Penn. The year I met you.”

She nodded, then tilted her head down again to carefully examine the “him” of that time. He wore a faded, white pair of jeans and a dark blue polo shirt, and his arm did not have a tattoo yet … It should have been taken before his mother passed away.

Tong Yan pulled the photo sticker of herself off of it again and handed it to him, but his photograph remained in her hand. “Could you give this to me?”

He gave a little laugh, not saying anything in reply.

Afterwards, the two of them went and ate something out in the city core, and then he accompanied her to the train station.

It was nearing the Lunar New Year, and hence, there was a sea of people at the train station. Worried that the schoolmates whom she was travelling with would see him, she could only say her goodbyes to him in an inconspicuous corner out in front of the entrance to the railway station.

When she was on the train, somebody asked her out of nosy curiosity, “Tong Yan, I thought I saw you just a moment ago. Did your boyfriend come to see you off?”

Tong Yan gave a vague “mm-hmm” in answer and took a seat.

The people in the train car, whether they were standing or sitting, were all familiar faces. The ones who were behaving particularly excitedly were first and second year university students, while in comparison, the third year or higher students were much calmer. Sitting beside her were several fourth year students who were all discussing matters regarding finding work, and the term most often brought up was the “Big 4[1].”

“Four years ago, when I had just entered first year university, it was still the ‘Big 5’ accounting firms. In front of her, someone from the Faculty of Management laughingly recollected, “Later, in that same year, one of those firms fell, and it became the ‘Big 4.’ Back then, I felt that this term seemed so distant, but when I started looking for a job, I discovered that it was actually very near and accessible to me.”

“Yeah. In this last year, I’ve grown numb from hearing about them in campus recruitment seminars.”

“Tong Yan, you should be heading into internship, right?” somebody suddenly asked her.

Tong Yan nodded. “I have one more semester and then I’ll be on internship. I still don’t know where I’m going.”

Back in high school, you would always feel that, once you got into university, you had accomplished all that you needed to do. However, after hurriedly and

busily studying your way through to third year, you finally realized that your student days, just like that, were coming to an end, yet you still had not found your direction for the days of your life that would be following.

Into the second half of the night, many people were asleep. A boy in first-year university had come with a guitar strapped across his back in a very artsy-youth type of style, and now, surrounded by several enthusiastic girls, he was lightly playing a tune.

The unique ambience that a train carries made such a scene seem so very romantic.

Gazing at the darkness outside the window, she remembered that many years ago, Lu Bei had done the same. At the Lunar New Year's party that year, each class was reveling in its own festivities, but with a guitar slung on his back, he had walked in on her class, saying he was there to pay New Year's greetings to his wifey's "family." The entire class had erupted into an uproar of teasing heckles that nearly overturned the entire high school campus …

Later on, she had thought it seemed fun, and so for a long period of time, she had learned the guitar from Lu Bei. However, she only learned to play a few songs that she liked to sing.

Talent is something that absolutely cannot be forced.

The boy seemed to have switched to play a different tune now. Tong Yan glanced at her mobile phone. It was past three o'clock in the morning already. He should be sleeping?

While she was thinking this, a text message suddenly showed up: *Asleep? TK*

Such a coincidence.

Tong Yan could not help smiling, and swiftly, she replied to him: *Nope. A boy beside me, a junior schoolmate, is playing the guitar. He's much better than me.*

You know how to play the guitar? TK

Yup. Well, I wouldn't say I know how. I just know a few simple accompaniments.

I have a girlfriend who can play the guitar? That sounds pretty good. TK

Once again, she could not hold back the smile that broke across her face. Beside her, a female senior schoolmate who had been in a half doze opened her eyes and happened to see her. Unable to restrain her gleeful laughter, she teased groggily, “You’re smiling so lustily. Kids that are smitten with love are so blissful.”

Tong Yan did not utter a reply. With her head resting against the icy glass, out of the blue, a thought popped into her head. She hesitated for several minutes before typing out a text message: *Have you ever had a girlfriend before?*

Immediately after she sent it off, she regretted her action. That question truly had not been filtered through the brain before she asked it.

A long while passed before he finally sent a reply back: *Yes. Do you need a detailed account? TK*

He was even offering a detailed account?

For a moment, Tong Yan felt amused exasperation but she could not quell her curiosity either: *Yes.*

How detailed?

…… Up to you.

She waited with her mobile phone in hand for a long time, but still, he did not reply.

Tong Yan was feeling a little jealous. Wait, no, she was very jealous.

Another while passed, but there was still no update from him. How much of a history did he have to have to need that much time to put together a reply? At last, she simply could not take it anymore and sent another follow-up question: *You need to reminisce for that long?*

This time, his response came very quickly: *I was making coffee just now. TK*

I thought you don’t drink coffee?

Occasionally I will have some. For instance, tonight, I need the energy to keep you company. TK

Such simple and ordinary words, yet Tong Yan read them over several times.

“Senior sister.” Those girls unexpectedly turned their eyes on her. “Do you want to sing a song?”

“Me?” Tong Yan shook her head.

“Senior sister, I honestly went silly with amazement when I heard your performance of ‘Without You’ that night at the Welcome Gala,” one of the girls suddenly jumped in to say. “How about a live version of it here?”

Tong Yan quickly shook her head in response. “We’ll just let that idea slide. If I end up waking them up, they won’t let me off the hook for sure.”

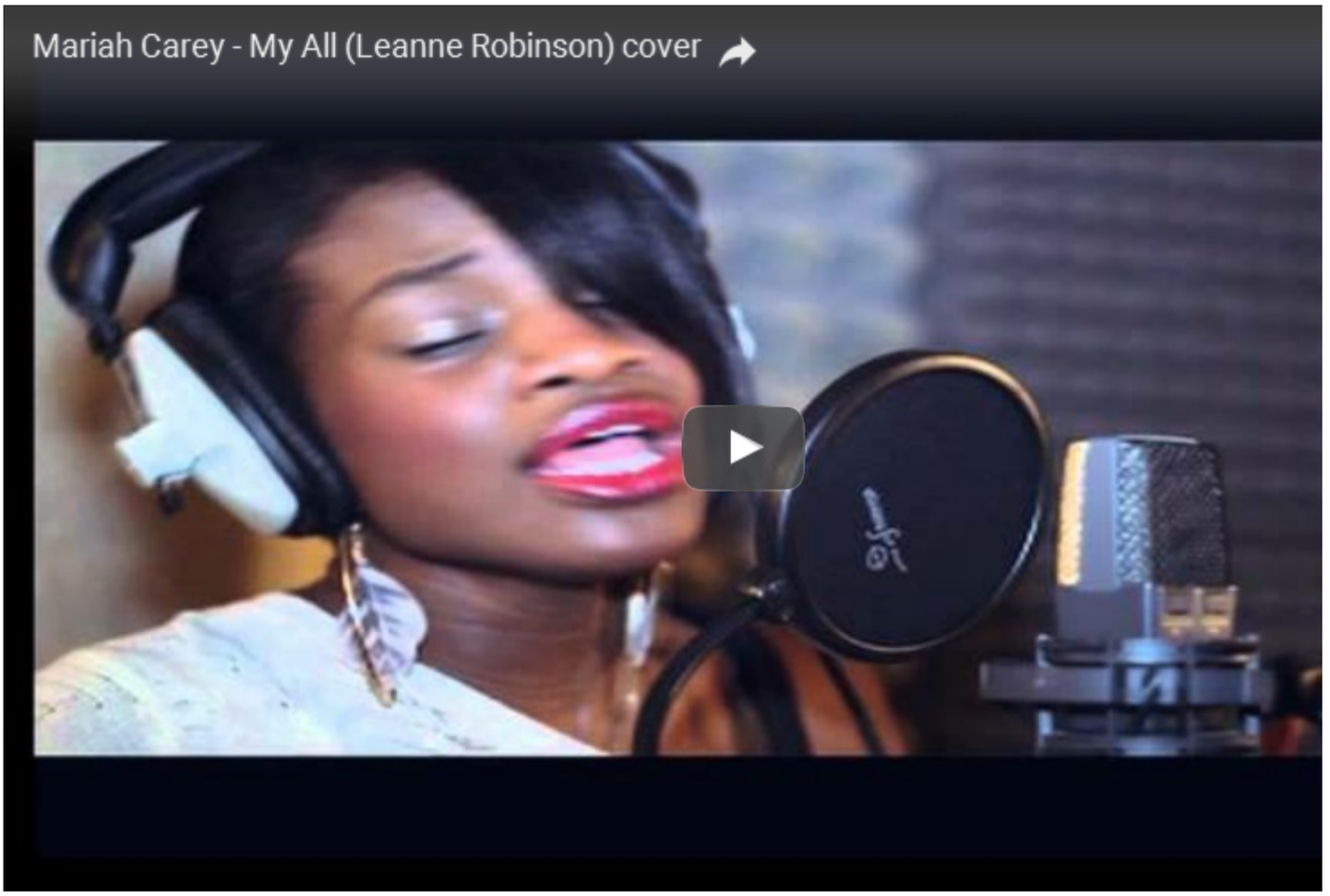
But before she had finished saying this, the fourth year female schoolmate beside her opened her eyes and blearily began to harass her in joking tones, “We’ve been sitting so long our backs are sore. Who can possibly sleep? Hurry, bring on some lullabies. We’ll just forget about ‘Without You’, though. The train attendants would lock you up for sure.”

After this senior sister had finished speaking, those nearby who had previously looked as if they were fast asleep all piped up and joined in with the heckling.

Unable to back out of it, Tong Yan had no choice but to set her phone down on the table and say, “Could you hand me the guitar for me to try?”

The boy looked at her in surprise and passed the guitar over to her. Tong Yan familiarized herself with it for a little while before saying rather apologetically, “I only know very simple accompaniments for a few songs, and I haven’t touched a guitar for many years now.”

She chose the song she was most familiar with, “My All”, and softly began humming. Fortunately, the people here basically all knew each other, and no one would file a complaint on her.



The hum of the train moving over the tracks was like an accompaniment. Even when she occasionally hit the wrong notes in some spots, nobody was really bothered by it. In the end, when Tong Yan handed the guitar back to the boy, he began asking her several questions in a row. Tong Yan hurriedly explained, “I honestly only know one or two songs. I’m absolutely incapable of doing a real solo or something like that. Please don’t ask anymore.”

“You definitely should not have studied law.” The senior sister gave a laugh and then pointed at her mobile phone on the table. “I think you got a text.”

Upon saying this, the senior sister picked up both of their cups and went to get some hot water.

Tong Yan picked up her mobile phone and took a look. Sure enough, there was one unread message: *Are you mad? TK*

No. I was forced just now to perform a show …

What sort of show? TK

Singing “My All” while playing the accompaniment.

The senior sister handed a cup of hot water to her. Tong Yan took it from her



a couple of sips.

ened up the newest unread text message: *“My All”? I am thinking of sleepless solitude tonight. TK*

s the first line of lyrics in “My All.” She thought he was trying to confirm this was the song, and she very naturally replied with “Mm-hmm.” But had sent it, she realized that this particular line of lyrics evoked a very notation …

Big 4 are the four largest accounting companies in the world and are employment. They include PricewaterhouseCoopers, Deloitte, Ernst & d KPMG. It was actually Big 5 accounting firms until the involvement of dersen LLP in the Enron scandal caused that company’s downfall.

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nal Comments:

The original rendition of “My All” is by Mariah Carey, which I absolutely love. The cover I included in this post has an acoustic guitar accompaniment, and I imagine it should be more similar to the simple accompaniment that Tong Yan played on the train.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

26 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 9.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 9.2

February 13, 2016 by hoju 19 Comments



One of the sweetest surprises for Tong Yan from Gu Pingsheng. But while we have been drowning in the sweetness of the last several chapters, life continues, and some aspects are not so pleasant.

Chapter 9.2 – I Can Hear You (2)

I miss you, too.

She pieced together these words but then wavered for a long time before finally steeling herself and sending it out. Her cheek was pressed against the window, but this still could not suppress the bursts of heat that rushed upwards to her face. So really sappy. So sappy even she, herself couldn't take it … Perhaps he had fallen asleep because he did not send any more text messages in reply.

Tong Yan leaned against the train window and also drowsily dozed off. When

she awoke again, it was already past seven o'clock. She glanced at her mobile phone. Still no messages.

She found this rather peculiar. Normally, Gu Pingsheng's routine was very healthy and regular, and he would usually be awake and out of bed at 6:30 a.m. …

While she was staring at her mobile phone, lost in her own thoughts, the senior sister was already coming over with a cup of instant noodles she had made. "Determining whether a person is currently blissfully in love is so easy. Back when my boyfriend and I were first together, everyday, we'd have more than a hundred text messages, and even my thumb joints got inflamed."

Tong Yan merely smiled and pointed at the noodles, saying, "So early and you're eating such greasy food?"

"I'm hungry." The senior sister offered with a grin, "Want me to share some with you?"

Her stomach was also growling hungrily, and only now did she remember that Gu Pingsheng had told her he had packed some food for her. Because she had been too lazy to carry it, she had stuffed it in passing into her luggage. Now, though, her suitcase was up on the overhead luggage rack and grabbing it down would be troublesome as well.

Caught between hunger and laziness, she finally succumbed to the latter and merely poured herself a cup of hot water to drink.

From time to time on this early morning train, someone would bring a towel and toothbrush and go to wash up. The several junior schoolmates who had played rowdily the previous night were all tired and were now curled up together, sound asleep, snoring and breathing heavily.

As she casually conversed with the senior sister, she would distractedly check her mobile phone. The train was already nearing the Beijing Railway Station when his text message suddenly popped up: *Nearly there? TK*

Tong Yan's mood all of a sudden lifted and she replied: *Mm-hmm. Almost pulling into the station now. Are you up and out of bed?*

More accurately, I never slept. TK

Never slept? Tong Yan did not really understand. If he had not slept, what did he do the entire night?

Without waiting for a reply from her, he followed up with another message: *Beijing Station only has one exit, right? I'll wait for you outside the main doors. TK*

Tong Yan was feeling somewhat stupefied by this, but then instantly understood the meaning of his words.

Through the intercom system, a train attendant was starting to speak, giving greetings along the lines of "welcome to Beijing." The senior sister hurriedly tossed her instant noodles into the garbage bag a train attendant was holding. "Is anyone picking you up? Want to catch a ride back in my boyfriend's car?" This senior sister's home was very close to Tong Yan's, and sometimes, she would drop Tong Yan off at home on the way back to her own.

Tong Yan quickly shook her head. "No thanks. I have a friend picking me up."

"Friend?" The senior sister immediately broke out into a laugh. "No way, little Tong Yan. You have a sweetheart here in Beijing, too?"

Tong Yan was uncertain whether to laugh or cry at this, but she could not explain that it was actually the same person either.

After she had deliberately split away from their large group and hurried out the main doors of the Beijing Railway Station, dragging her luggage behind her, she very easily spotted him among the bustling throngs of people. Everyone was wearing thick down outerwear, and only he was still dressed in the coat he was accustomed to wearing in Shanghai. Step by step, Tong Yan walked over toward him, her heart pounding with its every beat. This felt so surreal it was frightening.

Gu Pingsheng soon noticed her also and stretched out his arms, motioning for her to come to him. Only when she was nestled in his embrace did he finally exhale a long sigh. "It's so cold."

She rubbed her cheek gently against his coat, her nose feeling slightly stuffed and tingly. After some time, she finally raised her head and stared up at him. "I

thought you weren't coming back until a few days later? And you're wearing so little. You're going to get sick for sure."

He purposely touched his two hands to her face. They were frightfully cold. "You said you missed me, so I decided to come back earlier."

Yanking off her gloves, Tong Yan covered the backs of his hands with her palms. "Teacher Gu, must you do something so touching?" When she said this, her eyes grew warm with moisture.

"Alright, I'll tell the truth." Gu Pingsheng smiled, "I'm the one who suddenly missed you."

Pulling out a pair of gloves from his pocket, Tong Yan stuffed them into his hands, then also untied her scarf and stood up on her toes, wanting to wrap it around his neck. "But I can't really spend time with you. I need to go home first. This afternoon …" She estimated out her time. "After I've had lunch, I'll come out to find you?"

"There's no rush." He stopped her movements and then tied her scarf around her neck for her once more. "I will be in Beijing the entire winter break."

She nodded, then suddenly grew quiet.

From the moment when she had dashed out and seen him, it had all seemed unreal, and only now was she at last vaguely feeling that this was true.

He looked at her in bemusement, but she merely pursed her lips into a smile and rose once again on her tiptoes, kissing him firmly on his icy-cold lips. If he could do something so ridiculously touching, then why couldn't she give him a little kiss in front of the train station?

Gu Pingsheng's raised his eyebrows slightly, a smile spreading up to his eyes, but he did not speak.

Here, there were no students or teachers.

Here, was the city they had first met. He was Gu Pingsheng, and not Teacher Gu.

When she returned home, she speedily bathed and changed into some clean

clothes. As she stood inside the kitchen, watching Grandmother prepare lunch, she still could not hold back her smiles. She was beaming so much that even Grandmother found it extremely bizarre and asked her whether she had done especially well on her exams this year that she was so happy.

Leaning against the doorframe, Tong Yan bit down on her lip and grinned for a long time before finally replying, “Yup. I got ninety-four percent in Commercial Arbitration.”

For the entire twenty-nine days of the winter break, he would be in Beijing.

While Tong Yan was silently calculating out how many days she needed to stay at home and how many days she could spend with him, the sound of knocking abruptly rose at the front door. She offhandedly asked, “Who is it?” and heard a woman’s voice answer, “Yan Yan, it’s Mom.”

The entire space fell into quietness. She stood, stunned, for a long while, and it was Grandmother who, after wiping her hands clean, opened the door.

Even after her mother was seated and looking at her with a smile on her face, Tong Yan was still in a state of slight disbelief as she sat wordlessly on a small stool in front of the couch.

Many people had complimented her before that she was pretty, but in fact, she had only inherited the greater part of her mother’s looks. Looking now at her mother, who was already forty-five, forty-six years old, she could not even spot any differences in her from when she was in her thirties.

Grandmother seemed to have known ahead of time that her mother would be coming and very warmly chatted with her. Tong Yan still merely listened quietly, uncertain what she should say. In this last half a year, Mom had occasionally called her on the phone, but ultimately, the estrangement between them had existed over many years, and they had no common topics they could talk about.

“Yan Yan, do you have a boyfriend now?” Mom unexpectedly asked.

Tong Yan nodded. “Yes.”

“Is he a schoolmate?” Mom’s smile was very warm.

She pondered this for a moment, then nodded her head but did not speak.

Throughout the whole afternoon, this was the only dialogue between them.

Only after her mother had left in the evening did she all of a sudden remember that she had promised Gu Pingsheng she would go see him in the afternoon. However, looking at her mobile phone, there were no text messages. He had not tried to find her either.

Tong Yan burrowed herself in the couch and placed her mobile phone on her knees. She suddenly really wanted to see him. Actually, she did not know what she would say to him; she just really wanted to see him.

“These last few months, your mom has been visiting frequently.” Grandmother picked up a fully ripe persimmon, handed her a small metal spoon, and indicated to her that she should use it to scoop some out to eat. “Ever since she and your dad divorced, they’ve been fighting back and forth over the house. This year, I don’t know why but they have suddenly come to their senses and just let it go, saying that neither of them want the house and that they’re handing over the property rights to you.”

Tong Yan took the persimmon, not uttering a word. With the spoon, she scraped off a layer of skin and scooped out a spoonful of the fruit’s flesh.

A strong, rich taste. The taste of home. Grandmother hesitated, holding back the words on her lips and not continuing to speak.

Naturally, Tong Yan did not ask, either.

The year she was accepted into university was also when her parents’ battle over the property had been the fiercest. Her mother had pulled out the divorce settlement agreement they had signed in the past and stated that, at the time, they had agreed that the property would belong to the woman and the man would only take one hundred thousand yuan. However, in the short span of a few years, the property value had risen from two hundred thousand to more than eight hundred thousand yuan. How could her father possibly let himself get the short end of the deal?

Amid the terrible, earthshaking dispute, she had feared that her father would sell the property and use all the money to buy stocks, and then neither of her

parents would have any money in their old age for their retirement. Hence, she had sided with her mother by making the one statement that their divorce settlement was legally enforceable … From then on, for the two years following, every time her father came across anyone, he would always vilify her to them and say she was this and that …

All sorts of the most harsh and cutting words had come from him, all because of that house. A house that had long since ceased being a home.

After she was done eating her persimmon, she took the remains to the kitchen to throw away, and as she finished washing the spoon, she heard Grandmother pick up a telephone call and speak in low tones. In the beginning, her manner was amiable, but later, she became more and more livid until, in a quivering voice, she rebuked, “Yan Yan is your daughter. How can you say that about her?”

Tong Yan could guess that it was her father, and to avoid putting Grandmother in a difficult position, she did not immediately leave the kitchen. She simply picked up a cloth and began to meticulously wipe down and clean the kitchen.

At last, when the call was hung up, she pretended she had not heard anything and poked her head out to say smilingly, “I’m meeting up with a classmate. I’ll be out for two hours and then I’ll be back, okay?”

Grandmother nodded, uttered to her to come home soon, and then went back to her own room, secretly wiping at her eyes.

Walking along the street, she discovered that it truly was frigid.

A strong wind whipped against her face, stinging her cheeks, and although her scarf was pulled up to just below her eyes, she still felt the chill. In the end, she had no choice but to head into nearest building, a Parkson department store, and stroll through the cosmetics section on the first level, looking at the shiny display counters to pass the time.

Perhaps because it was approaching the Lunar New Year, the department store was packed with people. Aimlessly, she wandered around. And then, she came to a halt.

The other half of this level was the footwear department, and at every sales counter, there were many people trying on shoes. However, only those three particular people were so eye-catching. In that instant, her reaction was to avoid them, but Lu Bei had already caught sight of her first and, without even needing to think about it, had started walking toward her. Fang Yunyun, who was sitting and trying on shoes, quickly lifted her head and cast a glance in her direction, but then, as if she had not seen anything, she turned away to unhurriedly look over her own reflection in the mirror.

In contrast, Lu Bei's mother was staring at Tong Yan with an expression of great surprise.

"Tong Tong." Lu Bei extended out his arm, wanting to grab ahold of Tong Yan. "I'm here because my mom told me to come."

Wordlessly, Tong Yan evaded his arm. "I'm meeting up with someone, too. Why don't you go back over there and keep them company?"

"You're off on winter break? I'll come find you tomorrow, how about that?" Anxiousness tinged Lu Bei's voice, as if he was afraid she might misunderstand something.

But clearly, of the four of them, only she was an outsider.

Pressing her lips together, Tong Yan smiled at him. "No. My boyfriend will get jealous, and your wife will also get jealous."

The colorful and dazzling décor shone upon her smile and seemed to widen the distance between them.

"Lu Bei." Behind him, Lu Bei's mother finally opened her mouth to call him. Lu Bei remained motionless and only continued to gaze at her. Another call of "Lu Bei" came from behind again.

"I'm going now. You head back over there." Seeing that he was still unmoving, she turned and walked directly away.

Worried that Lu Bei would chase after her, she swiftly pushed open the doors

of the department store and stepped into the crowds outside. It was only after she had walked to a nearby bus stop did she at last sit down on the railing, and pulling out her mobile phone, she found Gu Pingsheng's number and dialed it directly.

The call was very quickly answered, and Gu Pingsheng's voice was very surprised. "What's wrong? Message me and let me know."

The wind carried his voice far away. Tong Yan bit down on her lip, but finally, she could not hold back her sobs any longer.

He asked her once more what was wrong, but afterwards, he did not speak again. Beside the bus stop, she sat and cried for a long time until even her scarf was wet. And still, he did not hang up his phone.

In the end, she was the one who pressed the button to end the call. He very quickly sent her a message: *What happened? TK*

With fingers that were frozen stiff, Tong Yan strained to type out the words: *Nothing. My phone was left on the couch, and I accidentally sat on the dial button. Can't believe I ended up calling you for so long … Why didn't you hang up? Long distance is really expensive.*

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
27 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 9.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 9.3

February 17, 2016 by hoju 32 Comments



Tong Yan and we, the readers, learn something very important about Gu Pingsheng in this chapter. Did you expect that?

Chapter 9.3 – I Can Hear You (3)

He did not ask further and only casually conversed a little more with her.

These next two days, I have things going on. I'll come pick you up the day after tomorrow? TK

Okay.

Tong Yan stared out at the dim lights of the nightscape, her mood significantly better. Perhaps it was because she had heard his voice.

The next afternoon, a woman who was around thirty-five, thirty-six years old came to pay a visit at Tong Yan's home. She was a surgeon at the Peking Union Medical College Hospital and a former student of one of the homeroom classes Grandmother had been in charge of. Actually, at the time, Grandmother had mainly taught music and had only been a homeroom teacher for two or three years, but many former students, even when they reached their middle age, still remembered to come visit and give their greetings during the Lunar New Year celebrations.

"This is the card for the medical centre." The auntie pulled out a card and set it down on the coffee table. With a smile, she advised, "In these recent years, you've entered into older age, and you should have physical examinations more frequently."

Grandmother was holding a knife and paring an apple. "No need, no need. I've always consistently exercised, and my body is very healthy."

"I know many elderly folks find it taboo to get physical check-ups and are worried that they might find out that there is a problem, but when people get old, it's inevitable that there will be more or less some areas that just aren't feeling all that well. It's best to get a complete physical done every year and set your mind at ease."

Smiling, Grandmother handed the apple over to that auntie. "Alright, alright. I will definitely go."

When Grandmother went into the kitchen to check on the ribs she was stewing, Tong Yan suddenly inquired, "Auntie, did the cardiac surgery unit of your hospital once have an intern doctor whose surname was Gu?"

She was actually merely very curious about his past — that past in which he had been a cardiac surgeon — and when she asked the question, she had not held out much hope of getting an answer. After all, he had only been an intern, and in that large hospital that Peking Union Hospital was, why would anyone pay attention to what was going on in another department?

"You mean Little Gu?" The auntie really did seem to have some sort of impression of him in her mind. "The boy whose mom was also a doctor?"

“You really do know? I think he was only there for less than a few months.”

“If the one you’re talking about is him, then I know him for sure.” The auntie contemplated briefly before speaking again. “His mom was a very well known cardiac surgeon. I saw her, as the lead surgeon, perform a surgical operation on a little girl. On that heart that was only the size of an egg or so, she put in more than one hundred sutures. Someone simply born to be a surgeon.” The auntie shook her head with a rueful smile, giving a sigh as she uttered ”Such a pity,” but then did not carry on with the discussion on this topic of his mother.

“Why? Do you know Little Gu?” the auntie suddenly smilingly asked.

Tong Yan hesitated for a while before replying, “He’s one of my university teachers, my teacher for Commercial Arbitration Law.”

The auntie looked at her in astonishment. “He switched into law afterwards? Didn’t he lose his hearing?”

Tong Yan hurriedly nodded. “Yes. Do you know how he lost his hearing?”

“It’s not really a secret. Basically, anyone there at the time knew at least some of what happened.” The auntie picked up her teacup and took a small sip before continuing, “Do you remember the SARS outbreak that year?”

“Yes.”

She remembered that back then, the news everyday would report, for each district, the number of new SARS cases that had been discovered in that day, as well as news stories on various medical and health care personnel. It was as if, overnight, the city had been transformed into a city of danger. Who wouldn’t be scared of a disease you could become infected with simply by breathing?

“At the time, I was pregnant at home. After Little Gu’s mother passed away, he was already preparing to end his internship. And then, he happened to be there for the SARS epidemic. Peking Union Hospital took in more than two hundred SARS patients, and he actually volunteered himself up to work in the SARS wards. All medical personnel working in those wards were at high risk, and many ended up contracting SARS. He was infected, and his deafness later was a result of drug poisoning from the treatments.”

After the auntie finished saying this, she pondered for a moment, then added,

“At that time, the drug treatment for SARS was very aggressive. Basically, anyone who survived and recovered was still left with many long-term side effects because of the large doses of hormones that had been used. This disease is just too terrible. In reality, the people who were treated were actually making a great sacrifice because they were doing it to prevent transmitting the sickness to other people. But such large doses. The great majority of people would not be able to handle that.”

Tong Yan had been somewhat stunned as she listened to all this, but that last part was very horrifying. “You mean, he still has other long-term side effects?”

“That’s hard to say,” the auntie answered carefully. “When I went back, he had already left the hospital. I only heard a young doctor in my unit say that he should still have other late effects.”

The auntie left shortly after. Tong Yan merely stared dazedly at her mobile phone. She wanted very much to ask him directly, but she was worried that it would give him the wrong idea. The television in front of her was playing the summer line-up of dramas, and this entire afternoon had been *My Fair Princess*. A plotline consisting simply of giggles and laughter that had been acted out so many years ago, yet it was still being broadcast.



Main cast of the drama,《还珠格格》*My Fair Princess* (1998), which is also

known as *Princess*
Returning Pearl

There, she sat for the whole afternoon.

At dinnertime, she suddenly stood and picked up her down jacket, slipping it on while she glanced at her mobile phone. It turned out it was nearly out of battery, so she decided to simply pack up her charger with her. Jogging up beside the kitchen door, she said, “I suddenly remembered, I have a gathering with some classmates tonight.”

Grandmother was carrying the ribs out from the kitchen right then, and dotingly, she shook her head, saying, “Okay, okay. Hurry and go, then. I’ll leave the ribs for you to eat tomorrow.”

Tong Yan gave a hasty bow of apology. “I may be home really late. Don’t wait up for me.”

After saying this, she opened the door and dashed out.

That day when he had taken her home, he had told her that he was staying in the vicinity of Beijing Normal University.

When she stepped out of the metro station, it was very windy. She knew approximately where he was located, and as she headed in that direction, she pulled out her mobile phone to send him a text message: *I really want to see you tonight.*

A while passed before he returned her message: *Okay. I’ll come find you some time past 10:00. TK*

Mm. Tell me when you are heading out the door. I need some time to get ready so I can sneak out.

Alright. TK

She did not tell him she was nearby. It was merely out of intuition that she felt he was at the place he was staying.

Right now, it was only a little past six o’clock, and there was still a long time to go until ten o’clock. With the aim of finding somewhere to charge her phone, she went into many fast-food restaurants, but no power outlets could be found in

any of them. Eventually, she found a bakery that was not far from Beijing Normal University and had power outlets in the section for customers. After buying the most inexpensive hot drink there, she sat down beside the window and stared out blankly while her mobile phone charged.

And in this way, she sat there alone until the store's ten o'clock closing time.

With truly nowhere to go now, she had no choice but to find a place that was sheltered from the wind by the gates of Beijing Normal University and wait to hear from him. At approximately 10:20 p.m., he finally sent a message: *I'm heading out now. TK*

Hastily, Tong Yan replied to him: *I'm at the entrance of BNU, the east gate.*

Alright. I'll be there very shortly. TK

Gripping her mobile phone, she smiled, her heart at last feeling settled. He had indeed been at home.

Soon, she saw a very familiar figure running toward her from afar. It was Gu Pingsheng. At this hour, she was the only person standing in this place, and he quickly reached her side and came to a stop. "Have you been waiting for a long time?"

She stretched her arms forward and stuck her hands into the pockets of his coat to warm them up. "Very, very long. I'm really hungry, and I still haven't had dinner yet."

His hands also slipped into his pockets and closed over her frozen ones. "What is so pressing that you didn't even eat and had to come find me?" His hand was very warm, and his palm was slightly damp.

With a smile, Tong Yan leaned in toward him, wordlessly burrowing herself into his embrace.

What should she say? She actually did not want to question him on anything. She had merely felt a very strong desire to see him. It was evident that her heart ached for him and his sufferings, yet now that he was truly here before her eyes, she actually seemed to feel that he was someone born for others to depend

upon.

Regardless of whether it was his beautiful smile or the voice in which he spoke, both radiated such warmth.

“Not hungry anymore?” There was a smile in Gu Pingsheng’s voice as he held her in his arms. “I am here the whole time. You can hug me whenever you want to. Let’s find a place to fill your belly first.”

Tong Yan arched her head up to look at him. “Okay. But it’s so late. There shouldn’t be any places nearby where we can have dinner, I’d think.”

“It’s really close to my home from here.” He squeezed her hand. “Come to my place to eat.”

“Your home?” She had thought that when he came back here, he would probably stay …

He would stay in a hotel? She truly had never thought about this question before.

“My [maternal] grandfather’s home.” While he was speaking, inside his pocket, he had enclosed her hand in his. Then, he led her back in the direction he had come.

His grandfather’s home?

Tong Yan suddenly halted her steps. When Gu Pingsheng tilted his head to the side to look at her, she finally told him hesitantly, “Let’s just walk around and see if there’s anything to eat around here, how about that?”

His grandfather’s home? That meant she would have to see the elder of his family?

Gu Pingsheng could perceive the unease in her expression, and chuckling, he closed his hand tighter around hers. “Don’t be scared. Pingfan is there, too.”

“I’m not scared …” Halfway through her sentence, her face began to grow hot. “I’m just scared that …”

In the end, she was still too embarrassed to finish what she had been saying.

By chance, when Tong Yan followed him into the living room, Gu Pingfan was also stepping out of her own bedroom. At the sight of Gu Pingsheng, she had wanted to say something, but after noticing Tong Yan, her words stopped at her lips. All of a sudden, she chortled, “How is it you guys can’t even last two days without seeing each other? It’s almost midnight already.”

Tong Yan had already been feeling tense, and now with these words, she felt even more embarrassed. Indeed, coming here at such an hour truly was not appropriate.

“Don’t be anxious,” Gu Pingfan immediately soothed her laughingly. “My [paternal] granddad went to bed long ago. Besides, he’s upstairs and he’s hearing impaired, so he can’t hear anything that’s said down here.”

As she spoke, an elderly housekeeper happened to come down from upstairs, and seeing Gu Pingsheng, she said, “Mr. Gu, you did not have dinner tonight. Would you like me to cook something for you to eat now?”

Tong Yan was taken aback by this. She did not expect that he had not eaten dinner either. Smiling, he stated that it was fine and he would make something simple himself, and then he brought Tong Yan into the kitchen.

While he was opening the refrigerator, Tong Yan had already come up beside him and noticed that there were handmade dumplings inside. She pulled out two eggs and some tomatoes, planning on making a soup as well.

After Gu Pingsheng had taken from her the items she had selected, she finally pulled the frosted glass kitchen door closed and gazed up at him to ask in a lowered voice, “Why didn’t you eat dinner either?”

Turning on the faucet, he began washing the tomatoes. “I was busy the entire time earlier on and didn’t get a chance to eat.”

Her heart inexplicably twinged once again. Walking over, she wrapped her arms around him from behind and rubbed her cheek against his back, murmuring in words only she could hear, “How busy did you have to be that you didn’t even eat? …”

His hands were dripping wet and holding a bright red tomato. Turning around, he lowered his head to look at her. “Why did you suddenly want to see me? And

you didn't even have dinner before you came over here?"

"I missed you," Tong Yan stated, putting on an unabashed front and tilting her face upwards.

He gave an "mm" and smiled very, very attractively. "What else?"

"Nothing." Gazing directly into his eyes, Tong Yan enunciated each word clearly as she repeated, "I missed you, so I felt that tonight, I positively, immediately, and absolutely had to see you."

He did not speak and merely used the inside of his arms to encircle her in front of himself. And like this, with a glistening wet tomato still raised in his hand, he very quietly brought his head down and kissed her. A silent, yet exceptionally firm kiss.

Droplets of water fell off the tomato and onto the floor, merging together quickly to form a small puddle.

A while passed before he at last let go of her and asked, "Did you cry last night?"

"No," Tong Yan automatically denied.

He set the tomato down on the marble countertop, pulled a clean, white towel down from a rack off to one side, and wiped his hands dry. "Many living creatures possess their own communication and voice recognition systems. Take, for example, the dolphin. If you were to slap the surface of the water to try to imitate the sound of a fish falling into the water, a dolphin would be indifferent to this. But, if you actually tossed in a fish, it would be able to very accurately catch the food. This is because dolphins rely on the ultrasound waves they emit to 'hear' the changes that are occurring in their environment. They also rely on this form of sound wave communication to interact with each other."

Tong Yan rested herself against him, listening with interest but not understanding why he was suddenly talking about dolphins.

"Even in the vast ocean darkness, they can still find one another, because their language is not limited by distance and can even transmit as far as several thousand metres away." He paused for several seconds, and then, his voice grew

lower. “Communication does not require a true, physical sense of hearing. And so, I could hear you crying.”

Additional Comments:

Has there ever been a line that you’ve read that has touched you so much you knew you would never forget it? The last paragraph of this chapter did that to me. But while the words themselves are beautiful and touching, as I reflected deeper upon them, what blew me away was from whose lips they were spoken.

A man who has endured so much, lost so much for the sake of people he did not even know. A man who faces a future of declining health and further side effects. It would be normal for him to carry some sort of bitterness or self-pity or even sadness for himself, but he does not think about his own condition. Instead, as Tong Yan said, he radiates warmth. I think about the maturity, strength, and love he must have in him for him to set aside his own troubles and choose to care instead about Tong Yan, for his heart to be so attuned to Tong Yan’s thoughts and emotions that it can transcend distance and allow him to “hear” her. That is why Tong Yan feels that he is “someone born to be depended upon,” because when someone has made your joys and sorrows his priority, he can be your harbour in times of storm.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
28 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 10.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 10.1

February 20, 2016 by hoju 24 Comments



“Oh, this one isn’t garlic chive filling!”

The revelation of Gu Pingsheng’s condition caught Tong Yan and us, as readers, off guard. What is admirable about this beautiful couple, though, is that despite the bitter, sad, and unfair things in life that they very rightly could look at and lament over, they choose instead to simply focus on the sweet, beautiful things. Borrowing from Tong Yan’s thoughts in this chapter: “…nothing else mattered. So long as they were together, then everything was good.”❤ However, there are things about the nature of their relationship that they eventually will have to face.

Chapter 10.1 – Wanting Only to Be Together (1)

Once he finished saying this, he selected an appropriate size knife from the rack and cut the tomato into six slices. Without even raising his head, he asked

her, “Is it, after I’m done slicing tomatoes, I can step down and hand things over?”

Tong Yan did not utter a sound. She seemed not to have heard him.

She had many emotions that she had never before exposed in front of anyone. Even when she was at home, she would still maintain an expression of always being unconcerned, unaware, and simple-minded. Crying or other similar expressions of emotion only occurred in times when she absolutely could not bear the pressure anymore.

Gu Pingsheng turned his head to the side so his eyes were on her. “What’s the matter?”

“Don’t know.” Tong Yan blew out a long breath. “I feel like I’m about to cry because of what you said.”

Hearing this, he was amused, and grabbing a tomato slice in passing, he fed it straight into her mouth. “Don’t cry. I don’t know how to console people.”

“Then why did you say such rousingly sentimental words? …” She blinked her eyes, sensing that she would not be able to hold herself together much longer. When her eyes were about to brim over with tears, she immediately buried her face into his chest. Gu Pingsheng had no choice but to set down his knife again and hold her in his arms, trying for a long time to coax her tears away.

Afterwards, when she thought about it, Tong Yan could not really remember what exactly he had said.

But, a very deep impression had been left on her that allowed her to verify something: he truly did not know how to console people.

The door was suddenly pulled open. Gu Pingfan was about to say something when she saw Tong Yan swiftly jump out of Gu Pingsheng’s arms, and with red eyes at that. Unable to contain a laugh, she said to them, “May I come in?”

Not bothering to pay her any attention, Gu Pingsheng offhandedly picked up a tomato slice and popped it into his mouth.

After closing the door, Gu Pingfan affectionately put an arm around Tong Yan’s

shoulder and leaned in close to her ear, whispering, “I’ll tell you in secret, he’s never known how to comfort his girlfriend. One time, when I went to visit him, I personally witnessed a pretty blonde girl in his room, crying hysterically, and he just sat on the couch, reading his book and letting his girlfriend throw and break things.” Saying this, Gu Pingfan’s lips turned up in a grin. If it were me, I definitely would not be able to stand it. Being the type of guy that he is, when he dates someone, I’m guessing you need to nudge him every time for every little move you want him to make? Wouldn’t that be really boring?”

“It’s fine …” Tong Yan searched through her memory. It seemed Gu Pingsheng was actually quite good with words. “Teacher Gu is very good.”

“Good? In what way?” Gu Pingfan looked curiously at her.

Tong Yan was somewhat embarrassed. How was she supposed to respond to a question like that? Gu Pingfan’s gaze caused her cheeks to flush. Being asked such a question by a thirty year old woman, and furthermore, that person was Gu Pingsheng’s older cousin, was … really weird.

Fortunately, Gu Pingfan was not a very nosy person and merely flashed an evil grin at Gu Pingsheng before switching into her main topic. The general idea of what she said was that she had arranged a follow-up examination for him and other things along those lines.

The words spoken from both of them were few and vague. Tong Yan tossed several dumplings at a time into some boiling water, pretending she did not understand.

Because the stove was on, the kitchen soon heated up. When Gu Pingfan left, the water had just boiled for the second time. Filling a bowl with cool water, she poured it into the boiling pot, and the rolling dumplings inside once again settled down.

Every once in a while, Gu Pingsheng would feed her a small piece of tomato until eventually, even the two tomatoes that had been set aside to make the soup ended up being gobbled down by them. She turned around to glance at the cutting board, which had nothing remaining on it except for a light red mixture of juice and water, and then gazed poutingly at him. “If I had known you wanted

to eat it raw, I would have at least added some sugar and dressed it as a cold dish."

He smiled, his body very naturally leaning in closer to her. Right as he was about to give her a kiss, an alert sounded from Tong Yan's mobile phone.

"I have a text." Tong Yan twisted her head away to avoid him and pulled out her phone.

An unfamiliar phone number, but a tone of speaking that was most certainly familiar. It was Fang Yunyun: *Do you have time in these next few days? I want to treat you to dinner.*

The tone of the message was so normal and unperturbed it seemed as if it was sent by an ordinary old classmate. Had it not been for the connection through Lu Bei, perhaps she really would simply have been an old classmate, and even a pretty good friend.

Tong Yan held down the power-off button, slipped her phone back into her pocket, and carried on in all seriousness with cooking the dumplings. When the water came to a boil for the third time, it roiled and churned for a long while. She, however, merely kept her eyes on its surface and did not show any reaction.

Standing behind her, Gu Pingsheng set his chin on her shoulder and said softly, "Tong Yan Wuji, the dumplings are going to break apart soon."

As if snapping awake from a dream, Tong Yan hastily shut off the stove and scooped out the dumplings for him. Then, she began in a flurry to search for some vinegar. Once everything was at last ready, she handed a pair of chopsticks to him.

Gu Pingsheng took them from her, ate a dumpling, and then, amid the white, hot steam, pulled her over toward himself, lifting her into his lap. "I don't eat garlic chives. I'm allergic."

With a cry of "ah," she pointed at the plate of dumplings. "Those all have garlic chives in them?"

"No." He recollected, "There should be some that are pork with bok choy filling. I forgot to tell you just now."

Actually, these two different fillings could approximately be ascertained from the difference in color that could be seen through the doughy skin. However, after hearing him say that, Tong Yan felt uneasy, and picking one up with her chopsticks, she took a small bite from it. “This one is pork with bok choy.”

Immediately after the words came out, she realized there was something wrong with this. She had taken a bite and then given it to him to eat …

A faint smile touched Gu Pingsheng’s face as he bit down on the half a dumpling held between her chopsticks and ate it. “This is a pretty good method.”

“You’re not … going to have me bite all of them before you eat them, right?” Tong Yan felt that, it was the middle of the night in the kitchen of his grandfather’s home, and doing that would truly be too improper and suggestive of other things.

“There is another way.” Taking his chopstick, Gu Pingsheng poked a hole into one of the dumplings. “I’m guessing this might be a little simpler.”

Tong Yan gnawed at the end of her chopsticks, staring at him with an expression that seemed at a loss over whether to laugh or cry.

Why didn’t you say so earlier? …

Lowering his head, he began to eat his dumplings in a focused manner.

Tong Yan loved observing him as he ate. His table mannerisms were very pleasant to watch, yet at the same time, the manner in which he ate was not the type that exuded a haughty air either. Every time she watched him eat, she would feel that the food she cooked was exceptionally delicious.

Since they both were rather famished, the food was quickly finished, and they began to go to work washing the dishes.

These types of operations were always lead by Gu Pingsheng, and at most, Tong Yan merely took a clean dishcloth, wiped each of the dishes dry, and neatly stacked them in the cupboards.

All that work and busyness, but actually, they had simply had a dinner together

and then he needed to take her home.

Because it was such a late hour, Gu Pingsheng was worried that they would not be able to catch a taxi and decided to drive her home himself. When their vehicle came to a stop downstairs of her home, she suddenly did not want to part from him yet, so she simply chatted idly with him, not wanting to get out of the car.

The heat in the vehicle was very warm. He wore only a button-up shirt, and the top two buttons were not even fastened. From her angle, she could his tattoo through his open neckline.

She had never carefully looked over the entire tattoo design that was on his body, and now, with great curiosity, she pointed at his shoulder. “Your tattoo goes from your forearm up to your shoulder? What’s the complete design?”

He followed the direction her finger was pointing and looked down at himself. “I need to take off my shirt before you can see the entire thing.”

Tong Yan blinked. And blinked again. And then blushed.

She swore, that was not what she meant. The notion of taking the opportunity to come on to him[1] had absolutely not crossed her mind at all …

Seeing into her thoughts, Gu Pingsheng lightly flicked her forehead with his fingers. “What’s that little brain of yours thinking?”

She rubbed her forehead. Suddenly, she remembered what Gu Pingfan had told her. “I’m thinking, it seems you still haven’t answered my question.”

“Which one?”

“Your ex.” Her curiosity was definitely suppressing her desire to be jealous. “Your cousin said that your ex-girlfriend is a blonde? And a pretty girl?”

He likely had not expected that she would change the topic so abruptly and seemed to be recollecting for quite some time before he finally replied, “I think so, but that was a long time ago.”

Besides the foreign exchange students and foreign teachers at their university, as yet, she had not really come into contact with other foreigners, and in particular, she truly had not seen a pretty blonde girl before. She visualized some

of the scenes from western television dramas, trying to insert Gu Pingsheng into them, but no matter how she imagined them, they just felt awkward and wrong …

"Why 'a long time ago'?" Could it be that his heart had once been hurt because of love?

"When she saw that particular girlfriend of mine, it should have been when I was in high school." He truly began to sincerely explain to her, "Back then, I was young, and for a few years, I really liked girls. Later, I suddenly felt that that sort of stuff was really troublesome, and I gradually started to shift my interests elsewhere."

"High school?" Tong Yan silently did the calculation. "That really is the distant past."

No wonder, on their first date after they had finished dinner, he had very honestly sighed that he lacked experience. And then, he had actually ended up bringing her to Mass … Tong Yan wanted to laugh as she offhandedly fiddled to and fro with the car vents. The warm air blew against her palm. It felt very comfortable.

"What about your first love?" Unwilling to give up and just let things go, she followed up with another question. "Do you still remember?"

"She was a Chinese girl." He gave her a concise answer. Then, with a little smile, he unfastened her seat belt for her. "Satisfied?"

Where would the satisfaction come from? … She narrowed her eyes, feeling that she was simply a glutton for punishment. Look, look at you. You're jealous again. And you asked for it yourself.

Tong Yan glanced at the watch on his wrist. 11:15 p.m.

"This whole winter break, I'll be really free." Leaning sideways against the passenger seat, she gazed at him. "What about you?"

As she thought over this entire night, she realized that she really seemed not to have done anything that was useful or proper. With an empty stomach, she had run out to somewhere near his home, charged her phone, and just stared blankly in a bakery. And in the end, she had only seen him for not even one hour

and eaten a plate of dumplings …

But, because of this one meeting, the edgy, unsettled feeling from the daytime was now soothed.

As she looked at him, she felt that nothing else mattered. So long as they were together, then everything was good.

“After these next few days, I don’t have anything either.” He took her down jacket from the back seat and handed it to her. “So, as long as you are able to come out, you can just let me know at any time.”

With an “mm,” she took the jacket from him and slipped it on. She was about to say something when she heard someone knocking lightly on the car window behind her.

When Tong Yan turned around, her heart gave an abrupt thud.

At a time unknown to them, Grandmother had come downstairs, and now, she was standing by the door on Tong Yan’s side of the vehicle. Had she not tapped on the window, even Gu Pingsheng would not have noticed her.

Only when Gu Pingsheng prompted her to get out of the vehicle first did Tong Yan snap out from her daze, and she opened the car door. “Why did you come downstairs? It’s so cold outside …”

A rather stern expression covered Grandmother’s face, and after she helped Tong Yan pull the hood of her jacket up over her head, she turned her eyes to Gu Pingsheng, who had stepped out of the vehicle on the other side. “Teacher Gu, do you have time to talk?”

Gu Pingsheng had gotten out of the car immediately after Tong Yan and had not even had the opportunity to put on his coat. In the strong northerly wind, the hem of his button-up shirt was being blown upward, but he showed no intention of going back to the car to retrieve his coat and merely nodded as he answered, “Yes. Would you like to talk here or go upstairs?”

[1] 吃豆腐 “chi dou fu.” This literally translates to “eat tofu.” To “eat someone’s tofu” is a slang for taking advantage of or liberties with someone by

touching, kissing, etc, usually without their explicit permission.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

29 of 66 Main story segments

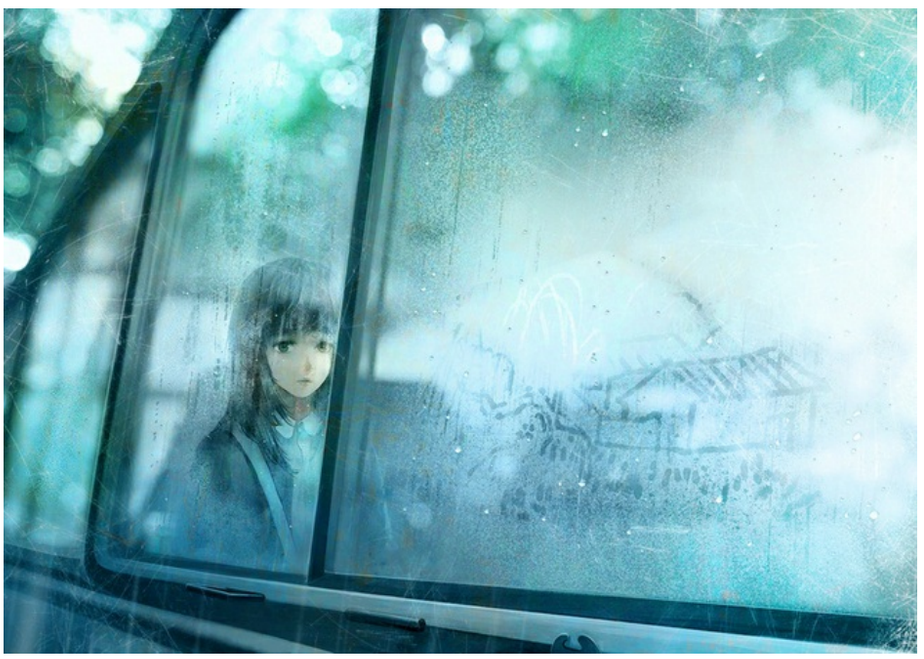
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 10.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 10.2

February 24, 2016 by hoju 25 Comments



Our leads are apart, but you can really see the maturity in their relationship. And, this chapter answers some of the questions that a lot of you have had regarding Tong Yan's past relationship.

Chapter 10.2 – Wanting Only to Be Together (2)

Afterwards, he and Grandmother talked for a long time downstairs.

Through the window of the third floor corridor, Tong Yan watched them from afar. Even though Tong Yan could not hear their dialogue, she understood that Grandmother would never agree to their relationship. But what would he say? How would he say it?

She was unable to guess.

The discussion that occurred after she was back inside her home was, in her memory, the first time her family member had expressed a stance on her relationship with Gu Pingsheng.

"During the school years, there will always be many students who hold a

special type of reverence for their teacher. After you are out of school, you will discover that he is just like any other ordinary person, and he is not for you."

Although Grandmother had been a primary school teacher, because of the uniqueness of that type of career, she still would always hear many stories of teacher-student romances. The majority of these were about a female student who became infatuated with a male teacher, and eventually, this not only affected her studies; the impact it brought about to the entire school was also very negative. In short, they were all examples that brought about sighs in people of what should not be done.

"He is one of your schoolteachers and furthermore, a teaching instructor of one of your classes. Were it not for the fact that I can tell he is a good boy, I certainly would not have even said anything to him. Yan Yan, in the teaching profession, there are many things that are not allowed. The relationship between a teacher and a student … can only ever be teacher and student."

The entire time, she did not say anything.

From when her parents divorced in her first year of middle school, she had lived with Grandmother. She had once had a two-year period of rebellion in which, day in and day out, she had roved aimlessly outside, not caring about her studies, and her elderly grandmother had secretly wiped away many, many tears because of her. Later, she had gradually matured and learned, and she had once resolved to herself that she would never again sadden the one and only kin who had ever poured herself wholeheartedly into her.

And so, now, she would not argue.

Only when Grandmother stated that she would bring her to their relatives' home for the winter break did she finally hesitantly ask, "When will we be back?"

Grandmother went to heat up a bowl of rice porridge for her. Setting a pair of chopsticks on the bowl, she replied, "After the Lunar New Year." She set another small plate of pickled vegetables beside the bowl of rice porridge and even very thoughtfully sprinkled it with some freshly diced cilantro. "We will come back when it's about time for you to start school."

With her chopsticks, Tong Yan picked up a big bunch of pickled vegetables, mixed it in with the rice porridge, and began to eat, one mouthful at a time. Her

mobile phone in her pocket lay very still. He had not sent her any messages.

It was past one o'clock before she finally returned to her room. In that moment when she pulled out her phone, she suddenly grew nervous. What had he said? What decision had he made?

Pulling back the window curtains on this particular side of her home, she stared out upon the blocks of buildings that were covered by a veil of darkness and sent a text message to him: *It seems, the outcome was not very ideal?*

A text was very quickly returned: *As I had expected. TK*

What did you expect?

There is no such thing as a free lunch in this world. You need to pay for your meal. TK

……

Tong Yan stared wryly at her mobile phone: *Did a math teacher teach you your Chinese?*

Even though his statement was not at all fitting, it did manage to ease her downcast mood somewhat. Turning on her table lamp, Tong Yan chatted back and forth with him for a little while before asking him whether he was home yet.

Gu Pingsheng nonchalantly replied with one sentence: *I'm still near your home.*

Tong Yan paused in surprise for a moment and then automatically looked out the window. There was no car.

After searching hard for a while, she realized she had confused her directions. He should be on the living room side. When this thought floated up in her mind, her heart seemed to follow along and started beating more heavily. It was fortunate that Grandmother was already asleep at this hour of the night.

Opening her bedroom door, she carefully slipped through the narrow living room and walked over to the window.

She pulled open the curtain.

This was the side of the building that was facing the road.

The traffic was as before, the lights were as before, and the position of that car was as before.

He had put on his coat now but was still next to the vehicle. As if he could sense that she would appear there, when the corner of the curtain was lifted up, he quickly brought his right index and middle fingers together and touched their tips to his forehead.

Someone walked by him and curiously followed his gaze to look up at the building …

Tong Yan could not see the expressions of the people, but she felt that those onlookers must be jealous of her.

Fine. With him around, she always had a valid reason to be a little narcissistic. It was because he was always so wonderful.

The corner of her lips could not help curling upwards. She leaned her forehead against the window, and for once, she felt that the cold touch of the glass in the winter was so very comfortable. Perhaps it was because there was a warmth in her heart.

The following day, Tong Yan went to Tianjin. Because she was with Grandmother for long stretches of time, she could not simply pull out her mobile phone at any time to communicate with him. It was not a long train ride, and the entire train compartment was brimming with the excited joy of being able to return home. Grandmother was smilingly conversing with a mother beside her, who was holding her child.

Tong Yan opened her insulated mug and took a drink of hot tea, remembering what he had later told her.

He had said, he wholly understood this reaction coming from someone who had once been a teacher. Even he had once resisted such a relationship, and for a very short period of time, he had tried to run from it.

He had said, nothing would truly be an issue.

He had said, “I will wait in Beijing for you to come back.”

She rested herself against the window and closed her eyes. Never before had she felt as she did now, where she longed to be able to graduate immediately.

It had been many years since she saw this relative who lived in Beijing, but that relative seemed to have long since heard that she was studying in a prestigious university. Holding Tong Yan’s hand, she pulled her along to introduce her to every person, and incessant praises were heard. Tong Yan could only smile and listen until someone asked her a question along the the lines of whether she had a boyfriend or not. She wavered on how to answer, but before she had an opportunity to speak, Grandmother had already interjected with a smile, “Her studies are the utmost priority.”

And then, what followed was the occasionally lively, occasionally quiet lifestyle that comes during the Lunar New Year period.

When Lunar New Year’s Eve arrived, the family reunion dinner[1] was surprisingly a ten-table banquet held in a hotel. A Spring Festival[2] celebrated with more than ninety people. In all her years of memories, this was a first for her.

Tong Yan had a distant cousin, three or four years younger than her, who had once stayed at Tong Yan’s home when she was a child. As a result, when she saw Tong Yan, she was rather warm and affectionate and insisted on dragging Tong Yan out with her to the hotel lobby, where they sat on a sofa, watching fireworks and chatting.

The conversation topics of young girls, no matter how they may twist or stray, always seem to end up being about romance and relationships.

The last time this little girl cousin went to Beijing, Lu Bei had been the one who had taken her around everywhere, so her impression of Lu Bei had always been especially good, and she could not resist asking Tong Yan how this “big brother-in-law” was doing.

Tong Yan quickly stated that they had broken up.

Her little cousin was astonished by this. She seemed to be thinking, he was

such a good person; why would they break up?

Tong Yan watched as a flash of light rocketed up into the sky, rapidly exploding apart and blossoming into a giant firework.

Perhaps it was because, for so many days now, she had been missing someone greatly. Or perhaps it was because she had run into a person who knew the Tong Yan and Lu Bei of the past, but in a certain sense, this person's life also did not intersect with hers, so this finally gave Tong Yan the desire to pour out some of the things in her heart.

"When he was in high school, he was driving and got in an accident and killed someone. Even though that person was the one in the wrong and had been jaywalking, the other side would not accept any out of court settlements and was adamant that he must go to jail. That family had people who worked in the municipal taxation department, so of course their tone and stance were uncompromising. His family asked for help from many people, but to no avail. So, at the time, everything had already seemed inevitable. He would first go to reform school for one year before being sent into prison."

"And then what happened?"

"And then," Tong Yan fell silent for several seconds before she carried on, "very much like out of a drama, one of my high school classmates said she wanted to help him. Later, after a lot of things … the problem was resolved smoothly. And then, he and my high school classmate got engaged. Last year, they were married."

She could remember every word his mother had said to her.

She also remembered that, in her time of despair, when this scene, which had seemed as if it had been taken from a drama, unfolded before her eyes, she had even felt that she must be in a dream. Fang Yunyun had stated that Lu Bei was a rare type of man and that she absolutely had to marry him. It had been that simple.

That was the first time she discovered that a vast gulf truly can exist between different types of people.

While she was merely crying all day long, a girl of her same age could actually

sob and whine, simply because there was a boy she wanted for herself, to have her family pull strings and utilize connections to higher up authorities to pressure others to resolve the issue.

"A privileged family[3] is the deciding factor for everything." Her younger cousin heaved a long sigh.

"Oh yes." Tong Yan grinned and continued, "And so, I lost my love."

And so, just like that, her first love came to an end.

Perhaps it had simply been too dramatic and the shift in events in this story had been too great, for to this day, when she thought about it, she still found it unbelievable.

The image of Lu Bei on that night — the night of his engagement — where he had sat on the roadside, his head buried in his hands as he sobbed disconsolately, would likely be etched into her mind for the rest of her life. That night, she had even wondered, had she been born simply to suffer? Although she had never experienced extremely impoverished days, time after time, life had stripped her of the love and care that should have rightfully belonged to her and that she should not have to beseech for.

"It's no big deal." Her younger cousin waved her hand at this, trying hard to console her. "My big sis is pretty, sings well, and is graduating from a prestigious school. She will definitely marry a good man."

Tong Yan leaned back into the sofa, her thoughts turning to Gu Pingsheng.

"And what about your current boyfriend?" Her cousin quickly switched the topic. "Don't tell me you still don't have one. I won't believe you."

Tong Yan looked at her with a smile, not giving any answer. After a while, she pulled out her mobile phone and sent a text message to him: *Happy Spring Festival. How was your day today?*

Happy Spring Festival. I spent the whole day eating with people. So tired from eating. TK

More than ten days had slipped by where they had not seen each other.

This winter break that had originally been all planned out had, just like that, ended up being wasted. She thought about the many plans she had made: They would use a few days to visit the scenic places and historical sites, then another several days to be close and snuggly with one another, and then … She imagined he would not find it boring if they just kept on snuggling together like that.

But, for some reason, things had ended up as they were now.

Because Grandmother had been by her side all along, even their messaging had been very limited.

I miss you.

She suddenly very honestly sent out this message.

Very shortly, he called her on her mobile phone.

Tong Yan answered it directly.

Against the deafening sound of firecrackers in the background, his voice was extremely unclear.

“The temperature in Beijing these last few days has been around ten degrees below zero. I checked the weather report for Tianjin, and I think it said it’s snowing there. Make sure you dress warm. Don’t catch a cold.” After these simple caring instructions, he paused briefly and then carried on again. “These last few days, I have been communicating with the dean. A teacher has been found to take over teaching next semester’s Maritime Law. I will not be teaching your year anymore and will assume responsibility for some second year courses.”

Since picking up the call, she had not said a single word.

Her cousin looked at her somewhat puzzledly and silently mouthed to her, “Is it some call from the Intermediate People’s Courts? Don’t believe it at all. They’re all scams.”

Tong Yan shook her head at her.

“I won’t say much more. There are a lot of other people in the room, and if they see me talking on the phone, they’ll find it very strange.” An obvious smile could be heard in his voice. “I miss you, too. Very much.”

Tong Yan could not hold back the smile that broke across her face. And then,

she saw her younger cousin's even more baffled expression.

The call was very quickly hung up. She brought her mobile phone back down from her ear, still thinking about the words he had said. The topic of changing courses had come up so suddenly, yet it also seemed as if this was something he had planned long ago to do.

"Who was that? How come you didn't say anything the whole time?"

Tong Yan pondered for a moment before answering with a show of seriousness, "A really, really, really good-looking guy who sings better than me and who went to a better university than me was just professing his love to me."

[1]团圆饭 "tuan yuan fan." The "family reunion dinner" is the dinner, usually on Lunar New Year's Eve, in which the family gathers together to celebrate the upcoming New Year.

[2] 春节 "chun jie." In China, the Lunar New Year period is also called the Spring Festival and lasts from the first to the fifteenth day of the new lunar year.

[3]投胎好 "tou tai hao." This cousin had actually said, "a 'good' reincarnation decides everything." When you say someone 投胎好 or "reincarnated well," you are essentially saying they were lucky enough that this life, they were born into a good family with power and/or wealth.

Additional Comments:

"… time after time, life had stripped her of the love and care that should have rightfully belonged to her and that she should not have to beseech for." My heart broke for Tong Yan at this line.

So there you have it. As Tong Yan said, her and Lu Bei's ultimate separation played out rather like a TVB drama. You cannot help but pity Lu Bei. He was not at fault for the car accident, yet he was the one who was proclaimed guilty. He did not want to be with Fang Yunyun, yet when he was in a circumstance where he could not even express his choice, his family decided this for him. He was

released from the crime he didn't commit, but the price paid was being tied to someone whom he doesn't love nor made a choice to be with. He needed to follow through on his family's decision for his marriage because if he didn't, the ramifications of getting on the bad side of people who had such power and authority would likely be very grave, not only for himself but for his family as well.

I've said before in comments that I don't agree with his current pursuit of Tong Yan because, no matter what the reason behind his marriage is, Tong Yan does not want to be involved with a married man and he should not drag her into it. He needs to sever that part out before he goes to find her, and if that is not possible, he really needs to let her go and give her her freedom. However, you can also understand why his heart does not want to accept this. How could he when everything was forced on him? While Tong Yan has clearly and firmly told him her stance, she can never be mean to Lu Bei because she knows that, in the end, she and he and their relationship were all victims.

This novel really holds a theme of how sometimes, circumstances in your life are just not in your control and life is sometimes just downright unfair. With Tong Yan, there's her family situation and her past love. With Gu Pingsheng, it's his health as well as other things you'll find out about later. With Lu Bei, it's being forced to give up the girl he loved. In each character, we see how they make their choices, whether they dwell upon the past or try to make the best of the future. I admire Gu Pingsheng and Tong Yan because they picked themselves up, continued walking down life's path the best they could, treasured the beautiful things they had, and tried their best to learn to let go of what was not theirs or caused them pain.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

30 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 10.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 10.3

February 27, 2016 by hoju 25 Comments



Gawd, it's torture sometimes when your favourite author is a foodie. Why do I translate at night? I often end up going to bed hungry. >_<

So much in this chapter. We get more of Gu Pingsheng's perspective, some wonderfully sweet couple moments, and at the very end, something to make our heart twinge yet again.

Chapter 10.3 – Wanting Only to Be Together (3)

After Gu Pingsheng hung up his phone, he continued sitting in the brightly lit and vibrant lobby. Around him, there were many people who had stepped out midway for a cigarette. He was sitting in a very comfortable, relaxed position on the sofa, watching the hotel's fireworks display.

Countless streaks of white light launched up into the sky and in an instant, exploded into a wide display of brilliance.

What was Tianjin like? He still had not yet visited that city.

Gu Pingfan came over to him, took a seat, and patted him on the back of his hand. When he turned toward her, she smiled and said, "Just now, [paternal]

Granddad asked about your girlfriend. I didn't mention that she was your student. You know … he is quite against romantic relationships between teacher and student."

"I know." He was not overly concerned. "I used to be against this type of relationship as well. Remember, you once asked me, did I fall for Tong Yan because of the similarities to my mother? In fact, it was the exact opposite. It was because of my mother that there was a period where I wavered over whether I should begin this sort of relationship."

During that time, he had used a period of two weeks to avoid her.

He had even privately asked Zhao Yin to take over her tutoring lessons. He had thought that everything had been well arranged, that perhaps his heart had merely by chance been stirred and so long as he avoided her for a longer period, he would be fine. In any case, it would be better than coming along and disturbing her life.

But on that afternoon, when he had sat down beside her and told her that he would no longer be tutoring her, the disappointment that could faintly be seen in her eyes had, just like that, caused his heart to soften.

He remembered, that day, sitting there beside the window, she had been facing the rays of sun shining in through the glass. Her features had been blurred, except her eyes, which had been so arresting. At the time, he had not known about her family and her past relationship, but he had sensed that she must have met with many unbearable disappointments and pain in her life.

Yet even so, the feelings he saw inside those eyes were still warm and sincere.

So sincere it was as if she had never before been hurt.

Gu Pingfan handed the cup of hot water she was holding to him. He took it from her and said thank you but did not drink from it.

"The results, this time, from your check-up were not very good. Do you have any plans for going back to the U.S. for your surgery?" Gu Pingfan decided to nonetheless try to persuade him one more time. "Even though there are a lot of clinical cases of this in China, I still feel you should choose the place that provides the better medical environment …"

“It’s fine,” he interrupted Gu Pingfan’s words. “I want to have my surgery in Peking Union.”

Gu Pingfan fixed her eyes intently on him for some time until finally, she breathed a lengthy sigh. “Fine. You can sometimes be really annoying. On the surface, you seem easygoing but in reality, you are so stubborn it can be scary. Just like how you’ve always refused to accept using a hearing aid, and no matter who talks to you about it, it still makes no difference.”

“Thank you, Pingfan.”

Smilingly, he gave his thanks to her, stopping all of her words that, outwardly, seemed to be complaints but in fact were expressions of her heartache for him.

The start of school happened to fall before the Lantern Festival[1].

Grandmother was very sad to see her go and had made *yuanxiao*[2] [glutinous rice balls], both the fried and the boiled type, in advance. She had eaten them for two whole days and by the end, felt that she was about to turn into a rice ball herself.

Only when she had towed her luggage out the door of her home did she finally pull out her mobile phone and look at the flight information he had sent her.

She had never been on an airplane before, and when Gu Pingsheng made the suggestion, she had hesitated over whether to decline his offer. If she became too dependent on his money, this would make her feel that they were not equal in their relationship.

However, when she had very solemnly and properly expressed her reason back to him in a text, Gu Pingsheng had not been too concerned and had quickly returned her message: *Even if we save the money for the flight this time around, it’s still all going to be yours in the future. Don’t worry too much about it.*

At the time when she received this message, a grin had covered her face for an entire afternoon.

He was always able, with just a few words, to make her ponder on the meaning behind them and then, afterwards, feel as if she was brimming with happiness.

Tong Yan was afraid she would be late so she had estimated an hour and a half for her to get there, but the unexpected result was that she ended up arriving very early.

At boarding gate 10 of Terminal 2, she pulled out her mobile phone from her pocket, but right as she was lowering her head and typing a few words, she felt her entire body being enveloped into an embrace until all the surrounding chill and cold was isolated from her.

Tong Yan received quite a fright, and her heart pounded fiercely several times before it gradually settled back down.

“Why are you here so early?” Gu Pingsheng’s voice was by her ear.

It had been more than twenty days since they had last seen each other. There was a remarkable sense of unfamiliarity mingled with a slight, unexplainable stirring of her heart.

A saying silently rose in Tong Yan’s mind: absence makes the heart grow fonder[3]…

“Why aren’t you saying anything?” He followed up with another question.

She hurriedly turned around. His face, which had come into her view, carried a smile. He was really, truly before her eyes.

“I’m suddenly not really used to this.” She smiled a little embarrassedly. “Don’t know how to describe this feeling …”

Gu Pingsheng took her suitcase from her and, putting on an air of seriousness, he smiled, “I know. Just now, I saw you walking this way from inside, and my heart started beating a little faster.”

A “huh?” slipped from her lips, but before she could react, her hand was already enclosed in his and they had stepped through the large glass doors.

When the two of them were on the plane and Tong Yan was sitting in a well-behaved and proper manner next to Gu Pingsheng, she at last began to adjust to the fact that Gu Pingsheng was indeed there beside her.

Gu Pingsheng discovered, as he was leaning over slightly and fastening her

seatbelt for her, that her eyes were on him the entire time.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Tong Yan blinked her eyes deliberately and told him softly, "I missed you. Really, really missed you. I missed you for twenty-something days." Her voice was very quiet, to the point that she was nearly mouthing the words.

With an "mm," he answered, "Me too."

Possibly because the plane was going to takeoff soon, there were not many people left walking about in the aisle. Only a few flight attendants were walking up and down, checking passengers' luggage and patiently reminding each person to fasten his or her seat belt.

Tong Yan was leaning back against the window while he was turned sideways so that he was facing her.

Out of the blue, she remembered, that first time in the cinema, it had been at this same angle when his sudden kiss had ended their simple teacher-and-student relationship … Or perhaps it had been even earlier. From the moment she had fallen for him, their whole relationship had changed.

"Why did you all of a sudden change courses?" she asked the question that had been on her mind all this time.

"Because your grandmother wishes that, at the very least, I would not be the direct instructor of your course and the person who decides your actual grades." After saying this, he added with an innocent expression, "But I don't feel I would have used my position for personal reasons and to help you."

His voice had also purposely been lowered a little.

Tong Yan gave an "mm" in agreement. "You're always the most fair and impartial …"

He turned his lips upward in a rightful smile. "What would you like to do when we get to Shanghai?"

She pondered for a moment. "Let's go to Jing'an Temple[4] and offer up incense, how about that? It's still not past the fifteenth of the first lunar month

yet.[5]”

“What would you like to pray and ask for?”

To pray for safety, peace, and wellness. To pray that all the people she loved would be safe, peaceful, and well.

But she did not tell him this. She merely pretended to mull over her answer before saying, “To pray that I can always be together with you. That no amazingly gorgeous girl will appear and fall for you, say, for example, a pretty blonde girl or something.”

He intentionally played along with her and joked, “If that’s the case, it seems there’s really nothing for me to ask for. You probably won’t ever meet someone better.”

She could not help laughing at this, but still, she nodded in sincerity and agreed, “I think so, too.”

Since they had taken a morning flight, it was only one o’clock in the afternoon when they arrived at Shanghai Hongqiao Airport.

However, although it was still so early, when they reached Jing’an Temple, there were not many genuine worshipers remaining who were there to offer incense, and many of the people inside were actually foreigners. This was her first time inside this temple that was situated in the city’s core, and by the time she had gotten her incense, she discovered that this place was, in fact, very small. There were only the few large, main halls, and if you were to stand in the main courtyard in the center of the temple and look up, you would be able to see Jiuguang Department Store[6] next to the temple.







Jing'an Temple. Counterclockwise from top: view of main entrance (image credit); the temple located in the busy core of Shanghai (image credit); courtyard in the temple (image credit)

Merely a single wall.

Inside the wall was the heavy aroma of incense while outside the wall was Shanghai's most bustling road.

She stepped up to the burner, intending on lighting her joss sticks in it, but beside her, several foreign tourists surrounding it had occupied the upwind position. As a result, she only managed to stand there for several seconds before she was choking from the smoke and tears were forming in her eyes. With the back of her hand, she hastily wiped a couple times at her tears, then glanced miserably at Gu Pingsheng, who immediately understood and took the joss sticks from her hand.

When those several foreigner girls saw him approaching, they cordially made room for him straightaway.

Glumly, Tong Yan watched him. After he returned to her side, she gazed at him at last and said, "I finally understand that 'Pretty Lady's Bane' is not a reputation that goes undeserved."

He handed her a bunch of joss sticks and, ignoring her teasing, gave a long sigh. “On this sacred site of Buddhism, *shizhu*[7], please conduct yourself respectfully.” Then after saying this, he placed the joss sticks between his palms and pressed his palms together. Facing the main hall and the statue of Buddha, which stood a dozen or so metres tall within, he closed his eyes.

The afternoon sunlight fell upon him and cast a faint shadow on the ground.

So peaceful, and also so reverent.

Tong Yan even forgot to present her wish and simply stared at the side profile of his face until he had opened his eyes again. When he lowered his head to look at her, she curiously inquired, “What did you ask for?”

Gu Pingsheng did not answer her and merely indicated with his eyes that she should not neglect this time in which the incense was burning.

By the time they stepped out through the temple doors and were once again standing on the side of the vibrant and affluent thoroughfare, she was still preoccupied with what he may have prayed for. Rather absentmindedly, she followed him as they strolled, and even after they had come to a halt, she was not aware of where she had now arrived at.

“What would you like to eat?” Gu Pingsheng was eyeing the glass display case before him with great interest. “Takoyaki [octopus balls]? This grilled squid here looks quite good. Want [Hiroshima-style] okonomiyaki, too?”





Left: 章鱼小丸子, which is the Chinese name for takoyaki (image credit). Right: 广岛烧, which is the Chinese name for Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki (image credit)

“I want to eat that.” She pointed at the octopus balls. “Six of them. That way, you and I can each have three.”

Gu Pingsheng thought for a moment. “The number three is not auspicious. How about eight instead? So four each? Hmm, that’s no good, either.”

“Then let’s buy twelve.” Tong Yan rapidly ran through various combinations in her mind. “Six for each of us.”

Listening to them, the cashier could not hold back a snicker and cast a couple of extra glances at them, unable to understand why this handsome fellow and pretty girl were so superstitious that they needed to be so particular, even when simply eating octopus balls.

As normal, Gu Pingsheng bought lots of food. The two of them found some empty seats and sat down, dividing up these foods that, to Tong Yan, were fascinating and bizarre.

“This one is really tasty.” Tong Yan was very pleased with her choice. “The one that you chose with the grilled squid is basically a variation of a Shandong *jianbing*[8], and it tastes a little fishy, too.”

Smiling, Gu Pingsheng watched her eat. Some time passed when he suddenly said, “My wish I prayed for earlier was that I would be kept safe and healthy, that I would have the ability to continue taking care of you.”

These words sounded very strange, but they instantly caused Tong Yan to remember what that auntie who was a doctor had said. She did not utter a sound and merely stopped, waiting for him to continue what he was saying.

“During my internship in Peking Union, some unfortunate circumstances occurred. What you can see is that I lost my hearing, but there are many other issues that you cannot see.” He seemed to really like the octopus balls as well, and with a bamboo skewer, he randomly stabbed one and put it in his mouth. “Osteonecrosis of the femoral head. Bone death in the head of the femur caused by lack of blood supply. Advanced stage. Surgery is needed to replace the hip joint with an artificial one.”

Tong Yan gazed at him, still not speaking.

During the winter break, she had already looked up the long-term side effects

of SARS, and she was mentally prepared for any symptom, including this femoral head osteonecrosis he was speaking of now. The use of mega-doses of hormones may have saved a life, but they also brought with them boundless pain and suffering for the second half of that life.

Hip pain, back pain, knee joint pain, buttock pain, and groin pain …

Since he said it was advanced stage, then that meant he must have already experienced these symptoms of the earlier stages. Although artificial joints are a form of treatment, the long-term effectiveness of this surgery is not ideal. More specifically, after the initial replacement, when the implant has experienced ten to twenty years of friction and wear and is starting to loosen, further treatment will be even more difficult.

She did not study medicine, so she could only read some information off of the Internet. But, she was very glad she had learned of these things in advance so that at this time, she could remain so calm.

She believed that Gu Pingsheng was like her, that he did not need anyone's unnecessary worry and only wanted a surrounding that was free of any pressure on him so that he could go resolve the things that he, himself, needed to resolve.

"So next term, I am not changing courses but rather, I'm preparing to take a leave from teaching for one semester." He was munching on that octopus ball, and his voice was somewhat indistinct. "I thought over it for a long time. I should tell you plainly and make all these things clear to you."

After he had said all that was to be said, he seemed unable to find anything to do. With his bamboo skewer, he speared the final octopus ball, but before he could pick it up, Tong Yan had already snatched it from him.

Crinkling her nose, she complained in a displeased tone, "You're already starting to fight for food with me. You be careful that when you're old and can't walk, I won't take you outside to get some sun."

Upon saying this, she, in a very natural motion, popped the little ball into her mouth.

She had long since lost her initial mood for eating, and now, everything seemed somewhat tasteless.

While she was pretending to be smug, he suddenly moved in closer to her. And then, amid the bustling crowd of people, he cupped her head in his hands, lowered his face, and kissed her.

A long, deep kiss. Tong Yan had never thought she would be so bold, that in a busy place where people were coming and going, she would do this with him …

When they had at last pulled apart, she did not even dare look at the reactions of the people around them. Grabbing his hand, she kept her head down, and they wound their way through numerous tables and chairs. Only after they had completely left that place behind did she slow her steps.



“Hey! You’re already starting to fight for food with me! You be careful that when you’re old and can’t walk, I won’t take you outside to get some sun!”

[1] 元宵节 “Yuan Xiao Jie.” The Lantern Festival or Yuan Xiao Festival takes place on the fifteenth day of the first month in the Lunar year, and marks the end of the Spring Festival (a.k.a Chinese New Year’s festival) with the first full moon of the year. Traditionally, lanterns are lit and put up as decoration or carried around during the night.

[2] 元宵. *Yuanxiao* are a “dumpling,” usually sweet, rolled (not wrapped) into a ball form from glutinous rice flour. A filling is first formed into a sphere and then dropped into glutinous rice flour where it is shaken and rocked back and forth until it forms a ball covered in the flour. Fillings include sesame, red bean paste, almond, *etc.* and are a traditional food of the Lantern Festival.



Yuanxiao (image credit)

[3] 小别胜新婚. This more accurately translates as “the reunion after a short parting is better than even a honeymoon,” but carries the same meaning as the English saying, “absence makes the heart grow fonder.”

[4] 静安寺. Jing’an Temple, which literally means “Tranquility and Peace Temple,” is one of the most famous temples in Shanghai and is located in the heart of the bustling core of the city. Some of the buildings date back to the late 1800s and the temple holds the largest jade Buddha statue in China.

[5] The Spring Festival encompasses the first fifteen days of the Lunar New Year. Many people will head to the temples to burn incense and offer their worship, asking for good luck and blessing for the upcoming year.

[6]久光百货. The Jiuguang Department Store’s flagship store is located beside Jing’an Temple and occupies a total of ten floors, hence, it rises up next to the temple (and is an interesting juxtaposition of the modern, commercial Shanghai against the old, traditional Chinese culture). You should be able to spot it in the photographs of Jing’an Temple, above.

[7] 施主 “shi zhu.” The way a monk would refer to any person who has not dedicated his or her life in monkhood. Hence, Gu Pingsheng is being playful when using this to address Tong Yan in this Buddhist temple.

[8]山东煎饼 “Shandong jianbing.” A popular street food. Traditionally, a

whole grain, thin, crepe-like outer layer is used to wrap inside of it leek, various vegetables, meats and sometimes, even various other delicacies such as seafood. There are many spins and variations on this street food nowadays.



Jianbing (image credit)

Additional Comments:

There's so much in this chapter that manages to stir something in me.

We now heard from Gu Pingsheng, himself, why he had once suddenly ended his tutoring with Tong Yan. Reasonable and logical, if you think of it from his viewpoint at the time, but that brief mention of his mother once again shows that her experiences and death have had a deeper impact on Gu Pingsheng than what most would initially perceive.

There are some sweet little moments in this update. (My heart also skipped a beat when Tong Yan said to him, "Really, really missed you" … reminded me of my other favourite couple.) But the one I really loved was Gu Pingsheng's text, "*Even if we save the money for the flight this time around, it's still all going to be yours in the future. Don't worry too much about it."* You read about couples who are serious but take it slowly, enjoy the moment, and don't give themselves pressure by planning the future. You read about couples where the relationship is regarded as one with marriage as the ultimate purpose. But to Gu Pingsheng, marriage is not a "purpose," it's a given for him. If it is still a "purpose," the relationship is serious but the couple is still seeing if they are fit for one another. However, from that statement you can tell that, to him, Tong Yan is already the

one he will spend the rest of his life with, unless she is the one who chooses to back out.

And so, with that degree of seriousness, he needs to be completely frank with her about his health. Though outwardly, he seems to be calm and we also don't get to see his perspective when he reveals his health condition to her, I can imagine that he must have been inwardly anxious. In essence, he is giving her a choice, to know the whole truth before deciding whether she truly wants to be with him. And Tong Yan's response — not to cry, not to comfort, not to smile and pretend to be optimistic, but to trust him that he will take care of everything, to accept that reality, and to look forward to the future with him and include that reality of his health in her dreams. How beautiful. If I were Gu Pingsheng, I would be so overcome with emotion I'd give her a hot kiss in the middle of the street, too!

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

31 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 11.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 11.1

March 2, 2016 by hoju 29 Comments



For one of my posts for another novel, I once wrote to the readers, “Read carefully. Don’t blink.” I think that applies quite aptly to this post as well.

Chapter 11.1 – The Past is No More (1)

After Saturday came to an end, it would be Sunday.

Or in other words, they had a full two days they could be together.

They arrived at Gu Pingsheng’s home. Silently, she calculated out each second, but no matter how it worked out, it still felt as if there was not enough time at all. If he needed to go back for surgery, he would most likely stay in Beijing for a lengthy period of time to recover. She, however, could only remain in Shanghai and would not even have an opportunity to take care of him.

Her thoughts ran chaotically through her mind, and without really thinking, she grabbed the Sichuan peppercorn, star anise, dried orange peel, and dried chile peppers she had already pre-mixed and tossed them into the frying pan.

However, she had forgotten that the oil inside had already been heating for a long time. Furiously, it began splattering from the pan. She hastily retreated two steps and bumped into him.

Gu Pingsheng swiftly brought the lid overtop of the pan and turned on the range hood fan.

“Why has your mind been wandering all this time?” Against the crackling and sizzling noises of frying, he asked her in low tones, “Since coming back from the supermarket, you’ve been lost in thought. Is there something you want to tell me?”

His voice was rather soft, but hints of a seldom-heard sense of uncertainty could be found in it.

Tong Yan turned off the burner, turned around, and gazed at him. “I want to go back to Beijing to take care of you.”

“You still have classes to attend.” He was a little surprised, but quickly, he smiled, “Tong Yan, this surgery is not dangerous, and it is only the recovery period that is relatively long. I will call you the entire time. Twice a day? Or three times? How about four?”

Tong Yan bit down on her lip. Watching as his smile deepened, her sadness only increased. Femoral head osteonecrosis, advanced stage.

In such an ordinary tone, he had stated this. For the first time, she discovered that the manner of putting on a front of strength, in reality, was simply a way of pushing everyone else away from yourself — far away …

“I can temporarily suspend my schooling for this semester and just wait until next year to continue my third year of university.” She moved close to him. “If I do that, it won’t affect my grades in any way, and all that will happen is that I’ll graduate one year later. How about that?”

He did not answer.

Tong Yan wrapped her arms around his neck, and quickly, she took his lower lip between her teeth and began carefully kissing around the contour of his lips, softly and at the same time, persistently.

After a while, she finally let go of him and faced him so that he could see her lips, earnestly asking once again, “Alright?”

“No.” His voice had become serious. “If I had late-stage cancer, I would, without any hesitation, take you straight back to Beijing with me and have you by my side the whole time. But this illness is not that serious.”

Their two bodies were pressed tightly together. She did not know whether it was because they had had a disagreement, but their bodies had gradually risen a little in temperature. And also rising up somewhat uncontrollably were both their heartbeats and the emotions that had unexplainably begun rushing forth from their hearts.

Tong Yan frowned, quietly admonishing, “Don’t curse yourself.”

“Don’t be so superstitious.” Gu Pingsheng enfolded his arms around her. “I studied medicine. Never have those things been taboo to me.”

Her brows were still furrowed tightly, and she spoke no more.

She merely used the ten minutes that followed to do one thing: she wholly devoted all her heart and mind to kissing him. In that kitchen filled with the aroma of spices, she tilted her head back, encircled his neck with her arms, and kissed him while, at the same time, being kissed by him.

“Stop. Don’t continue.”

His voice was slightly uneven. As he kissed her, he seemed to be telling this to himself as well as telling it to her. But, it was only this once, and then he no longer attempted any persuasion.

Tong Yan’s eyes were closed as he lifted her up directly and enfolded her against his chest. Instinctively, her legs wrapped themselves around his waist. In this way, the two of them entangled themselves together, holding and kissing each other continuously, sometimes gently, sometimes heavily, but unwilling to part from one another anymore.

All this time, though she had stayed before in his place, she had never entered his bedroom.

When Gu Pingsheng used his knee to nudge open the door, she managed to evade him for a moment and curiously turn her head to scan this room with her eyes. “Your room is so simple.” After she said this, though, she realized that the room was dark and he could not see what she was saying.

“Do you want to turn on the light?” Gently, he caressed his cheek against hers.

Tong Yan hesitated, then gave a nod.

Lowering her down onto the bed, he turned on the wall light. Here, in this room that had illuminated in an instant, she saw that Gu Pingsheng’s shirt was already half open … And after the fact, now, she began to feel self-conscious and quickly shook her head, saying, “On second thought, let’s keep the lights off.”

He seemed to give a little laugh but did not speak. Pressing the switch again, he cut off the source of light.

On this winter night, even the moonlight outside the window was dusky, but because of his tireless, meticulous, and deep kisses, it seemed to transform, to become delicate and velvety. From the glow of light in the room to all that was stimulating her sense of touch, everything was warm and soft.

In this light, she could see his tattoo, a large, winding design that snaked from his elbow up his arm, but it was not frightful.

He held her body to him, the tip of his nose brushing against hers. Amid the pain that was gradually being left farther and farther behind her, she focused on looking at him. Because the lights were turned off, they could not have any verbal communication between the two of them, but in her gaze that was at times hazy and other times clear, she could sense that never once had his eyes left her.

Afterwards, Tong Yan, dazed from exhaustion, fell asleep in his embrace, and when she awoke again, it was already the middle of the night.

Gu Pingsheng, his arms encircling her, was half-sitting up as he leaned against the head of the bed, and he appeared as if he had not slept the entire time.

Tong Yan shifted slightly. Very quickly, he turned on the light. “You’re awake

now?”

From this angle, he looked very much like that night in their past where he had sat on the floor of the corridor, his hair nearly completely concealing his eyes and his entire being emitting a dense atmosphere of pain that was difficult to disperse. Now, however, his hair was slightly shorter, and a smile which had risen up in his eyes could be seen.

“Are you repenting to God?” Tong Yan asked him in a half-joking tone as she gazed at him.

“I’m not religious.” Hugging her to himself, he kissed her forehead. “I think I told you that from the very beginning, when we went to Mass that time on Christmas Eve.”

Nodding, she pulled herself ever so slightly away from him so he could see her speak. “After next semester, you may not be teaching any more classes, right?”

With a nod, he answered, “Yes, it will depend on how the recovery is going.”

“So that means, from the moment last semester ended, you were already no longer my teacher.” She was very satisfied with his answer.

Gu Pingsheng finally understood that she was referring to his previous statement, that “at the very least, we still need to wait until you are no longer my student” … He could not help laughing. “I wasn’t thinking about that.”

When he finished saying this, he did not continue explaining, and Tong Yan did not ask further. Instead, her eyes flickered away and she said, “I’m hungry.”

It would seem that, in the very beginning, she was originally supposed to cook dinner. They had bought so many ingredients, but those were still just sitting in the kitchen, and the “pot of raw rice” in the bedroom had ended up being “cooked”[1] [metaphor for sexual intimacy] instead.

Gu Pingsheng quickly hopped off the bed, and right there, with his body completely and overtly bare before her eyes, he slid on a pair of jeans and a shirt. “I’ll go buy some food for you and bring it back.”

Before Tong Yan could say anything, he was already striding out of the room.

Only after she heard the front door closing did she retreat back under the

blanket. Her mind was continuously replaying the scenes from earlier on until, in the end, even the blood in her entire body seemed to be burning up. Pulling open the blanket, she blew out a long breath.

Gu Pingsheng soon returned. At three or four o'clock in the morning, only the nearby convenience store had food to buy.

Unfortunately, the only items remaining that were hot and would relieve hunger were various oden foods.



关东煮, the Chinese name for the Japanese food, oden in which a variety of foods are simmered in usually a light, soy-flavoured broth. In China, it can often be found in convenience stores, as shown in the photos, and customers pick their own and mix and match. (Image credits, clockwise from top left: 1, 2, and 3)

"Taste good?"

She nodded, staring down with a very satisfied look at her own cup.

Inside Gu Pingsheng's cup, there were only two or three skewers, while hers was stuffed with five. There was another cup on the bedside table filled also with another five skewers, and they were all for her to eat.

"Why aren't you eating?" She looked at him.

“I’m watching you eat.” With great interest, Gu Pingsheng eyed the one she was holding in her hand. “From the looks of it, yours seems to be tastier.”

“I actually think yours look like they taste better.”

“Which one do you have your eye on?”

Tong Yan pointed at his skewer of shirataki knots. “How come everything you’re eating is vegetarian and everything you bought for me is meat?”

“You’re too slender,” Gu Pingsheng answered offhandedly. “Eating more won’t hurt.”

Looking at his expression, she very quickly understood the meaning behind his words, and she nearly bit her own tongue.

He, on the other hand, had a very innocent look on his face as he took his shirataki knots and held it up to her lips. Tong Yan bit a bundle off before also bringing her skewer of “arctic wings” to his mouth, and tilting his head to the side, Gu Pingsheng took a bite from it.





Left: 魔芋丝, the Chinese name for shirataki knots, which are thin noodles made from the Konnyaku potato and tied into a knot (image credit). Right: 北极翅 “Arctic wings”, so named for their chicken wing like shape, is made from fish meat of some sort with a fried outer layer (image credit)

So in this way, the two of them casually chatted about which ones tasted better until they completely demolished all of the foods.

“All done?” he asked, handing a box of napkins over to her.

Pulling out one, Tong Yan wiped her mouth clean.

“I didn’t get a good look at your tattoo earlier on.” Unable to contain her curiosity, she gave in and tentatively asked him.

“It’s an emblem of a Kenyan tribe.” He removed his button-up shirt to show his upper body to her. “The year I got sick, a few of my university friends went to Kenya as volunteers. At the time, my spirits were a little low, so I decided to go with them.”

As his fingers traced the lines of the emblem, he explained to her, “This part was done by a local tattoo artist there, and then later, I found it rather interesting so under his guidance, I completed the second half of it myself. And also, I did this English name.”

The complete tattoo was finally clearly displayed before her eyes.

She stroked her fingers over it, and after some time, she finally lifted her eyes to look at him. “If you didn’t have such a ‘sunny spring days and white snow[2]’ look, you would actually seem quite like the bad boys in the Hong Kong *Young and Dangerous* films[3] I watched when I was a kid.”

“ ‘Sunny spring days and white snow’?” He did not understand.

Tong Yan could not help giggling. “It means you’re a beauty in a clean sort of way.”

Gu Pingsheng gave an “oh” in reply. Seeing the increasingly teasing expression on her face, he unexpectedly reached out, pulled her in front of him, and kissed her, all the while beginning to remove her clothing that she had just put back on not long ago. The heat in their bodies seemed as if it could not be dissipated, and very quickly, it began to seep from their skin. Simply his kisses alone already caused her mind to cloud over, and the initial fear of pain had long since left without a trace.

An eternity later, he finally released her lips and looked at her — only looked at her.

Her eyes hazy, she gazed back at him. In an instant, too many images all crossed through her mind. That cold night of many years ago. A brilliant, sun-filled classroom. The wordless gaze between them inside a taxicab …

Their very first encounter with each other had been in late autumn in the north. Prior to that, there had been too many situations of helplessness that had been out of their control, and after it, there had been too many instances where fate had been unfair. But still, they had both safely walked the journey of life up to this point.

His eyes were resolute but also tender.

At last, she pulled herself out from her memories and reached up toward him. Holding his face between her hands, she kissed him deeply.

From this moment, the past is no more. All I see is the future you give me.

I believe we deserve happiness.

[1] There is a saying, 生米煮成熟饭, which literally translates to “the raw rice is now cooked.” In a very general sense, it means, “what’s done is done,” similar in meaning to the English saying that something is “water under the bridge.” However, it is most often used to describe a couple who has had sexual intercourse and now, after the fact, “what’s done is done.”

[2] See footnote [2] in chapter 6.2.

[3] 古惑仔. *Young and Dangerous* is a series of films in the mid-1990s about young members in Hong Kong’s triad society.

Additional Comments:

Surprise! Did that come out of left field at you?

The initial surprise we (or at least, I) as readers feel parallels how this truly was not something either of them had anticipated would happen. Gu Pingsheng did not forego his belief that sex should be after marriage, but he was just not able to carry it through. Rather than describe it as “heat of passion,” I would say it was more being overwhelmed by emotion. Notice when Tong Yan was lost in her thoughts and he asked her if she had something to say to him, his tone had a

“seldom-heard sense of uncertainty.” I suspect he thought she might have been having second thoughts about their relationship after he told her about his sickness. Instead, she told him she wanted to put her life’s plans on hold for him, to take care of him. The feelings he got from that statement must have flooded over him intensely. Tong Yan’s heart was dull with heartache for him and all she wanted was to be with him, to care for him, to be … close to him. And so, not out of passion but other emotions that came coursing over them, what they had not expected did end up happening.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

32 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 11.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 11.2

March 5, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



Halfway mark of the story.

So, after the big surprise last update, this one has another surprise for you guys. *silly grin*

Chapter 11.2 – The Past is No More (2)

He had always had the habit of rising early, and he slept only until some time past six o'clock before he woke.

The person beside him was truly exhausted. She lay curled up in a ball, nestled tightly against him, and her long hair splayed across her pillow. Possibly because the room was a little too warm, her face had a slight flush to it.

In this way, he watched her for a long time. Finally, he picked up his mobile phone and sent a message to Pingfan: *I've decided to go back to the U.S. for my surgery. TK*

Very soon, his phone vibrated: *Really? I'll make the arrangements right away.*

He let out a rather helpless chuckle: *I seem to recall that I used to study medicine as well. I should be able to arrange everything myself. TK*

Once his text message was sent out, he turned his head to the side to glance at her. Her face seemed to be turning a deeper and deeper shade of pink.

He pulled her arm out from beneath the quilt and set it on top. After a short while, her breathing began to slow and become even, and her complexion gradually returned to its original colour.

At the same moment, Pingfan's message also popped up on the screen: *If you insist on making your own arrangements, then at the very least, inform me after you have decided on who your surgeon will be. You've already done the surgery once, so this one is going to be more complex and the recovery period will be even longer. You need to be prepared for that.*

He sent a very simple "okay" in response, set down his phone, and put on a shirt.

When Tong Yan awoke, he was not in the room, nor was there any movement or noise coming from outside of it either.

As she leaned over the edge of the bed to reach for her clothing, she discovered they were all neatly laid on top of clean towels he had spread on the hardwood floor. Such a peculiar practice. However, when she picked them up, she realized they were warm and did not have even a hint of the chill that should come after rousing from bed in the winter.

She donned her clothing and slid off the bed, but after taking only two steps, she seemed to think of something. Whipping around, she threw back the covers. The next second, she froze, her face instantly turning completely crimson.

Swiftly, she pulled back the bed sheets and looked down. She wanted to weep, but this was beyond tears. After all, she couldn't change out the whole mattress, right?

In the end, she had no choice but to be selectively blind and only stripped off

the bed sheets.

The washing machine for Gu Pingsheng's home was out on the balcony, and even though the balcony was enclosed, it was still quite a bit colder than being indoors. She was worried that the washing machine would not be able to get the bed sheet completely clean and had soaked more than half of it in cold water. Right as she turned on the faucet, she heard the sound of the living room door being opened. Feeling as if she was would be caught doing something bad, she immediately stuffed the bed sheet into the washing machine and wiped her hands dry on herself.

"It's so cold out. What were you doing out on the balcony?" Slipping off his black jacket, Gu Pingsheng watched as she walked toward him.

Tong Yan hesitated for a long moment but still was unable to form a single word.

How to say it? … How could she possibly say it?

He noticed her fingers were slightly red, and taking them in his hands, he lifted them up before his eyes for a closer look. "You're washing something?"

She nodded.

He fell silent for several seconds. Then, as if suddenly understanding something, he appeared to want to hold back his laughter, but, unable to do so, his chuckles soon slipped from his lips. "You don't need to wash it. Just change it out and put on a new one. I will send it to the dry cleaner tomorrow."

Tong Yan looked at him in shock. "You can't do that." A man taking a bed sheet like that to the dry cleaning shop …

The grin on Gu Pingsheng's face grew more and more evident. Taking her into his arms, he said softly, "It's no big deal."

He used his own hands to warm hers. Tong Yan was just starting to feel the warmth returning to her fingers when she felt a delicate coolness slip down from the tip of one of them. A ring, perfect in size, encircled her ring finger.

A simple band without any unnecessary adornments.

“I am not too familiar with Shanghai and was unable to find one that was most suitable for you.” Gu Pingsheng’s voice was so close and clear as it told her, “I know this isn’t something that should be treated casually, but you’re still in school. This design should be adequate as a standin for now.”

As if she had not heard, she remained there motionless, only staring down at her finger.

Her hands were lightly clasped in his and still showed traces of redness from being chilled by the cold water.

All around, it was quiet. There were no sounds, and even he did not say any more. Finally, she was the one who raised her head and broke this silence. “Gu Pingsheng, are you proposing to me? …”

Tears unexplainably began to roll down her cheeks without any warning.

Without warning, there was a ring. Without warning, there was a marriage proposal. Without warning, everything had happened.

Really, so unromantic. How could there be such an unromantic guy?

“This is merely making up for a ring that should have already been given. I remember I once clearly told you that only in marriage is sex the most intimate expression of love and that any type of sexual act outside of marriage is wrong.” In a half-joking manner, he gazed directly at her. “And so, that means last night, you should have already accepted my marriage proposal, right?”

Tong Yan was crying and smiling simultaneously. She could not respond at all to his words.

“My parents’ relationship was actually a teacher-student romance.” He leaned against the glass door of the balcony and held her in his arms. “I am their illegitimate child, and it was also for this reason that my relationship with my mother was never very good, to the point that, even on the night she passed away, we had gotten in a big argument. And it was also on that night that I met you.

“You seemed very much like me, when I was young. Your views on right and wrong were too strong, and your actions were extreme. I wanted to hit you, to completely wake you out of it, so that a dozen or so years later, you would not

be like me, regretting everything you had done in the past but too late to repair anything.” His palm covered her cheek that he had hit many years ago, gently caressing it. “Then later, when I saw you again, I don’t know why but I just wanted to take care of you, and I ended up forgetting that my position was actually your teacher. I’m sorry, Yan Yan. When I discovered my feelings for you, my first decision was actually to run from them.”

She tilted her head up to look at him. “It’s alright. I forgive you.”

He carried on, “Running away is absolutely not something a man should do.”

Tong Yan finally could take it no longer and gave a little smile. “Are you done talking?”

He smiled as well and did not speak.

Burrowing herself against him, she said, “So, this is considered the conclusion to the one and only time in your life that you will be proposing? You’re just planning on skimping over it like that?”

It seemed she should not ask for any sort of special surprise from him. To be able to turn such a touching scene into a gathering for self-examination and criticism … He was just too adorable.

“There’s also the most important thing.” Gu Pingsheng mused briefly, then told her honestly, “I do not have a completely healthy body.”

Tong Yan shook her head and wanted to say something, but he stopped her.

“But, I will strive my hardest to regain my health.”

From his pocket, he pulled out another ring and held it before her eyes. “So, will you?”

For just an instant, Tong Yan stared blankly at him. And then, with a “pfft,” she let out a giggle.

Taking the ring from him, she very solemnly slid that small, silver band onto his ring finger. Who would prepare two rings for a marriage proposal, and one of them was actually for himself?

Probably only him.

Gu Pingsheng's hands had just the right amount of flesh compared to bone, and they were flawless. She remembered, at the time of their initial reunion, she had once sighed in admiration over how this pair of hands was like the hands of those glamourized surgeons in American television dramas.

Osteonecrosis of the femoral head. Perhaps this was the true reason behind why he had walked away from the operating theatre.

She felt a momentary twinge of sadness in her heart. Her fingers rested for a moment on his ring finger before she lifted her head up and stated solemnly, "In sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, I will always be with you."

Many years ago, when she first saw a wedding scene in a movie, she had felt that there had been such feeling in the words the priest had asked: in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, she would love him, care for him, respect him, accept him, and always be faithful to him, all the days of her life.

At the time, she had been young and did not understand the true meaning behind "in sickness and in health" and "for richer and for poorer." However, possibly as a result of the family environment she had grown up in, the requirements she placed upon the word, "marriage" could practically be described as being overly harsh and severe. Yet, she did not have any negative feelings at all toward this hasty decision now.

Gu Pingsheng took her hand in his. With his fingers, he lifted up her ring finger and lowering his head, he kissed that ring.



"Gu Pingsheng … Are …
are you proposing to

me?”

The daylight outside the window was pale and bleak, but yet, it seemed as if it had nothing at all to do with this room. Because there were classes the following day, she returned to the university that evening.

As before, the taxi stopped near the teaching block in a location far away from the dormitory building. Gu Pingsheng stepped out of the vehicle with her and extended to Tong Yan her suitcase’s handle. She took it from him, and with one hand resting on it, she stretched out her right hand and waved it in front of his eyes.

The wind was strong, and he helped her pull up her hood and secure it on. “When you are in your fourth year of studies and are back in Beijing for your internship, we will go do the registration.”

Tong Yan paused uncomprehendingly. After finally understanding the meaning behind what he was saying, she gave a very faint “mm.” But then, remembering that he would not be able to hear, she had no choice but to open her mouth and say, “Okay.” However, upon mulling this over for a moment, she found it rather peculiar. “Why do we have to do the registration in Beijing?”

“Principle of territorial jurisdiction. Marriage registration must occur in the location in which either the male or female party’s *hukou* is registered [household’s registered permanent residence][1].

“Really?”

“Really.” He admitted very openly, “I just found this out today, as well. I had originally thought that as long as I had my passport, I could bring you to any government agency to register our marriage directly.”

As Tong Yan’s confusion over the procedure was resolved, she, at the same time, gradually comprehended the meaning behind what he had just said. In other words, he had actually planned to quickly and efficiently complete all of the procedures and registration today?

“Are you trying to take advantage of me while my head is not clear and caught in a moment of rashness to get everything done?” She turned her face upward

to gaze at him. “Many people have said that you should never make any decisions when you are in your best or worst mood. In those sorts of circumstances, 98% of the decisions made are wrong.”

“Head is not clear?” He repeated her words.

She beamed, as if she had managed to win a hugely advantageous side of a deal. “Fine, I’ll admit it. I’ve been scheming and had my eye on you for a long time now. It definitely is not because my head is momentarily not clear.”

“When did this start?” His interest truly seemed to be piqued.

“From last semester, the moment you walked into the classroom.” She narrowed her eyes and said, “From when you had obviously noticed me the instant you came into the classroom but still had to wait until I asked you first.”

“I was just very curious, at the time, how the little girl from before had suddenly become so pretty.” Smiling, he tapped her on her forehead. “And, she kept staring at me the whole time, not thinking at all that she should curb herself.”

The glow of the streetlamps permeated out from behind him.

There, face to face with her, he exposed her but, at the same time, he was also subtly admitting to the special attention he had paid her.

[1] 户口 “hu kou.” The *hukou*, or household registration system is a system in China to identify its citizens. A paper document, similar to a passport, contains identifying information as well as stating the location where the household and its members permanently resides.

Additional Comments:

“that … you would not be like me, regretting everything you had done in the past but too late to repair anything.” I honestly shed a tear at this. Who we see now is a mature, warm Gu Pingsheng who seems to still be able to smile warmly

in the face of any of his troubles or adversities. But, that came with such a price. The pain he must have felt must have been so deep and etched a permanent mark on him. Thankfully, he chose to not spiral into the darkness and give up on himself but move forward, making him a better person and an amazing person who is now capable of loving Tong Yan with such strength.

It's brilliant how the author weaves instances of their past, like the mention of his mother or his sickness and need to give up his career as a surgeon or her unhappy family situation and hence the requirements she placed upon the word, "marriage," into such a sweet moment. It yet again reminds us that life is only partly made up of circumstance, which can be sometimes awful, but also partly made up of our choices and mindset. These two truly are trying to treasure the joys they have, and you really root for them to find their happiness.

As for the proposal, unromantic perhaps, but filled with such sincerity and promise. <3 We've probably all heard the vow, "in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer," but for them, it really seems to take on a different meaning, doesn't it? Such a powerful promise from Tong Yan.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
33 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 11.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 11.3

March 9, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



Tong Yan! … Hurry and put away that adoring gaze … Teacher Gu is married …

Back on campus again. Some things have changed, while some things are as before.

Chapter 11.3 – The Past is No More (3)

When she pushed open the door of her dormitory room, Shen Yao coincidentally happened to be heading out the door, but seeing that she had returned, she straightaway grabbed her hand. “You’re finally back …” Before Tong Yan had a chance to reply, Shen Yao could already feel the ring on her finger. Her eyes instantly widened, and she barked, “Tong Yan Wuji, it’s only

been one winter break where we haven't seen each other, and you've already completely got yourself set for the latter half of your life?"

Unable to conceal it, she could only, in low tones, tell her a little bit of her and Gu Pingsheng's story.

Immediately, Shen Yao tried to get the gossip by asking her many questions, all regarding the details on how she and Gu Pingsheng got along with each other. She even threw her arms around Tong Yan's waist and persistently whispered the question of whether she had already did "it" with him …

Outside, someone unexpectedly called Tong Yan's name. Opening the door, she stepped out for a look, and to her surprise, it was Zhou Qingchen.

"What's up?" Through the stainless steel security bars, she gazed puzzledly at President Zhou.

Zhou Qingchen was somewhat hesitant as he handed her an exquisitely wrapped gift box through the bars. "Could you give this to Xiaoru for me?"

She was even more surprised by this, and taking it from, she asked, "Didn't you break up with Xiaoru already? I heard that you and Jingjing are together now."

"Wen Jingjing is a really nice girl. Truly, a really nice girl," Zhou Qingchen replied. "This is just a birthday present for Xiaoru and nothing else." With such an ambiguous answer from him, in the end, she still did not understand. She walked back into the room and shut the patio door.

"Continue with what you were saying." Shen Yao took the gift from her hand and tossed it onto Xiaoru's desk, still exhilarated over the news of her and Gu Pingsheng.

Tong Yan omitted many things, such as their first meeting many years ago as well as many of the things that had occurred in Beijing later on. After being condensed down to such a brief account, their story really did seem to be one of good, old-fashioned love at first sight … When she spoke of the latter parts of their story, because she had left out too much, Shen Yao expressed her solemn protests, and then finally the topic was changed.

"Why is Prez Zhou still giving a gift to Xiaoru?"

“Don’t bother sighing over it. Jingjing knows that Prez Zhou likes Xiaoru, and she is completely willing to accept whatever comes.”

Tong Yan could not help glancing at the gift on Wang Xiaoru’s desk. That night, in the hospital emergency room, Wen Jingjing had said so much to her.

Some of it she had forgotten, some of it she could still clearly remember. What Wen Jingjing had said aloud and even what she had not expressed into words had mostly been about the “unfairness” of life. But did such “unfairness” in a relationship truly not matter?

“She sought it, she got it.” Shen Yao ripped open a package of cucumber-flavoured potato chips in passing as she stated, “Some people only seek after the feelings side of things, for example, me. Some people want to be a person who is exalted above others and don’t care who they step on to get there, for example, Wang Xiaoru. Wen Jingjing needs someone who can completely alter the course of her life. Whom Zhou Qingchen likes is not important. The important thing is, his girlfriend is Jingjing, so that means the person most likely to accompany him in the future when he goes abroad will also be Jingjing.”

Only a winter break had passed. Why did it seem as if everyone had grown up? Tong Yan bit down on the potato chip that Shen Yao was holding up to her lips.

“Of course, you’re the type that Heaven is smiling down on, the type that you don’t even have to ask and you have a beauty falling at your feet.” Shen Yao gave her final summary, then passed the entire bag of potato chips to her. “I forgot. I’m trying to lose weight. You finish it.”

She made a face and began unpacking her luggage.

If Heaven really was smiling down on her, then some of the details were really just too sad and were worthy of woeful sighs. If his past experiences had not been so similar to hers or if he had not experienced that SARS epidemic, perhaps the two of them would never have met. Or perhaps they would have met but would not truly have chosen to be together and disregard even their relationship as teacher and student.

For the second semester of third year-university, besides the one core course

from their faculty, the remaining course load consisted only of any individual courses that people had previously failed and needed to re-take.

On the first morning of the semester, their entire class did not have any lectures to attend. During a routine internal meeting of their class, the class sponsor finally brought up that Gu Pingsheng was taking a long leave this term and would not be teaching the Maritime Law course anymore.

Before he had finished this announcement, the entire classroom was already filled with wails of anguish.

Shen Yao put on an expression of poorly feigned obliviousness, and picking up her pen, she wrote a line in her notebook: *Your man is just too popular. I swear there are definitely people in our class who have a crush on him.*

Tong Yan grabbed her pen as well and, in a half-joking manner, wrote her a reply: *As long as it's not you, I will annihilate anyone else.*

Raising her eyebrows, Shen Yao rapidly wrote back: *The warrior's got the mightiness and fierceness a warrior should have.*

The internal class meeting ultimately turned into a meeting with "Teacher Gu" as the main topic.

The class sponsor was pressured by the class until he could not handle it anymore and finally revealed that Gu Pingsheng was at Administration today to complete the procedures required for leave of absence. Class Prefect immediately was stoked and with simply a few words, he spurred the entire class to go bid their farewells to him …

While Tong Yan was hesitating and trying to figure out how she could avoid going, Shen Yao had already quietly murmured to her that it would be fine and that she would help cover for her. She, however, pointed at the band on Tong Yan's ring finger. "Should you take that off first?"

Tong Yan shook her head, feeling that doing so would be very inauspicious.

"It should be fine if I just keep my hand in my pocket, right?" She demonstrated for her.

Shen Yao pondered for a moment. "That could work, too. After all, nowadays,

couples are giving this kind of thing all the time, and no one really pays attention. Look at our class prefect. Even he's been forced by his girlfriend to wear a ring. There's nothing that stands out about yours. People shouldn't be able to tell."

In the end, due to their classmates' over-eagerness, downstairs of the university's Administration Building, she and Shen Yao could actually only stand outside of the circle formed around him by twenty-odd people and watch him from a distance.

She gazed on as his arm was repeatedly hugged by different people, as he took photographs with groups of twos and threes, and even as someone brought her books and notebooks to him, asking for his autograph.

When the notebook was handed to him, for fear that the pen might slip, he deliberately pulled off one of his black leather gloves to take the pen. Inside the front of the book, he wrote out those few characters in an elegant and bold script. While he was handing the pen back, several of the more sharp-eyed girls suddenly noticed the ring on his hand.

"Teacher Gu, you're married?" one of them could not resist asking nosily. Immediately, all the other people stepped closer, surrounding him and peering.

Shen Yao clutched her arm, an expression of "we're participating in an evil secret together" showing on her face …

Tong Yan felt a strange nervousness in her. Looking at him from this angle, she could see only less than half of one side of his face. Then, she heard him state, "Yes. Married now. It happened over this last winter break."

Another round of howls and weeping rang up.

Everyone began incessantly throwing out inquiries: Who was this *shimu* [teacher-mother]? Was she pretty? Where was she from? … Basically, whatever they could think of, they would ask. The more Tong Yan listened, the more uncomfortable she felt, but the more Shen Yao listened, the more ecstatic she became. Gu Pingsheng, on the other hand, merely smiled and remained silent, sidestepping this topic completely.

At the end, when the class prefect pulled out a camera and called everyone together for a class photograph, Gu Pingsheng finally cast a deliberate glance at her. Shen Yao instantly picked up on his intention. Leading the charge, she towed Tong Yan along and fought their way through to the front of the group where she shoved Tong Yan up to Gu Pingsheng's side.

Shen Yao's push had been a little too forceful, and she nearly fell into Gu Pingsheng's chest. And then, his hands were there, firmly supporting her. Immediately, with an air of utter propriety, she murmured, "Thank you, Teacher Gu."

After saying this, a very weird feeling caused her to freeze self-consciously. Why did it seem like they were acting in some sort of spy drama? …

Gu Pingsheng was evidently much more immersed into his role than she was. Releasing his hold, he very naturally stood in a pure, harmless posture and put his arm around her shoulder. At the same time, Shen Yao was protectively holding onto his other arm, intercepting any girls who had intended on coming near him.

"Hey, I'll say. You two …" Class Prefect was dying with laughter, and holding the camera, he joked, "Just now, you guys were doing quite well pretending to be reserved and ladylike, but when the critical moment comes, you are definitely warriors. Even fighters for democracy aren't as keen as you two … Alright, alright. One, two …"

Tong Yan sensed that he was looking at her and instinctively turned to return his gaze.

"Three!"

In that moment when their eyes locked, the class prefect pressed the shutter.

"Tong Yan Wuji …" Class Prefect's head was lowered as he carefully examined the results, and instantly, tears sprung to his eyes. "Can you please focus? Teacher Gu is married. Please put away your adoring thoughts …"

When the class prefect spoke this, his head had been down, so Gu Pingsheng, of course, did not see what he had said.

All around, from high and low, people started chiming in along with him, much

like the scene during Gu Pingsheng's first in-class quiz. Everyone was helping to stir up a disturbance, but they were also deliberately not allowing him to see what they were saying …

"D*mn!" A voice from a corner muttered quietly, "Tong Wuji, I could tell right from the start that you were up to no good."

"Tong Yan, you're too late already. Definitely too late."

"Pretty Lady's Bane is such a nice catch of a man, but in the end, an outsider's the one who gets this benefit …"

The entire time, Tong Yan did not utter a word, acting as if she did not hear anything.

"Teacher Gu, we will have to trouble you to take another one." Class Prefect had finally raised his head again, and grinning, he looked at Gu Pingsheng, "This time, no matter what little movement or action Tong Yan makes, just ignore her."

Tong Yan could only cry a tearless cry over all these words about her.

"Alright." Gu Pingsheng gladly played along and replied with a smile, "I will pay no attention to her for the time being."

Only two people understood the other meaning behind his sentence.

From behind, Shen Yao gave Tong Yan's waist a fierce pinch, and the connotation in that action was very clear: Hey girlie, the little secret you're hiding under this smokescreen really evokes envy.

Tong Yan's mouth opened in a grimace from this pinch, but under Class Prefect's exasperated glare over her failure yet again to meet his photo expectations, she hastily squeezed out a smile. And so, this photo with him was perfectly taken.

A photo of the Law Faculty's 2008 entering class taken with Gu Pingsheng. And, their second photo taken together.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

34 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 12.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 12.1

March 12, 2016 by hoju 29 Comments



The time has come. Gu Pingsheng is going away for his treatment. Just because they don't express explicitly that they will miss each other, the feelings still run strong.

Chapter 12.1 – Miss You a Little (1)

In Shen Yao's words: Everyone else was just background scenery — background scenery that was completely unaware of what it was and oblivious to the situation.

Tong Yan was entertaining herself as she fixed her eyes on the group photo on the computer screen. "Let's crop just the two of us out and keep the photo as memento." She pointed at the date on the bottom right corner of the photograph. "Today is February 14th… Must you leave tomorrow?"

While saying this, she turned her head to look at him.

"Leaving one day earlier means I will return one day earlier."

The reasoning was right, but this decision was too sudden, and it caused her to

wonder, just how bad had the results of his medical check-up been? And furthermore, he had all of a sudden changed the location of treatment from Beijing to the United States. Even though the treatment results would potentially be better there, this also made her heart even more unsettled.

She subtly, and not-so-subtly, asked him about it the entire afternoon, but he lightly brushed over it, only promising that he would return to her side, completely healthy, in half a year.

Half a year could be considered not a very short period of time.

Perhaps, based on his personality, he truly would wait until he had completely recovered and was no different from any ordinary person before he was willing to show himself.

Gu Pingsheng leaned forward, one hand supporting himself on the edge of the desk and the other on the back of the chair, and looked at the photograph. It was a rare instance today where he was wearing a cotton, checkered-pattern dress shirt in pale pink … This colour on him did not exude even a hint of frivolousness, and in fact, there was a slight sense of … what was it? “Beauty pure and refined as jade[1],” and “bearing like the orchids and trees of jade[2]”?

Smiling, Tong Yan tugged on his collar. “Mr. Gu, did you purposely wear pink today?”

He saw the teasing in her smile, but still, he merely calmly and leisurely lowered his head to gently take her lower lip between his teeth. “It doesn’t look nice?”

“It looks nice,” she murmured in return, her words indistinct.

He did not look to see what she was saying, and instead, reached forward, hooked one arm under her legs and the other around her body, and lifted her completely out of her chair into his embrace. “Mrs. Gu, you’ve been facing the computer an entire night. That is very bad for the eyes and also very unbeneficial towards nurturing the relationship between husband and wife.”

She actually just wanted to edit one photograph of the two of them and print it out tonight to put into his wallet.

He walked toward the bedroom, all the while kissing her deeply. She felt that even the root of her teeth seemed to go weak. Circling her arms around his neck, she kissed him back, their lips coming together then separating briefly again, over and over.

As he neared the door, she was about to stretch out an arm to feel for the light switch when all of a sudden, she felt their whole center of gravity being thrown to one side. While she reflexively threw her arms back around his neck, he had already swiftly set her down on the floor.

She had been lowered too quickly, and her foot ached slightly from being slammed down.

But the next second, she understood what had just happened.

“What’s wrong?” She knew that he could not hear her but still, she anxiously blurted the question.

Leaning against the side of the door, Gu Pingsheng seemed to know that she had received a great scare. Because he did not know what she was saying, he simply patted her on the forehead and comforted, “It’s okay.”

Even her hands had a slight tremble in them, and she felt around for a long time before she found the room’s light switch.

The warm amber glow of the light illuminated all their surroundings.

Besides his action of leaning against the side of the door, there was nothing unusual about him that could be detected visually. However, from that moment earlier on to now, he had not moved in the slightest, which meant there definitely was a big problem.

Tong Yan wanted to reach out to support him, but she did not know how she should do it. She could only stand barefoot beside him, overwhelmed and not knowing what to do, her heart aching so terribly she was near tears. “What is it that’s wrong? Can you just tell me the truth, please?”

It was to the point that she could not even control the volume of her voice or the tremor that could be heard in it.

Fortunately, he could not hear it.

Gu Pingsheng gave a smile, but as he was about to say something, she could contain herself no longer. Tears began to stream down, and large teardrops, one after another, fell to the floor.

Part of the reason was because he had given her a scare, and the other part was because of the fear within her that she could not control. She feared that he truly did have some sort of serious condition or side effect that he had not told her about, and she was also scared that the results this time of the treatment he was going to have would not be very good …

Never before had fear and trepidation surged up so violently in her, and almost instantaneously, it seemed to invade, from inside out, her every inch of awareness.

He had not expected that she would have such a big reaction and reached out an arm, pulling her into his embrace. “I just suddenly felt a little pain right here.” He pointed at his thigh and pelvic region. “It’s much better now.”

“Does it hurt a lot?” Stretching her hand out, she rather hesitantly touched his hip, then followed it down, sliding her hand very gently to his thigh area. She raised her head to ask, “Would it help if I massage it a bit?”

As she said this, she tentatively kneaded the spot a couple of times.

“It helps a lot.” In his eyes, there seemed to be laughter and also, heat.

“It really helps?” Her heart still seemed to be dangling in her throat, and she gazed at him, not quite convinced.

“It really does help a lot.” His voice was rather soft and tender. The reflection of the bedroom’s wall light could be seen in his eyes, and there was an inconcealable sensualness in his smile. “But Mrs. Gu, if you keep massaging like that, Mr. Gu really won’t be able to handle it anymore.”

It was so obvious what he was saying; even a fool could understand that.

Besides, she was not a fool …

For a moment, Tong Yan was both annoyed and amused with him.

Pulling back her hand, she wiped away the tears on her face, but in her heart,

there pervaded a heavy sense of disquiet that she could not shake.

But right now, on this night before he was to leave, she could not allow herself to create a big fuss over a small issue and cause him to have to worry about her.

“I’m tired. Let’s go sleep, how about that?” Gu Pingsheng moved, still wanting to pick her up into his arms again.

“Alright.” Evading his movements, she strode away quickly and hopped into bed. “I’ve gone onto the bed myself. Don’t go trying at all to carry me here or there anymore.”

Although the floors were warm, it was still wintertime. The instant she slid under the quilt, she covered her slightly cool feet with her hands amd watched as he walked over.

It seemed there really was no issue. The expression on his face had not shifted in the slightest, and the way he walked looked normal as well … She focused intently on observing whether, out of worry for her, he was simply forcing himself to pretend nothing was wrong. When Gu Pingsheng slipped off his jeans, she could not help fixing her eyes on the area around his waist and thigh, scrutinizing it carefully.

And then she suddenly realized that … she had been staring at him for a long time already.

“Finished looking?” He sat down on the edge of the bed and was about to lift up the covers.

Unexpectedly, she placed her hand on top of the edge of the quilt to hold it down. “How about you go sleep in the guest room tonight? Your current condition … is not too suitable for sleeping with me …” She put great efforts into carefully wording her explanation, but in the end, this created the opposite effect to what she wanted and brought about laughter from Gu Pingsheng.

“Don’t worry.” He lifted open the down quilt and with one arm, pulled her towards himself so that she was snug against him. In a low voice, he stated, “I’ll be able to handle such a simple task.”

With regard to whether a man can handle the scenario of sharing a bed, this, indeed, is something that should not be questioned directly to his face. Tong Yan used several seconds to criticize and correct herself and then finally lifted her arms and slid them around his waist. Burying her face into his shoulder, she struggled with herself for a long while before finally, with some difficulty, raising her head and looking directly at him to say, “How about I take the lead?”

She at last discovered the only drawback to his deafness.

These words that should have been quietly murmured in an extremely shy voice had needed to be stated while gazing straight into his eyes.

All her facial expressions, mental processes, and evasiveness of her eyes could not at all escape his detection …

Hence, the direct result of this was that Gu Pingsheng completely used action to demonstrate his ability.

The entire night, they tossed about together in the bed. The down quilt had fallen entirely to the floor. On their bodies, layer after layer of sweat would dissipate, only to form once again on their skin. The wafts of air from the central heating seemed to blow directly onto their bodies, feeling like a slightly damp and cool, yet soft caress.

In the end, her arms were so limp she could barely hold onto him, and haphazardly, they rested on his shoulders.

When at last she utterly fell into a deep slumber, she still had not discerned whether the sky outside the window had lightened already.

The following day, she only had two periods of classes, both of which were physics.

She had not expected that, in order to be able to see Gu Pingsheng off, the first time in her entire university career that she skipped class would be dedicated to Zhao Yin.

“When Teacher Zhao does a roll call for this first time and discovers that I’m not there, will I be put directly onto her blacklist? But I guess it’s not big deal

anyway. With you around, I reckon she blacklisted me very early on …" She deliberately jested at the airport customs entrance, trying to cover up her downcast spirits.

Gu Pingsheng did not speak. From his jeans, he pulled out his wallet and took out a photo from inside, handing it to her.

When he gave it to her, it was face down.

She flipped it over. It turned out to be the photograph taken that time when she had been forced to accompany him to climb the Great Wall. In the photograph, her cheeks were rosy and the sheen of sweat could be seen on her forehead, while beside her, he faced into the sunlight with a smile, looking very handsome.

At the time, the two of them had not yet developed a close relationship, so naturally, when they took the photograph, they had been stiff and reserved.

Even though they had been standing so close their bodies were touching, their expressions had been deliberately proper. Now, looking back at it, there was an additional sense of amusement.

What sort of process had brought two people together?

She mulled over this carefully but still was unable to think of any noteworthy event or moment that had occurred. But, they were together now. Baffling, yet it also felt as if this was what it ought to be.

She slipped the photo into her backpack, and then, purposely putting on a pouty manner, she took ahold of his hand. In that instant when their fingers intertwined together, a strong feeling of sadness and not wanting to part from him suddenly swelled upwards. She simply could not at all make herself let go of that hand.

"When you're back in the U.S., will you run into your first girlfriend? Or maybe some of those blonde or brown-haired ex-girlfriends?" As she joked, she forced herself to pull her hand back, but unexpectedly, he tightened his grip on her, not allowing her to escape.

His hold was very strong, but the smile on his face was very relaxed. "Likely not. My schedule is really packed, so packed, in fact, that I can only spend time

in either the hospital or at home.”

“Fine, I’ll believe you for now.” Since she could not break loose of his grasp, she instead applied strength to her hands so that her hold on him was even tighter than his grip on her. “You promised me you would return in half a year, so you must be back in half a year. Otherwise … if you’re late, you won’t be waited for.”

Actually, what she really wanted to say was, it did not need to be perfect; he did not need to seem like he was a completely healthy person before he returned. And he could take his time with any rehabilitative therapy … However, after hesitating for a long while, she still did not end up speaking these words out.

There the two of them stood, hand tightly in hand. All around were people bidding their farewells and many, many words of parting being spoken. But she truly did not know what else she should say and merely tried with all her might to maintain a smile and suppress all her worries into the deepest reaches of her heart.

Only when it was time for him to go into customs did her gaze completely mist over. Right as she was about to steel herself and turn around to leave, Gu Pingsheng suddenly stopped at the customs entrance and looked in her direction.

She thought he wanted to say something.

Merely smiling, he closed his left hand into a fist, brought it up to his lips, and kissed the band that encircled his ring finger. And then, bringing that hand down again, he stepped through the entryway to customs.

[1]美人如玉 “mei ren ru yu.” Originally taken from the poem《夜坐》*Sitting in the Night* by celebrated Qing dynasty poet, 龔自珍 Gong Zizhen. The beauty being described here is the ideal, refined beauty that comes not from outer appearance but the type that comes when all shackles on a person’s talents have been removed and, like in a state of zen, he can at last exude his purest, truest

form of beauty.

[2]芝兰玉树 “zhi lan yu shu.” This is an idiom that literally means “like angelica and orchids, or trees of jade” and is used as a metaphor to describe outstanding young men, so exceptional that this feeling is emitted from their entire bearing.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

35 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 12.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 12.2

March 16, 2016 by hoju 15 Comments



Life goes on, as it always does, but what is it like without him by her side?

Chapter 12.2 – Miss You a Little (2)

When the new semester began, many people also started to systematically plan out their futures.

One afternoon, Shen Yao furtively tugged Tong Yan over in front of her computer and said, “Can you take a look at this email and tell me what you think about the tone? I’m writing it to the old guy from the United Nations, the one from the conference last time. I’m hoping he will write a letter of recommendation for me.”

Pulling over a chair, Tong Yan took a seat and began to seriously read through

her letter.

After reading for a while, Tong Yan told her with furrowed brows, “I think, from a content perspective, it should be pretty good. As for your grammar and sentence structure … you be the judge of that. My English is not nearly as good as yours.”

Shen Yao told her some of her plans, and from the sounds of them, she had put much thought into them, to the point that she had even started calculating out what grade point average she must achieve this term before her applications to certain universities would be accepted.

For law students like them, it was actually very difficult to obtain scholarships at any university that was particularly good because, after all, there was a difference between how universities abroad and Chinese universities viewed law school.

Similar to medical school, law schools in the United States require that students first earn an undergraduate degree before they are eligible to apply to study law. However, in China, it is simply, if you don’t know what to study, then go take law.

“One of my friends who won an award together with me when we were in primary school has already graduated from a music conservatory in Germany.” Shen Yao sighed wistfully, “My dream in the very beginning had actually been to be a pianist, but because of early dating, I wasted my time. Now the other person is already a professional violinist and I’m just still an ordinary undergrad student … So, Tong Yan, I absolutely must become a lawyer.”

Seeing that this was a rare instance where she was being so serious, Tong Yan obliged her by dreaming with her about the future.

When her eyes happened to sweep over the clock on the computer, she abruptly leapt to her feet. “Oh shoot, I’m finished! I have physics this afternoon.”

Grabbing her books and bicycle key, she unlocked her bicycle and dashed away.

Because it was Monday afternoon, there were people everywhere on the campus.

With only another five minutes before class started, everyone was in a hurry, and bicycles were being ridden as if they were in a high-speed race … She sped along on the small pathway between the several dozen dormitory buildings, and right as she turned a corner, she managed to successfully collide head-on into three or four girls who had been riding side-by-side in a row and heading directly toward her.

A peal of shrieks rose up as girls and bicycles all crashed to the ground.

Her teeth clenched in a painful grimace, Tong Yan pulled herself up from the ground. Her physics book had been flung somewhere far away.

This was truly a year of ill luck.

All the while saying sorry, she and the other girls picked up the fallen bicycles. Fortunately, they were all students, so aside from apologizing to one another, no dispute arose between them.

It was only after those people had left that she discovered there was a tear in her down jacket because of the fall. Soft, white feathers could faintly be seen poking out from the royal blue … Although the rip was not large, it still pained her terribly.

This was Gu Pingsheng's Christmas gift to her.

"Tong Yan," someone spoke up, handing her book to her, "you okay?"

Looking up, she saw it was that Class Rep Shen. She had not seen him since the end of her elective course last semester.

"Thanks." She took it from him. "I can't talk right now. I'm going to be late for class."

Upon saying this, she was going to ride away, but Class Rep Shen unexpectedly stretched out an arm and grabbed ahold of the back of her seat. "Can I ask you a question?"

Puzzled, she turned back to look at him.

There was uncertainty in Class Rep Shen's eyes, but hesitantly, he still voiced

his question. “I’ve heard people say that you and your faculty’s Teacher Gu are together now, and that Teacher Gu even resigned because of this?”

Many people walked by beside them, and because the fall she had taken had left her in a bit of a sorry state, where her pants and down jacket both had several rips in them, passersby were constantly turning to glance their way. Those who did not know them even thought that they were a couple who had gotten into a quarrel plus a physical fight …

She took another look at her watch. “I really am late.”

That boy was still as introverted as before and did not have the courage to ask a second time.

Due to this unexpected mishap, by the time she stepped into the classroom, she was already ten minutes late.

She had taken three semesters of Zhao Yin’s class already and knew that this teacher had a practice of taking a roll call right after she walked into class. The attendance check did not contribute to actual grades, but students with poor attendance would absolutely not receive credits for her course.

Once Tong Yan entered the teaching building, she deliberately removed her jacket and hugged it in her arms. In that five hundred-person lecture theatre, the instant she walked through the door, she attracted the attention of everyone.

At that moment, Zhao Yin, with chalk in hand, was writing out notes on the blackboard and did not seem to have noticed her.

She felt a little awkward. Part of this was because she was late, but another part was because of Gu Pingsheng.

Out of the three, four hundred people present, ninety percent of them were university freshmen, and now, they curiously appraised this person who was standing at the doorway.

“Teacher Zhao,” she finally greeted when she saw Zhao Yin set down the chalk.

“You’re late?” Zhao Yin glanced at her, then walked over to the podium to flip through the attendance book. “You did not show up last class either. Tong Yan, if

this semester you still do not pass and have to re-take the course in your fourth year, it will directly impact your internship. Your faculty requires that your internship term is an entire year of full-time work, and no internship employer will give you a half day off, twice a week to come back and attend class."

"I'm sorry, Teacher Zhao. Last week, I had some personal family matters. I won't skip class again."

Zhao Yin opened her book and did not look at her again. "Go find a seat."

A simple little incident. Zhao Yin had not purposely tried to be hard on her and make things difficult, but Tong Yan still felt very uneasy, especially when she thought of what Class Rep Shen had said.

That night when she returned to her dormitory room, she specifically told Shen Yao about this incident. Chomping on her soy-sauced pork chop, Shen Yao asked her in a voice muffled by the food, "Tong Yan, what are you afraid of? So if people talk, are you going to lose anything? If you ask me, I'd say you should learn from Wang Xiaoru and her superstar style. No matter how dreadful your opinions of her may be, she still only does what she pleases in her own way and is just living a better and better life."

The aroma of soy-sauced pork chop had infused their entire dorm room.

Shen Yao munched down her dinner while starting her daily, two hour-long, long-distance lovey-dovey talk time.

Tong Yan opened up the laptop he had left her. It could probably be considered eighty or ninety percent new. He had bought it last semester, when he first arrived in Shanghai. When he left it for her, he had cleared out the hard drive right there in front of her.

The D-drive had already been very clean and simple with nothing but two folders in it. One was comprised of medical-related contents, which he had deleted, and the remaining one contained things related to law, which he left completely for her.

After logging into MSN, she glanced at his name. It was greyed-out.

Sitting cross-legged on her chair, she tucked a blanket over herself, pulled out her physics textbook and notebook, and began doing practice problems while waiting for him.

It was fortunate that he was the only person in her MSN contacts list, and very soon, a short alert sounded and a chat window silently popped up on her desktop: *It seems I'm late.*

Setting her textbook down on her lap, she quickly typed on her keyboard: *It's alright. I used the time to do some studying.*

How was your day today?

So lousy. I fell when riding my bike, I was late for class, and when I was getting lunch and finally got to the front of the line, they didn't have my favourite Kung Pao chicken.

It was true. The general course of events had indeed happened as she had described here, but she had simply omitted some details. For instance, her clothing had torn from the fall, she had heard a voice questioning her actions, and … the class she had been late for was Zhao Yin's university-level physics course.

From the sounds of it, it was pretty tragic. Does Kung Pao chicken really taste that good?

After you've eaten in the school dining hall for a long time, everything will start to seem tasteless, and you can only manage to scrape together a bit of an appetite if you have really spicy dishes like that one.

There really was no specific point to their dialogue. Still, Tong Yan could not keep from smiling. A couple of simple sentences of casual conversation from Gu Pingsheng had completely shattered away her downcast mood of this entire day.

By the time Shen Yao hung up her phone call, it was already nearly nine o'clock. Tong Yan knew that Gu Pingsheng had a very regular routine and would usually sleep by around ten o'clock, so although she really did not want to say goodbye, she still was about to let him go sleep.

They had actually already said good night, but as if steered by a bizarre force, she typed out a row of words: *Want to consider, after your recovery has about reached a certain point, coming back here to slowly work on your rehabilitation?*

On the other end, there was a long period of silence before he at last sent over a reply: *That will depend on how things go.*

Tong Yan had known that he would not agree to it so readily.

But I'll miss you. Won't you … miss me?

Silence persisted.

She stared fixedly at the screen, feeling somewhat apprehensive.

"What's going on?" Noticing the expression on her face, Shen Yao said amusedly, "Is Pretty Lady's Bane having an affair? What's up with the grave face?"

She flicked her eyes over to Shen Yao. "I'm discussing something very serious with him."

"You're pregnant?"

Tong Yan threw her a glare, then paid no more heed to her teasing.

The icon next to his name was still lit, but he did not send over any more replies.

Did he go take a shower? Or did he have to answer a phone call? Or … The scene from that night floated up into Tong Yan's mind, and she was suddenly gripped by a slight sense of fear. Over there in the United States, he should be living alone. If he had been pouring water and suddenly fell … She rapidly typed on her keyboard, and even that light noise seemed to give a strange, unsettled feeling: *Still there?*

Still here. I'm contemplating how to answer your question.

What question?

You asked me whether I would miss you.

So devious.

She felt helpless against his avoidance of giving her a true answer. But, in reality, this response was already a very clear answer: his mind was made up.

Very soon, he sent a file over to her.

Unfortunately, after she accepted the file transfer, because there was a problem with the Internet speed, the speed of the transfer was extremely slow, and she reckoned that it might not even be complete the following morning. Gu Pingsheng seemed to have also discerned this problem, and shutting down the transfer request, he typed a message to her: *It will probably take about ten minutes and then you'll have it in your email.*

Feeling rather curious, Tong Yan inquired further with him what it was.

The answer to your question. Get some sleep now. Good night.

After leaving this one line with her, the icon beside his name went dim.

Tong Yan was somewhat baffled and could only open her inbox and wait for the email to arrive. Approximately ten minutes later, she saw that sure enough, she had mail, and furthermore, it was not one, but ten separate emails.

No wonder he had said that. A file had first been uploaded to each one, and then one after another, they had been sent. It would indeed take that long.

Based on the time the messages were sent, she opened up the first email.

Yan Yan,

In the past, I had a habit where, after every surgery, I would sketch out my thoughts to prolong in my mind the surgery that had just finished. Or sometimes, when I was explaining or trying to communicate with people, I would sketch and talk at the same time so that I could allow people to see, step by step, the surgery and how it had progressed.

Unlike digital cameras, before you bring your pencil to paper to sketch, you need to call up the memory. Just now, when I was scanning, I carefully looked over these papers that were by my hand. The facts prove that Mr. Gu misses Mrs. Gu very much.

—- TK

She clicked open the attachment. It was a sketch that could not be considered very finely and detailedly drawn, depicting a scene inside a classroom. The many people in the drawing who served only as background were simply rough outlines. Only the lone person standing in that scene had been drawn in slightly more detail.

Annotated simply in the bottom right corner was a date — the day he had left.

Additional Comments:

Gu Pingsheng is over in the United States, so 9:00 at night for Tong Yan should be morning time for him. Hmm… I guess Gu Pingsheng's routine includes a mid-morning nap? :p Actually, in the online version, Tong Yan slept on everything for a night and then the next morning, she had her conversation with Shen Yao and the MSN chat with Gu Pingsheng. When the book went to publishing, they changed the discussions to take place at night, Shanghai time (I'm guessing because students usually have class mid-morning and wouldn't be still hanging out in the dorm) but they didn't change the little bit about Gu Pingsheng needing to get his sleep.

I should be an editor. LOL. Instead, I'm just a translator and I'll translate everything that's there, even continuity issues. :p

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
36 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 12.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 12.3

March 19, 2016 by hoju 17 Comments



Every time I read this chapter, I don’t know what to say. Your heart aches for Gu Pingsheng, but there’s always more in this chapter for me. When I was translating, I read up on articles and information on SARS and the victims to ensure an accurate translation, and I ended up shedding many tears for all those real-life victims. My sincerest, deepest respect for the heroes who worked the front lines. This novel was written by Mo Bao Fei Bao to honour doctors, a profession she deeply respects, and it really highlighted for me the risks that they take.

Chapter 12.3 — Miss You a Little (3)

The facial features of that sketched figure were indistinct, but it was still clearly recognizable that it was her.

She was unable to guess which specific day of class this was, whether it was

the very first day when she had confirmed who he was or the time he had called her out to answer what the general concept behind “international commercial arbitration laws” was. This should have been drawn when he was on the airplane, where, as he had said, he had created this sketch by relying on the fragments of his memory.

There was no more text in the bodies of the nine emails that followed.

There was only sketch after sketch.

She was caught up in her thoughts as she stared at them, guessing which particular day and which specific moment each one was. It was as if she was playing a game with him. When he drew these, he needed to call up the scenes from his memory, and as she guessed, she also needed to pore over the past in her mind, carefully trying to discern which moment it was.

At some time, Shen Yao had quietly come up beside her, and immediately she exclaimed, “Whoa! People who’ve studied medicine are just so much better. They all more or less know how to do some sketching. You say, why did I find someone who’s like me and is studying law?”

Tong Yan grinned, “You can make him take sketching as an elective, just like what I did last semester.”

“Hey, why are you smiling so raunchily? Yeah, a man just made a dozen drawings for you, so what?“ Grumpy and amused at the same time, Shen Yao leaned in and carefully studied the drawings for a moment. “Is this the supermarket?”

“Yes.” She tilted her head slightly to the side. She could even remember how, under the persistent persuasion of that elderly woman’s eloquent tongue, he had bought many things.

Gu Pingsheng had not purposely told her when exactly his medical examinations would be after he returned to the United States or when his surgery was arranged to take place. She was not a medical student, and her understanding of all this was essentially no different from any other ordinary person. And since she did not understand, her thoughts automatically gravitated

to the graver consequences.

But for fear that he would learn of her worries, she could not ask him either.

There are some words that, once they have been spread, cannot be stopped anymore.

The teacher who took over the responsibility for Maritime Law had a rigid and dry teaching style and constantly had on a deadpan face. Grumbles and cries of complaints rose up from all the students in the class, and in the conversations during class breaks, some of the people, whom she had not been very close to in the first place, would now always declare how much better it would have been if Teacher Gu had not left. Tong Yan knew these words were deliberately spoken for her ears, but she merely lowered her head and read her books, acting as if she had not heard anything.

Fortunately, there was only this one core course during this semester, and the remaining course load consisted of either courses that individuals needed to re-take or electives. Therefore, there were not too many opportunities for her to run into her classmates. After three or four classes, though, even the people she had good relationships with had started to fall in with the general opinion and begun to chime in with the clamour and discussion.

She had once terribly feared having to face this sort of situation, and when she first began her relationship with him, she had imagined in her mind countless hypothetical situations. However, now that she was actually facing it, she found that it truly was not such a big deal. Compared to the neglect from her parents, the pressures of life, and his medical condition, this really could not be considered much of anything.

So long as it did not affect her from graduating normally, then it was okay.

On the other hand, one time, Shen Yao had been so livid that she had fiercely flung her book and ended up bringing a harsh rebuke from the teacher onto herself.

“If Teacher Gu had not left, they would not be talking to this extent.” After class ended, Shen Yao stuffed her books back into her schoolbag, still burning

with indignation. “Yan Yan, what’s the real scoop? Why did he suddenly give up teaching?”

“There were some things that suddenly came up in his family, so he’s just temporarily not teaching for one semester,” Tong Yan smiled, brushing over the question in this way.

“One semester? We only have one semester left, Tong Yan Wuji.” Shen Yao said with an exaggerated sigh, “Given that he belongs to you, I won’t look at his pretty face, but Teacher Gu’s lectures really are top-notch.”

Tong Yan deliberately raised her brows and put on a smug expression, ending the conversation right there.

Soon, eight weeks of classes had slipped by, and midterms were quickly coming up on them. She had university-level physics and Shen Yao had advanced mathematics, two examinations that were capable of making students who had followed a liberal arts stream feel as if they had had a layer of skin flayed off of them. They both knew that this time, it was their hour of doom, and they began their endless, round-the-clock lifestyle of solving practice problems.

In order to find a room where they could study, they searched floor after floor in the buildings until finally, on the fourth level of the Middle Building, they discovered a classroom that did not have any lectures taking place.

Coincidentally, Zhou Qingchen and Wen Jingjing were also studying in the last row of that room.

Shen Yao wanted to avoid them, but Tong Yan felt that they ought to go over there to at least say hello.

After all, besides Maritime Law, they practically had no courses in common with Jingjing this term, and it had already been a long time since they had last spoken to her.

When she stepped into the classroom, Jingjing was asking Zhou Qingchen in low tones whether he wanted to drink some water. Zhou Qingchen fished out a few coins and handed them to her. “Just go to the vending machine downstairs and buy two cans of cola.”

As Jingjing stood, she noticed Tong Yan and, rather surprised, greeted, “Yan Yan?”

“We can’t find a spot. Would it be alright if we study with you guys?” Tong Yan asked softly.

“No problem.”

After she left, Tong Yan took a seat in the row in front of Zhou Qingchen, and turning around, she said to him, “Jingjing is a very good person.”

“Shen Heng is not bad either.” With much meaning in his words, Zhou Qingchen stated, “I bet you have no idea that, because he wanted to help tutor you in physics, he specifically read through the physics topics that you guys need to study and even very earnestly wrote out lesson plans. But in the end, he couldn’t summon himself up to tell you.”

Tong Yan was taken aback by what she heard.

“Of course, Teacher Gu is also great,” Zhou Qingchen quietly added.

She very quickly understood.

Pulling out her books, Shen Yao muttered sullenly, “See? And here you were saying that Wen Jingjing is good. The root of all the troubles has finally shown itself.”

“She didn’t do it on purpose.” Zhou Qingchen was also very apologetic. “I had wanted to talk to your Teacher Gu about applying to get into Penn, so she said that Tong Yan and Teacher Gu had a pretty good relationship. I didn’t expect that, when I was comforting Shen Heng and offhandedly mentioned a couple of things, that guy would take them seriously. But Tong Yan, even though undergrad students are now allowed to get married, the school is still very much against romantic relationships between teacher and student … It’s a good thing that Teacher Gu knows to stay away to avoid drawing unwanted attention and criticism.”

She did not speak. Some rumours were unintentional by the ones who started them. As long as she got through this semester and entered into her internship term, then everything naturally would turn for the better.

In the end, Jingjing returned with four cans of cola in her hand, and she set two down on the table in front of her and Shen Yao.

They were all being silent, and somewhat apprehensively, she handed a can to Zhou Qingchen. She hesitated for some time but in the end did not dare say anything, merely taking her seat to continue her studying.

“Do you know about SARS?” After studying for a little while, Tong Yan leaned back into her chair and softly asked Zhou Qingchen this question.

“Yes.” As he spoke about this topic that was in his field of study, Zhou Qingchen seemed to be rejuvenated. “A teacher for one of our med courses especially likes to talk about that period of history in medicine because his teacher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences was actually the one who suggested corticosteroid treatment of SARS.”

“Tell me a little about it.” Tong Yan’s heartbeat was somewhat unsteady.

“What do you want to hear about?” He lowered his voice. “If I speak too technically, you wouldn’t understand. In simple terms, it’s a form of pneumonia where you have a high fever and severe dehydration, and it’s transmitted mainly by respiratory droplets. Aren’t you from Beijing? At the time, that was one of the areas hit most severely by the outbreak. You should be quite clear on all this.”

“I am clear on it, yet at the same time, I’m not.” With a book, she blocked her face from view. “I remember watching several television programs on it, and they all said the long term effects of SARS are like an ‘undying cancer.’”

“More or less. At the time, the ordinary patients didn’t understand this. Some doctors who were infected, though, refused this form of treatment, and in the end, they still died. Some who were unconscious were forced to take the treatment, and everyday, it was a dozen or more bottles of hormones dosed into them. Yeah, their lives were saved, but the side-effects are never-ending.” Zhou Qingchen thought for a moment. “To put it simply, pulmonary fibrosis, cerebral infarction, and osteonecrosis of the femoral head are all common problems that may develop. And there’s also complete damage of the immune system, loss of mobility, heart failure, and all sorts of others … So basically, in one sentence: they’re alive, but they’re incurable, yet at the same time, they’re not at the point

of death either. And plus, only a few years have passed. No one knows, further down the road, what kind of other complications and side-effects will arise."

These were all things she already knew.

However, to hear them spoken, one word, one sentence at a time from someone else's lips was still terrifying.

Goosebumps popped up on Shen Yao as she listened to this, and setting down her pencil, she asked, "Loss of the immune system? Isn't that the same as AIDS?"

This comparison was simply too scary, and for a moment, Tong Yan did not know what she should say.

"AIDS is not bad. Really, it honestly is not bad. But SARS truly was devastating to the medical system." Zhou Qingchen sighed incessantly. "Spread through breathing, it was! Back then, so many doctors and nurses succumbed to it. Society nowadays says how disappointing the medical system is, but it has basically forgotten that that year, there was absolutely not a single person on the front lines who retreated. Basically, one batch of medical personnel would fall to the virus and the next group would immediately move in to take its place. They were all angels in white coats. Absolute angels in white coats."

When he said these words, he forgot to control his speaking volume. Many people studying in the rows in front turned their heads to look at them, and Tong Yan hurriedly apologized in a low tone, "Sorry. We'll be more mindful."

Zhou Qingchen said no more. With a "crack," he opened his can of cola and took a large swig, as if he purposely needed to suppress some emotions.

That night when she returned to her dormitory, an indescribable sense of unsettledness plagued her heart.

Since last week, he had basically started staying at the hospital, so it was not possible to arrange fixed times to chat on MSN anymore. In an unspoken understanding between them, they both began to use email as their medium for communication.

When she opened up her inbox, there surprisingly were no new emails.

Staring dazedly at her inbox for a long time, she finally opened up a new window to compose an email.

TK:

You seem to be slacking a lot these last few days.

I'm going to be having my midterms very soon over here. I'm really nervous about this time's results and grades. How are your results? When will you be handing in your test?

Today, I ran into Prez Zhou, that boy who had once forced us to be emcees. Do you still remember him? He's a med student here, so when we were chatting, the topic of that SARS outbreak came up. To be honest, I was a little frightened by what he said. I've actually never told you, but before you told me, I had already known it was because of SARS that you lost your hearing. Who told me? I'll keep that a secret for now.

So, since I told you this secret of mine, shouldn't you be honest and tell me about what happened when you got sick in 2003?

Were you frightened then? Was it really painful?

I've heard Grandmother say, when I was about two or three years old, I got pneumonia, too, and stayed in one of the intensive care rooms in the China-Japan Friendship Hospital. But at the time, I was just too young, so I really don't have any memories of it. Hey, in view of this, there must truly be a fated connection between us. Oh gosh, why is it I'm talking about such a serious sickness, yet I'm still acting like a silly, besotted girl? So scary …

So, I think you need to come back soon.

—- Yan Yan

Shutting down her email, she carried two buckets of hot water back from the boiler room, and in the shower stall of the bathroom, she arbitrarily bathed

herself. When she had blown her hair until it was half-dry and was about to head up onto her bed, she could not resist opening up her email again. To her surprise, she had received an email from him in reply already.

In great haste, she opened up the email. However, there were only three short lines of text.

Yan Yan,

There were too many victims in that calamity.

What I felt then was actually very simple. The whole time, I had actually not been very conscious, so I had not felt very much pain.

In addition, Mrs. Gu, please behave yourself. Mr. Gu will be back soon.

—- TK

Additional Comments:

These two emails. Such intense emotions, such deep-seated memories that are held in them. Yet, they both use a light tone to describe all of it. Makes my heart twinge.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
37 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 13.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 13.1

March 23, 2016 by hoju 12 Comments



“But … it seemed like these sorts of things were coming at her too frequently.” It really seems like life doesn’t want to give them a break right now. Also, we saw the faults of Shen Yao before, but in this chapter, we get to see that she is a good friend.

Chapter 13.1 – While Waiting For You (1)

She read that last line several times, not quite daring to believe it.

Eight weeks had already passed since his departure.

After climbing into her bed, she tossed and turned repeatedly. Although her face was nestled against her pillow, no matter what she did, she could not sleep. So, she decided simply to turn on her beside lamp, and lying in her bed on her stomach, she began to work on her physics practice tests.

Shen Yao was already ready to head to bed, but seeing her suddenly invigorated, she thought that physics had tortured Tong Yan until it had transformed into a compulsive obsession for her. “Don’t scare me, Yan Yan. It’s only midterms right now and you’ve already gone mad?”

Tapping her pencil against her cheek, Tong Yan replied, “I’m guessing I won’t

be able to sleep tonight.”

The person below her bed did not understand what she was saying, and only she, looking at her practice tests, had a wide grin across her face.

Her physics midterm was scheduled for Wednesday, during the evening study time.

Because it was only a midterm examination, the monitoring of it was not very strict. With a stack of examination papers in her arms, Zhao Yin had the students, beginning from the front row, take one and pass the rest back. Tong Yan was sitting in the last row, and listening to the moans and sighs rising up from in front of her in the classroom, she took the last examination paper being handed to her.

Perhaps it was truly because she was re-taking it for the fourth time, or maybe as a result of Zhao Yin and Gu Pingsheng’s tutoring last semester, the problems looked relatively easy to her. She spread open the test paper on her desk and was about to begin answering the problems when her mobile phone suddenly began ringing.

She had been so focused on the exam questions she had forgotten to turn off her phone.

It was an unfamiliar number, and she had a moment of hesitation. The people in the rows ahead had already turned and were looking around, curious as to who would so boldly dare to blatantly turn on a mobile phone during an examination.

“Before the start of an exam, everyone’s mobile phones must be turned off.” Zhao Yin stepped over to her from the podium. “That is an examination rule.”

Tong Yan did not dare delay any longer and powered-off her phone.

“Teacher Zhao, I’m sorry.” She hurriedly explained, “It’s shut off now.”

Zhao Yin picked up her phone, glanced over it, and, after determining that it had indeed been turned off, stated, “Next time, do not violate the rules of the examination room.” Upon saying this, she picked up the phone and brought it up

with her to the podium. “I’ll keep it here with me for now. When class is over, come get it.”

Without saying a word, Tong Yan lowered her head and continued looking over the exam paper.

Problem after problem, Tong Yan worked hard to concentrate on answering each one of them. Still, she could not help thinking of that phone call. Calls from unknown phone numbers such as this one were usually out-of-the-blue telemarketing calls, but for some reason, this particular time, she was getting a bad premonition from it … Unconsciously, she twirled her pen between her fingers, feeling somewhat disconcerted.

It was fortunate that this exam paper truly was not difficult.

When it was nearly time for all papers to be handed in, she at last set her pencil down.

Zhao Yin’s head was down as she flipped through the dozen or so test papers that had already been handed in, and with pen in hand, she was already beginning to mark them there on the spot. As Tong Yan handed her own papers over, she purposely slowed her action and said in a quiet voice, “Teacher Zhao, I’m handing in my test now … May I have my phone back?”

Zhao Yin looked at her for several seconds until finally, she lowered her head again, browsing through her test paper as she answered, “Go ahead, take it.”

Outside the examination room, some students who had just finished the exam were gathered together, comparing their answers. Seeing Tong Yan step out, they kindly asked if she wanted to join in and figure out her own test score. Tong Yan raised her mobile phone and wagged it in a gesture that indicated she was in a rush to make a phone call.

The examination room was in the Upper Building, and at this time of day, the people in the building were all those who had just finished class.

She strode through the crowds of people and followed the stairwell down until she walked up beside a vending machine. At last, somebody on the other end picked up the call.

“Yan Yan?”

It was a voice that did not sound too familiar. It should be someone she knew, but she could not really think of whom it might be.

“It’s me, Auntie Liu. We met before, in your home this last winter break.”

“Auntie Liu?” She finally placed the voice. It was that surgeon who worked at Peking Union Hospital, the person who had told her about the connection between Gu Pingsheng and the SARS outbreak. “Sorry about that. I was in an exam just now.”

“It’s no problem. Actually, it was only because I was unable to reach your parents that I contacted you.” On the other end, Auntie Liu’s voice seemed to echo out in an open space, causing it to sound especially clear and calm. “Do you have any way of contacting your parents?”

“My parents …” Tong Yan had a slight sinking feeling as she answered vaguely, “They’re not very easy to get ahold of. If there’s anything urgent, you can tell me.”

“You’re so far away, over in Shanghai, and there are some things that you shouldn’t be the one who is informed of them. But, Yan Yan, you’re twenty-one now, and it’s better anyway if you have a clear understanding of what is going on in your family.” Auntie Liu’s voice deliberately became gentler. “Last month, your grandmother went for a physical check-up. I have now received the report with a confirmed diagnosis. It’s breast cancer. I have not told your grandmother yet about the news that it is confirmed. Don’t feel too much pressure on yourself. Find your parents and have them come take care of your grandmother. We’ll take this one step at a time. Cancer is not that terrible a disease.”

In an instant, Tong Yan felt as if she had lost all ability to speak.

Auntie Liu continued talking to her, using language that was simple and easy to understand, half of which were words of comfort while the other half were about the arrangements that were to follow.

It just so happened that when she hung up the phone, an evening class in a large lecture hall had just finished.

More than two hundred people walked out, laughing and joking. A few girls strode up next to the vending machine, and talking back and forth with one another, they looked through the glass and selected the drinks they wanted. Tong Yan was standing beside them, watching vacantly as they inserted their coins and a drink fell down in response.

After the loud banging had finished sounding out, one of the girls smiled at her, “We’re good now. You go ahead.”

Tong Yan did not move, nor did she utter a sound.

The stream of people gradually subsided from being a great mass to having less and less people, until finally, there were only a few stragglers remaining.

Leaning against the side of the vending machine, she called her home telephone number. Following what seemed like an endless ringing tone, a familiar voice echoed out from within her phone. “Hello, may I ask who is calling?”

She gripped her mobile phone and addressed the other end. “Grandmother.”

The entire telephone conversation was only three or four minutes. She merely said nonchalantly that she had just finished her midterm examinations and could take advantage of the time during the May Day break[1] to go home.

Grandmother could not conceal her happiness at this, but still, she urged Tong Yan to not waste the money on train fare. Feeling slightly relieved that she was unable to hear anything odd in Grandmother’s words, Tong Yan gave her a vague excuse that she had gotten a scholarship and could afford the cost of the train ticket.

Possibly because the news had come so suddenly, by the time she walked back to her dormitory, she had already calmed down.

Lu Bei’s mother had also had breast cancer in the past and Tong Yan had stayed by his side all that time, so she more or less understood some things.

The first thing was money. Regardless of whether it was for traditional Chinese herbs and medicine or chemotherapy, she first needed money.

That entire process was like a bottomless pit. Tens of thousands of yuan worth

of medication would be consumed within two to three weeks.

And then, there must be someone who could stay and provide care from beginning to end.

Sitting on a chair, she sorted everything out in her mind while staring unseeingly at her computer screen.

Numerous windows, one upon another, were open on her desktop, all containing various types of information: the cost of pre-owned properties in Beijing, all sorts of information on breast cancer, and even many people's journals of their fight against cancer.

When Shen Yao finished her very lengthy, sweet, long-distance telephone call and saw the look on Tong Yan's face, she was somewhat perplexed. "Tong Yan Wuji, what's wrong with you?"

She looked back at Shen Yao. "I need to request to temporarily suspend my schooling or maybe just forsake my grades for this term."

Shen Yao's expression instantly froze. "Yan Yan, you really are pregnant?"

The complicated background of this situation was not something she could clearly describe, so she could only provide a vague explanation.

However, in this moment, no matter how she had mentally prepared herself, she still wanted to discuss it with someone, even if that simply meant pouring out all of her thoughts and ideas at once …

Dropping her head down, she leaned her forehead against the edge of the desk. "Something really serious has happened in my family, and I must go back home. I only have Maritime Law and physics this semester … Do you think I should just directly put in a request to take a leave from my schooling, or something else?"

"Don't scare me." Shen Yao pulled a chair over and sat down close beside her. "Is there anything I can do to help? Is it really that serious? There's only another half a semester and then we'll have no more classes. What kind of situation would need you to go back to Beijing for so long? Your parents can't take care of

it?”

Tong Yan gave an “mm.”

From when she had filled in her own forms stating her preference of schools for high school, she knew that she must increasingly face more and more problems alone …

But … it seemed like these sorts of things were coming at her too frequently.

Without any warning, her eyes entirely blurred over, and tears started to spill continuously from them.

At first, Shen Yao did not notice, and only after she had asked a couple more questions did she realize that Tong Yan’s leg was damp. Pulling her up for a look, she discovered that Tong Yan’s face was already completely covered in moisture and her tears were flowing relentlessly, though no sounds of cries or sobs came from her.

Seeing her like this, Shen Yao was genuinely alarmed now.

Stumblingly, she consoled her for a long time, but it was to no avail and all she could do was continuously hand tissues to her. “Yan Yan, when you’re done having a good cry, tell me what is wrong, okay? We can figure it out together …”

Tong Yan yanked out handful after handful of tissues and her eyes were swollen from being wiped, but gradually, her emotions began to settle down. “What do you think if I request to suspend my schooling?”

This time, Shen Yao did not joke with her and very seriously contemplated the question. “Suspending your schooling is a possibility, but I feel it’s not worth it. You’re not like me. I have four courses this semester, but you only have two left. I mean, if we put it bluntly, there are some courses where many people don’t even attend a single class, and in the end, as long as they pass their exam, they’re fine … Suspending your schooling is too drastic. If you honestly need to go home for half a semester, you might as well just discuss with those two teachers. See if they will release you to leave for half a term but come back at the end to take your final exam.”

Shen Yao’s words were very good counsel.

Tong Yan lowered her head and pondered on this. Perhaps, this truly was a good approach.

She did not speak anymore.

Shen Yao prattled on and on for a while to comfort her, but unable to find the heart of the issue, she also did not dare say much more. Her mind was finally set somewhat at ease when she saw Tong Yan open up her email inbox, and rising to her feet, she stated, “If there’s anything I can help with, you must make sure to let me know. If you’re scared of talking to your two teachers, I’ll go with you.”

Tong Yan answered with an “mm,” and hugging Shen Yao’s waist, she rubbed her face against her friend’s clothing. “Don’t worry. I definitely won’t be shy with you.”

“You don’t worry, either. When Teacher Gu comes back, I will make him pay me back with interest.”

Shen Yao had purposely mentioned Gu Pingsheng to try to cheer her spirits a little. Tong Yan understood her intention, but hearing his name spoken right now only caused her heart to sink even more.

After Shen Yao left to get some hot water and bathe, she at last opened her email inbox and stared vacantly at the “0 New Messages” prompt. Another dozen or so minutes passed before she shut down her email again, found Gu Pingfan’s number in her phone, and dialed it.

The call was answered very quickly, and Pingfan’s voice, which had been deliberately made very quiet, came through. “Yan Yan?”

“Mm-hmm.” Tong Yan stepped out onto the patio, observing the passersby outside as she said, “I’m calling you so late at night … Actually, there really isn’t anything the matter. I haven’t received any emails from him these last two days, so I’m just a little worried.”

Underneath the glow of the streetlamps, there were two couples.

They were not far from each other, but neither pair disturbed the other. Both couples were holding hands, nestled together and whispering in one another’s

ear.

An ordinary night. Ordinary, enviable campus romances.

“Wait a moment.” After Pingfan said this, there was a long, blank period. Tong Yan seemed to hear the sound of a door being closed. “I’m right by his side. He’s doing fine. Do you have email? I’ll secretly send you some photos.”

Following along with what she said , Tong Yan stated her email address to her.

It seemed it was not a convenient time for Gu Pingfan to talk for she gave only a very brief description of his current condition and situation and, in a very gentle voice, instructed that she must relax and not stress. By the time Tong Yan slid open the door and walked from the patio back into her room, there was already a new email in her inbox.

To her surprise, it was a video. Or more precisely, it was a still scene taken in video form.

In a rather dim hospital room, he lay on a bed, sleeping.

From the angle of the person taking the video, a set of white blinds could be seen covering a window, and the brighter slivers of light shining in there cast an especially tranquil atmosphere over the entire picture.

As she gazed upon it, there seemed almost to be the illusion that she, herself, was inside the picture, and she could not help carefully controlling her breathing, for fear that she might wake him.

[1] 五一. Literally translated as “five one.” This is referring to May 1, which is officially known as Labour Day, but is colloquially referred to as “Five One.” May 1 is International Labour Day, which is a nationally recognized holiday in China, where they give an additional couple more days off as holiday.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

38 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 13.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 13.2

March 26, 2016 by hoju 28 Comments



It's still Good Friday for me. Wishing everyone a happy Easter!

I think you guys might have been waiting for this.

Chapter 13.2 – While Waiting For You (2)

The surroundings were very easy to identify. He should be in the hospital. Had he finished his surgery? Or had he just been admitted into the hospital and preparing for surgery? The more she guessed, the more agitated her heart felt. In the end, she could only use Gu Pingfan's words to comfort herself.

Relax and do not stress. Only when she did not allow stress to overtake her could she first take care of everything that was happening here.

The following day, Shen Yao purposely accompanied her to the Physics Building.

Inside Zhao Yin's office, there were many students from the Department of

Physics, so the two of them stood outside and waited for a long while before the office was finally empty of other people.

“Do you need me to go in with you?” Shen Yao asked her softly.

Tong Yan shook her head. “There’s definitely nothing good about this sort of thing. Just wait for me outside.”

From when she knocked on the door and went in to when she stepped out again at the end, only a dozen or so minutes in total had elapsed.

Shen Yao had been pacing back and forth over the same spot as she waited, and when she saw Tong Yan emerge, she hurriedly grabbed her arm and began asking how everything had gone. Tong Yan had not quite recovered herself yet as she answered, “She agreed to it. She said, since I had already taken three semesters of this course and also scored higher than eighty percent on my midterm, I shouldn’t have any real problems with the final exam.”

“Just like that, she agreed?”

“Just like that.”

Shen Yao gawked disbelievingly at her. She nodded in affirmative, confirming the authenticity of this.

Initially, when she stepped through the door, she had not held out much hope. Zhao Yin thought she had come to inquire about her mark and had quickly handed her exam paper to her. Eighty-one percent. That was absolutely a record-breaking moment in history.

Unfortunately, Tong Yan had not felt any sort of excitement at this, and while Zhao Yin was still describing in a warm voice where her mistakes had arisen, she had tentatively explained her purpose for coming.

Zhao Yin had not expected that she would suddenly make this request. To a teacher, such a request was rather unreasonable.

Tong Yan hesitated at first but still told her the real reason behind it.

However, that reason by itself was woefully riddled with flaws. It was an elder two generations removed who had fallen sick with a serious illness. Why would she have to return home? And furthermore, even if she did go back for this,

simply visiting should be adequate; why would she need to stay and provide long-term care while the elder was in the hospital? Most people would ask all those questions in succession, but surprisingly, Zhao Yin had not inquired further.

“TK and I are friends of many years. If there is anything you need help with, feel free to tell me at any time.” Zhao Yin wrote down her mobile phone number and gave it to her. “Before he left, he talked to me. While I do not support romantic relationships between a teacher and a student, as his friend, I still wish happiness upon the two of you.”

With her hands in her pockets, Tong Yan walked out of the Physics Building amid Shen Yao’s string of incredulous sighs.

The first level of Lianhua Supermarket was comprised wholly of stalls selling different snack foods, and Shen Yao deliberately dragged her over there to buy two egg-filled flatbreads[1] to eat as their breakfast. Since it was raining outside, there were a lot less people buying breakfast today, and Tong Yan and Shen Yao stood beside the little stall, eating their food while taking shelter from the rain.



鸡蛋灌饼 Egg-filled flatbread (image credit)

“Yan Yan, does Beijing have egg-filled flatbreads?” Shen Yao suddenly felt sad and sentimental.

“Don’t know. It should, I would think.” She thought for a moment before saying, “I’ve been gone for nearly three years, and every time I go back, it’s not for very long, so I’ve never really paid any attention to that.”

After this semester was over, it was a one-year internship term.

Undoubtedly, she would not be staying here in Shanghai for her internship, which meant that, once she left this time, aside from coming back for final examinations … they really did not have much time together anymore.

"I think you need to thank me." Chomping down on her flatbread, Shen Yao stated in a voice made indistinctive because of the food, "I've decided I will go listen to the physics lectures and take notes for you. Do you know what a hard decision that was for me? Back then, I barely passed, too, with my mark of sixty-something percent. Definitely a nightmare for me."

Tong Yan broke out into amused giggles.

Teachers tended to take more care of their own students from their faculty, and coupled with the help of one of the administrative teachers, she basically also received an exception for Maritime Law and was granted the opportunity to still take the final examination.

When she returned to her dormitory room that afternoon, she began packing her belongings. After everything had been placed into the boxes, the only item remaining was his computer. Worried that it would get bumped and jostled, she planned on putting it into her schoolbag and carrying it with her.

Sitting down in her chair, she, out of habit, opened her email inbox and surprisingly discovered that she had received an email from him.

Right now where he was, it should be very late at night …

Yan Yan:

Yesterday, I went back to Penn and saw my old university. It stirred in me very particular feelings.

After you graduate, I'll bring you here for a look. The University of Pennsylvania is located in the city centre of Philadelphia. Transportation is very convenient, and it's really close to New York and Washington, D.C. How about we make Penn the first stop on our honeymoon trip?

I am doing very well. Everything is well with me.

—-TK

There unexpectedly was a video attached in the email.

Tong Yan clicked on it to open it.

In an unnamed square, he stood, arms folded across his chest, in front of a fountain as he stared at some Gothic architecture not far away. The camera was very shaky, and she surmised that Gu Pingfan had wanted to speak to him so she had jogged over until she was directly in front of him.

When he saw the camera, he realized that Pingfan was recording him and was somewhat taken aback. Then, very slowly, a smile spread across his face.

“TK, hurry and say something to your wife,” a voice offscreen urged him.

Because they were by a fountain, the loud noise of flowing water filled the video.

In the picture on her screen, his hair was slightly longer than before and a smile was on his face. The gushing column of water, the dazzling sunshine — all of these beguiled the heart and mind. As a result of Pingfan’s request, he began to seriously muse for a moment.

And then, he soon bent his arms so that, ever so casually, they formed a heart shape above his head.

Offscreen, Pingfan’s shouts of “Oh my Lady Gaga[2],” were sounding out incessantly. Presumably because she had never before seen Gu Pingsheng do such a thing, Pingfan was nearly going crazy …

Tong Yan sat on her chair as if in a state of shock from the picture she was seeing, and only when the video had come to an end and the screen had turned black did she gradually begin to hear her own heart again. Clear and slow, aching dully. All the feelings of yearning for and missing him these last two months were drawn up out of her by this single action of his.

Inside the video, he was handsome and healthy and possessed all that was beautiful and good.

Perhaps this had been recorded a month ago, perhaps a dozen or so days ago. She did not know, but she did know with certainty that it was not yesterday. She

stared at that video and for the longest time, did not re-watch it until at last, she closed the computer and packed it into her schoolbag.

In those days after returning to Beijing, everything was hectic and urgent, as if she was fighting a war, and moved at a breakneck pace.

First, using all possible reasons and arguments, she managed to completely persuade Grandmother to accept the advised treatment of surgical removal. Then, it was scrambling to sell their home and rent a new place to stay for them. In a single month, she learned nearly all the skills that were required to survive, all those things that were not often learned in a school setting. Fortunately, Grandmother's former student was helping them so she was not too overwhelmed by all those matters regarding the hospital and medical treatment.

Worried that moving would be too much trouble, she had rented an apartment in the building next door to their old home, and all the smaller items, she had moved over herself, one trip at a time. When it was time to move the larger pieces of furniture, she hired a moving company to move everything else all in one go and asked two of her high school classmates to help keep an eye on things.

That afternoon, after everything had been moved but the apartment was still not cleaned up and organized, she hurriedly raced off to the hospital.

When she arrived at the hospital, many of the other patients' family members were also there. Lively conversation could be heard as everyone carried out idle chitchat.

Those who were staying in this section were all oncology patients, and they were exchanging their knowledge and experience about various illnesses they had heard of as well as some they had not heard of.

Apart from returning home to shower and change her clothing, most of Tong Yan's time was spent in the hospital, and hence, she was rather well acquainted with these people. Occasionally, someone would ask her why her parents had not come all this time, and she would only give a vague response.

Eventually, people gradually stopped asking.

Since renting the apartment, she would use the time that she was outside buying dinner to go online at a nearby Internet café.

Shen Yao every time would send her an electronic version of the class notes and would always include a joking sentence or two, saying things like she was not even this diligent when it came to her own classes. Gu Pingsheng, as before, would send her an email every two or three days, but never in any of them would he talk about his medical condition and recovery.

And every time she replied, she would also only write things along the lines of, the weather was getting hotter, her schoolwork was really light and easy, or similar. Privately, though, she kept a diary of everything that had happened over these last several months, and when he returned, she planned to pull it out to show him and say, “Look how strong and positive a person Mrs. Gu is.”

In mid-June, Shen Yao began reminding her that her physics final examination would be taking place in July.

By the time she hung up the phone, the pressure cooker inside the kitchen was already letting out a high-pitched whistle. Dashing back in, she shut off the burner. As she looked out the window at the white poplar tree outside with its wide, leafy branches, she,in an instant, felt as if she had traveled through time.

How had time passed so quickly? In the blink of an eye, it was going to be July.

“Yan Yan?” Grandmother shakily walked into the kitchen. “Do you need to have a nap?”

“No, it’s okay.” She turned around and set the pressure cooker down on the floor, planning on taking the stewed pig trotters out from it. “After I finish preparing these trotters for you to eat, I’m going to go do some practice problems.” Zhao Yin had kindly granted her an exception by giving her the chance to still write the final examination, so even if it was simply out of thankfulness to her, she should make sure she achieved a good grade.

After managing with great difficulty to persuade Grandmother to take an afternoon nap, she returned back to the kitchen and opened the pressure cooker. When the trotters were pulled out, they were so tender the meat was

nearly falling apart. She washed her hands and began to carefully separate the parts of the pig's feet, pulling apart the tendon, meat, and skin and placing them into a small bowl.

She had just finished off one and was about to move her efforts over to the next one when a knock that was neither light nor heavy in its force suddenly sounded at the front door. Worried that it would waken Grandmother, she rubbed her hands hastily on a cloth and jogged over.

While she was pulling open the door, she was thinking that it was likely Auntie Liu and she should ask her about the results from the latest medical examination … But when she saw that person leaning against the side of the door, saw his face that was slightly thinner but still smiling lightly, all of her thoughts completely left her.

And then, she heard him say, "Is it convenient? May I come in?"

Her eyes did not so much as blink as they gazed fixedly at his eyes.

Gu Pingsheng looked her over with a smile, and in a musing voice, he stated, "Mrs. Gu does look prettier when she's wearing a skirt, especially if it's a mini-skirt."

Amid his naughty teasing tone, she finally believed that this sight before her was true.

When she was about to reach her arms forward and slip them around him, she noticed the cane in his right hand, and her heart, which only a moment ago had grown warm, instantly felt cold. "The surgery outcome wasn't good?"

With a little laugh, he handed the cane to her and explained, "There is no elevator here, so it's a little strenuous to walk up. In about a month, I won't need this anymore."

Tong Yan took it from him and set it against the wall.

The hallway was too narrow, so she could not even support him with her hand and could only watched as he walked in by himself.

From simply observing him right now, it seemed that he was recovering very well.

“Where’s Grandmother?” he asked as he stepped into the living room.

“She’s taking an afternoon nap.” Motioning that he should speak quieter, she brought him into the kitchen.

After pulling the kitchen door closed behind her, she immediately turned and threw her arms around his waist. And then, she felt him return her embrace. In this way, they remained in a lengthy stillness, and as she buried her face into his chest, she heard him say, “I arrived in Beijing this morning, and at midday, I signed the home purchase agreement. It will take a few days to tidy it up and organize it and then we will be able to move in.”

She neither moved nor lifted her head to speak.

She only thought, this feeling was so nice, to have someone take care of everything for you.

He said another few things before silence was restored.

That was, until she tilted her face upwards to gaze at him, and he also lowered his head and looked at her. Tenderly, he brushed his lips against the tip of her nose, then allowed them to continue their way down, but he did not deepen his touch, only ever so gently grazing her lips with his own.

His breath, his smell, these things that she had not experienced for such a long time, now, one inch at a time, were dismantling the anxiousness, disquiet, and fear of these last several months …

[1] 鸡蛋灌饼 “ji dan guan bing.” Beaten egg is poured into a tortilla or pita-like flatbread while it is still being pan-fried so that the egg fills the bread itself, almost like a pie filling. When the flatbread with egg inside is cooked through, it is removed from the pan, spread with sauce, and then rolled or folded, usually with lettuce inside.

[2] The English words, “oh my Lady Gaga” became a popular expression in China around 2010/2011 and they are used in place of “oh my God.”

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

39 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 13.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 13.3

March 30, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



Sometimes, the greatest feeling of happiness comes from the ability to do what any other ordinary person does and often takes for granted.

Chapter 13.3 – While Waiting For You (3)

The weather in June had already entered into the early stages of summer. They were both dressed very lightly, and because she was inside the home, she was only wearing a short skirt and baggy short-sleeved shirt. His hand was directly against the skin of her arm, but it did not carry the warmth that it should be expected to have in the summer.

Tong Yan touched the back of his hand, then followed it upwards and tentatively tested the temperature of his arm before looking at him uncertainly. “Are you really cold?” Or was it because of his physical condition?

“No.” Clasping her wrist, he lifted it up and examined her hand. “What’s on

your hand? It's sticky."

"It's pig trotters." She brought a bowl over from the stove. "There have been a lot of tests lately where they're looking for certain indicators and criteria, and there's one in particular that Grandmother was testing very low in. The doctors said she needed to get shots, but with that specific type of needle, every time they inserted it, it was especially painful … The patient who was sharing the hospital room told me that if you eat a pig trotter a day, that particular measure can go back to normal ranges." She pinched a small piece between her fingers and fed it to him. "Afterwards, I found out that it really does work."

Gu Pingsheng chewed it earnestly, as if he was eating an exceptional delicacy.

Her eyes remained on him, not wanting to miss each subtle movement or expression in his eyes.

Was it Heaven watching over them? Grandmother's surgery had been very successful, and there were no signs of the cancer spreading. And now, he had finally returned as well.

"It's been a long time since I last ate your cooking," he said.

Tong Yan pursed her lips. "What would you like to eat? I'll go buy the ingredients this afternoon and come back and make it for you."

Before she had finished speaking, he had stretched out his hand and gently taken her chin in his fingers.

"Yan Yan?" Grandmother's voice was echoing out through the bedroom and kitchen doors, so it was not very distinct.

She gave a cry back in answer, all the while trying to brush his hand away.

Gu Pingsheng did not loosen his hold and only bowed his head, continuing to caress her lips with his, like a child who had just finished eating candy but was insatiable and still greedy for more. Hearing the bedroom door open but unable to break free of his hold, Tong Yan instead brought her face up directly to his and allowed him to take her lips into his own.

A deep kiss that had absolutely no skill or technique involved and was brief, but

thorough.

When they broke apart, she gasped a couple of breaths and then immediately pulled out of his arms.

In the same instant, the kitchen door was pushed open and Grandmother poked her head in to take a glance around. A look of surprise flashed across her face. Tong Yan clenched her hands together, so anxious she did not know what to say.

“Little Gu is here?” A smile arose very slowly on Grandmother’s face. It was a moment like the budding flowers in the warmth of spring, like the warm sunshine that was shining outside the window.

He did not show the slightest discomfiture and greeted Grandmother. When the topic of the duration of the final course of chemotherapy was brought up, he even seemed, in a short period of time, to have already from somewhere gained a clear understanding of the condition of Grandmother’s illness … He must have made a trip to the hospital.

That place where he had once had an internship, fought bravely, and also said his final goodbyes to his mother.

After Grandmother went back into her room, Tong Yan reached out a hand and waved it in front of his eyes.

Gu Pingsheng turned back to her. “What’s the matter?”

“How did you know? Why didn’t you tell me you were coming back? Was it Pingfan who helped you look for the property? What are you going to do with the one in Shanghai? … Will you still be going back to the university?”

“I’ve already asked some old schoolmates to recommend some appropriate schools, and I will likely still continue being a university professor but in Beijing. You will be coming back here next semester for your internship, and your grandmother also needs someone to take care of her, so it will be better if I stay here in this city. The apartment in Shanghai has already been sold. Pingfan was the one who helped me find this apartment in Beijing. It was a one-time payment in full for the other one, so that was perfect and could be used to

purchase the place here in Bejing. Everything went smoothly, and there were no real complications …” As he stood there beside the window, it was uncertain whether it was because he was simply too tired or there were other reasons, but there appeared to be a heavy sense of fatigue in him. “What other questions do you have?”

“There are also the first and second questions …” She reminded him, “How did you know? When did you find out? Why did you suddenly come back without telling me?”

“Last week, Zhao Yin went to the U.S. to attend an academic conference, and she went to visit me.”

Once he gave this one sentence of explanation, she understood.

This place she had rented was a one-bedroom apartment.

Tong Yan could see that he was truly very tired, and therefore told him to go sleep on the couch. Because it was an old-style couch, when he lay down on it, he did not quite fit, but he still soon fell fast asleep.

Tong Yan covered him with a thin blanket and then went to pull out some ingredients from the refrigerator. The fish and meat were placed into the sink to defrost while the remaining items were taken out, picked over carefully, and washed.

Even after all this was finished, he was still sleeping. Propping her chin with her hand, she gazed at him. A face so very close to her that she could even clearly see his eyelashes.

He seemed to want to turn over, and still in a state of slumber, his brows were obviously furrowed into a very uncomfortable expression. While Tong Yan was wavering over whether she should pat him awake, he had already roused.

“Are you feeling pain in your leg? Or in your waist or hip? Or does somewhere else not feel well?” she asked, leaning in close.

Without answering her questions, he sat up from the couch, offhandedly folded the blanket, and motioned for her to sit next to him.

She, however, seemed to suddenly remember something. From a hidden little corner of the kitchen, she dug out a bankbook and handed it to him. “This is the money from selling the apartment and what I’ve been using to pay for Grandmother’s medical expenses. There’s still more than three hundred thousand yuan remaining.”

Taking the bankbook from her, he flipped it open and took a quick glance. “I still have some savings. You don’t have to worry.”

“That’s not what I mean. I want you to help me put the money away. “ She contemplated for a moment and then said in a joking tone, “Put it in your bank account. If it all gets spent, then we have no choice but to rely on you to support the family. If there’s any left over, we’ll consider it as you helping to keep and take care of my grandmother’s retirement money.”

Since Grandmother had fallen sick, her father had only come to visit two or three times.

The time right before the surgery, he had actually been very worried and had truly stayed there for the greater part of the night. When he heard she was going to sell the home, he had been extremely proactive and volunteered his help. At first, she had been quite astonished and was even moved by his actions, thinking, could it be true that love manifests in the hour of need? However, the next time he came, he had begun preparing to allocate where the money from the sale of the apartment would go, based on his own strong ideas.

How much should be invested into the stock market, how much should be put into futures trading, and even how much should be used to play the Welfare Lottery[1]. It was as if money really could grow more money, and nothing would be a problem anymore.

The end result, naturally, was a complete fall out between them. Before her father left, the one sentence he had repeated over and over again was, “I’m going to sue you!”

Fortunately, no matter how she was cursed at, she still tightly guarded this money.

“Would you like me to set-up a joint account?” Gu Pingsheng did not continue pressing her for the reason and handed the bankbook back to her. “We can do it

tomorrow?”

“No,” Tong Yan quickly refused, “just put it all under your name.”

Amused, he ruffled the top of her head lightly. “You’re that unaware of protecting yourself?”

Her only thoughts had been on how to use legal loopholes to preserve the money. The thought had never crossed her mind that she should ever have to protect herself as well in front of him.

Indeed, such an answer certainly did not seem like the proper thought process of someone who studied law. Even Shen Yao, such an easygoing and unconcerned person, had very seriously written up a formal contract when she partnered with her boyfriend to open an online shop, and both parties had signed it. They had even agreed that, should they break-up, the girlfriend or boyfriend of either party would not be allowed to become involved in any of the matters of the shop … For this single contract, two law students were in discussion for three or four days. So incredibly prudent and rational.

“Mr. Gu, have you forgotten? Once we go through the official procedures, even the name beside the beneficiary of your life insurance will be mine.” She wagged her right hand to allow him to see her ring.

Without even being conscious of it, she had worn it for so long already. A very shallow imprint from the ring encircled her finger. When she was washing clothes at the hospital, she had been worried that it would fall into the sink and had taken it off for the very first time. That was the first time she saw the mark on her finger.

At the time, the first thought that entered her mind was, “Oh no, if I wear this all the way until I’m fifty, won’t that mean there’s going to be a very obvious mark left behind?”

And so, halfway through washing clothes, she had been embarrassed by her own idea and had lifted her head to look into the mirror with a silly grin.

The next day, Gu Pingsheng accompanied her to take Grandmother to the hospital.

This was the seventh course of chemotherapy and also the final one.

After the series of checks and examinations last time, Auntie Liu had specially requested the chief physician of the department to carefully look over the results and the CT scan. The conclusion had been that the previous courses of treatment had been quite effective. Auntie Liu had also arranged the timing of this particular stay in the hospital. They had just settled down before Gu Pingsheng ran into people he knew.

Or more accurately, many people whom he knew.

When he went to the nurses' station to look up the examinations that would be occurring the following day, Auntie Liu happened to have just concluded a surgery and hurried over to see Grandmother.

"Yan Yan, I heard just yesterday from the chief physician of the oncology department that Gu Pingsheng specifically contacted him and asked about the specifics of your grandmother's illness." With a smile, Auntie Liu stood beside the bed and said, "His mom used to be an associate chief physician of the cardiac surgery department, and he has many old friends in this place. You definitely will even more so be taken good care of now, and I can set my mind at ease."

She did not know how or what exactly Gu Pingsheng had said since, after all, she had once stated with her own lips that he was her university teacher. Hence, she did not dare speak in much more detail about his matters and only provided a vague response before hastily moving on to another topic.

By the time all the arrangements had been made, Grandmother was already asleep on the hospital bed.

The elderly woman maintained a very healthy schedule and would punctually retire to sleep at 8:30 p.m. However, during the periods of her chemotherapy treatments, she would always be unable to fall asleep for an entire night. Now that she had this opportunity to sleep a little longer, Tong Yan certainly would not wake her, and drawing the curtains closed, she quietly took his hand and left the room with him.

"Let's go out and walk around?" he asked as they stood in the hallway.

"To where?" Tong Yan did not want to spoil his mood, but she still had to tell

him, “I really can’t leave here. I need to stay and keep an eye on things. If you’re tired, how about you go home first and get some sleep?”

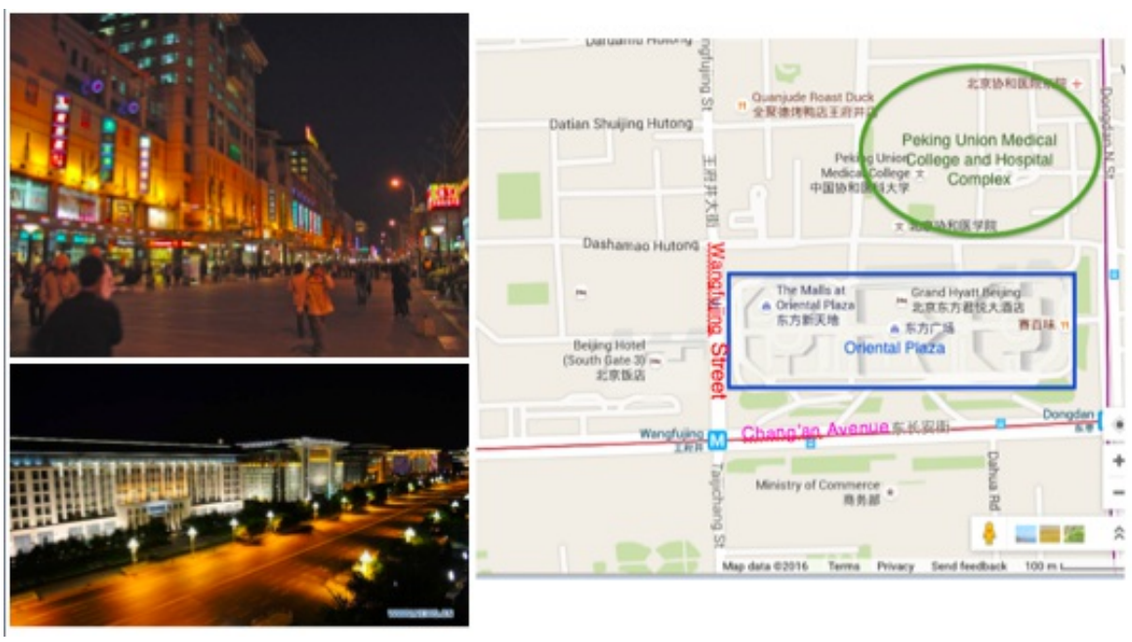
Since yesterday when he returned, she could tell that his body had not yet completely recovered.

“I’m okay,” he answered. “There are nurses here. Come out and take a stroll with me. We’ll be back in half an hour, alright?”

She contemplated for a moment. Grandmother had only just begun her stay in the hospital, so there should not be anything too important or urgent yet.

When they stepped out of the hospital together, the night was beginning to fall and it was the liveliest time of day.

Peking Union Medical College Hospital was very close to Oriental Plaza[2] and Wangfujing Street[3]. His pace was not quick, so she also ambled slowly with him. As the two of them strolled along beside the plaza, there were couples carrying shopping bags, tourists wanting to take photographs of the night view of Chang’an Avenue[4], elderly folks out for a walk, and children riding their skateboards and having fun …



Top left: Wangfujing Street at night (image credit). Bottom left: Night view of Chang’an Avenue (image credit)

Despite often being in this vicinity when she accompanied Grandmother for

her doctor visits and even having stayed in the hospital for a very long period of time, these last several months, she truly had never relaxedly strolled around here as she was doing tonight.

She had thought that Gu Pingsheng was merely taking leisurely walk or perhaps was reminiscing about this place which had once been so familiar to him. In the end, only after she had followed him into the plaza and was led into a women's clothing store did she understand that he wanted to buy her clothes.

Walking up alongside a long clothing rack, he had on a rather serious manner as he selected several items and brought them over for her to try.

Tong Yan's head was swirling from this unexpected act of his as well as the salesgirl's keenness. Soon, she had tried on two outfits, and while the salesgirl left to go greet some other customers, she finally turned her head to ask him, "Why do you suddenly want to buy clothes for me?"

Leaning back into the black couch that was there for customers take a rest, Gu Pingsheng looked at her in the mirror.

She was currently trying on a pale blue dress, and because she had not worn sandals today, on her feet was a pair of wooden clogs provided by the store for customers to use while trying on clothing. It was a couple sizes too big for her and made her look rather clumsy.

Yet, it also created an inexplicably sweet and dear feeling and a sense that everything was real and tangible.

Seeing that he had not answered, Tong Yan thought he was starting to feel pain again, and striding over so she was in front of him, she crouched down and asked in a quiet voice, "What's wrong?"

When Gu Pingsheng saw her anxious expression, he understood that she was worried about him and moreover, it was to the point where "every bush and tree looked like an enemy soldier[5]" [plagued with worry over the littlest thing]. A smile finally spread across his lips. "When I was in the U.S., I realized there were many things I had not yet done, for instance, just like right now, keeping you company while you walk around and shop and watching you try on clothes."

Hearing this, the salesgirl threw a very envious glance in Tong Yan's direction.

These sort of words in a bystander's ear sounded like a young girl had found herself a wealthy husband, and what's more, he was one of those who would get anything she wanted for her and was incredibly loving and doting … But to the person from whom the words had been spoken and the person for whom the words were meant to be heard, they held a completely different meaning.

[1]福利彩票. The China Welfare Lottery is one of the two authorized lotteries in China and is run by the government. It is so named as its monies are a source of funding for social welfare in the country.

[2]东方广场 "Dong Fang Guang Chang." Oriental Plaza is a large commercial complex in the city centre of Beijing and contains luxury hotels, commercial office buildings, luxury apartment buildings, and a large shopping complex called the Malls at Oriental Plaza.

[3] 王府井 "Wang Fu Jing." Wangfujing Street, which dates back to the Yuan Dynasty, is one of the busiest and most famous shopping streets in Beijing with a large variety of shops, modern and old alike, and boutiques, a snack street, *etc.*

[4] 长安街 "Chang'an Jie." Chang'an Avenue is a major east-west thoroughfare through the axis of Beijing and also a historic road, having been built in the Ming Dynasty with the Forbidden Palace. Numerous significant political buildings or historic sites are on the avenue. The night view is popular with tourists with its lights and numerous tall buildings.

[5] 草木皆兵 "cao mu jie bing." Like a soldier to whom every rustling of the grass or tree that appears in sight is imagined to be an enemy soldier, this is describing a person who for which every little thing, real or imaginary, can cause fear and anxiety.

Additional Comments:

LOL. The engineer in me really needed to see everything on a map (down to the scale in the bottom right corner, although I ended up accidentally cutting it off a bit here) and thought maybe there might be some who are just as anal as me. If

not, humour me and pretend and then just ignore it. Tehe.

Some of you might know that I'm a bit obsessed with timelines as well. I need to know where everything fits chronologically in a story.

So, just a few dates to keep in mind: February 15th, Gu Pingsheng left to go to the United States, saying he would return in six months, which would be mid-August. As much as Tong Yan subtly and not-so-subtly tried to persuade him to return earlier, he had always avoided answering, which was his way of saying that he would not return until he was fully recovered. However, we see now that he has come back in mid-June, two months earlier than he had planned, and with a cane in hand.

Clearly, he was not done his rehabilitation when he made the decision to return to China and head straight to Beijing where Tong Yan was. I doubt he was previously refusing to return because of pride or any other reason along those lines but rather, he simply did not want Tong Yan to have to worry about him when he was in such a state and felt he could take it on himself. (Do I agree with him? Not necessarily, but I can see where he is coming from.) But when he learned of her situation, that she was bearing all the burdens of taking care of Grandmother, the other reasons did not matter. Going back to help her, to ease some of that burden was most important. I sometimes wonder what his reaction had been when he found out. We do know, though, that once he did, he began doing whatever he could to help her. In one week, he organized his departure and also had Pingfan begin working on selling his home in Shanghai and getting a property in Beijing. Then, when he arrived, in the span of half a day, he had secured a new home and went to the hospital to understand the condition of Grandmother's illness before heading straight to see her.

What am I trying to say? Hmm… not much, except that I'm touched. He never expressed in words how worried about her he had been and kept a calm, even nonchalant voice with her, like a solid rock that would never falter in the face of anything, one that she could always lean upon. But his actions say it all, don't they?

<u>Completed:</u>

1 of 1 Prologue

40 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 14.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 14.1

April 2, 2016 by hoju 11 Comments



Can you imagine how significant the events, how deep the wounds must have been for a person's personality to do a complete a 360 degree change?

Chapter 14.1 – The Love At the Time (1)

That evening, when they returned to the hospital, another of the patients in the room was already asleep, and for reasons unknown, she had no family or other people staying to take care of her. The family member of the patient nearest the window had pulled the bed curtains shut and was quietly conversing with the patient.

Opening her notebook, Tong Yan began reading over a stack of copied class notes that had been printed out.

In order to express that she had toiled away with great difficulty to take down these notes, Shen Yao had every so often written some words enclosed in parenthesis between the lines of the actual notes. For instance, there was "(The

boy in the desk next to me is looking at me)" or "(Goddess of Nightmares's clothes are so tacky today)", or similar, and from these, Tong Yan was always able to imagine what sort of state Shen Yao was in when she was in class … She read for a little while, then sent a text message to Shen Yao: *Gu Pingsheng is back.*

In less than a minute, Shen Yao called her on the phone.

"He's back? He's really back?!" Shen Yao was clearly more excited than her. "Let me tell you, you need to give him a good schooling. Such a huge thing happened, and he didn't come back until now … But, oh well, forget it. Men always have a lot of excuses. As long as they're acceptable, then it's fine."

Tong Yan was about to die laughing listening to her, and holding her phone, she stepped out of the room.

"Did he gather you into his arms, give you fierce, hard kiss, and say, 'Wifey, it's been hard for you. Thank you."

"…… You could say he did."

Shen Yao laughed gleefully. "You're at home? Or at his home? Or at the hospital?"

"The hospital." She stood in front of the hospital room, watching as two nurses walked by. "It's the final course of chemo. Grandmother will probably be discharged from the hospital in July or so. It'll be perfect timing, and I can go back to take my final exams."

Shen Yao was now alone in the dormitory all day long and had long since been going mad with loneliness, so hearing her say this, she immediately cheered jubilantly and quickly stated, "In any case, he's back now, so make him help you keep watch over Grandmother through the night. It's in times like these that men should come forward and help. You can put 'em to the test."

Tong Yan brushed over this with a couple of vague sentences, and then picking up her notebook, she began to ask about the places in the notes where the handwriting was illegible. Shen Yao was terrible in physics as well, and for most of the notes, she had basically taken them down and then forgotten about them. She did not even know what she had written, but clinging on to face and pride,

she answered with a bunch of nonsense that caused Tong Yan to grow even more confused after listening to her.

Eventually, she decided instead to ask Gu Pingsheng the next day.

When she hung up the call, she happened to hear the conversation of several personnel who were on night shift.

Within the abundant amount of gossip that was being exchanged, she faintly caught the words, “Doctor Gu.” Subconsciously feeling it might have to do with him, she pretended to lower her head and send text messages while she listened carefully to the details of the dialogue. Gradually, though, she discovered that there was something not right, and listening further, she realized that by “Doctor Gu,” they were actually referring to his mother, Gu Tongke.

There were many comments and opinions and all of them were good ones, such as, “Doctor Gu was so nice to people and even nicer to patients, and she took such good care of the graduate students that she mentored. No matter how busy she was, she would still go to cities in other provinces to perform surgeries, too.”

As she mechanically pressed the keyboard on her mobile phone, she imagined what type of person his mother might have been … Based on what he had said in the past, his mother was someone who was always very calm, having even taught him as a child how to gain control of his own emotions.

“I’ve always heard that Associate Chief Physician Gu was very good-natured and stuff. The ones nowadays are too arrogant and look down on people. The other day, I even saw the three associate chiefs of cardiology get in an actual fight.” The young nurse’s lips curled into a sneer. “Two men and one woman having a war of words. What a lively and exciting sight.”

The young nurse’s face was animated as she recounted this.

Tong Yan had heard about enough and was just about to turn around and go back when she heard some dialogue regarding him.

“Actually, Doctor Gu’s son’s temperament was not good. He was always so cold and unfriendly.” A nurse who appeared to be approaching thirty years old

suddenly mentioned him. Though she had not specifically stated any names, Tong Yan could guess that she was referring to him. “But these doctors all have such weird temperaments. He’d actually be considered pretty normal, just that he didn’t really like talking to people.”

Bad temperament. Didn’t like talking to people.

That did seem like the feeling she had gotten the very, very first time she saw him.

“And then afterwards, during the SARS outbreak, he changed a lot. This afternoon when he was here, he was like a completely different person from before.” The nurse gave a sigh and added, “I heard that he saw Doctor Gu commit suicide. It was at home … No wonder his personality has changed so drastically. It had to have had some sort of effect on him …”

While her heart was palpitating from listening to this, from the corner of her eye, she saw Gu Pingsheng walking over from the elevators.

After a brief moment of surprise, she quickly adjusted the expression on her face and turned her head to smile at him, acting as if she had not heard anything.

The resting area for nurses did not have a view of the entire hallway, and as a result, those nurses continued their discussion and did not notice at all that the person who was central to their conversation topic was actually here. Only when he drew near did the nurse who knew Gu Pingsheng suddenly shut her mouth in realization, but then, remembering that he was actually deaf, her expression relaxed again.

Gu Pingsheng glanced in their direction and gave a polite smile.

Those nurses greeted him rather awkwardly, “Doctor Gu? You’re here so late?”

Out of habit, they still addressed him as “doctor.”

“I came to see my wife.” He pointed at Tong Yan. “I was worried she wouldn’t be able to handle everything alone.”

When he spoke, his eyes were on her.

With his words, the nurses followed his gaze toward her. Tong Yan's cheeks reddened slightly. This was the first time she felt that eavesdropping on people's gossip was even more shameful than gossiping about people.

Inside the hospital room, the patient and her family member who had been chatting earlier on were now asleep. Worried that she would disturb the other people, Tong Yan pulled him into the stairwell. The breeze that blew in through the window carried the feeling of a busy city core and blended with the heavy smell of disinfectant from the hallway, causing a person to feel slightly dazed. She raised her arm and glanced at her watch. It was past eleven o'clock already.

Three hours. The two of them had been apart for only three hours, and now he was here again and so late at night, too.

"I'm probably still adjusting to jet lag. I laid down and read for a bit but still could not fall asleep, so I came here to see you."

He explained it in this way, but unfortunately, those eyes of his had already clearly stated the true reason. He missed her.

"I can't sleep either." Echoing in Tong Yan's mind were still those nurses' words, but concerned that he might perceive something, she raised the stack of notes in her hands instead. "Since you can't sleep too, how about doing some physics problems with me?"

As this sentence slipped from her lips, she ended up laughing at herself first. Oh, dear Lord, what kind of lame excuse was that? …

"Sure." He also could not hold back a smile. As he took the notes from her hand, he happened to see Shen Yao's comments that were written in parenthesis. "Shen Yao is truly a rather fun student."

"Don't say the word, 'student.'" She snatched the top sheet of notes back from him. "She is Mrs. Gu's best friend. When you say she's your 'student,' it makes me feel really weird and awkward."

" 'Covering your eyes while stealing a bell[1]' [only deceiving yourself]." After

he had smilingly made his critique, he carried on looking at the other sheets of notes that had been below the previous one. “Go grab a newspaper.”

Tong Yan gave him a puzzled look.

“To spread on the windowsill. It’ll be easier to work and solve problems that way.”

She happily accepted this assigned task.

And so, with an air of earnestness, the two of them truly began to do physics problems in the stairwell. He was very focused and serious as he explained things to her but Tong Yan’s mind would frequently wander, and by some time past three o’clock in the morning, she could no longer keep herself from drifting off. With her elbow propped on the newspaper-covered windowsill, she sleepily closed her eyes. Very soon, she felt a warm touch against her lips, and her eyes flew open.

“Go back in to sleep.” He had already straightened himself back up, and putting the cap on the pen, he said, “It’s almost four o’clock.”

“You’re still not sleepy?” She had no real experience with jet lag, and only now, after seeing that his dark eyes were still bright, did she at last have a bit of a sense of what it was. “No wonder you looked like you were always really tired during the day. And here I was all worried for no reason.”

“It will gradually get better. It’s only because I just got back and haven’t adjusted yet.”

“I’ll keep you company for a little bit longer. Just this night.” Her eyes swept over their quiet surroundings. “How about you tell me a ghost story? I’m really easily scared. Once you’ve finished telling it, I’ll immediately lose all my sleepiness.”

“Ghost story?” Gu Pingsheng was silent for a moment. “I really can’t think of any.”

“You said before that people who studied medicine are the best at telling ghost stories.” She reminded him, “It was during that first time we went to the Upper Building. I told you a ghost story but you weren’t scared at all. Didn’t you tell me at the time that medical schools are the birthplace of ghost stories? That

the classrooms, laundry rooms, shower rooms, washrooms, cafeterias, and even every dormitory room and every bed have a ghost story that can be told about them?”

Gu Pingsheng had a very innocent smile on his face. “I really said that?”

“Of course. If medical schools already have so many ghost stories, then hospitals should definitely have even more.” Tong Yan seemed to suddenly think of something. “Alright, ‘fess up. Did you ever tell ghost stories to female nurses or other girls and then take that chance to get touchy with them?”

“I honestly don’t know how to tell ghost stories.” His smile grew even more innocent. “But I do remember, before, when the students from the medical college came here to pick up the bodies that had been donated for medical study, it was through this stairwell here that they left. Out of respect for the deceased, the people who were moving the cadavers would not carry out any conversation, and so over time, anyone from the hospital who passed through this place would also keep their silence.”

Instantly, her hands and feet turned to ice, and her heart hammered so heavily her chest hurt. So that meant, tonight, they had violated the taboo … The night wind at four o’clock was a little chilly and even more so made the skin crawl. And yet, there he was laughing.

“Really?” She did not dare turn to look out the window. Clinging tightly to his hand, she still felt as if her hairs were standing on end, and she slipped herself in close to his chest.

Too scary. In the middle of the night, simple sentences like those could definitely cause people to make all sorts of mental associations.

“No, it’s fake.” He pulled her into his embrace. “How is that possible? This place is just the oncology department.”

But as a result of his little untruth, Tong Yan truly did not dare stand there anymore. After he had left and she was lying alone on the foldable bed, her imagination was still running wild. Unable to endure this, she pulled out her mobile phone and sent a text to condemn the main culprit of her situation: *Oh*

no, I cannot sleep at all. You have to take full responsibility for this.

She rolled over and sprawled on top of the small pillow, staring blankly at her phone.

Since the hospital was carrying out a trial to implement "zero accompanying persons," the standard of nursing care had actually improved quite significantly. With this, plus Auntie Liu's extra attention to ensure that they were being well taken care of, the entire time, Grandmother had actually had fixed nurses who cared for her as well as nurse's aides to help. In truth, these last few months had not been too exhausting for Tong Yan.

A newspaper, her books, her mobile phone, her laptop computer, and a folding bed were adequate enough for her to be able to get through every night.

During all those nights, she had often worked on practice problems into the middle of the night. Part of the reason was because she knew that Grandmother was in great pain from the chemotherapy and could not sleep, so she used this as a way to keep her company. The other part of the reason, however, was because she was always thinking about him and could not help speculating what he might be doing during the daytime over there.

Yet who would have thought that, though he had now returned safe and sound, she would still be unable to sleep?

He had left the hospital, come back, and left again. Going back and forth in the span of just several hours, on the surface, appeared to be rather overdramatic and did not at all seem to be something he would do. However, it was precisely because it was not like him to do this that she even more so felt that in the 117 days they had been apart, there must have been many, many things that she could not even begin to imagine or comprehend. It was just like the many burdens she had shouldered alone here but did not want him to know about either.

He loved his mother very much. She had sensed this from their very first encounter, when he had sat slumped over brokenly against the wall, as well as later, when he had, partly out of needing a place to redirect his anger, lectured her in a berating voice. Even a very simple power outage had been able to create such anxiousness in him … At the time, he had said, if he had just been a bit

more aware, a bit more attentive and if had truly listened carefully to the sounds coming from her room, his mother would not have left the world so early.

Her mobile phone unexpectedly lit up. Her eyes were unable to adjust to this sudden brightness, and squinting them, she read his text message: *Rest assured. Mr. Gu is someone who takes responsibility for his actions. He'll keep you company until you fall asleep. TK*

[1]掩耳盗铃. This idiom is illustrating that, in a futile attempt to cover up something that is plainly obvious, you are not able to deceive anyone and can only deceive yourself with your actions, like an ostrich burying its head in the sand.

Additional Comments:

One of the main purposes of this particular chapter is to give more insight into Gu Pingsheng's character and how his past affected him. You realize that beneath the surface of that warm, imperturbable man who always seems to have a smile on his face, there is much pain in his past. You may have seen me write this. His maturity and strength came with a very high price.

But actually, did you guys catch the other side of him? The naughty side. LOL. Tong Yan asked him whether he used to tell ghost stories to female nurses to use that as an excuse to "comfort" them. Judging from what the nurses said here, that he used to be cold and distant to people, the answer to Tong Yan's question is probably "no," but that doesn't mean he can't do it now. Naughty Mr. Gu told his wife a scary story so that she immediately snuggled herself up right against him and he had a valid excuse to give her a nice, comforting hug.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
41 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 14.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 14.2

April 6, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



No matter how far he travelled, he still ended up coming back here … back to her.❤

Chapter 14.2 – The Love At the Time (2)

In the end, the person who was adjusting to jet lag thoroughly outlasted the person who was overly excited.

Over the following dozen or so days of chemotherapy treatments, during the daytime, he would be there, and then at night, he would keep her company using this same way. His excuse was always that he was still jet-lagged. Eventually, not wanting him to exhaust himself, she would tell him the entire time that she was going to sleep, that she honestly needed to sleep. Only after repeating this many times would she finally be able to end their lengthy exchange of text messages.

By the time Grandmother was discharged from the hospital, both of them had noticeably lost quite a bit of weight.

Upon seeing this, Grandmother's eyes reddened from heartache. The way she treated him was even obviously better than her own granddaughter.

"This grandson-in-law of mine is truly quite wonderful." Grandmother repeated this over and over again to Auntie Liu. "Truly wonderful."

Auntie Liu was very clear about Gu Pingsheng's health situation but never did she reveal any of it to Grandmother. Privately to Tong Yan, however, she had said many things. The general themes were that life was not easy for anyone, and that for calamities created by Heaven or man, she should accept them and then look to the best.

In a half-serious tone, Tong Yan had answered, "Auntie Liu, my biggest strength is that I am good at looking to the best."

When all the things at the hospital finally came to an end, he had also settled on which school he would be teaching at.

It turned out to be the one she had frequently gone to play at and hang out in when she was growing up.

With an inner sense of pride and self-satisfaction, she insisted on taking him to walk through the campus.

These two people, who at the moment neither needed to go to class nor work, went one weekday after lunch to that university. Prior to heading there, Tong Yan selected for him an outfit that was very student-like in style, including a white, short-sleeved shirt to deliberately expose his very intimidating tattoo.

The effect was very apparent. All along the way, regardless of whether it was from male or female students, the rate of head turns they received was astonishing.

When they were sitting in the stands of the university stadium, watching the two teams of students in the sun kicking the ball on the field below, he finally heaved a meaningful sigh. "Never have I regretted like I have today being young and rash at the time and adding this drawing onto my body."

Tong Yan was wearing the dress he bought for her. In the sunlight, its light blue

colour offset the paleness of her complexion that was a result of this long period of, night after night, staying up into the late hours.

“Do you ever feel like you really look like a student?” Tong Yan leaned back against a railing, gazing at Gu Pingsheng, who was sitting on the concrete steps. “Actually, when you think about it, you really are a student. You haven’t worked out in the real world for more than a year, so the vast majority of your time was still spent in school. The only difference between us is that I’m in my undergrad while you’re a PhD, that’s all.”

“And so?” He leaned back on one elbow and smilingly looked at her. “What are you trying to say?”

“No real special meaning.” She turned her head to the side. “It was just an offhanded thought, so I said it out just as offhandedly. But I suddenly thought, don’t we seem particularly like one of those couples on a school campus? We don’t seem at all … like we’re already …”

Wait. That wasn’t right either. They actually weren’t really married yet …

He stretched out his hand to her. “Come here. Sit next to me.”

Tong Yan walked over and sat down snug against him.

“What should a married couple be like?”

Tong Yan mulled over this briefly. “You eat together, take walks together, calculate out the cost of living for the elderly folks and children in the family, calculate out the cost of all the daily necessities.” Those were what came to mind initially, but when she seriously pondered further over this, she truly did not have a real concept of what it should be like. “I don’t know. I don’t have any experience with that …”

“I don’t have any experience either.” Gu Pingsheng watched her amusedly. “But you seem to have forgotten something.”

“What?”

“Eat together, take walks together. If you continue along with that train of thought”—he gazed at her with a musing look—“do you also need to ‘sleep together’?”

……

“Gu Pingsheng, you’re behaving inappropriately for your older age!”

“Strictly speaking, I have not even reached the age of thirty.” Gu Pingsheng continued correcting her words, “I’m not considered too old yet. And plus, I did not only spend my time on a campus of some sort. Since high school, my vacation time was used to do volunteer work. When I went to university, in my first year, it was the school’s volunteer project and I went to Ghana. At the time, I was around your age and taught children, who were around ten years old or so, math and English and even had to step in to teach religion and French.”

Tong Yan was absorbed with interest as she listened to him, and looking at him intently, she asked, “You can speak French?”

“No. Back then, I honestly did not know how to, and now I seem to have forgotten it all as well.” Gu Pingsheng finally admitted to another weakness. “The education standards in Ghana aren’t high, so at the time, I basically taught myself from scratch and then went to go teach a class … But now that I think about it, that was in a school setting, too.”

Tong Yan interrupted him, “Do you feel like we’ve always been in completely different worlds from each other? It seems like our lives have never intersected in any way.”

“Mrs. Gu, are you being overly humble?” Gu Pingsheng laughed, carefully examining her features and then placing his hands beside her face to measure off a size. “When you were thirteen years old, your face was only this big …”

He stopped for a moment, searching around on the step behind him and picking up a small stone.

Then, under her puzzled gaze, he drew on the ground a rough sketch of a world map. Tapping the location where Beijing was on the map, he told her, “When you were thirteen, we bumped into each other here. Then,” he continued, all the while drawing circles around place after place on the map until there were so many it could make people jealous, “I went to these places. But in the end, I saw you again, here.”

He circled back to where China was located and wrote, “Shanghai.”



“And now, we’ve returned once again to the starting place.”

Gu Pingsheng tossed away the stone. “Did you realize that, no matter how far the roads I’ve traveled have taken me, I still ended up coming back?”

As he spoke, he brought his face very close to hers so that she could even smell the scent of his breath.

Their noses touched, tip to tip. She lightly exhaled a breath. “Dearest Teacher Gu, you are going to be teaching here in the future. You need to make sure you exercise a bit of restraint.”

With a slight smile, he told her, “Sometimes, when a man says some touching words, his intent is actually very clear. He did it because he wants a little reward.”

Tong Yan was thoroughly tickled by this and laughed, “I’ll sing a song for you then, as your reward.”

It was *Sailing*, a song sung by a British rock singer. She had learned it a long time ago but had never before seriously reflected upon the lyrics until one night, two months ago, she had been arbitrarily humming this tune and suddenly thought of him.



“I am sailing, I am sailing,
Home again, ‘cross the sea.

……

Can you hear me, can you hear me …”

As Gu Pingsheng gazed at her, he seemed to understand the meaning behind what she was singing.

Eventually, she could not contain herself any longer, and looking at him, she griped, “You should at least show some sort of indication that you were touched by this, you know?”

He gave an “mm” and replied, “I need to go home and have a good think, a serious think about how I should express that I was touched.”

Tong Yan heard the implied meaning in those words. Even though, from the first day of his return, he had pulled out the property deed and used the two names written side-by-side on it as proof that he would indeed formally marry her, she was still a student, and there were some things that they simply could not blatantly do. Hence, all this time since Grandmother’s discharge from the hospital, they had been sleeping in separate bedrooms …



he way, they bought some groceries for dinner that night, and when ed at home, it was not even 3:30 p.m.

ced all of the items into the refrigerator before quietly pushing open to Grandmother’s bedroom, where she saw Grandmother leaning back er and, with her glasses on, reading a book.

back,” she interrupted Grandmother’s reading with a smile. “We’ll d sauce’ noodles[1] for dinner tonight, how about that? I’ve bought all dients, and I’ll start making it at 5:30. We’ll have dinner at 6:00?”

nother pulled off her reading glasses and smilingly nodded. “You’re ng fun outside? Go have a nap or maybe watch some TV or something. need to worry about me.” With that, she quickly slipped her glasses nd carried on with reading her book.

Shutting the door, Tong Yan wanted to head into her own bedroom to change, but her hand had only just touched the door lever before he had already come up behind her and enclosed her in his embrace. Tong Yan turned her head back to him, and sticking out her tongue impishly, she silently mouthed, “Let me go change first.”

He gave a slight smile and then, with one hand on her bedroom door, he brought his face down and covered her lips with his own. The tip of his tongue felt cold. He should have just finished drinking some chilled purified water. Her hands slid from his waist to his back, and as she rested herself against the wall, she was constantly trying in nervousness to evade his actions. Finally, unable to escape him, she grabbed ahold of two of his fingers and wagged them. “Mr. Gu, ‘bai zhou xuan yin’ [engaging in lascivious acts in broad daylight][2] is strictly prohibited, eh.”

Gu Pingsheng seemed not to understand. Pushing down the door lever, he entered her bedroom.

“What is ‘bai zhou xuan yin’?”

Tong Yan, therefore, had no choice but to describe how each of the four characters was written and explain what the meaning was when they were strung together. In the end, she deliberately nuzzled her cheek against his chin, and lifting her head, she summed up, “Anyway, it means that doing naughty things during the daytime is very, very bad.”

He laughed, his dimple clearly visible.

“It would seem that Mr. Gu has been adjusting to jet lag all this time and is still unable to differentiate whether it is nighttime or daytime right now …”

After speaking these words that carried such a justified and righteous air, he lowered his head and began brushing kisses over her lips and cheek, all the while steadily advancing his steps forward. Tong Yan followed his pace, stepping backwards again and again.

[1]炸酱面 “zha jiang mian.” Zhajiang noodles, or literally “fried sauce” noodles are a dish of wheat-based noodles and minced pork mixed with a brown sauce.

The sauce is bean-based, and for the traditional Beijing version, it is made from a fermented yellow soybean, but depending on location, this can vary.



Fried sauce noodles
(Image credit)

[2]白昼宣淫 “bai zhou xuan yin.” This saying means “to engage in sexual acts under the full light of day,” but the language used is rather literary and less like everyday speech. Therefore, as someone who grew up overseas, Gu Pingsheng was not familiar with the saying and Tong Yan needed to explain it, and since he could not hear, he could only repeat the words based on the shape of Tong Yan’s lips when she had spoken them.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
42 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 14.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 14.3

April 9, 2016 by hoju 9 Comments

 So sweet. It's unfortunate that the day had to end in disappointment for Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng.

Chapter 14.3 – The Love At the Time (3)

The next morning, she woke up relatively late. While she was looking at the mirror and brushing her teeth, she heard Grandmother and Gu Pingsheng conversing in the living room. The soundproofing in this home was very good, and despite pricking up her ears for a long time and trying to listen, she still could not catch the essence of the conversation. When she stepped out, she saw him on the balcony, his arms propped against the railing as he gazed at the scenery outside.

He had donned a soft, exquisite-looking white dress shirt and a pair of chinos, and his sleeves were rolled up. Walking over to him, she patted him on the back, and as he turned around, she discovered that he was actually wearing a tie as well … It was seldom that he dressed so formally.

Narrowing her eyes, she made a show of admiring this look of his.

“You’re going to the school today?”

“Going to get married,” he stated.

“Huh?” Tong Yan stared uncomprehendingly for a moment. “Married?”

“Today is a business day, and moreover,” he said in a low voice as he loosened his tie slightly, “your grandmother has agreed to it.”

With an “oh” in response, Tong Yan looked first at his eyes, then allowed her gaze to travel its way down until she saw the ring on his finger. Her mind inexplicably went blank for some time. Then all of a sudden, she gave a cry of “I’m going to take a shower!” and hurriedly dashed back into the bathroom.

This was a perfectly proper matter, but it threw her into disarray for the entire morning. Simply selecting her clothing alone took a full hour as she tried on different outfits. Her bedroom did not have a large enough mirror, so she could only haul a huge pile of clothes into the bathroom to try on. However, dissatisfied with all of them, she brought them back out and continued on to carry another batch into the bathroom. At last, even Gu Pingsheng found her actions funny. Pushing open the door, he stepped in and assigned to her a light pink dress to wear.

She also thought it was good, so she slipped it on.

But when they were sitting in the taxi, Tong Yan looked down at the dress she was wearing and suddenly felt it was unsuitable. “Is it too pinky and immature? Not formal and dignified enough?”

Gu Pingsheng looked her over carefully. “No, it’s very nice. Mrs. Gu looks very pretty.”

She smiled, then after a while, felt something was peculiar. “How come you’re not nervous?”

“I am. I’m nervous, too.” With a very attractive smile, he quickly added, “It’s true.”

Tong Yan gave a lopsided smirk in an expression that showed she did not believe him.

Gu Pingsheng placed his hand forward and motioned to her to give her hand to

him. Although Tong Yan did not understand, she still did as he instructed and set her hand on his palm. And then, she could feel that there was actually a slight dampness to that hand that was holding hers.

"Do you believe me now?" His voice was solemn and his manner was serious.

She nodded, not pulling her hand back and merely turning her head away instead to face the window with a ceaseless smile.

In her past twenty years of awareness, Tong Yan had never believed that a person could smile for such a long time. How good did a person's mood have to be to smile like a starry-eyed girl who did not care at all about her image? But when she stood in front of the door to the Marriage Registration Centre of the Civil Affairs Bureau and discovered that her lips were still spread in a grin, she finally believed that a person truly could be so happy that she could smile nonstop.

The sunshine of early summer felt warm and tickled the skin as it shone down on the people below.

Perhaps because it was a working day, there were not many people inside. There looked to be eleven or twelve couples, some of them sitting in front of the counter, filling in forms, and others consulting with the staff. When they walked in, an older woman at the door was rather keenly helpful and instantly directed them to take a premarital medical examination.

Tong Yan paused in surprise and automatically glanced toward Gu Pingsheng.

He had stepped in later and had not seen what this staff member had said, and only after seeing that Tong Yan was looking at him did he ask, "What's the matter?"

"Little lass, a premarital medical exam is a must." This auntie-figure noticed that Tong Yan did not look willing and very patiently advised, "This is very important. You kids all don't understand this."

"We're not doing it," Tong Yan swiftly declined. "What's the next step?"

"Auntie still advises you that you should do it." This staff member was very

dedicated and kindly counseled, “Last month, there was a young couple that came and registered their marriage, but they didn’t do the premarital medical exam. This month, the girl’s parents came and said the man has fertility problems. The girl is regretting her decision, and they were yelling at us, saying we weren’t taking responsibility for the issue. But these days, premarital medical examinations are optional. What can we do about it?”

With a shake of her head, Tong Yan grabbed his hand and continued walking further in, deciding simply to find and read the sign that had instructions on the entire process.

That older woman truly was only speaking out of good intentions, but Tong Yan was most clear on what the condition of his health was. Even though she did not know exactly what a premarital medical examination entailed, she did not want to affect today’s good mood.

Behind them, that woman seemed to be lamenting to someone that nowadays, young girls were just not being realistic by choosing not to do such an important medical check-up. Pretending not to hear, Tong Yan lifted her head and carefully read through the process. She discovered that it really was very simple. They only needed to take a photograph together and then they could head directly to the counter to do the registration. She tilted her head sideways to look at him. “We’ll go to the room next door to take a photo and then come back here to the counter to register.”

He answered her with an “alright,” seeming not to have been affected by the staff member a moment ago.

They paid the photography fee, and while they were standing in line waiting to have their photograph taken, Tong Yan watched the young couple in front of them smile as if they had just won five million yuan. The elderly man taking the photographs kept telling them, “Smile a little less widely. Even less. Your teeth are all showing …” Those two looked and laughed at each other for a long while before they finally re-adjusted their smiles. Though they were a little stiff and nervous, they managed to put together a proper pose for the photograph.

When the photo was printed and they were walking past Tong Yan, the girl even deliberately said sorry to them for such a long delay. Tong Yan hurriedly

shook her head. “No worries.”

Once the subjects of the photograph became her and Gu Pingsheng, she finally understood that the photographer was definitely the one who created the stiffness and nervousness.

“The one on the right, bring that lip up higher. I’m talking to the girl.” The old photographer meticulously directed them, “Don’t let your mouth smile too wide … No, no. Now your smile is too fake … “ It was evident that she was dazed from all these instructions.

After the photograph was placed in their hands, she saw that in it, against the red background, his smile was neither overstated nor too subtle, just simply perfect. Her own expression, on the other hand, was very bizarre … You could not say whether she was trying to cry or smile.

“Look at your husband and how natural his smile is.” The old photographer even did not forget to throw in his own comment as he took advantage of this moment when there was nobody else waiting in line.

Putting on an unperturbed front, she took a pair of scissors and cut apart the four photographs. Carefully, she tucked two away into her wallet while she held the remaining two in her hand in preparation for attaching them to the marriage certificate later.

The entire time, Gu Pingsheng merely watched until, with a serious manner, she had readied everything. Then, he at last slipped his arm around her shoulder and suggested, “When you’ve come back after your finals, we’ll go and take a real set of wedding photos.”

With her lips turned out in a pout, she very sullenly stuffed the photographs over to him. “Some people were just born with a ‘*waigua*’ [a ‘cheating tool’ to make things easier in life][1]. Makes people so darn jealous.”

“*Waigua*?” He copied the shape of her lips and repeated this term.

“It’s basically a plugin or tool in online gaming that makes you invincible under the gaming heavens.”

“A programming bug?”

“No, not really a programming bug.”

And hence, while the two of them were in line waiting to register their marriage, they began a serious discussion on the difference between a *waigua* and a programming bug. When it was their turn, they still had not arrived at a definite conclusion yet, but Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng sat down and decided to first take care of their proper business.

Gu Pingsheng took the pen and form and had soon filled in his own information. For some reason, when Tong Yan brought her pen to the paper, her heart began beating rapidly and she wrote each word very slowly. For many basic pieces of information, she had to think for a long time before she knew what she should write.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw that he had already completed filling in his and seemed now to be looking at her. In an instant of anxiousness, on the place where she was supposed to sign her signature, she ended up writing in her birthday …

The middle-aged woman behind the counter burst out in a chuckle. “Little lass, you really are nervous. Not at all like when you were talking about gaming just a little while ago.”

TongYan smiled embarrassedly. Crossing out her birthday, she hurriedly signed her name.

“Your *hukou* [household register and declaration of permanent residence] booklet and identity card.” The middle-aged woman smiled and took the forms back from them.

Gu Pingsheng pulled out his passport and Tong Yan’s *hukou* booklet, and Tong Yan also handed her identity card over. The woman casually flipped through them before very puzzledly asking Tong Yan, “Little lass, this *hukou* account doesn’t have you registered in there.”

Tong Yan gave an “ah” and stared blankly at Gu Pingsheng. Gu Pingsheng looked as if he did not understand what was going on either.

“Did you transfer your *hukou* [registered permanent residence] to somewhere else[2]?”

She seemed to suddenly realize something. “I think when I first got accepted into university, I transferred it over to the school …”

“You’re still a student?” The woman was rather taken aback. Although university students had long since been allowed to marry, it was still only a small number that actually did.[3]

“So, I need to transfer my *hukou* out from the university?” Tong Yan seemed as if she could not quite catch the direction of the discussion. “My identity card won’t work?”

“In these last two years, they have basically stopped attaching a student’s *hukou* to his or her educational institution.” The middle-aged woman patiently explained, “But a few years ago, all students would be registered in their school’s collective *hukou* account. That is a little more troublesome because you need your school to provide a verification. Is your school here?”

“No, it’s in Shanghai.”

“Then you need to obtain a proof of residency, and you need to do that in Shanghai.”

After the entire discussion came to an end, she realized that the whole time, she had been facing that staff member and Gu Pingsheng could not see the conversation in its entirety. When she was about to explain the situation to him, he had already smilingly squeezed her hand. “We’ll take it slowly. We can resolve this one step at a time.” She nodded and took all their items back from the staff member’s hand.

Joyfully, the two of them had come here, but it had turned out to be a fruitless effort.

As she gazed vacantly out at the endless streams of traffic outside the main entrance, she was extremely dejected. He, on the other hand, did not seem overly affected emotionally and asked her whether she wanted to go back home or go pick up Grandmother to go out for dinner.

She absentmindedly answered him. Then after a little while, she tentatively turned the conversation topic back again. “If I go back to the university and ask

them for a verification, would it be a lot of trouble?”

No matter what, they had met in the university and their relationship had been teacher and student. Even though he had now already decided to change to a different university to teach, the gossip and rumours that were being spread privately as well as the attitudes and stances of the fellow students of her class would more or less still reach Administration. If she had not had these as the basis of the situation, she could simply have thickened her skin and still gone to ask for a verification of her *hukou* …

“Doing that could very likely affect you so that you won’t be able to graduate normally. We can just wait until you’ve graduated and make up the official marriage registration then,” he said in solemnity.

She nodded and stretched out her hand to take his right hand. “Let’s go home to eat?”

With a “sure,” he held her hand in his and waved down a taxi, going home the same route they had come.

When they arrived at the door to their home, they realized they had not bought groceries to make dinner, so they went to a restaurant near their community compound and bought a couple dishes of takeout. Once they were back home, though, they discovered to their astonishment that an entire table of food had been laid out, the meal so sumptuous it left them dumbstruck. Tong Yan was a little stupefied and clearly did not know how to react to the dinner Grandmother had prepared. Fortunately, he was there and was always able to give a good and apt reason to explain unexpected disappointments.

After she returned to her own bedroom that night, a rare bout of insomnia caused her to lay awake until past one o’clock in the morning. Eventually, truly unable to fall asleep, she got off the bed and in her bare feet, quietly opened her room door. Their home had two normal bedrooms and one master bedroom. As the master bedroom had its own individual bathroom, needless to say, it was given to the elderly one of the house. Therefore, their two bedrooms were actually adjacent to one another.

When she turned the doorknob and stepped inside, Gu Pingsheng was still

leaning back against the head of the bed, reading a book. To her surprise, he had on an attractive pair of glasses and was still wearing the white dress shirt from the daytime.

Seeing Tong Yan walk in, he set his book down beside him and opened his arms to her. Tong Yan hopped onto the bed and burrowed herself against his chest. After holding him for a little while, she tilted her face up to ask, “Why haven’t you showered yet?”

“I’m going to be depressed and disappointed for several days because we could not obtain our legally recognized papers,” he replied in a half-joking tone. Lowering his head and nuzzling it against her cheek, he asked her, “Why are you in here so late at night instead of sleeping?”

His face was pressed against hers, so naturally, he would not be able to see the shape of her lips when she spoke. Tong Yan cuddled a little while longer with him before lifting up the light blanket and nestling herself under it. At last, she looked at his eyes. “I’m here to go to sleep with you. When did you start wearing glasses?”

“Sometimes I need them, but in the future, I may be inseparable from them.” His elbow was resting on his pillow as he propped his head on his hand and gazed at her. “Side effect number one: vision will gradually deteriorate. But good thing, once I put on glasses, it’s not much of a hindrance.”

Before he had even opened his mouth to speak, Tong Yan had had a suspicion that this was the case. Now, she merely stretched her hand forward and placed it at a distance very close to her eyes as a demonstration to him. “Once something is past this point, I can’t see it very clearly. Super nearsightedness. A prescription of minus five. Normally I wear contact lenses so you can’t tell. Do you know what the biggest advantage of being nearsighted is?”

Gu Pingsheng gave a silent smile and did not reply.

“If you take off your glasses, the entire street is filled with pretty girls and handsome guys.” She slipped his glasses off for him. “Do you see a very, very, very beautiful girl lying on your bed and smiling at you?”

“I think there really is.” His eyes narrowed slightly.



“Do you know what the biggest advantage of being nearsighted is? If you take off your glasses, the entire street is filled with pretty girls and handsome guys. Do you see a very, very, very … beautiful girl smiling at you?”

“I have a question I’ve been wanting to ask you for a long time.”

“Go ahead, ask.”

“Can you truly not hear anything? Can you wear a hearing aid?” She reached her arms out and, with only that thin dress shirt separating them, hugged his waist.

“I can, except I just don’t want to. At least, up to the present, I do not want to.”

So it turned out, it actually was not so irreversible and hopeless.

Tong Yan’s mood immediately improved, and she swung her legs on top of his. Lying on his side, he hooked his arm under her legs and pulled them up onto his waist. It was a simple action, but it tickled the heart and made it restless. And on top of that, he was unconsciously drumming his fingers on her bare calves as he

pondered on something.

[1] 外挂 “wai gua.” The Chinese gaming term for cheating/hacking tools (gamebots, cheat programs, etc.) used in online gaming in which a player is given an advantage over other player(s). Tong Yan is saying that Gu Pingsheng was born looking perfect and just seems to be able to do everything so easily and perfectly, like he was born with “cheat tool” that gives him an advantage in all things in life.

[2] Recall in footnote [1] in chapter 11.2, the *hukou* is China’s household registration system where, basically, a person declares a location of permanent residence. This is important because the *hukou* area determines where you can access certain services, such as medical insurance, public schooling, *etc.* Organizations, such as businesses or educational institutions, can set-up what is called a 集体户口 “collective *hukou* account.” Therefore, students of an educational institution can transfer their *hukou* into the school’s collective *hukou* or employees can transfer their *hukou* into their employer’s collective *hukou*, especially if they are changing where they would be living (i.e. the school or employer is located outside of where their *hukou* area is). Tong Yan brought her *hukou* booklet that she had at home, but the account in that booklet would be tied to Beijing, and since she had transferred her own *hukou* into the school’s collective account in Shanghai, the booklet would not have her registered in it.

[3] Legal age of marriage in China is age twenty-two for men, twenty for women. In even the early 2000s, undergraduate students of post secondary educations institutions were prohibited from marrying while they were studying. This blanket rule was abolished in Sept 2005 and students were allowed to marry.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
43 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 15.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 15.1

April 13, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



A short, sweet, but relatively uneventful update, except those important three words were spoken. I think Fang Yunyun is the only character in this story for whom I have absolutely nothing nice to say.

Chapter 15.1 – A Warm Temperature (1)

Tong Yan's heart felt like it was itching because of his actions. She closed her eyes, then opened them again. He was still in the same position, not having even changed it in the slightest.

"What are you thinking?" she asked.

He answered, "I'm thinking about you."

"What about me?"

“Can’t really say.” He really began to seriously contemplate. “Do you want to do your internship in a law firm or in the courts?”

“I don’t know.” She had always thought that she was mature enough already, but in reality, when faced with internship, career choice, or other questions of this type, she was still very much at a loss. Possibly in five years, when she looked back on herself now, she would feel then that none of these were actually issues.

But right now, they truly were issues.

“How about I’ll just contentedly be Mrs. Gu?” She blew out a breath. “Mr. Gu’s ‘ru hua mei juan[1]’ [beautiful wife who is lovely like a flower].”

He copied the shape of her lips that she had used to form “ru hua mei juan,” but his pronunciation was not very accurate.

Tong Yan chortled delightedly as she listened to him. “I’ve finally discovered our cultural differences. Teacher Gu, it seems you are only able to teach law, and preferably international law or something along those lines.”

He suddenly gave an utterly harmless and innocent smile before his hands slipped beneath the covers, and sliding them in under the hem of her pajamas, he allowed his warm palm to stroke the skin at her waist. His action caused Tong Yan’s throat to grow dry, and she motioned with her lips for him to turn off the lights. However, it was as if he had not seen anything as he continued caressing her for a little while. Then all of a sudden, he began to lightly squeeze her in the spot where she was most ticklish.

She bit down on her lip, not daring to laugh out loud.

Unable to escape him, she could only strugglingly writhe beneath his arms, but unfortunately, he was too strong and no matter what she did, it was no use. Finally, when her face was flushed and her entire body was covered in sweat from laughing so hard, he released her. Rolling to the other end of the bed, she protested, “Gu Pingsheng …”

“Mm,” he answered, still lying on his side with one arm propping up his head, his hairs in front falling forward gently so that they partly concealed his eyes.

“Pretty Lady’s Bane?” She suddenly felt that this name suited him perfectly.

He smiled, not batting an eye, and did not answer.

“Have I ever told you”—she shifted herself herself back cautiously out of worry that he would tickle her again, wrapped her arms and legs around him, and enunciated each word clearly—“I love you?”

After saying this, she pressed her cheek against his chest. And then, she felt his arms encircle her waist.

“I don’t think you have.” His voice came from above her head.

His answer was actually given quite seriously.

Tong Yan had thought her one sentence had been quite touching, but his answer left her at a loss over whether to cry or laugh. Right as she was about to lift her head to protest, he began gently placing kisses from her forehead down her face.

So he had been touched. In satisfaction, Tong Yan turned her face upwards and responded to his kisses until, in the end, both of them somewhat felt that control was slipping from their grasp. He suddenly halted himself and wrapped her snugly in the blanket. “Nothing is one hundred percent guaranteed to be failproof. Be good and go back to sleep. We have plenty of time in the future.”

She understood his meaning. With an “mm,” she truly did obediently put on her pajamas and quietly slip back into her room.

It was fortunate that she only had final examinations for two courses. When Shen Yao gave her the exact dates when examinations would be taking place, she also deliberately described in vague words the rumours about Tong Yan that were floating around in the faculty.

“ ‘The one who is pure and without fault shall, naturally, only be blameless[2]’ [if you are innocent, what others say should not matter because you truly are innocent],” Shen Yao muttered sullenly. “Anyway, once we’ve graduated, we’re all going to go our separate ways and won’t see one another. You don’t need to care about what they say.”

Holding the telephone receiver, Tong Yan laughed and gave an “mm-hmm.”

After hanging up, she calculated out the dates. It was about time for her to return to school.

Perhaps due to the uniqueness of their own family situation, Grandmother had never really asked too much about Gu Pingsheng's family and would only frequently lament, "You two children, things have not been easy for the both of you."

"Actually, it has been pretty easy." Lying on her stomach on the sofa, she quietly murmured this, feeling very happy and blessed.

So easily, they had seen each other again. So easily, they had come together as a couple. So easily, he had returned healthy.

She let these mindless, random thoughts occupy her for a while before heading downstairs to select some fruit for him from the fruit store out front of the community compound. The owner of the store had long since come to know her and greeted her warmly, informing her which fruits had come in this morning and were especially good. While providing occasional responses to him, she walked beside the row after row of fruit stands. Then, she saw several familiar figures at the door to the store.

In the same instant she saw them, they also noticed her.

Holding a sun umbrella over her head, Fang Yunyun looked towards her and gave a smile. And Lu Bei, from the moment he saw her, did not move his gaze away from her.

"Mrs. Gu, this one is absolutely the freshest of today …"

The storekeeper was still babbling on and enthusiastically making recommendations, utterly oblivious to her reaction. Somewhat awkwardly, she shook her head and sidestepped him with an excuse. "I forgot to bring money. I'll come down again later to buy some."

Cheerfully, the storekeeper chose a cantaloupe for her. "It's alright. You come down here everyday anyway. It'll be no problem if you just pay me tomorrow."

While she still was uncertain how to take her leave from this place, the owner

handed to her a bag of fruit filled with yellows, reds, and warm greens in a perfect combination that he had selected.

As she took the bag from him, she heard Fang Yunyun say that this place seemed quite nice and how about they take a look around? Lu Bei's parents appeared as if they did not really want to go in, but unable to endure Fang Yunyun's persuasion, they all stepped in through the gates of the community compound even before Tong Yan.

She could approximately figure out that Fang Yunyun was beginning to form some rash and unreasonable ideas in her mind, and Tong Yan was genuinely worried that, in a moment of impetuousness, she might just buy a property here. She did not like Fang Yunyun, but Lu Bei had done nothing wrong. She hoped that Lu Bei could live a life that was good. Extremely good.

Deliberately, she allowed herself to fall behind by several steps to avoid them. Right as she arrived home, she received a text message from Gu Pingsheng: *Mr. Gu is going to take you to buy clothes. TK*

She immediately sent a reply back: *Why are we buying more clothes for me?*

Soon, her phone vibrated, indicating a reply: *To satisfy Mr. Gu's ego. TK*

It so happened that Grandmother was not home that evening. Since her bout with that disease, the elderly woman more and more enjoyed participating in various social activities. At first, Tong Yan had had some misgivings about this, but after the respected doctor of their household had stated the fact that the benefits outweighed the harm, she dared not prevent her from going anymore. And so, the two of them gradually came to have plenty of time alone together.

When she arrived at their arranged meeting place, Gu Pingsheng was already there.

As he had been guest lecturing that afternoon at a university where one of his friends taught, his appearance, naturally, was very proper and respectable. A black suit jacket was folded over his arm and one hand held his tie. Even in such hot weather, he did not show the slightest bit of agitation or impatience from the heat.

Yet, it was also this outstanding man who … last night, on the bed, had horsed around and tickled her.

Tong Yan squinted her eyes and stared at him from afar, very much relishing in what she saw.

Her mobile phone all of a sudden vibrated. She glanced down at it: *Stared enough yet? If you have, then come on over. TK*

She lifted her head and broke into a smile. Putting her phone away, she ran over to him.

Women's apparel occupied two levels of the shopping centre, one level for young, fresh styles and one for mature, professional fashions. To match Gu Pingsheng's appearance, she purposely first went with him to browse through the floor with the more business-style apparel. After less than five minutes, though, they both felt those did not at all suit her and proceeded downstairs to begin wandering through each of the various shops there. Eventually, they had both walked until they simply could not move anymore, and taking a seat in the McDonald's inside the mall, they bought iced colas to drink.

They talked and laughed, and then, she secretly stole a look at the glass where her reflection could be seen together with his.

These last several months, she had not cut her hair, and at most, when her bangs grew too long, she had simply faced the mirror and taken care of them herself. Now, her hair was past her waist, and to stay cool, she had tied it up in a ponytail, which made her appear quite a bit younger.

However, he did not look old either, or at least, there did not appear to a ten or more year age difference between them.

"I ran into my ex-boyfriend this afternoon. He and his wife were looking at properties." Looking at him, she asked, "If they ended up living in the same community compound as us, would that make you uncomfortable? Would you be jealous?"

"I'm guessing I would."

"Guessing?" She tried to judge from his facial expression, but she was unable to deduce whether that was the truth or not.

“How about this?” He made a show of looking at his watch. “It’s still early right now. We’ll go look at some properties, too, and change homes tomorrow.”

Seeing the soft smile in his eyes, Tong Yan realized he was joking and could not refrain from giving him a kick under the table. Then, smiling at one another, they continued their completely pointless conversation and squandered away the beautiful afternoon.

[1]如花美眷 “ru hua mei juan.” An idiom that means, “beautiful wife who is lovely as a flower.” The last character, 眷 “juan” is referring to 眷属, which literally means “family dependent upon another.” It can be specifically used to describe a couple that has chosen to come together in marriage, and in the case of this idiom, it is referring to the wife. This is not an everyday way to refer to one’s spouse, and therefore, Gu Pingsheng, as someone who grew up overseas, was not familiar with the idiom.

[2]清者自清 “qing zhe zi qing.” A more literal translation is, “the one who is pure, naturally, is simply pure.” I have translated the 清 “qing,” which literally means “pure” or “clean,” as “without fault” and “blameless.” Just as clear water shall always be pure, even if someone points at it and says it is dirty, a pure, clean, blameless person shall, without question, only be pure and blameless, regardless of what others may think or say. In other words, your innocence is not dependent on what others may or may not think, so you should not place any regard on their words.

Additional Comments:

Love Tong Yan’s perspectives on life shown here. If you allow yourself to focus on the pain, you’re only going to magnify it and allow yourself to fall into bitterness. Instead, she chooses to count her blessings. “So easily, they had seen each other again. So easily, they had come together, as a couple. So easily, he had returned healthy.”

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

44 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 15.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 15.2

April 16, 2016 by hoju 14 Comments



Rumours can be such a deadly thing and can really tear someone down. Fortunately, our girl is mature and strong enough to not allow these to get to her. Isn't Gu Pingsheng cute when he gets pouty?

Chapter 15.2 – A Warm Temperature (2)

After knowing when approximately her final examinations would be taking place, Gu Pingsheng soon booked her plane tickets for her. Before she left, she insisted on accompanying him to his follow-up medical examination.

When they arrived, it was lunchtime. Doctor Liao, whom he had a very close relationship with, had just finished performing a surgery, and after showering, with his hair still half-wet, he came and greeted Gu Pingsheng. "I finally get to see your wife."

Tong Yan smiled shyly, still not very accustomed to this particular form of address for her. Taking all the medical reports from the previous few days, he handed them to Gu Pingsheng. In Doctor Liao's office, the two of them began communicating rapidly and very technically. She did not understand what she

was hearing and only felt that the entire time, Doctor Liao's manner was very serious and cautious. In the end, when she began gripping Gu Pingsheng's fingers nervously, he finally chuckled and warned the doctor, "My wife is scared easily. If you keep being so solemn, she's going to start reading too much into it."

"Don't be scared." Smiling, Doctor Liao poured a glass of water and handed it to Tong Yan. "Through these years, he's long since found ways of coping with everything. Plus, the surgery this time was so successful that there should be no major issues for at least the next ten years. Really, he's considered to be doing quite well. I have several SARS patients here who, during these sorts of July days, strain to simply try to breathe and have major problems with their lungs. You say, how awful that would be if every summer for the rest of your life, it was going to be like that …"

Tong Yan took the glass from him, feeling that this doctor really did not know how to console people.

Gu Pingsheng also gave a chuckle of annoyance. "You keep these. If there's any issues, just email me directly."

"You go. I still have another surgery to perform this afternoon and don't have time to read through these carefully. And anyhow, your issues are not ones that I, as an orthopedic surgeon, can solve …" Gu Pingsheng frowned and looked at him. Immediately, he stopped what he was saying and explained to Tong Yan, "Please don't mind too much. It's like that when you're a doctor. You always talk about the worst possible problems first."

"I understand. Thank you."

Although Tong Yan had expressed her understanding, on their way home, she still felt a persistent sense of disquiet. When it was night and nearing time to go to bed, she finally could restrain herself no longer. Sprawling herself on his chest, she stared into his eyes with a serious look and instructed him, "If there's anything wrong with your health or if your body does not feel right, you must not hide it from me."

Gu Pingsheng's hand was on her waist, and patting her gently, he replied with laughter in his voice, "You've been thinking for an entire day and it was just to

say this one sentence?”

“I’m serious.” Tong Yan continued to stress, “If there is anything bad, you have to let me know.”

“Alright,” he answered.

Tong Yan lowered her head, knowing that he would not completely abide by this. It would be just like when he was in the United States, where Pingfan’s secret video recording of him had shown that he was already lying in the hospital, but the next day he had still sent her a video of him out sightseeing and having fun, using this to try to obscure her perception and mislead her … So, it would seem that he was “only desiring to partake in life’s sweetness together and unwilling to share the bitterness.[1]”

The following day, he took her to the airport.

When she was on the plane, she briefly clenched her now-empty hand and began to comfort herself. It was actually only going to be ten days. Take her exams, clean out and pack up her dormitory room, and get the fourth-year internship form and her letter of recommendation. Then, ten days later, she would return here again.

After arriving back at school, she very solemnly pulled out Grandmother’s proof of illness medical certificate and gave one copy to the university and one to the teacher of the Maritime Law course.

When she obtained the internship form as well as the letter of recommendation, one of her faculty teachers caringly asked her whether she wanted the faculty to help arrange an internship position for her. Regarding this, before she came back to the school, Gu Pingsheng had already made arrangements for her. She could not state this directly, however, and merely said that a family member needed to be taken care of but she would definitely complete her one-year internship in Beijing.

The examinations for physics and Maritime Law were one day apart. After finishing the Maritime Law exam, Shen Yao dragged her to the library under the fine-sounding reason that it was their “final study session in the library.”

Out of nostalgia, Shen Yao very sentimentally rose early to snatch the spot that they used to frequently sit in.

Their seats were near the window, and the sunlight shone on them. However, because the library's air conditioning was blasting at a low temperature, the torrid heat of midsummer was absent.

Laying her head on the table, she looked over and over again through the detailed solutions Gu Pingsheng had written out for her to her physics practice problems . She had read through these many times already, and staring at that stack of A4 papers and the writing on them, her mind soon started to drift. Very shortly, though, the private whispers of nearby people snapped her out of her daze.

Though she called them "private whispers," it was actually more appropriate to say they were criticisms to the face.

The words generally fell along the lines of, "health declined due to an abortion so she had to temporarily suspend her studies," "entire time, school has been covering it up for her," *etc.* She finally understood what these so-called rumours were that Shen Yao had spoken so evasively of. So, it turned out the supposed reports were about "a temporary suspension of studies due to an abortion."

Shen Yao heard the whispers as well. In a hostile manner, she jabbed her pencil down and glared at those few men and women while saying to Tong Yan, "If I had known, I would not have forced you to come study with me. You have no idea. The rumours of Teacher Gu's background that have been circulating are so extravagant. Those people are all just jealous."

Tong Yan gave an "mm" and said self-mockingly, "What are they jealous about? That I've had to re-take physics four times?"

Shen Yao very unkindly laughed at this. "Tong Yan Wuji, you seriously …"

Sticking out her tongue, Tong Yan kept quiet and just grinned.

To say that she did not mind was impossible, but she could not take Grandmother's medical certificate, copy it, and put one in the hands of everyone in her year, right?

When the two of them were happily engaging in rounds of "you mock me

once, then my turn to put you down once," Wang Xiaoru arrived, dressed very strikingly, and in a manner as if she was fashionably late, she tossed her backpack onto their long table. Sitting down, she declared, "The good student that I am doesn't have any exams after finishing the one for Maritime Law, but I still have to keep you two company while you guys study … Seriously, I was not careful when choosing friends."

Gnawing on her pencil, Shen Yao grinned, "The goddess of gossip topics has arrived. Tong Yan Wuji, you don't need to be scared anymore."

Wang Xiaoru did not understand. "What's going on? What's Tong Wuji scared of?"

"Gossip and rumours." Shen Yao's gaze swept around in a half-circle. "About Great Beauty Gu."

With an "oh," Wang Xiaoru replied, "You're actually even listening to those? Once people reach fourth year, they start getting edgy. You know, all that stuff about entrance exams for getting into graduate studies, going to study abroad, looking for work. You don't even know about all those stories of the scheming that occurs within dorm rooms. They're much more exciting than yours. The dorm room next to ours, when I was packing up my stuff just now, I even heard them arguing. Something about one person had opened another's international mail." She quickly opened up her backpack and put on a show of pulling out a book. "And anyway, having Teacher Gu as yours means that you'll have to lose something or take some grief somewhere."

Shen Yao very much agreed with this statement. "Yeah. 'Balance,' you know? If you gain something that's just too good, you're going to have to give up some other things. Otherwise,x even Heaven's going to be jealous of you."

Tong Yan truly did not have the heart to carry on watching them both incessantly try to comfort her. "I really am not bothered by what's being said. Those are really just small things, so small they can't get any smaller in my mind." When compared to the many years of challenges in her life, gossip and rumours indeed held no weight.

"Yeah, sure." Shen Yao turned her lips up in a pout. "In my eyes, you're like a delicate little shoot of a plant raised in a greenhouse. You've simply been

transplanted from the Tong family greenhouse to the large Gu family greenhouse. And here you are trying hard to pretend that you've had to go through the harsh ups and downs of life …"

Tong Yan raised her brows and smiled. Her fingers unconsciously twirled her pencil as she lowered her head and continued looking over her practice problems.

When it was nearing ten o'clock, they left the library. Outside, rain had begun pattering down onto the ground. There were many second and third year university students who had not brought umbrellas and were now crowded together against the entrance to the library, watching the evening graduation celebration that was being held outdoors.

The rain was growing heavier, and the people squeezing in at the outer edge of the crowd were continuously moving backwards. Tong Yan and Shen Yao were crammed to the point that they could retreat no further, and as they both pressed their backs tightly against the glass wall of the library, they exchanged a wry smile. In this spot that they were occupying, besides the blaring sound system of the stage, they really could not see anything at all.

She raised her mobile phone and took a glance at it. During the confusion a moment ago, Gu Pingsheng had sent a text message: *There is moderate to heavy rainfall in Shanghai tonight. Don't play so hard that you forget about everything else and forget to take shelter from the rain. TK*

"Well hello to that! Teacher Gu even keeps a constant eye on the weather forecast?" Shen Yao's eyes brushed over her screen, and clicking her tongue in praise, she sighed, "I've worked it out for you. An entire year of internship will be enough time for you to have a baby. It's a seamless plan …"

Tong Yan gave her a fierce jab with her elbow.

Suddenly, another text message arrived, and she opened it to see. It was also from him: *The late night snack I cooked tasted gross. I'm earning money to provide for the family but don't get to eat any tasty food. It has been very miserable for Mr. Gu these last few days. TK*

[1]只肯同甘，不愿共苦. There is a saying, 同甘共苦 “tong gan gong ku,” which means “together in the sweetness, sharing in the bitterness,” and it is used to describe relationships in which people are willing to face whatever may come their way, be it good or bad, together. Here, the saying has been broken apart to say a person desires only to partake in the sweetness together but is unwilling to share the bitterness. Normally, this would be taken as the person is only hanging around for the good times but will leave when the going gets tough. However, in describing Gu Pingsheng, Tong Yan is saying that he is only willing to give the best to her, to share all the things of joy with her, but is unwilling to let her take on any of the burdens he may have, preferring instead to shoulder them completely himself.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue
45 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 15.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 15.3

April 20, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



We learn a few more things about Gu Pingsheng here, including a little glimpse of his feelings for Tong Yan. This world just had to have that one, specific person, just for him. <3

Chapter 15.3 – A Warm Temperature (3)

This was the first time he had ever spoken to her in such a way.

For some reason, Tong Yan nearly had the false impression that he truly was in the terrible throes of suffering and hardship.

She estimated out the timing. Originally, she had planned on leaving the university after ten days, but if she lined up everything tightly in her schedule, it might only take seven or eight days.

When she returned to the dormitory that evening, she began to rush to pack away her things. The cardboard moving boxes had been readied very early on, and after her books and clothing as well as the random trinkets she had accumulated over three years were packed away, three whole boxes were filled.

“Didn’t you say you weren’t sealing up your boxes until the day after tomorrow?” Shen Yao grumbled, “You so put your man above your friend. You’re going to be heading back to Beijing right away, and by the time you come

back here, I'll have gone abroad already … Mrs. Gu, your Mr. Gu isn't running off anywhere, but your best friend really is going to be leaving."

"He doesn't know how to cook. I can't leave him by himself at home for too long. You be good. During winter and summer breaks, you can go to Beijing and visit me. I'll provide you with food and accommodations."

"Gu Pingsheng should be nearly thirty, right? Let me calculate this," Shen Yao sighed. "You guys had your underground affair for one semester, then you were actually together for one semester. Wait, that's not right. This semester, you can say you were together, but in reality, most of the time he was not even by your side. Tong Yan Wuji, all those years prior, how do you think he managed to survive?"

Tong Yan did not utter a reply and only sealed the boxes with packing tape.

Only after she had straightened again did she suddenly state, "All those years prior, it was really sad for him."

"Sad?" Shen Yao was torn between laughter and tears. "The University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. King's College London. No matter how you look at it, he should be a person with high intelligence. Just from my perspective, as someone who was his student for half a year, his EQ is high, too, and his looks are handsome. If your man is sad and pitiable, then people like us can only hug the toilet everyday and cry …"

Tong Yan gave a couple of dry laughs. "All those years prior, he didn't have me. Of course he was sad and pitiable."

Shen Yao was squelched to silence by this reply and gawked wide-eyed at her. "Tong Yan Wuji, you've finally reached a point where you're even more shameless than me."

At the time, when she had resolutely packed up her bags and moved south with her notice of admission from the university in hand, she had never thought that, one day, she would willingly return to this city in which she was born. She had even considered the possibility that after she had settled in another city, she would get Grandmother and bring her to be with her, far away from Beijing and

all the people and matters there.

But in the span of just one short year, her mindset had completely changed.

Compared to Gu Pingsheng, those experiences life had thrown her way were perhaps at least a little better than his. If she had been the one to have witnessed her own mother commit suicide right before her and then encountered the SARS epidemic — to have experienced such great trauma, both physically and psychologically — she might not have even known how to make it through. And there were many other hurts that were still hidden away in his past. There was his father.

Her plane landed at Terminal 3, and when she stepped out of its exit, she soon spotted him. Dressed in a black, short-sleeve polo shirt and casual shorts, he looked ridiculously youthful and full of vitality.

She took a couple of stealthy steps, intending on sneaking up and surprising him, but very quickly, Gu Pingsheng noticed her. In the end, she decided to simply toss aside any abashedness, and running over to him, she threw herself into his arms. “How does it feel to flaunt your affections out in public?” So, everyone deep down has it rooted in their nature that they want to show off, and Gu Pingsheng, of course, was definitely worth showing off.

“Very nice.” When he finished saying this, his face suddenly moved closer, and lowering his head, he pressed his lips directly onto hers.

After several seconds of stillness, his head tilted slightly and he enclosed her lips in his. However, right as she stretched her arms up and slid them around his neck, Gu Pingsheng unexpectedly pulled away and, purposely dropping his voice, told her, “Let’s go home first.” To stop so abruptly — it was obvious he was deliberately playing around and teasing her.

She did not even have the opportunity at all to react before he was already wrapping his arm around her shoulders and walking with her toward the corridor.

“How about doing your internship term in the courts?” Gu Pingsheng asked her as they walked. “I have already made arrangements for you at one of the courts to have your internship term there. In this way, after you’ve graduated, you might even be hired directly to stay there. That type of work is relatively

easier.”

“How do you know I want something easier?” Tong Yan tried hard to come up with a justification. “What if I want to be the career-oriented type?”

“Familiarizing yourself with the business and work of the courts will be beneficial in the future anyway.”

Hearing him say this, Tong Yan did not have any more objections.

They ambled along together, all the while discussing matters related to internship.

In contrast to the urgency exhibited in the other people around them, this was a rare moment of idleness for both of them, with nothing waiting ahead for them to take care of or solve. She slipped her own arm through his right one and nestled against him, looking arbitrarily out beyond the glass windows at the airplanes soaring up into the sky.

Perhaps a light and easy job really would be pretty good.

From behind, someone unexpectedly called out to him with a very clear enunciation of “TK.” Turning around, she saw a man pulling a suitcase. He looked to have kept good physical care of himself, and it could only be guessed that he was roughly somewhere between fifty and sixty years old. Those eyes very much resembled Gu Pingsheng’s.

Her heart pounded ferociously, and she did not dare continue this train of speculation. Following her movements, Gu Pingsheng also turned and looked toward that person.

Soon, he said, “Hello.”

A detached, yet very polite greeting.

“When did you come back to China? Are you planning on living in Beijing for the long-term?” the man asked him.

But unfortunately, no one answered him. After a brief silence, the man’s expression suddenly softened, and his eyes turned to Tong Yan. “Is this your girlfriend?”

“My wife.” Gu Pingsheng opened his mouth and, in a very neutral tone, gave this explanation.

“Hello.” The man stretched out a hand to Tong Yan. “I am Gu Pingsheng’s father, Dong Changting.”

Tong Yan had not expected such a coincidental encounter or such dialogue. She shook the hand of Gu Pingsheng’s father. “My name is Tong Yan, like the ‘tong yan’ in the idiom, ‘tong yan wuji’ [‘children’s words are spoken without reservations or filters’].”

A moment ago, his father had called out his name from behind him. It would seem, therefore, that he did not know about Gu Pingsheng’s deafness. The amount of time that had passed from the 2003 SARS tragedy to the present could not be considered a short period. Had the two of them never seen one another in all that time? She had many questions that puzzled her, but in this moment and place, she could not ask and could only act as if she did not know anything about all of this.

She merely gave a self-introduction, like a young girl first meeting her boyfriend’s parents.

Dong Changting seemed very grateful for Tong Yan’s smile and began telling them about things that really did not have much to do with them, like how he had just arrived back from Hubei after doing a liver transplant, and to his surprise, when he got off the plane, he saw them. As he spoke, he would occasionally ask Tong Yan some questions, all of them extremely normal and straightforward ones, such as how old she was or where she was from.

Tong Yan had never been a person who could be cold and surly to elders, but for fear that Gu Pingsheng would be unhappy, she looked at him and sought his direction.

With a light smile, he stroked her hair. A simple action that could be viewed as implicit approval.

Tong Yan relaxed slightly and began to tentatively and cautiously answer those questions.

Fortunately, the questions were all very simple and casual. And fortunately, a

pharmaceutical representative soon arrived to pick Gu Pingsheng's father up after his plane trip. "Associate Chief [Physician] Dong, I am sorry, really terribly sorry. I'm not sure which important leader was on the way to the airport, too, but the expressway was closed for more than an hour." As this pharmaceutical representative spoke, he very kindly took the suitcase from him and also cordially shook Gu Pingsheng's hand.

After a few polite pleasantries, this father, who might as well have been a stranger, finally went his separate ways from them.

The urban centre's traffic was strictly regulated, so by the time they were back at home, it was already one o'clock in the afternoon. Tong Yan had eaten on the plane, but his stomach still had not yet been fed. As a result, the first thing she did after stepping through the door was to dash into the kitchen, pull out some leafy vegetables, egg, and ham that were in the refrigerator, freshly steam some rice, and then dump them all into a pan with oil to make fried rice for him.

Amid the thunderous hum of the range hood, she handed the metal spatula to him and then wiped her hands clean on a cloth, planning on heading over to Grandmother's bedroom.

"Grandmother has gone out." Gu Pingsheng scooped her back into his arms. "She said she was going to a former student's home for a visit and would be back after dinner."

Very puzzled by this, Tong Yan asked, "How come she still went out despite knowing that I was coming home today?"

Looking like he knew what he was doing, Gu Pingsheng stir-fried the rice as he leisurely speculated, "The elderly tend to have more experience and understand that feeling of 'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'"

While she muttered about his self-flattery, she changed spots with him and dished out the fried rice from the pan.

Seeing that he had started to eat, Tong Yan at last could take the time to unpack her belongings.

Each item that she pulled out came with reminiscence, and full of happiness,

she would narrate to him a story of its background or where it came from. In the end, she could not help sighing, “I was so simple back then. Any gift I received would make me excited for days.”

Even the slightest of blessings would bring her contentment. Never would she be concerned with the ravines of trials that came with the blessing, how deep they might be or whether they could actually be traversed.

This was Tong Yan.

To Gu Pingsheng, his sickness was so terrible because it tortured not only him but also the loved ones who cared about him and loved him. It was not that he had never before let himself give up and slip into despair, nor was it as everyone seemed to perceive, that he did not care in the least. In fact, he very early on had made the decision that he would never marry and would not even give himself the chance to find a girlfriend to suffer with him.

But alas, this world had to have a girl named Tong Yan.

She continued crouching in front of the cardboard boxes, taking out each little trinket and quietly musing where she should put it.

With his head lowered, he watched her. He did not know whether it had simply been too long since he had last eaten her cooking or because her culinary skills truly had improved greatly, but this food that was so simple smelled incomparably enticing, and its appearance, aroma, and flavour were all wonderful. His stomach now warm, his hands began to gradually warm as well.

“You are still very simple, even now.”

Smiling lightly, he leaned against the glass door near her and carried on eating the remainder of the fried rice.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
46 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 16.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 16.1

April 23, 2016 by hoju 13 Comments



Oh my, how can you not feel for these two? As much as they work hard to move forward in life, there are some hidden things that are just waiting to come forth. And so, we have one of them in this update.

Chapter 16.1 – My Mister Gu (1)

When the very long summer vacation came to an end, she began the true lifestyle of an intern student.

It was not as she had imagined. It was not very busy, but she would always have opportunities to see various defendants and plaintiffs as well as their legal representatives.

Gu Pingsheng's new students were all very delightful.

The first time she went to his school to wait for him to finish his lectures, they ended up causing her face to flush a brilliant shade of red and her ears to turn crimson. That afternoon, after the bell signaling the end of class rung out, a

crowd of students soon stepped out with him enclosed in the middle, like the multitudes of stars surrounding the lone moon.

Leaning against a railing, she stood not far away and watched him until he noticed her, and then she immediately made an impish face at him.

“Teacher Gu, is that our esteemed *shimu* [teacher-mother]?” a female student inquired of him.

After he directly affirmed this, teasing heckles began to rise up from all those students who were two or three years younger than her. In voices that he could not hear and from angles that he could not see, there were endless cries of “Esteemed *Shimu*, hello,” or “Esteemed *Shimu* is really pretty,” or other similar things … She was reminded of how, in the past, at her school, her own classmates had also did the same, always, from below the podium, using voices that he could not hear to tease her.

In terms of time, it was now more than a year removed, and in terms of location, they were more than 1400 kilometres away.

But he was still Teacher Gu, that same Teacher Gu who wore button-up shirts and enthralled everyone.

“I remember someone once cautioned me that university teachers and doctors are the professions that most easily give in to temptation. You say, in the next thirty-odd years of your future, you will always be looking at seventeen, eighteen year old students. So, when you go home to see me and I’m looking more and more like a worn housewife, will you even be just a tiny bit swayed?” She was sitting on the couch, her legs resting on top of his thighs. “Plus, men don’t age easily …”

When Gu Pingsheng finished watching this long babble of hers, he raised his brows in a smile, then lowered his head to resume flipping through his book.

He was not even paying attention to her idle worries.

She had initially only said those words in jest, but seeing him now being so uncooperative to indulge her, she continued in great displeasure to rub her foot against his leg. Only after he at last raised his head and looked toward her did she set down the National Judicial Examination practice exam paper and sidle

herself from her side over to his. “What if a girl student falls for you like I did?”

His expression seemed to grow serious, and he contemplated for a while before suddenly sighing, “That is indeed very highly possible.”

“Very highly possible?” Tong Yan silently fixed her eyes on him.

“This university has a relatively large law school. From the looks of it now, I will be coming in contact with the students of nine different classes. If we estimate the probability based on Mrs. Gu’s success rate, then indeed, the situation is very dangerous.”

“Yes, yes! You only taught one class and you were already able to nab a girl …”

“But for every class, before I begin teaching them, I will let them know that I am already ‘not available.’”

Not available.

That was a good way of saying it. She smiled in satisfaction. “Mr. Gu, what would you like to eat tomorrow? Please, go ahead to make your requests. No need to be polite with me about it.”

He nodded. “Let me have a good think about it, and I’ll let you know at noontime tomorrow.”

Alas, man proposes but God disposes. When Tong Yan came home from the courthouse and finished preparing dinner, it was already nearing 7:30 p.m., but he was still not home. Grandmother’s schedule tended to be quite early. Usually, dinner for her would be between 5:00 and 6:00 p.m., and by 9:00 p.m., she would promptly retire for the night. Tong Yan texted Gu Pingsheng three times but received no response, so she could only say to Grandmother that perhaps he had some matters at the school that he needed to attend to.

However, though she was not certain the reason, a persistent sense of unease plagued her heart.

At some time past eight o’clock, she could not remain there in inaction any longer, and arbitrarily making up an excuse to Grandmother, she left the home. She took her phone and began to repeatedly dial his number. After the taxicab

had driven for ten minutes, the call was suddenly picked up on the other end. “Hello? Is this … um, is this *Shimu*?” It was a male voice that sounded very young.

“Mm, yes, it’s me.” Tong Yan provided this response first, then took a deep breath. “Has something happened to Teacher Gu?

Upon throwing out this question, though, she did not wait for the person on the other end to answer and quickly followed up to ask, “Did he fall? Is he at the school or the hospital?”

“The hospital.” Afraid that she would become anxious with worry, the boy quickly added, “A bunch of us guys, all students, brought him here. Teacher Gu regained consciousness just earlier …” Her ears were filled with a droning hum. The voice inside the phone at times would seem far away while at other times, it felt so close she wanted to move away from it.

After getting an understanding of approximately where he was, she quickly told the driver to turn around and head straight toward that particular hospital.

When Tong Yan stepped inside to where he was, there truly were three or four young men surrounding his bed, anxiously watching him. A doctor, who could not be considered very young, was there, holding a film sheet, and the expression on his face was rather odd. “Do you have some sort of past medical history? This picture …”

All her attention was focused on him, and she did not care at all what sort of picture the doctor was looking at on that film sheet.

If there were any issues, they were undoubtedly repercussions left behind by that sickness.

“Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.” When Gu Pingsheng finished stating this, he saw her approaching the bedside, and the corner of lips turned up into a smile.

“SARS …” The doctor automatically simplified it down to the acronym and then abruptly turned his eyes to the film sheet in his hand.

One of the male students unconsciously took a step back, but soon realizing what he had just done, he bowed his head.

That student was standing in a position at the end of the bed, and Tong Yan had seen his action very clearly.

“That’s right, then. Angina — chest pain, discomfort, or tightness — due to lack of oxygen to the heart. This last week, there has been relatively more rainy weather, and the air has been stuffy and hot as well. It should have been like this for you these last several years, right? During hot, humid weather, you need to be especially mindful. In the summer, there is more rain and the humidity is a lot higher, so you must minimize your activity …” Once the doctor learned of his medical history, he quickly understood the cause of the condition.

When he had nearly finished providing all the required explanations and instructions, he inquired further, “Which hospital were you in before? I mean, during that time with SARS.”

“Peking Union Hospital.”

“Peking Union?” The doctor recalled, “The treatments at Peking Union at the time could be considered the most successful. You were pretty lucky to have been sent there. Did you live nearby?”

Gu Pingsheng seemed not to have fully recovered yet and was controlling how deep each breath was as he replied, “I was a doctor there at the time.” His expression was just as unperturbed as always.

Something flashed in the eyes of that boy with the slight figure who, earlier, had instinctively backed away, and he looked over their way.

Astonishment came over the doctor for an instant, but he soon adjusted his facial expression and began to carry out an exchange with Gu Pingsheng about his colleagues at Peking Union during that time. Gu Pingsheng’s duration at Peking Union had been very short, but as luck would have it, he happened to encounter the SARS outbreak. In the conversation, the doctor mentioned that one of his classmates had passed away during that period. When he stated the name, Gu Pingsheng quickly nodded and told him he had once shared a hospital room with that person.

The several students who were present appeared to be younger than Tong Yan by two or three years, and at the time, they had been young so they did not really understand that disaster that had long since passed. They merely were somewhat amazed that Gu Pingsheng had once been a doctor, and even more so, just like Shen Yao in the past, they held an admiration for him.

After all, medicine and law sounded like they should be so very different.

Only that one boy was listening with seriousness, so serious, in fact, that it was rather excessive.

In the end, because it was too late, Gu Pingsheng told those students to leave first. Tong Yan sat beside the hospital bed and listened as these two men who originally had been strangers to one another now casually chatted. When she was very little, she had always believed that doctors were all-powerful, that so long as you told them where you were feeling unwell, their medicine would act and the sickness would disappear. Her faith was even to the point that, the instant their stethoscopes were placed on your body, you would stop coughing and your fever would subside.

Later, from high school through to university, she heard more and more about “red packets” [cash gifts given to medical personnel][1] and the refusal to treat patients.

It seemed the only thing the media could provide was negative reports. And then, she had met him once again. In particular, in those several months when he had left for his surgery, she had repeatedly searched for news of that specific period, and she had inexplicably felt a sense of ruefulness. Only during major epidemics were doctors called “angels in white coats.” Once the epidemic passed, they were reverted back to being “butchers in white coats.”

Angels could save and heal people, but ultimately, they still had to die in sickness and pain, unable to save themselves.

That night, Gu Pingsheng did not choose to stay in the hospital, and the doctor personally saw him downstairs to the main entrance hall.

“Nowadays, doctors’ reputations aren’t even as respected as those of people

who make ‘gutter oil[2]’ [illegally produced cooking oil, recycled from waste oil].” The doctor gave a bitter smile. “I look at you and I look at that classmate of mine, and I feel that it really wasn’t worth it.”

Standing there in that entrance hall, which was now significantly quieter than during the daytime hours, in a tone which was not clear whether he was laughing or sighing, he replied, “Were it not for the fact that my physical condition is not ideal, I would without a doubt choose to return to the hospital. Your classmate would probably have given this same answer, too.”

As the two of them stepped out the main hospital doors, an extremely worried look finally showed on Tong Yan’s face. “There are really no issues with you? Should you stay in the hospital and be under observation for some time?”

Regardless of whether it was a problem of the lungs that had led to lack of oxygen to the heart or something else, he truly had collapsed unconscious due to angina. Problems of the heart could be just little ones, or they could be very big … She simply was not able to regard this as a small matter.

Before Gu Pingsheng could provide an answer, he looked in the direction behind her.

Following his gaze, she turned around and discovered that, surprisingly, that boy was still here.

“Teacher Gu.” The boy’s Mandarin was not very good. “Since I was young, I’ve heard the people around me talk about SARS. Guangdong was also one of the hardest-hit areas, so …”

Gu Pingsheng walked over and patted him gently on the back of his head. “Hurry back to the university. Teacher Gu has a wife and family, so if the dormitory doors are locked, I won’t take the responsibility of taking you in for the night.”

The boy seemed as if he had words to say but he swallowed them. Even when he was leaving, the expression on his face was apologetic.

It was already past midnight by the time they arrived back at home. Tong Yan was worried about him and was unwilling to sleep in a separate room from him

anymore. After hurriedly showering, she walked into his bedroom.

Every time she slept with her arms around him, she could feel that his body temperature was lower than her own. Tong Yan lay there for a while but after discovering that he was actually not asleep, she decided to simply turn on the table lamp. “The last several days have been rainy as well as hot. Once I’m not in an air-conditioned room, even my chest will feel heavy and tight. Do you think you should request some time off with the university and rest up for a few days?”

Gu Pingsheng squinted his eyes as he faced the light and answered, “Sure.”

She pondered on something for a moment, then asked him, “Before, you would sometimes not go to school and would always say that there were things in your family that you needed to take care of. Were you actually feeling unwell then?”

As she spoke, she placed her hand on his chest, trying to feel his heartbeat, but she could not figure out a right method. While she slowly made her attempts, her chest actually started to feel very uncomfortable, as if she was in tune with him and could experience what he was feeling.

Gu Pingsheng lay with his left hand beneath his head, merely smiling and gazing at her.

“Teach me how to take a pulse, okay?” she unexpectedly said.

“Tomorrow, after you’ve come back from the courthouse, I’ll teach you then.” He picked up his watch from the bedside table and glanced at the time. “It’s nearly two o’clock. How about we sleep first?” After he said this, he moved to turn off the lamp.

She grabbed his hand, finally speaking out the guilt she had been feeling the entire night. “I’m not a good wife. It seems like I don’t understand anything and don’t know how to do anything. Besides cooking for you everyday, everything else, I need you to do.”

And even when he suddenly collapsed and was admitted to the hospital to be checked, she was also the last to arrive.

She had no real-life experience in society, nor did she have a whole, healthy

family. She did not even know what it meant to be a good wife or what little things a normal family would do everyday behind their closed doors.

“Other than earning money, I also don’t know how to qualify as being a good husband. And on top of that, the money I make is not considered much.” He clasped her hand in his and placed it on his chest. In a serious tone, he told her, “Right now, all these things you are negating yourself over do not actually have much to do with you, personally. They all still stem from me. Yan Yan, I am actually very selfish. I know that my health is very poor, but I still am resolute on being with you.”

[1]红包 “hong bao.” The “red packets” or “red envelopes” are the name of cash gifts put in a red envelope. In the context of the health care system in China, they are referring to cash gifts given to medical personnel by potential patients as an expression of gratitude but is also used as a way of exchange to secure higher quality care and services. “Red packets” have a negative connotation of bribing your way to better health care.

[2] 地沟油 “di gou you.” The term “di gou you” or “gutter oil” is used to describe cooking oil that was made illegally by processing waste oil, *i.e.* oil that was recovered from garbage (trash cans, dumpsters, even sewers). Producers of it sell this oil at a below-market rate to the food industry. This is a huge food safety issue.

Additional Comments:

“Were it not for the fact that my physical condition is not ideal, I would without a doubt choose to return to the hospital. Your classmate would probably have given this same answer, too.” Such a big, beautiful heart. And also shows the price he paid, that he gave up his dream.

Those last two paragraphs just really tweak something in my heart. *sigh* Think about what type of childhood they must each have had. Neither of them even know what a wife or husband “should” do. Their love is so deep, but neither has

seen a healthy, loving relationship modelled for them, so they feel at a loss. In my opinion, they are both doing a wonderful, beautiful job of loving each other and contributing to their little family unit, but to them, it's not about what other people feel or see, it's what they perceive. They have nothing to compare to, no model of a relationship to measure themselves against, so they always wonder if they are measuring up to what a "proper" spouse should be like. The self-doubt you see in them here shows that for both of them, their parents (or lack thereof) really are a wound and, I believe, a cause for low self-esteem.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

47 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 16.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 16.2

April 27, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



Our Teacher Gu is a man of outstanding talent, and while it is not recognition that he seeks, he will do more than fine in more “high flying” settings.

Chapter 16.2 – My Mister Gu (2)

His words seemed to settle down into the depths of her heart.

So long as she was not occupied with anything, her thoughts would turn to these words of his.

According to his logic, she knew that her family had many issues, yet she still decided to drag him into the messiness of it all.

If he had been healthy, perhaps he would have had the strength to bear all of this with her, but to make him, who was already in this condition, face this together with her — wasn’t that even more selfish?

“What did you think of your visit to the prison this morning?” Another intern opened the microwave, took off the lid of his lunch container, and put it inside. “Before I first went there, I thought for sure that it would be really scary, but once I was actually there, I was fine with it.”

After hastily eating her lunch, she went downstairs to retrieve some written submissions filed by attorneys. In the main foyer of the courthouse were two dark-skinned elderly gentleman who were following behind their lawyers. One of them was pointing at the other one, grumbling incessantly, “It’s all your fault! You’ve made both sides have to take this to a lawsuit!” … When Tong Yan walked over and said that she needed to get some information, immediately, a friendly smile was received from both the fierce-looking individual and the party who was suppressing his objection and not daring to retort.

It was as if, so long as a person had come down from somewhere upstairs in this building, he or she would be able to take charge for them.

She could not adjust very well to this situation where people were misunderstanding her status. Right as she wanted to turn around to leave, she unexpectedly spied a seemingly familiar face. While she was still searching through her memory, that person had already approached her and smilingly greeted, “Miss Tong, do you still remember me? I’m the pharmaceutical rep who went to pick up Associate Chief Dong from the airport last time.”

With an “oh,” she responded, “I remember now. You are here because …?”

“I’m here helping a friend drop something off.” The pharmaceutical representative’s smile was very warm and amiable. “You work here? You just graduated?”

It was very easy to spot clues as to whether a person had ever worked before, and Tong Yan quickly explained, “Not graduated yet. I’m just on internship here.”

“It’s a good job placement. This type of place is suitable for young girls. It’s not tiring, and you don’t need to ask people for help.” The middle-aged man very naturally turned the topic onto Dong Changting. “Last time I was in a hurry to take Associate Chief Dong to a seminar and did not have time to meet your boyfriend. Is he a doctor as well, like Associate Chief Dong?”

Tong Yan shook her head. “He is a university teacher.”

“Oh, that’s great. Are he and Associate Chief Dong relatives? Based on their ages, their relationship should be uncle and nephew?”

Tong Yan did not want to say what their relationship was, but subconsciously, she was not willing to deny their relationship either.

Sometimes, things were just this unfair. They were legitimately father and son, yet this could not be acknowledged. Gu Pingsheng’s unwillingness to be in contact with him was his choice. However, that man, as a father, should not reject his duties and responsibilities.

Perhaps all medical sales representatives were very capable of exchanging in social niceties for she unknowingly ended up talking to that person for a long time. Piecing together many of the words spoken in casual conversation, a picture of Gu Pingsheng’s father gradually was sketched out. He was an associate chief physician for the nephrology department of a certain hospital and was very well known in professional circles. He had a wife who was also a doctor, the chief physician in the cardiology department of the same hospital.

Apart from having no children, his every aspect evoked envy in people.

That evening, the North Third Ring Road was congested for some time, and by the time she strode from the bus stop to the entrance to their community compound, she was just in time to see Gu Pingsheng at the doorway of the fresh fruits store, selecting some fruit while he waited for her.

The storekeeper’s wife very much liked him. Every time, she would choose the freshest fruits for him, but they were not the ones that looked the brightest and most attractive to the point that they were scary. When she walked up behind him, she saw that the fruit store owner’s wife was competently teaching him how to select dragon fruit and mangosteen.

She took hold of his left hand, which was currently unoccupied. Gu Pingsheng knew it was her and did not turn around, continuing instead to watch the storekeeper’s wife speak.

When the storekeeper’s wife had finished weighing everything, he finally was

willing to look at her.

“I don’t like to eat dragon fruit. Every time, I feel like there’s no flavour …” Tong Yan straightaway stated her central message by asking, “How about buying some mangoes?”

“Mangoes can cause excessive internal heat[1].” The storekeeper’s wife was filled with mirth. “Just now, I said as well that you liked mangoes, but your husband would not buy any.”

“Then let’s just buy the smaller type …”

“You’ve had mango this week already.” Gu Pingsheng’s answer was straight to the point. “I’ll buy some for you next week.”

She still wanted to make a last-ditch effort and throw in some words of protest, but Gu Pingsheng had already handed over the money and was pulling her towards their community compound, completely severing the last of those thoughts.

Later, after carefully mulling it over again and again, Tong Yan did not mention to him those things she had heard that day regarding his father. On the other hand, after a little more than half a month, Gu Pingsheng suddenly mentioned the topic of work to her.

He and Pingfan both had law backgrounds, so naturally, he had many friends in this field.

According to what he told her, at the time when he had come to China, the best work opportunity presented to him had actually been at a foreign-based law firm. However, because he had chosen to take a position in a university, needless to say, he had turned down the offer. However, that partner of the firm who had been interested in him was actually a schoolmate and alumnus of his university, and after him, another suitable candidate for the position had never been found. To date, the position was still unfilled.

“You don’t want to be in a university anymore?” Tong Yan was holding a clothes iron in her hand, uncertain as to why he all of a sudden had this idea.

“I’d probably still continue to stay and work at the university.” Gu Pingsheng seemed to have already thought through everything he was to say. “My teaching load at the university is by no means too heavy, so if there are other opportunities, I still have time for them.”

With her head lowered, Tong Yan spread out a dress shirt and began ironing the wrinkles.

After she had finished with the two sleeves, she lifted her head and continued to question, “But I feel that your current physical state definitely won’t be able to handle it.”

“I’m clear on what my own physical state is, and I’ll make sure to work within my limits.”

Behind him were floor-to-ceiling windows. Looking out from the twentieth floor, the myriad of brilliant lights seemed to merge together into a glowing sea.

Tong Yan carried on with lowered head to iron his shirt. She could approximately guess some of what he was thinking.

He had not been working for very long, and the apartment and his little bit of savings were all from what was left to him by his late mother.

If he had been in good health and had also graduated from a well-known medical school, he likely would have led a leisurely life. Even now, though he could no longer take up a surgical scalpel, if he did not have her and a furture lifestyle that could not be predicted, it would not be difficult for him to have a comfortable life.

But now, those were all just hypothetical situations.

Even when two ordinary people came together in a relationship, they needed to be mindful about being able to manage all the unknown ups and downs that life would bring them. And he, himself, already had too many problems that could not be resolved. Concerning the matter of the osteonecrosis of his femoral heads, he would undoubtedly have to have at least another surgery, and there were those other side effects that eventually, one after the other, would be showing up in him as well. Then, there was also Grandmother’s increasing age. These were all things that had to be resolved, one by one, and needed to be

thoroughly prepared for.

After the incident last time, she had also seriously contemplated this problem.

Out of the corner of her eye, Tong Yan could see that he had not moved the entire time. Raising her head, she wrinkled her nose slightly and said, ‘Fine. I’ll let you loose for now to forge your way in the world. Wait ten years for me. Ten years from now, I’ll be the bread winner, you be the gardener[2].”

Gu Pingsheng laughed in surprise at this, a smile lifting up one side of his lips.

Wagging the iron in her hand, she warned, “Careful of getting burned.”

But he did not care at all. Very quickly, his face drew near, and then slowly, he brought it up against hers. She, on the other hand, was alarmed by this and raised her right hand high up, keeping the dangerous device in it away from him. In this bizarre position and very unenjoyable experience for her, she exchanged kisses with him.

Gu Pingsheng was absolutely a person who put action to his words.

The following morning, she stood inside the bathroom, brushing her teeth, and through the half-open bedroom door, she saw him, head lowered and very focused on doing up the left cuff of his dress shirt. His face was not visible, but she could see his hands. Such a simple action, yet it was so pleasing to the eyes when he did it …

After the dress shirt was put on, it was the suit jacket.

And lastly, it was the pocket square. From a drawer inside the closet, he took out a handkerchief that was the same colour as his tie. Folding it diagonally down the middle by bringing the bottom corner to meet the opposite one, he spread those two corners at the top so that they were offset, then slipped the handkerchief into the pocket of his suit jacket.

Smooth. Fitting. So perfect that not a single flaw could be found.

When all of this was complete, she even somewhat felt that she did not recognize him.

“Mr. Gu, you’ve made me think of a movie.” Tong Yan cupped a handful of

water and washed away the foam in her mouth before carrying on, "*Roman Holiday*. You remind me of *Roman Holiday,* except in that movie, Audrey Hepburn, who slipped into the world of commoners, was actually a princess, and you're a man. Is this what you would have originally looked like after you graduated from King's?"

"If I had stayed there, or if after I came back to China, I did not go work at a university, this indeed should be what I would have looked like." As he spoke, he was leaning against the frame of the bathroom door, and reaching out a hand, he wiped away some white foam from the corner of her mouth.

Gu Pingsheng, Mr. Gu, when ever did you possess such beauty?

With a tilt of her head to the side, she joked, "Am I going to be one of those rich wives really soon, then? Ideally, the type who buys five or six big dogs, and everyday, I just walk the dogs and garden or something like that?"

"That type of request can be very easily fulfilled." Suppressing the smile peeking through at the corner of his lips, he mused, "To some extent, those in this particular profession can actually lead a very good life. I'll give you a simple example. I have a classmate who, in the 2008 economic crisis, did not have any projects, so his company forced him to take a one-year paid leave of absence. During that leave, the company paid him an annual salary of $500,000 USD."

Tong Yan listened in dazed astonishment. "He didn't bring in any business and he still got $500,000 USD a year. Then if he was actually working as normal …" She thought about her 1600 yuan monthly wage from her internship job at the courthouse and inwardly gawked that, in comparison to the legal counsel provided by foreign law firms, she was truly cheap labour.

By the time he left home, Tong Yan had already packed her lunch as well and was heading out the door.

Outside, it was raining moderately, and the platform at the bus stop was crammed with people. With much difficulty, she found a place to stand, and as she closed her umbrella, the bus was pulling into the stop.

Inside the long, articulated bus, the passengers were also packed in tightly

against one another, and many people, when they saw this, decided to give up getting on this bus. Tong Yan, though, did not dare delay, for fear that traffic congestion would cause her to be late. Bracing herself, she dashed towards the door of the bus.

However, right when she had just squeezed in, someone suddenly grabbed hold of her wrist and pulled her back out from the crowd.

She let out a cry of fright. As she whipped her head around in alarm, Lu Bei was already extending his arms upwards, using his coat to shield her from the rain. “I have something to ask you.”

[1] 上火 “shang huo.” In traditional Chinese medicine, this is describing when the yin and yang in your body have been thrown off balance, and there is excessive yang or “heat.” The resulting symptoms can vary, but the more common ones include rashes, sore throat, coughing, acne, *etc.*

[2]我负责赚钱养家，你负责种草种花. The literal translation is, “I’ll be responsible for earning the money to provide for the family, you be responsible for planting the grasses and flowers.” Tong Yan is saying that ten years from now, she will take on the responsibility of supporting the family and he will just need to do relaxing things at home. This sounds singsong when it is read because it rhymes and therefore carries a playful, cute feeling.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
48 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 16.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 16.3

April 30, 2016 by hoju 15 Comments

 The mind and its imagination are such powerful things. This is just a small piece of what Gu Pingsheng meant, that if he had a girlfriend, she would “suffer with him”? (On a side note, who said Teacher Gu is all serious? See how he lures his wife out for some fun?)

Chapter 16.3 – My Mister Gu (3)

He pulled her outside, catching her completely off guard.

In that space where many people were swarming forward with all their might, only the two of them were moving in the opposite direction.

“I have to go to work.” Tong Yan could hear the people around her grumbling and complaining, but though she wanted to break free, she was unable to. “If there’s anything, we can talk about it tonight, okay?”

“I drove. I’ll drive you to your work. We’ll talk on the way.”

He stretched out an arm, fending off two men beside them who were trying to get on the bus.

“Eh? First thing in the morning and I get to run into a lunatic. What are you doing not getting on—” The obstruction incensed one of the men, but when that person whipped his head around and lashed out with a sentence, he was

gradually frightened into silence by the look in Lu Bei's eyes.

Worried that he might cause trouble, Tong Yan quickly flipped her hand over and held him back by the arm. "These people are all just going to work. We're the ones in the wrong." Lu Bei did not utter a sound and merely wiped away at the rain on his face.

His vehicle was parked on the roadside not far from the bus stop. As she stepped out from the flow of people, she quickly pulled his coat back down from over her head and opened her umbrella above herself.

Lu Bei opened his car door and motioned for her to get inside. Tong Yan shook her head. "Let's just talk here. What is so important that you absolutely had to come find me now?"

Lu Bei had expected this insistence from her, and he did not force her. Or to be more exact, he had never known how to force her to do something.

"That day, I heard the people in the fruit shop call you Mrs. Gu. Are you married to that person?"

Tong Yan gave an "mm."

"He's your university teacher." Lu Bei was not asking; he merely stated this. "I remember last Christmas, I saw him in Shanghai."

As before, she answered with an "mm."

"With you in a relationship like this with your teacher, will that affect you from graduating?"

"It's just another year. After my internship, I'll be graduating."

"You and him are living here, in this community compound? And you're living together with Grandmother?"

"Yes. He's the one who bought the apartment."

The questions Lu Bei asked were all over the place and had no method or plan to them. But no matter what he asked, she provided a sincere answer to him, with no intentions at all of being perfunctory or half-hearted.

Eventually, Lu Bei could not make himself ask further but yet was also unwilling

to get into the vehicle, so he stood beside his car door in silence. And she, holding her umbrella above her, stood with him. Many years ago, in one of their occasional arguments, Lu Bei had also stood awkwardly out in the thickly falling snow, unwilling to go home but also unwilling to admit he was wrong. She had also stood in the same way before him, wearing a thick knitted hat and gloves and remaining in a silent huff.

"It's about time now." She pressed her lips into a smile. "I really am going to be late."

"Is he unable to hear?" Lu Bei suddenly opened his mouth and spoke again. "He can't hear people speak? Can't hear any sounds at all?"

This question was rather unexpected, and Tong Yan did not answer straightaway. Then, she heard him say, "One night, I came here to sign the home purchase contract and saw him over in the fruit store selecting fruits. I had originally wanted to say hello to him but discovered that he actually could not hear me speak. And then you came home."

Tong Yan thought for a moment, then decided to be honest. "He once had an illness and that later affected his hearing."

"So you know that he is deaf, but you still want to be with him?"

"Of course I know about his deafness. I knew from the first day he came to class." Tong Yan's tone was light. "Aside from this one thing, he is outstanding in every aspect, and he is very good to me, great to me."

Lu Bei did not utter anything. It was not long ago that he, in Tong Yan's eyes, had also been this way. None of his shortcomings were important. She would only say, "Lu Bei is very good. He is great to me …"

"You really want to live in this community?" Tong Yan turned the questions to him. "Do you really think that will be a good thing?"

He fell silent for some time before telling her, "Fang Yunyun is the one who bought the property. I won't be living here. You can rest assured."

That day her luck was very good, for when she was about to leave, a taxicab

happened to come to a stop beside her. No sooner had the passenger in the front seat pushed open the door than she pulled open the back door and sat into the taxi.

After the taxi had driven far away, even the driver noticed something and with a grin, asked this young girl whether she had gotten in a quarrel with her boyfriend. Otherwise, how could she harden her heart and just leave alone in a taxi?

Tong Yan smiled and answered, no, he was simply an old schoolmate.

When she arrived at the courthouse, the court clerk who was mentoring her had just finished two court sessions. Seeing the terribly wretched state that Tong Yan was in as she wiped at the water soaking her pants, she was rather perplexed and asked, was the rain coming down hard outside? Why were her pants all wet? Tong Yan could not very well say that she had stood out in the rain for too long and had basically gotten wet because of the wind and rainwater that had splashed up, so she only gave an “mm-hmm” and answered vaguely, “Quite hard.”

“Autumn rains carry a chill in them. I have a pair of workout pants in my cabinet. Go grab it and put it on.” This big sister-like court clerk smiled and patted her on the shoulder. “You’re late anyway, so you might as well be a little bit more thick-skinned and just ask for the day off.”

“No, I can’t.” Tong Yan pulled out several more tissues and dabbed at her pants. “I can’t change into workout pants. That would look so bad in an office setting. Requesting a day off also will not do. I need good grades for my internship to help me earn money in the future to provide for my family.”

Usually, those who were able to obtain an internship position in one of the courts had all relied on connections to do so, and hence, the court clerk simple treated her words as if she was joking. From the drawer, she pulled out a hairdryer for Tong Yan, telling her to go to the washroom to blow herself dry, and then set the notes she needed Tong Yan to organize onto the desk.

Since starting his job at the foreign-based law firm, the time Gu Pingsheng spent at home was much less.

Sometimes, when she got off early from her work at the courthouse, she

would take the bus to the university or his office building to wait for him to go home. Gradually, the people at the courthouse who mentored her learned of this, and they all could not help laughing and saying that she truly was leading a new era of being a good wife. For other people, if they were younger, the boyfriend would drive over to pick up the girlfriend, while if they were a little older and married, once they got off work, they would rush off to pick up their children from school.

Only she was the oddball exception.

Entering into November, all the internship students began discussing their results from the National Judicial Examination[1].

Though she did not talk about it, in her heart, she was extremely nervous. With her abilities and intelligence, she had no chance at all of getting into a foreign-based law firm, and therefore, the National Judicial Examination was a necessary bridge that she had to cross. The Saturday that she could look up her score was quickly approaching. Gu Pingsheng happened to be invited to attend a conference that was being held at a vacation resort out in the suburbs of Beijing.

Before he left, Tong Yan repeatedly verified with him when he would be returning and what the conference schedule was so she could know approximately the times he would be speaking and when he would be resting.

On that Saturday, she arose early, and while she was researching how to make milk pudding, she also tried to gauge out the time, speculating what he was doing at that moment. Would he suddenly feel unwell?

She spent the morning experimenting several times, and both the successful and unsuccessful puddings were all destroyed in her and Grandmother’s bellies.

Following dinner, she kept an eye on the time, and when there was about an hour or so before he was to arrive home, Tong Yan once again began making some milk pudding. She worked through all the steps until, finally, she had poured the cream into the moulds and placed them in the oven.

Are you nearly home?

She sent this message out, and after a while, she received his reply.

It was the detailed address of the vacation resort, so detailed, in fact, that it contained a room number. Were it not for the fact that it had come from his mobile phone number, it would have seemed more like a spam message.

She used eight or nine seconds to read through that message twice but still did not understand what he meant by it. Fortunately, a second text was very soon sent over: *Just now, that was the address of the resort. Mrs. Gu has thirty minutes to dress and pretty herself up, then bring one day and one night's worth of clothing and essentials here to have a little vacation with Mr. Gu. TK*

His tone in the message was relaxed.

She asked him: *But then, what about our elderly family member here at home?*

Pingfan needs a quiet place to get ready for her exams. She'll be staying in our home for the next two days. Mrs. Gu, you have another twenty-nine minutes. TK

From the looks of it, he had had this planned ahead of time.

Now that she seriously thought about it, since coming back after her final examinations, the two of them had not spent any time away from home together and especially had not stayed any nights away. They could definitely take the title of "most model homebody couple in history" … These sudden arrangements by Gu Pingsheng had caught her completely by surprise, and it was fortunate that it was only for one day and night. Pulling out her backpack, she packed it, told Grandmother that someone was coming to take care of her, and then hurried out the door of their home.

Before she left, she still did not forget about the milk pudding she had made for him.

The resort was not very close, and she spent approximately fifty or more minutes on the road to get there.

Since the resort was comprised wholly of individual villas clustered together, when the staff saw the address on her mobile phone, they immediately arranged for a vehicle to take her over there. The passengers on the vehicle consisted mainly of people who had come vacationing, and stepping into the vehicle with

her were a young couple who were whispering quietly the entire time. The boy was holding all sorts of brochures, trying to find a place to go fishing, while the girl repeatedly said to him, “Let me look at the yoga class schedule.” Eventually, because of these few brochures, the two nearly broke out into a quarrel. The boy hurriedly bowed and apologized, making all sorts of animal sounds in remarkably perfect imitations, and after a full five or six minutes, the girl finally gave a light “humph,” bursting out into giggles.

Tinges of warmth and tenderness. The entire vehicle was filled with this feeling.

When the vehicle stopped in front of the place where Gu Pingsheng was staying, she hopped out and, gazing at that little villa speckled with lights, inhaled lightly.

Earlier on, the staff had described the villas, explaining that each one was composed of four separate suites.

For every forty villas, there was assigned one customer service team, which waited to offer its assistance at any time by providing twenty-four-hour telephone service.

Gu Pingsheng’s room was on the first floor, and she followed the meandering gravel pathway over toward it until she was directly facing the room number. Glancing down at the number in her mobile phone and confirming that they were indeed the same, she sent him a text message: *Tonight’s moonlight is quite nice. A very suitable ambiance for eloping.*

After she sent the message, the room still remained quiet.

Moving forward, Tong Yan pressed her ear against the door, listening for sounds inside. There truly were no noises of movement or water, but given that there was light shining out from under the door, there should be someone inside.

Even merely thinking in this way caused all the previous excitement and anticipation to start to gradually dwindle away, and an insuppressible feeling of fear silently spread in her.

Her mind went blank for several seconds, but then she immediately swung off

her backpack and set it down. Yanking out seven or eight leaflets and brochures, she opened them to look for the telephone number of the customer service centre.

The surroundings were too dim. She unlocked her phone and, by the light of the screen, searched frantically for the number.

First page, no. Second page, third page, fourth page … The leaflets did not have it. Neither did the brochures.

They were all filled with descriptions of many kinds of activities and events, so many that she was going mad. The more she wanted to read through carefully, the more panicked she was getting, to the point she did not even know what she might have missed. Her heart was beating so heavily it was as if it was being weighed down by lead, and every thud caused her chest to ache with pain. At last, her legs became so weak they would not support her, and leaning feebly against the door, she made herself calm down. Then, with trembling fingers, she turned back to the very first brochure …

Biting down on her lip, she kept telling herself, “Stay calm. Tong Yan, stay calm.”

Suddenly, all the light disappeared.

A hand covered her eyes.

“It’s me. Just now, I wanted to go out to meet you, but I took the wrong path.” Gu Pingsheng’s voice was directly against her ear, and his breathing was still somewhat ragged. From behind, he enfolded his arms around her and assured her, “I am fine. There’s absolutely nothing wrong. Don’t scare yourself.”

[1] Recall from footnote [2] in chapter 8.1 that the National Judicial Examination is a unified national entry exam for people practicing legal professions in China and is held in September every year.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue

49 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 17.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 17.1

May 4, 2016 by hoju 14 Comments



“I discovered today at noon that the patio here is very beautiful, so I wanted to bring you here to see. But, the bedroom is very inviting as well. Which one would Mrs. Gu like to see first?”

sizzle Hear that? It’s quite hot. You might want a fan for this update. Oh, and nosebleed warning.

Chapter 17.1 – When You Listen to Me Speak (1)

Tong Yan slowly nodded her head. Her heart, which had been clenched tightly, loosened, but in that instant, her arms still felt limp.

As he spoke, he swiped open the room door with his key card, all the while still keeping one hand over her eyes. With his other hand, he picked up her backpack from the ground and then guided her into the room.

Trepidation still lingered in Tong Yan's heart, and from her lips, the question slipped out, "You're really okay?" But after saying this, she realized that he could not see her speaking.

"I discovered today at noon that the patio here is very beautiful, and I wanted to bring you here to see. But, the bedroom is very inviting as well." Gu Pingsheng shut the door and set the backpack on the couch. "Which one would Mrs. Gu like to see first?"

Her lips pursed together, then lifted up into a smile.

This man was covering her eyes and standing behind her, so although he was asking a question, he did not appear as if he was going to let her answer.

She followed along with his steps and slowly moved forward.

When he released his hand and she saw in front of her the completely enclosed patio, she finally understood what he meant by "beautiful." The patio was actually suspended. Beneath their feet was a transparent glass floor, and when she lowered her head, she could see a pond and several koi swimming inside. Above their heads was the night sky that could not be considered very clear, for only very faintly could the stars and moon be discerned.

Indeed, this was designed for people on vacation. It was so large it was frightening.

In order to allow people to sit and rest, there was even a very large L-shaped sofa and a tinted glass coffee table.

"I was honestly frightened terribly just now." Although Tong Yan was enjoying the lovely surroundings, she still did not forget to continue discussing what had happened earlier. "Next time, when I send you a message, no matter where you are or what you're doing, you must reply to me right away."

"Even when I'm in class?"

“Even when you’re in class.”

“Even when I’m in a meeting?”

“Even when you’re in a meeting.” Without any hesitation, she stated, “Work is not important; your safety is most important.”

Perhaps for the average person, this sort of request truly was very unreasonable.

However, with that first time from before and today’s second time, she was genuinely afraid. In particular, just a moment ago, when she was searching for the telephone number, she had nearly thought through every possibility of what might have happened. The human imagination was the most fearsome thing, for it could utterly demolish all judgment and calm.

The most important point was, these were not based completely on imagination. They were all things that were possible.

“It’s my fault.” Smiling, he moved so that he was close up against her. “I agree to everything you have requested.”

His face was very close, so close that she could smell the scent of his breath. Tong Yan jumped in alarm, and shifting her face away, she reminded him, “This place is surrounded by glass …”

With an “mm,” Gu Pingsheng told her, “The glass is rather special. We can see other people, but those people can’t see us.”

Tong Yan understood this, but she still thought that it was a very weird feeling.

Through the glass, you could see the night sky, the surrounding grove of trees, as well as, near and far, the lights with their dim glow. Possibly in order to create ambiance, there were not many high street lamps and rather, more lights were embedded into the paths.

Tong Yan felt Gu Pingsheng’s fingers lightly stroke her face, brows, and eyes. For a few seconds, his hand obstructed her sight, and she could feel her eyelashes grazing against his palm. And then, that hand moved away, and his fingers slid all the way down from the bridge of her nose to her cheek, until they finally came to rest on her lips.

His hand, for once, was not cool.

It seemed that since his surgery and return, it was not often that his body temperature felt normal.

The pads of his fingers had the slightly rough texture expected of a man, and when they brushed against her lips, it felt tickly and warm. Tong Yan bit down on her lip to try to stop that ticklish sensation, and laughing, she skirted away from him. “I made pudding for you, milk pudding.”

She sidestepped away quickly and pulled out the food storage container sealed with its locking lid. She had even deliberately bought some aluminum foil tart pans from the supermarket, and each pudding was packaged very meticulously, like a Portugese egg tart[1] in one of Macau’s cafés.

Taking a seat on the couch, Gu Pingsheng patted the spot next to him. Tong Yan immediately was very fawningly obedient, and with the box held between her hands, she kicked her sneakers off using one foot to help the other, hopped onto the couch, and sat down cross-legged on it. “Here, eat.”



牛奶布丁 Milk pudding, which has a consistency somewhat similar to a baked custard. (Image credit)

Holding one by the foil tart pan, Tong Yan brought the pudding up to his lips.

The corner of his lips turned upwards, and he lowered his head and took a bite.

“Have you felt unwell at all lately?”

“Once summer is past, it will be much better. There are no big problems with my heart. Mainly, it’s just right here.” Gu Pingsheng placed a hand over the upper part of his chest. “Don’t think of it as something that serious. SARS is a type of pneumonia, and pneumonia is something that most people have had during their childhood.”

His facial expression and tone of voice were light. Tong Yan leaned her elbow into the back cushion of the couch, propping her head up on her hand and watching him absorbedly as he ate.

Gu Pingsheng truly had good habits during eating. He did not speak, and in two bites, he had finished one pudding.

At once, she replenished his food supply and gestured to him to continue eating. Gu Pingsheng pushed his lips out as a hint and did not move, the smile on his face becoming deeper. Fine. She had to admit that, despite being a teacher who served the people, he sometimes still really knew how to inject fun and delight into things.

She very sensibly obliged him. Pinching the edge of the foil pan beside the pudding with both hands, she fed him.

When Gu Pingsheng went to take a shower, she took their clean clothes out from the backpack.

Hearing that the sound of water had essentially stopped, she picked up his clean underwear and shirt, walked over to the bathroom door, and pushed it open by a crack, intending on setting the clothing down on the marble counter.

She had not expected that when she glanced in the mirror, she would see him completely unclothed and shaving his face with a razor.

Tong Yan thought he had not detected her presence and quietly took half a step back, pretending that she had not seen anything as she pulled the door shut. However, the next second, she wordlessly pushed it open again and leaned herself against the doorframe, watching him.

In the mirror, Gu Pingsheng returned her gaze. There was still shaving cream on his face, and he was using his fingers to feel for any spots he might have

missed. Even though he had toweled himself dry, beneath the lighting, his body still glowed with the sheen of moisture.

"In your opinion"—Tong Yan stepped over to his side, trying to focus all of her gaze on only his face—"are human beings very fragile?"

Without answering, he picked up a damp towel and wiped his jaw clean.

While she was still planning in her mind what were the appropriate words to use to express what she wanted to say, he had already put down his towel, lifted her up, and set her down so she was sitting on the edge of the sink. The place where she was seated was very narrow, and she could only wrap her arms around his bare back to maintain her balance.

"What are you trying to say?"

Tong Yan's throat felt dry and hot, and she licked at her lips. "I miss you. If your work from now on is going to be really busy, will it be better if we have a child? One who can miss you with me."

The bathroom after a shower was very humid and several degrees higher in temperature than the bedroom. The humidity and temperature as well as his appearance at this moment were all combining to silently cloak these words with a suggestive, sensual overtone.

His lips came together and curled upwards. "That sounds pretty nice."

Upon stating this, he lowered his head, but he did not bring his mouth to hers, instead letting his kisses begin on her cheek, trail over the indentation below her jaw, and stop at her neck. Then his lips parted, and his teeth took hold of the delicate cartilage above her throat.

His lips and teeth razed against her neck. Instantly, a numb limpness and fluttering of her heart she had never before experienced flooded through her every nerve.

Warmth. Moistness. Breath that seemed to burn.

She was enclosed tightly in his arms, unable to move at all. Her mouth and tongue were dry. Her throat was held captive between his lips and teeth so that she did not even dare swallow. Her entire body felt so weak she could not even

sit and slipped backwards down the curve of the sink.

It was fortunate that his hand was supporting her back, so she at least did not completely fall backwards.

Second after second, minute after minute. Over and over again.

This torture of extreme intimacy nearly suffocated her.

At last, he raised his head, seeking a kiss. Tong Yan's lips were parched, and amid his deepening action, she obligingly extended the tip of her tongue to probe into his mouth, letting him tightly, closely intertwine with her in a kiss.

Supporting her with one hand, the other hand began to methodically unfasten her clothing.

"Yan Yan?" He was calling her, but he did not lift his head to look at her face. His voice, which had been moistened by the steam in the room, was somewhat husky, and in the warm air surrounding them that had not yet dissipated, it sounded particularly tender and beguiling.

She gave an "mm," treating it as if he could hear her.

His hand followed the curve of her back as it slid down. Lifting up her entire body, he slowly entered her.

Tong Yan breathed in deeply. Inch by inch, her strength and ability to think were drawn from her, and in the delirium of passion, she caressed her face against his … After a very long time, he took another shower with her. The warm water spraying upon their hair and bodies felt absurdly good. When she climbed into bed, there was not an ounce of strength left in her whole body, and the instant her head touched her pillow, her awareness became more and more fuzzy.

But she was forced to deal with his question of whether she wanted to blowdry her hair.

When she awoke again, it was already past eleven o'clock the next day. With whirring hums, the central heating blew out hot air, and the room was so warm it could cause people to forget what season it was outside.

The thick curtains had been completely drawn, and if she had not looked at her watch, she would not have realized it was already approaching the time for lunch. Sitting up in bed, she felt that her lower back was so sore it felt limp. Very quickly, she remembered that as he was blowing her hair, he had, from behind, pulled her into his arms. His palm had rested against her lower abdomen. And then, it had slid downwards … Besides the sensation of his lips against her back, she could not clearly recall any other details at all …

After getting dressed, Tong Yan discovered that Gu Pingsheng was not in the room, but he had left her some breakfast. Spread open on the table was one of the resort brochures, and in black pen, a location had been circled. It should be the place where he had gone.

Tong Yan hastily polished off all of the food and then took a shuttle bus to find him.

The sky had been dark when she arrived the previous evening, so she had not been able to look closely at the scenery along the way. This hour was the time of day when the sunlight was at its best, and as the shuttle drove along the perimeter of a lake, the atmosphere of late autumn could be felt much heavier here than in the city. When she jumped out of the vehicle, she saw, off in the distance at the end of a row of sun umbrellas, that person leaning back in a lounge chair beneath one of the umbrellas, reading.

The fishing rod in front of him was there entirely for appearances.

She followed the graveled pathway that had been laid along the brook's edge, and because she had intentionally dressed herself up, she drew many gazes. However, her eyes were focused only on that person who was engrossed in his reading.

Crouching down beside him, she asked, "What time did you get up?"

"A little past seven o'clock." Gu Pingsheng set his book aside. "I thought you were going to sleep all the way into the afternoon."

Tong Yan could hear the implied meaning in his words. Turning her face away to look instead at the fishing float bobbing on the surface of the water, she chose not to respond to him.

Since this resort had specifically allocated an area for you to go fishing, then of course they were adequately prepared for it. All around them, there were people crying out that they had a bite, and basically, with every two or three times of pulling up on the rod, there would be a fish on the hook. By the looks of it, these fish were not small either.

Tong Yan was enthusiastically watching when all of a sudden, he patted her on the shoulder. “Mrs. Gu, if you don’t reel in your rod, your fish is going to get away.”

Suddenly grasping his meaning, she turned around to see that Gu Pingsheng’s fishing float had already slipped under the surface, and she hurriedly jumped up. “How do I reel it in, how do I do it?”

Gu Pingsheng also stood and chuckled as he taught her. By the time she had learned what to do, though, the fish had already gotten away.

“Look at you, how lazy you are.” Tong Yan looked crossly at him. “You should have just pulled it in yourself. Instead, you were counting on me, a fishing idiot, to do the reeling in …”

“The problem is, fishing to me is just something to pass the time. Watching you fish is what is actually fun.” Gu Pingsheng baited the hook and continued on to cast the line before unperturbedly taking a seat again.

Squeezing herself on so that she was sharing his lounge chair, she sat snug up against him.

“Why do you all of a sudden want to have a baby?” he suddenly asked her.

“Because life is unpredictable.” Gazing directly into his eyes, she told him, “We’re not like other people. We definitely are not going to separate. So I don’t want to wait until some sort of tragedy or disaster happens before I recognize that there were things I should have done but did not do.”

The wind by the lakeside was somewhat chilly. She was dressed rather lightly, and her hands were already a little cold.

“You’ve made me come to realize one thing: in the face of love, one’s personal principles can become completely worthless and inconsequential.” He pulled open his winter coat and encircled her in his embrace. As the wind penetrated

through his words, his voice carried a bewitching quality that could cause a person to sin. “Since Mrs. Gu is so eager, Mr. Gu will certainly work his hardest on the task.”

[1]蛋挞”dan ta” egg tart or 葡式蛋挞 “Pu shi dan ta” Portugese egg tart. Macau is known for its Portugese egg tarts, which are a baked egg custard in a flaky shell pastry. (Probably the most notable visual difference from the Hong Kong-style egg tarts is the caramelized-looking top of the Portugese-style.) While you can find them in many places in Macau, there are a couple of bakeries and cafes that are famous for them.



Portugese egg tarts
(image credit)

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
50 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 17.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 17.2

May 7, 2016 by hoju 12 Comments



When Mr. and Mrs. Gu combine forces, they are definitely a force to be reckoned with. Catch the little details about Gu Pingsheng?

Chapter 17.2 – When You Listen to Me Speak (2)

After that short, little vacation, Gu Pingsheng's work started to become busier. Although the majority of his work was done by a paralegal and he did not need to go in to the office everyday, when there was an important meeting, he still could not avoid it. In particular, when he was working for clients in markets that had a time zone difference, it was even more difficult for him to control the timing of things.

On Christmas Eve, she walked for a long time through the shopping centre near his office building to idle away the time.

However, he eventually still sent her a text message, telling her to go to his office to wait for him. While Tong Yan would often come and wait for him to get off work, she generally avoided going up to his company's office, so when she saw the message, she was somewhat surprised.

At the company reception desk, she stated Gu Pingsheng's name.

The young girl at reception did not at all try to conceal her curiosity as she assessed Tong Yan over. "Mrs. Gu?"

Tong Yan answered with an "mm" and asked, "He's still in his meeting?"

"Still is. His assistant came out just now and told me that if a woman came to find him, that person for sure would be Mrs. Gu." The receptionist smiled very amicably. "I'll take you to his office first." After saying this, she finally turned to look at a man beside Tong Yan. "May I ask for your name, please?"

The man had been eyeing Tong Yan as if appraising her, and when the young girl asked him this, he finally snapped his attention back and smiled, "Luo. Luo Zihao. I am a friend of TK's."

"Mr. Luo?" The receptionist flipped through the notebook in front of her. "You don't have an appointment? I'll take you to the waiting room first, then, and when TK finishes his meeting …"

With a frustrated, yet amused look, Luo Zihao interrupted, "May I go with Mrs. Gu into his office to wait for him?"

The receptionist hesitated at this. Luo Zihao turned his eyes to Tong Yan.

Quickly, she came to Luo Zihao's rescue. After the receptionist led them both into Gu Pingsheng's office, they finally looked at each other again and could not help chuckling.

"I am TK's classmate from many years back, starting from when we were in Catholic school together." Luo Zihao gave a short and concise self-introduction. "Later, I went to Yale and he went to Penn, and we thought we had finally escaped each other. Who would have thought? After I withdrew myself from Yale, I somehow got accepted into his university and even ended up staying on and working there."

“You’re a university professor, too?” Tong Yan eyed him up and down with a show of seriousness.

“Authenticity guaranteed.” Luo Zihao took out a cigarette, but after thinking about it, he did not light it, only playing around with it in his fingers. “Too bad he later withdrew from Penn. Otherwise, he would have had to call me ‘Teacher.’”

Tong Yan could not hold back a laugh. “Is it a fad for you guys to drop out from your school? His cousin did the same.”

“Gu Pingfan?” Luo Zihao made a very strange expression with his face. “She is a pure idealist, doing it so that her studies would be put to true usefulness. I dropped out back then merely because my patriotism was overflowing. A student at Yale who was a Chinese national was being discharged from the school, and the reason was that her English wasn’t as good as an American’s. At the time, all the international students in the entire school participated in the protests and demonstrations, including me.”

“And then what happened?”

“And then the university made concessions and that student changed majors. But my patriotism was overflowing and I just did not want to continue studying in that school anymore, so I went to Penn.”

Luo Zihao talked about things of the past, and he would occasionally intersperse some stories of Gu Pingsheng’s history in between. Many were ones she had never heard before, and Tong Yan listened to them with enthusiastic attention, frequently asking further about little details.

When Gu Pingsheng pushed open the door and stepped in, Luo Zihao was recounting one of Gu Pingsheng’s previous wilderness survival experiences with a pretense of solemnity. He was unable to see what Luo Zihao was saying and could only see that Tong Yan was listening with great delight. Unconsciously, a smile appeared on his face as well.

Hearing the noise, Luo Zihao turned around to look at him. “TK, I must say, you made the first move and beat me to the punch. I’ve said before that the type of woman I like the most has eyes where the separation between the whites and

her black irises is not overly distinct. Right here”—he used his unlit cigarette to point at the inner corner of his own eye—“needs to curve deeply inwards. When she smiles, her entire eye will curve into a crescent shape. Absolutely wonderful.”

Gu Pingsheng walked over to Tong Yan’s side and sat down. “I know. Since our student days, you have liked to mimic my tastes.”

Luo Zihao cast a sidelong glance at him before speaking to Tong Yan in jest, “Tong Yan, let me tell you a secret. TK once asked me whether I would ever fall for my own student. This sort of guy looks so gentlemanly and respectable on the outside, but he is actually just a beast dressed up nicely. He could very well one day end up having ‘something’ with his own student.”

Going along with the playful mocking tone Gu Pingsheng had used, Tong Yan calmly responded, “I know. I was once his student.”

That person, who previously had been incessantly talking with vigour, was now, by the combined forces of Gu Pingsheng and Tong Yan, left dumbstruck.

Since the meeting had ended too late, most of the eateries were already closed, so Tong Yan ended up suggesting that they might as well go home for dinner. Luo Zihao was very happy to agree with this and really did follow the two back to their home to freeload an ordinary, home-cooked meal.

He was someone who had a way with words, and even Grandmother liked him very much. When he left, he did not forget to urge Tong Yan to make sure she left some free time in her schedule to allow him to treat her to a meal in return.

“He said the girls in your school before were very open and liberal, and they would, in the window, show only their thigh or …” Tong Yan was sprawled on his desk, and unable to think of any appropriate wording to use, she decided to simply point at that voluptuous part of her body. “They would have the boys guess the name of who it was based on the part that was showing?”

Gu Pingsheng broke into laughter. He really did not know what else Luo Zihao would have said to cause Tong Yan to be so curious and constantly seeking confirmation to her various questions. “Every place will have girls who are more

liberal. Of course, there will be more conservative ones, too."

"The key question is, did you ever see any?"

"I think I did."

"You think you did?"

"I did."

"You did?"

Gu Pingsheng finally gave a laughing sigh. "Mrs. Gu, I studied medicine, so in my eyes, those were no different from medical specimens."

Tong Yan thought about this and agreed that what he said was true, but then she thought about it some more and found that there was a big problem with what he said. "So when you look at me, I'm also like a specimen?" When the meaning of this sort of term was extended to include her, an inexplicable chill was sent down her back …

"What do you think?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. That's why I asked you."

Leaning back against the head of the bed, Gu Pingsheng pinched the bridge of his nose to ease some of the fatigue he was feeling. "Mrs. Gu, your question can very easily cause me to interpret it as, you are not happy with a certain aspect of your married life."

He completely quashed her with those words, and no more sound came from her.

Actually, she still had many questions that she had not asked him.

In terms of his physical condition, Luo Zihao's descriptions had come from a different perpective, and naturally, he had mentioned some things she had not known about, for example, how Gu Pingsheng had received speech training after he lost his hearing. According to Luo Zihao's depiction, he actually had not needed to do this as he could have simply accepted the use of a hearing aid, and with the device's help, he could have been no different from a normal person.

With regard to whether he could use a hearing aid, she had once plainly asked

him about it. At the time, Gu Pingsheng had answered that he did not want to for the time being. But Luo Zihao's explanation was much more in depth than what he had told her.

"He normally does not wear a hearing aid, and I really think there is nothing the matter with that. Honestly, nothing at all. He has taken speech training and has said himself that he will make sure to regularly attend therapy for speech error correction. However, the reason behind this is not a good one. You must know about what happened with his mother. I've always felt that he has not been able to get past that psychological barrier."

She carefully recalled in detail all the little things he had once said as well as the gossip she had heard before in the hospital.

His mother's death had been by suicide. And he himself had once said that on the day of the mishap, he actually could have discovered even earlier that something was wrong. He had said that if he had been just a bit more aware, a bit more attentive, that if he had truly listened carefully to the sounds coming from her room, perhaps his mother might not have left the world so early …

Now that she thought about it, his words then had still been very vague and had omitted too many details.

Her thoughts were somewhat in disarray.

However, she very much understood matters such as these. There were some words that, unless it was the appropriate time, speaking them aloud would be even more severely consequential to you than killing you. For instance, years ago, during their first encounter, for what reason had she refused to sign the papers for her mother to have surgery? Or later, why had she needed to borrow money from him? Or why, after she had sold the home, had she insisted that all the money remaining after the medical expenses had been paid be kept with him?

Those were all hidden scars in the heart, hidden scars that were too difficult to speak of.

She tossed and turned in bed, unable to fall asleep. Beside her, Gu Pingsheng, who was leaning back in bed and reading, detected this and lowered his head to ask her, "What's wrong?"

She hesistated for half a second, then turned her face up to look at him. “Nothing.”

Once she finished saying this, she moved herself snug up against him and wrapped her arms tight around his waist.

She buried her head against him for several seconds and then finally began using both her hands and feet to crawl up until she was lying on top of Gu Pingsheng. Pulling his book from his hands, she tossed it onto the bedside table. “Do you still remember what we were doing last year at this time?”

“Watching a movie.” He broke out in amused chuckles and asked her in return, “So, this year at this time, what would you like to do?”

The words had only just left his lips before he was lowering his head. Meticulously, he began grazing kisses around the outline of her lips as he reached behind and turned off the bedside lamp.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
51 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 17.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 17.3

May 11, 2016 by hoju 24 Comments



I know it's the wrong novel, but happy anniversary to Zhousheng Chen and Shi Yi. ❤

Haha. I'm quite amused by the task that Mrs. Gu made Mr. Gu do for her. And Teacher Gu is a sly one, isn't he?

Chapter 17.3 – When You Listen to Me Speak (3)

Prior to the New Year's holiday, anyone who hung around in a school would not be able to escape going to a lively evening celebration.

No matter where he was, Gu Pingsheng was always the most popular teacher. In order to ensure that he could indeed attend, the students of his faculty had specially told several of the ones who knew Tong Yan to call her and invite her as

well.

She hung up the phone and silently calculated. She was clearly only twenty-two years old and a fourth-year university student, but with all these addresses of "*Shimu*" and "Little *Shiniang*[1]" ["Little Teacher-Mother"] coming from his students, she was nearly starting to doubt her own age.

"I'm still just on internship." She ran a deep brown wooden comb unhurriedly through her hair. "Teacher Gu, after being together with you for so long, I've become old and serious …"

Gu Pingsheng leaned back into the couch and glanced at his watch. "You should go have your afternoon nap now."

He had completely ignored her protests.

In her bare feet, Tong Yan jumped down onto the floor, and amid Gu Pingsheng's tireless voice cautioning her that she would catch a cold that way, she brought out a stack of glass bottles and an entire box of cotton swabs from the bedroom, dropping them onto the couch in a colourful display.

"Which colour do you think is nice?" she asked him.

Gu Pingsheng really did not have much of a good opinion about these sorts of unhealthy products, but he knew that all girls liked to prettify themselves and occasionally allowing some leniency was necessary.

"This rose-coloured one." With reluctance, he made himself offer an opinion.

"Do you know how to apply nail polish?"

"No." He gave her a look of incredulity. "Do you think I should?"

Tong Yan suppressed her grin and answered seriously, "Of course not. Mr. Gu may be a beauty, but he is not a girly man." She opened up that particular bottle, meticulously wiped the excess nail polish from the brush onto the inner rim of the bottle, and handed the brush to him.

Gu Pingsheng fell into silence and stared at her for some time. With a grim expression, he took the tool from Tong Yan, picked up her hand in his, and lowered his head to study where would be the best place to begin.

Tong Yan suddenly stretched out her finger and hooked it under his chin.

“What other instructions does Mrs. Gu have for me?” Gu Pingsheng’s eyes curved into crescents, and his voice carried a soft teasing tone.

Tong Yan gave a pleased nod, advising him, “If you hold onto the entire hand, your nail painting is going to turn out to be a disaster. You need to prop up and hold the finger individually. Remember, make one stroke through the middle first, then swipe the brush along the two sides. Also never, never get polish onto the sides of the fingers. But if you do get polish on the sides, I brought out some cotton swabs and nail polish remover, so I’ll be able to clean it up.”

He gave an “oh” and continued to look down with head bowed. At last, he began to carry out his task.

She had been utterly prepared for all scenarios, but she underestimated Gu Pingsheng’s care and attentiveness. Basically, after getting through the pinky finger, he settled completely into the correct rhythm. Tong Yan stared gloomily at him. She had originally wanted to make things difficult for him, just for fun, but contrary to her expectations, this turned out to be simply child’s play for him.

However, remembering his classic story of how he had practiced julienning potatoes, she soon relaxed and let it go. Sure enough, some characteristics in people were simply innate.

In bare feet, the two of them sat cross-legged, facing one another. He was extremely careful and detailed, and therefore, she had plenty of time to observe him. Sunlight was the best adornment. Compared to the light reflectors and strong, artificial lighting in a studio, sunlight was much softer. She tried with all her might to find an inherent flaw in his features, and if there really was some sort of regret, then it was only one small one — he had monolid eyes.

“Are monolids hereditary?” She was waving her left hand incessantly to allow the nail polish to dry as fast as possible.

“Double eyelids are a dominant trait and monolids are recessive. Putting it a little simpler, the probability of monolids is lower.” Gu Pingsheng’s eyes swept over the remaining glass bottles, and he was struck with a sudden notion to have some fun. “Want to change to another colour?”

“Okay.” Like a good girl, she held her right hand out to him. “If that’s the case,

then you must have two of the recessive gene, and I am either one dominant, one recessive gene or two dominant genes? So in the future, if we have kids and they have monolids like you, then it's for sure your fault …"

"What's wrong with being like me?"

"There's nothing wrong with being like you … But if they have monolids like you but everything else looks like me, then quality would seem to have gone down quite a bit." Tong Yan had always considered herself to be quite nice-looking. However, the eyes of the masses were sharp and discerning, and the difference between "quite nice-looking" and "extremely good-looking" was still significant.

The two of them talked about many things, most of them very pointless, but she liked talking about worthless stuff with him. This game of turning an outstanding person into someone just as boring and nonsensical as she was something that would always amuse her and she would never tire of.

Resting herself into the soft cushions, she looked at her two hands with its two different colours and sighed, "If I didn't have you, I would definitely not even bother living. I simply can't find anyone better than you."

He twisted the glass bottle's lid closed and set the bottle down on the dark-coloured coffee table. "Without me, you should still be able to live a life that is very good." His voice was languid and was partially joking, partially serious.

"Yes, you can be assured that, regardless of what tragedy or calamity strikes, even without you, I will still keep on living — and live well — because I still have many people I need to take care of." Biting down on her lower lip, she seriously pondered, why had the topic suddenly become so somber?

Gu Pingsheng bent his finger and flicked her forehead lightly with it. "That's more like it."

Tong Yan gathered those bottles up once again and jogged two steps away, but then she turned around and glared at him.

"That's not right either. How come that makes my love seem so fickle?" Bending over at the waist, her brows creased into a frown as she said, "Who

knows what will happen tomorrow? Even though you may be older than me by nearly ten years, that does not mean I'm going to live longer than you, right? If I'm not with you, you definitely will keep on living well, too."

Without waiting for any response from him, she gave a smug smile and went back into the bedroom.

The summary Zhou Qingchen once provided was still clearly etched in her mind.

"… pulmonary fibrosis, cerebral infarction, and osteonecrosis of the femoral head are all common problems that may develop. And there's also complete damage of the immune system, loss of mobility, heart failure, and all sorts of others … So basically, in one sentence: they're alive, but they're incurable, yet at the same time, they're not at the point of death either. And plus, only a few years have passed. No one knows, further down the road, what kind of other complications and side-effects will arise …"

An undying cancer. A very direct and plainspoken summary.

But never had she worried about anything happening to him. This was not a blind optimism, but rather, it was because she understood that life was fragile. Perhaps the one you thought most likely to leave this world first would end up being the last one remaining. Who could say with certainty?

Fortunately, the reason the two of them could so calmly and unreservedly be together and not be fearful of all those things of the future was that characteristic of their personalities that was most similar between them: love was not everything. No matter what, a person was actually not a completely separate entity, and therefore, for someone, regardless of whom it might be, they would both continue living their lives.

But, something would still be different. For example, this type of love they shared was so rare and beautiful that it was not something that could even be sought after in a lifetime; how could there possibly be a second time?

On the day of the New Year's party, Gu Pingsheng happened to have a class to teach.

At their arranged time, she took a taxi alone to his university. By the time she arrived at the main gates, the sky had already darkened. He sent a text message to her, saying he was not yet finished class and that she should head directly to the Student's Centre.

Though Tong Yan had roamed about this campus since she was a child, she had not, after all, graduated from this school, so after standing in a daze for a few seconds, she began to walk and inquire for directions along the way. By chance, she asked a girl who was a law student, and even after the two of them had walked and arrived together at the first floor of the Student's Centre, the girl still thought she was actually a student from another school here to find her boyfriend.

"We're there. Is your boyfriend in third or fourth year?" The girl very warmly slipped her arm through Tong Yan's and suggested, "Tell me and we'll see. Maybe I know him."

Tong Yan felt awkward, not knowing still how she should explain …

That was, until they had walked up the staircase to arrive at the second level, where several male students were sitting on a sofa in the hallway and chatting. Seeing Tong Yan, they all jumped to their feet and grinningly jogged over to greet her with cries of "Little *Shiniang*," striking the girl silly with shock.

The greatest concidence was, as she stepped up onto the floor of the second level, he was already making his appearance in the main entrance hall of the first level.

As a result, amidst the commotion, he step by step followed the staircase up and then rightfully swept in like a hero rescuing the beautiful maiden, pulling Tong Yan out from the group of students into the circle of his arm. Against the rowdy jeering and heckling that fell incessantly on the ears, he led her into the banquet hall first.

He could not hear, but that did not mean that she could not hear. In the end, Tong Yan's ears burned a crimson colour, and while she took a seat with him in the front row that was reserved for teachers, she told him in a low voice, "I have a bad feeling about this."

He glanced at her puzzledly. "What sort of bad feeling?"

“Usually, in these sorts of parties where everyone is together and there are no real distinguishing lines based on hierarchy or authority, the popular people who are always the focus of attention end up having jokes played on them to embarrass them.”

Gu Pingsheng gave an “oh” and, seeming rather interested, asked, “What sort of jokes?”

“Don’t know …”

Tong Yan said some silent prayers.

He began to greet the teachers who were, one after another, coming over and taking their seats. One of his hands reached across himself and rested on his leg as, the entire time, it clasped Tong Yan’s hand in its palm. As if it was perfectly natural and right, he truly seized every opportunity to declare to everyone that he was “not available” anymore.

In the beginning, she had felt self-conscious, but eventually he had rubbed off on her. Now, she simply rested her head on his shoulder, watching the various performances put on by the students. Since the party this evening was only an internal celebration of the faculty, the decorations essentially were only a red banner and balloons of all different colours, and attire was self-provided. Though it could not be considered an exquisitely put-together event, there was a great New Year’s atmosphere to it.

Right when she was being thoroughly tickled by one performance on the program, where the genders of the various roles were cross-cast, and was laughingly whispering something to Gu Pingsheng, the female student who was one of the masters of ceremonies suddenly turned the focus of her words on them. “Teacher Gu?”

Tong Yan quickly gave him a tug on his shirt.

Gu Pingsheng turned his head to look at the two student emcees.

“We were thinking … Since you were the only one who brought your wife with you today, you should give us some sort of unique surprise, right? How about you guys sing ‘Husband and Wife Together Return Home[2]’[song from a Huangmei-style Chinese opera]?”

Before these words were even finished, the entire banquet hall was already roiling with enthusiasm.

If they could force this perfect man and his wife to sing this sort of song together, the feat most certainly could go down gloriously in the history books of the Law Faculty.

Actually, although they had offered up these particular terms partly for some humorous entertainment, the main reason was that they were still being considerate to him. When this sort of operatic theatre song was performed for comical purposes, no matter how it was sung, it could not be botched up too badly.

Alas, the subject of the teasing, Gu Pingsheng, did not even know what "Husband and Wife Together Return Home" was. With only a mere sweep of his eyes over the room, though, he could approximately deduce that it was not an amusing thing for him.

He was silent for several seconds before stating in a musing tone, "Next semester, the 2010 students will have one class taught by me. I have discussed with the dean already. Marks from moot court will likely account for sixty percent of the grade."

Moot court? It was obvious he was intentionally tipping them off.

The three classes of 2010 entering students immediately shut down their heckling and wagged their tails to demonstrate how well-behaved they were.

With a "hee hee," the male master of ceremonies grinned, "I shall represent all the girls in the three classes of 2010 entering students in saying, 'I love you, Teacher Gu.'"

Tong Yan rolled her eyes and glanced him. Seriously … Such an abuse of power.

However, there was still more as he cleared his throat. "The foreign-based law firm that I'm at has lately begun implementing their summer student plans. The targeted group is third year students in each of the major law schools, and potential candidates need to have obtained the top grade in their year." As his words reached this point, he deliberately slowed down his speaking. "Supposedly, there will be a relatively large number of projects that I will be

responsible for, and depending on things, I should have three to four summer student slots.”

The entire group of students who entered in 2009 instantly covered their mouths, their eyes growing wide.

Even Tong Yan felt all sorts of stabs of jealousy, envy, and hate. If her own classmates ever found out, they probably would start wailing and scratching at the wall …

With two such temptations laid before them, most of the people had ceased their firepower of teasing.

Despite this, a smile that declared, “these are no concerns of mine” still graced the lips of the female master of ceremonies. “Teacher Gu, I’m from the 2008 entering class. It’s already been confirmed that I’ll be heading straight into doctorate studies, and on top of that, it won’t be in this university …”

Her eyes drifted over to glance at Tong Yan, then drifted back to rest on Gu Pingsheng again before continuing, “But since Teacher Gu has demonstrated such sincerity, we won’t make things difficult for you either. You choose your own act to perform, how about that?”

This type of lively atmosphere reminded Tong Yan of her first year, when she had just entered university. The New Year’s evening party had also been like this, where they had made their teachers bow and cry for mercy. It seemed, only after you entered university did you have the sense that your teachers were no longer people who were superior and sititng up on high. They were your friends — friends who could share with you knowledge and experience you had never before even heard about.

[1] 小师娘 “xiao shi niang.” Similar to *shimu*, *shiniang* also means “teacher-mother” and is another way to address the wife of one’s teacher. The 小 “xiao,” which means “little” is added because of Tong Yan’s relatively young age.

[2]《夫妻双双把家还》. This is a song from the Huangmei-style Chinese opera, 天仙配 *Marriage of the Fairy Princess (*also known in English as *Marriage to a Goddess, Fairy Couple*, etc.). This song is sung by the couple who, after having

endured hardships, are now together, and they sing of returning home as husband and wife, forever living happily, side by side with one another. While there have been more modern remakes, this is still an old-fashioned Chinese song, and as someone born and raised overseas, Gu Pingsheng is not familiar with it.



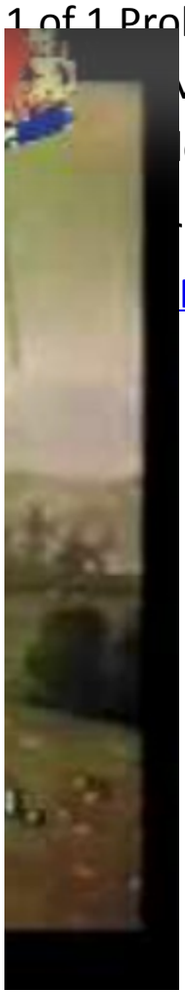
Additional Comments:

While I'm a sucker for love and romance, I agree with our leads' perspectives that romantic love occupies only a part of one's life, though it is a significant part. That nail polish scene really strikes home. They both know that without the other person, no, they will not die, nor will they choose to give up and let their life spiral away. They will keep on living and try to live their best life because they have other people in their lives who care about them and need them. But without the other person, though life will go on, there will always be a hole in the heart. "But, something would still be different. For example, this type of love they shared was so rare and beautiful that it was not something that could even be sought after in a lifetime; how could there possibly be a second time?" That

hole would never be filled — it would be impossible to fill — because they have loved so deeply that it is not possible to love like that a second time.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue



Main story segments

logue segments

ies: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 18.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 18.1

May 14, 2016 by hoju 13 Comments



Technically, this is a short update, but I've added something on the back end.

"Naughty. Pretty." I love how these two show that they're in love, yet you don't get the feeling that they are deliberately flaunting. It's just a fact to them, but it sure does even more so make everyone jealous. Unfortunately, what should have been a relaxing day turned out to be a bit of a downer.

Chapter 18.1 – What Life Looks Like (1)

They were all young teachers from the faculty who came tonight, and they did not think anything of what was going on. In fact, they were happy to watch the antics of this group of students.

Gu Pingsheng knew that he should not keep turning down the request, and tilting his head to the side, he looked at her.

"What should we do? Want me to swoop in as the hero and rescue the

beauty?” She mouthed this to him.

His beautiful hand lifted her hair that was cascading over her shoulders, and leaning in toward her, he answered in a low voice, “Sure.”

He appeared to truly have been infected by the New Year’s atmosphere. From his expressions to his movements, he had become more relaxed and natural. It seemed like it had been so long already since he had accepted his second job and had become always busy and showing hints of fatigue.

The “he” of this moment carried a tranquil expression in his eyes that had not been seen in a long time.

She all of a sudden felt a twinge of guilt. Things were already hard for him, but because he now had her, there was an even greater burden placed upon him. She rose to her feet, and in that atmosphere that was charged with enthusiasm, she borrowed a guitar from the hands of a boy and sat down on a chair that someone nearby had pushed over for her.

“May I squeal? Pretty girl, you honestly are married already?” After the female emcee had finished enviously teasing Tong Yan, she looked around. “My fellow female junior schoolmates, to be a girl that Teacher Gu likes, you must first know how to play the guitar, got it?”

Below, the answers came back like rowdy jesting, and everyone answered together, “Got it.”

“Your Teacher Gu is tone deaf, so I had better take his place when it comes to any sort of performance,” Tong Yan joked deliberately.

“Hmm … That can do”—the female emcee contemplated for a few seconds—“but you can’t completely fill in for him either … How about this? If you and Teacher Gu each answer a question, we will let Teacher Gu off the hook.”

Answer a question? She truly dared not agree to that. Who knew what they might ask? …

“We definitely wouldn’t dare ask any mature-audience-only questions.” Grinning, the female emcee walked up beside Gu Pingsheng and said into the

microphone, “Teacher Gu, may we start with you first?”

He gave a light shrug. “Sure.”

“Use two words to describe our Mrs. Gu who is standing here in front of everyone.” This question was a very proper and suitable one.

He nodded, and looking at Tong Yan with with a smile so gorgeous it did not seem real, he answered in English, “Pretty. Naughty.”

Praise, loving affection, and even doting were wholly and unabashedly encompassed within those two words.

“Woohoo!” From various corners, simultaneous cries rose up from different people.

Even as the person who was with Gu Pingsheng day and night, Tong Yan was still struck by these two words … And as a result, after returning to Tong Yan’s side, the emcee still maintained an expression of absolute envy on her face. Seeming extremely torn but also extremely curious, she asked Tong Yan the next question. “Well then, may I ask, what is the one thing our Teacher Gu said that touched you the most?”

“A line of lyrics.”

“Lyrics?”

With an “mm-hmm,” Tong Yan adjusted the microphone stand and set the dark silver microphone beside her face. Gazing directly at him, she stated, “I am thinking of you in my sleepless solitude tonight.”

After several seconds of silence, someone finally revealed the source of this line. At the back of the crowd, a girl excitedly gripped the arm of another person and cried, “‘My All’! It’s ‘My All’! That’s my favourite song!”

It was also her favourite song.

Because of Gu Pingsheng.

As opposed to the song that, during the Anniversary Gala, had caused the entire university to boil over with exhilaration, she loved even more to sing out the feelings in this one. This song that she, holding a guitar, had sung to her fellow junior schoolmates on that train ride deep in the night, from Shanghai to

Beijing, when everyone else was blearily asleep. That had been the first time she left him after they had become a couple.

I am thinking of you in my sleepless solitude tonight.

I am … thinking of you … in my sleepless solitude tonight.

In that first taste of separation, she had not known how to express those feelings of missing him, but he had used this first line of lyrics to unreservedly tell it to her.

As Tong Yan began to sing, the banquet hall gradually quieted down. The very festive and tacky neon lights were continuously moving and changing their angles.

To make up for the regret that last time, he had not seen her sing this song, this entire time, she looked only at him as she sang. Because it had been so long since she last touched a guitar and she also had to divide some of her attention to ensure that each word was clearly articulated and visible, it was unavoidable that she hit a few wrong chords. Fortunately, most of those people whose ears could hear were amazed by her singing abilities and did not pay too much attention to those subtle mistakes.

The song finished, but before her hands had even left the strings, several boys who were being silly[1] came up to her with notebooks in hand, putting on a display as if they were chasing after their idol.

Later, when many years had passed and she again ran into his students at the time, they could all still talk about her performance of “My All” during the New Year’s celebration.

On the New Year’s holiday, Grandmother rose early and headed out to visit an old friend. Gu Pingsheng, for once, actually slept in, and Tong Yan did not have the heart to wake him. Seven or eight articles of clothing were soaking inside a washtub, and sitting on a small stool, she began with her hands to scrub the fabrics. When she was nearly done with washing the laundry, she wanted to go to the bedroom for a look, but turning rather hurriedly, she forgot that the floor

beneath her feet was wet. With a loud bang, she slipped and crashed to the floor with the washtub.

She felt with her hand. Only wetness from water. She had not cut herself. Yes, it really hurt, but it should not be serious. She pushed herself up on the tiles, but then her brows creased together. Only when she was applying some force did she discover that the place that hurt most was actually not her head but rather, the area around her tailbone — it was that type of pain that rendered you unable to move. Hence, when Mr. Gu rose from bed and walked to the bathroom, the picture he saw before him was Tong Yan sitting red-eyed on the tile floor and covered with water, her face pale as she looked up at him.

This was supposed to be a hard-to-come-by day of rest, but the two of them spent several tiring hours of it in the hospital instead. As the doctor held up the x-ray film and examined it, he smilingly told her that she had fallen just right and confirmed that she had only fractured her tailbone. Throughout the entire time, besides carefully taking care of her, Gu Pingsheng maintained a somber expression on his face, as if this was an extremely big incident.

“Fracture” sounded like it was a very serious matter, but in the end, she was merely told to rest.

Utterly and completely rest.

[1]无厘头 “wu li tou.” This term is usually transliterated as “mo lei tau” as it is actually a Cantonese term that originates from Hong Kong popular culture. The term itself means “makes no sense” or “meaningless” and is describing a unique type of humour based on wordplay, slapstick comedy, and puns.

Additional Comments:

This particular online chapter was heavily edited when it went to the printing press, and by “heavily edited,” I mean a significant chunk was removed While I’m actually translating from the published version, I thought I would include here what got cut from this chapter around Tong Yan’s tailbone fracture.

Only when she was applying some force did she discover that the place that hurt most was actually not her head but rather, the area around her tailbone — it was the type of pain that rendered you unable to move. She tentatively tried to touch her tailbone with her finger. A sharp, unbearable pain caused tears to spill over from her eyes. Could there be anyone funnier than her right now? Slipping in her own bathroom and injuring herself to the point that she could not even move …

Many ideas whirred through her mind, but it seemed, without being able to stand, no plan would actually be effective.

Not being able to move meant that she could not even turn over into a very ungraceful posture and crawl herself out of there. As she leaned back there in the bathroom, she continued to rub her head, deciding that she might as well pick up any of the clothes her hands could reach and toss them back back into the washtub.

She tried to grit her teeth through the pain, thinking that she needed to just rest through it and then perhaps it might be better. Unfortunately, after several minutes had passed, aside from the pain that was becoming ever more distinct, she remained the same.

And then she heard footsteps that seemed as if they were walking in a pair of slippers, slowly, tiredly approaching.

Hence, when Mr. Gu rose from bed and walked to the bathroom, the picture he saw before him was Tong Yan sitting red-eyed on the tile floor and covered with water, her face pale as she looked up at him.

“I’m done for. I accidentally fell and now I can’t even stand. Gu Pingsheng, have I broken a bone somewhere? Or maybe I smacked my head and now there’s something wrong with my brain? …” She started rambling nonsense.

After seeing the first half of what she said, however, he was already squatting down. “Where did you injure yourself when you fell?” His voice carried the nasal tone that comes from just awakening and was somewhat husky, somewhat anxious. The expression in his eyes was not calm, but he was purposely suppressing this.

“I think it’s somewhere around my tailbone.” She did not want to frighten him and simply stated the facts. “I touched it just now with my hand. It really hurts. I can’t really have broken it, right?”

Carefully, he stretched his hand over and slowly pulled down her pajama pants. After examining the area she had described, he quickly lifted his head again. “Put your arms around my neck. I’m going to carry you out first.” Tong Yan reached her arms up and obediently wrapped them around his neck.

In that instant when she was lifted from the ground, she inhaled sharply. But then, the next second, she could sense the exertion was somewhat strenuous for him, and his steps were not quick.

Since his return after his second surgery, he had never carried her like this. During their day-to-day life, she had not even detected this, but now even this short distance exposed what she had been worried most about. No matter what, have the same surgical procedure done once again on the same place would have a great effect.

While her thoughts were in disarray, he carefully set her down so that she was sprawled very inelegantly on the bed.

This was supposed to be a hard-to-come-by day of rest, but the two of them spent several tiring hours of it in the hospital instead. As the doctor held up the x-ray film and examined it, he smilingly told her that she had fallen just right and confirmed that she had fractured her tailbone and would need to rest at home for one month.

The doctor told her pleasantly that nowadays, it seemed very common for young girls to fall and injure that area. For example, this month, there were four or five girls who, for the sake of being pretty, had worn high heels and fallen down the stairs, or other similar incidents.

Tong Yan smiled self-consciously, feeling as well that she was unlucky.

Throughout the entire time, besides carefully taking care of her, Gu Pingsheng had maintained a somber expression on his face, as if this was an extremely big incident. When the two returned home, she lay belly-down on the bed, her head turned to the side to look at him sitting there at the bedside. She tried ways to make him smile but all to no avail.

“I want to drink some water.” She blinked her eyes, trying her best to be pouty.

Gu Pingsheng complied and brought her a glass of water.

Pursing her lips, Tong Yan looked down in satisfaction at the glass he was holding up to her, taking two sips before pulling on his button-up shirt and wiping her mouth on it. She continued to sprawl on the bed, her head resting on her arm as she stared at him. “I want to eat candy.”

Their home always had White Rabbit candy ready in all sorts of different flavours.

After Gu Pingsheng had very tirelessly and patiently unwrapped four for her to eat, she finally grew sick of the overload of sweetness.

In order to make it easier for her to speak with him, he sat on the carpet, leaning against the side of the bed as he looked at his laptop computer.

Smacking her lips, Tong Yan finished off all the milk candies in her mouth, then stuck her head out over the edge of the bed and poked his shoulder. When he turned toward her, she said with a tender smile, “I want a kiss.”

He fell into an unexpected silence. Seeing her gazing at him with her clear, sparkling eyes, he finally blew out a light breath and gave a little laugh. And then, he extended two fingers to tilt her chin up slightly, slowly moistening her lips with his own and diluting the saccharine sweetness that filled her mouth. The central heating whirred as it warmed the room. All she could feel was that she was hot. The pain from the fracture was still so great it could melt the soul, and his kiss was incomparably soul-melting as well.

I actually wish they had kept more of this. This scene really illustrates that, because Gu Pingsheng is deaf, being able to call for help in such a situation — something we take for granted — is not possible. Also, there’s the mention of his physical change, that carrying her is not an easy task anymore. In this passage, you can also see that Gu Pingsheng is quite upset with Tong Yan’s injury. I suspect that he’s frustrated at himself, at the helplessness caused by his physical condition, that Tong Yan was hurt but he did not even know it to come help her

in a timely fashion. And lastly, I just love that Tong Yan’s pouty request for a kiss finally eked a smile out of him.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

53 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 18.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 18.2

May 18, 2016 by hoju 11 Comments



We get two different perspectives on life and love. Who can say who is right or wrong? Of course, there's some lovey-dovey between Mr. and Mrs. Gu, and at the very end, there's also a shocker for Tong Yan.

Chapter 18.2 – What Life Looks Like (2)

Shen Yao was determined to go abroad, so naturally she did not put much heed on her internship. After she had had her parents find a court to affix a stamp of verification on an internship evaluation form, she had begun enjoying a well-nurtured life during this fourth year of university, all the while spending it in Hunan, where she kept her boyfriend company.

Tong Yan had not expected that when she told Shen Yao about her fracture, Shen Yao's first reaction had been to guffaw. "Finally, I have an excuse to go to Beijing to meet my future father-in-law and mother-in-law!" And then shortly after the winter break had begun, she had hustled straight to Beijing.

After ten days passed, she finally managed, before the start of the Lunar New Year celebrations, to make a visit to see Tong Yan.

“Have a bit of sympathy, okay?” Tong Yan lay belly-down on the couch, aimlessly flipping through television programs. “I’ve been recuperating for nearly a month. When I sit on a chair to eat, I need to put three or four foam seat cushions down, and it still hurts. You don’t even think about comforting me; all you know is to use me as an excuse.”

Shen Yao crouched beside the couch and peeled a mandarin orange for her. “Come wintertime, do you Beijingers just eat mandarin oranges, peanuts, and melon seeds? When I’m with Cheng Yu, no matter whose house we drop in on to visit, there are always these things.”

“It seems so.” Tong Yan thought about this for a moment. “But it seems not quite right, either.”

“Do you know that he told me to wash dishes in his home and tidy up the place? He said it was to leave a good impression with his dad and mom …” Being the delicate and helpless young Shanghai girl that she was, this form of torture had left Shen Yao feeling very defeated. “You know my family has a housekeeper who does all that stuff. He said that most families don’t hire a housekeeper, especially in Beijing, where the girl does the housework and takes care of the entire family, old and young alike.”

Giving an “mm-hmm” in response, Tong Yan took a segment of orange from her. “It’s the custom of the North. Did you think everyone was like your mom, everyday just going shopping and chatting with people and stuff? You didn’t even find yourself a guy from the Northeast[1] … Just be content.”

“Well, what about you and Great Beauty Gu?” Shen Yao laid her head down beside Tong Yan’s face and looked at her.

“I do the cooking, I do the laundry.” Tong Yan mulled this over and discovered that she truly did meet the requirements. “It seems I do the majority of things.”

“Then you should just be a full-time wife. Hasn’t he already taken a job out in the real world? After a few years, when he’s gotten by well and has become one of the big bosses, do you think he’s even going to care about your puny salary?”

Sprawled on her stomach, Tong Yan also looked at her. It felt as if they had returned to the times when they were still in school and the two of them would squeeze onto the same bed together, whispering face to face to one another.

“My wish is that I can provide for him, to allow him to just stay home and read, or if he wants to, he can go teach a couple of classes at a school and that’s it.”

Shen Yao gawked wide-eyed at her. “You’re really going to keep him like he’s a beauty?”

“I’m just worried that he won’t let me keep and provide for him.” Tong Yan sighed, “I’ll tell you something honest. His health is actually not very good. Back when he was doctor, he got sick because he was trying to save people, and that left some side effects. That’s why it’s not really suitable for him to get too tired out.”

This was the first time she had ever mentioned this to Shen Yao. Perhaps it had simply been too long and she needed a place to let it all out, like a tree hollow that she could talk into, to just voice out everything in a jumble.

Shen Yao let out an “oh” and fell silent for a moment. Abruptly, she straightened herself, startling Tong Yan with the action.

“That time you were pressing after Zhou Qingchen, asking about the long-term side effects of SARS and stuff, that wasn’t because of Teacher Gu, was it?”

Tong Yan gave an “mm.”

Shen Yao completely rose to her feet, pacing back and forth around the living room for a long time before returning to the side of the couch and sitting down again. “Yan Yan, have you ever thought about breaking up? Don’t tell me you’ve never thought about it.”

“Of course I haven’t.” Tong Yan also sat up, leaning sideways against the couch and trying as much as possible to avoid placing pressure on her tailbone. “Friend Shen Yao, you are currently in Gu Pingsheng’s home. You need to think twice and then twice again before you speak.”

She was joking, but Shen Yao was serious. “I can still remember a little bit of what Zhou Qingchen said. What if, in the future, Great Beauty Gu really does have heart failure, and there are problems with all his internal organs? What are you going to do? Wait on him everyday? Okay, fine, let’s just say that’s the case. But you’ll still have to spend money on medical treatment for him, and moreover, it will be never-ending. You sell your home, you sell your car until in

the end, you have nothing left to sell, then what? Sell your body?”

“Why are you looking at things so negatively?” Tong Yan laughed, her eyes on Shen Yao.

“The reality is, things are already so negative.” Shen Yao gaped disbelievingly at her. “These last few days, I’ve been going with Cheng Yu to his family’s home, and when I discover many lifestyle differences where we are at odds, I will waver a bit and wonder whether I can be a part of that family for my entire life. That is still only a possibility for me … But yours is already a reality, just that the situation will manifest itself slowly. Do you know what a bottomless pit is? It’s a bottomless pit, yet you’d still dare jump into it?”

Tong Yan could see that Shen Yao’s emotions were stirred up as she spoke, so she simply waited until Shen Yao had completely finished venting them out.

Seeing that Tong Yan did not say anything, Shen Yao at once fell into a mode of self-criticism. “Of course, what I’m saying here is spoken very much as a realist. I’m being unfair and wrongful against Teacher Gu. He rescued the dying and saved the wounded, and I am still stabbing him in the back.” Once her self-criticism was finished, she instantly switched back into her friend-protecting mode. “But you’re my friend, and I must take your side.”

“Done talking now?”

“Done talking.”

“Okay, then it’s my turn to talk.” Tong Yan pointed out the window. “Everyday, there’s a possibility that we will encounter all kinds of disasters — car accidents, fires, plane crashes. I’ll not be afraid of taboo and just say something: who knows, when I go out tomorrow, whether I’ll be struck by a car and die? So none of the matters of tomorrow will affect my decision today.”

A cry of “Sh*t!” slipped from Shen Yao, and pulling Tong Yan’s arm, she scolded, “Ptooey! Touch wood[2]!”

“Actually, I’m a person who is especially lacking in love, so as long as it’s a love that I can grab ahold of, I will never let go of it, even if you beat me to death.” She leaned herself on Shen Yao and rubbed her cheek against her shoulder. “If one day you end up like him, I don’t mind supporting you either. You don’t eat

much anyway, and so long as you don't buy brand name clothing and bags, I'll be okay."

Shen Yao let out another shout of "Sh*t!" and patted Tong Yan on the back. "You're the expert at bringing on the sappy feelings. I'm about to cry because of what you said."

Shen Yao had originally wanted to wait until Gu Pingsheng came home before she left. They had not expected, however, that even after eating dinner with Tong Yan and Grandmother and sitting around some more until nine o'clock, she still would not get to see him. Cheng Yu's repeated calls came, three or four times urging her to hurry, until Shen Yao finally stood to take her leave. As she walked up to the front door, she seemed to all of a sudden think of something, and in a quiet voice, she asked Tong Yan, "Do your parents and grandmother not know about Gu Pingsheng's condition?"

"They don't know, and I don't want to let them know." Tong Yan made a motion, like she was wielding a sabre. "I will strangle all possible opposition when they're still in the cradle."

"You just laugh. Go ahead and laugh. The time will come when you will be crying." Once Shen Yao finished saying this, she immediately spat out another couple of "ptooeys." "I'm not going to curse you. What kind of darn 'crow's mouth[3]' [always stating misfortune, like it is challenging Lady Luck] was that?"

After seeing Shen Yao out the door, she continued lying on the couch with her stomach down and fell asleep several times while watching television until the sound of the front door being unlocked was finally heard.

Gu Pingsheng stepped in through the door, turned on the light in the entryway, and changed into his slippers. In the glow of the light, moisture could be seen on his hair and coat. When he walked over to her, she took his hand and led him to sit down beside her. "It's snowing outside? Is it heavy?"

"It wasn't very heavy yet downstairs of my office building, but by the time the car reached Chang'an Avenue, large snowflakes were already coming down." Gu Pingsheng's expression was one of great pleasure.

“Is this your first time seeing Beijing’s snowfall?” She touched his hair with her hand. “It’s quite wet. Hurry and take a shower.”

“I saw it once in Beijing, when I was about five years old.”

“Five years old? You were five and you still remember it so clearly? I have no impression of anything I did before I was six years old.”

He laughed, “My mother gave birth to me outside of the country. That year when I was five, during the Lunar New Year, was my first time coming back to China to see my real family. That year, my [maternal] grandmother was still alive. She loved to laugh, whereas my [maternal] grandfather is a very stern person. I remember that year, on the fifth day of the new lunar year, snow started to fall in Beijing, and for once, Grandfather actually left his study and took me outside to build a snowman.”

She was always particularly afraid of hearing him talk about “the past” or “before” or similar. Every time he brought that up, it would cause her to feel pained, as if those things had happened to her personally. And so, from when he had said that he was born outside of the country, her heart had begun to clench. Luckily, oh so luckily, it was a very heartwarming topic.

It was a pity that, even though she wanted to hear more, it was too late in the night already.

Gu Pingsheng finished his shower, and with his entire body radiating warmth, he slipped into the bed, stretched out his right arm, and encircled her in it from behind. “Are you asleep?” The lights were off, and she could not be bothered to turn them on. Gingerly avoiding her injured area, she turned over to face him.

She used action to demonstrate that she was not yet asleep.

With his two hands, he guided her until she was straddled across his body. Tong Yan could feel his palm cupping the back of her head, and in a very natural motion, she leaned herself down until she met him. Extending her tongue, she touched it briefly against his lips.

She had thought this was simply a good night kiss, but to her surprise, he had intentionally done this … There was no verbal communication at all, and the only

thing she could feel was that the heat from his body could burn a person. Their lips and tongues came together initially with intensity and then later gradually pulled apart to, sometimes heavily, sometimes gently, brush against one another.

Never would they grow weary of such pleasure.

She abandoned herself into it, falling into a half-dreamlike, half-awake state as they kissed, until in the end, his two hands lifted her waist up. While she was still dazedly wondering how they would do it, he had already positioned himself and plunged directly into her from below. She could not contain the cry that slipped out from her, but immediately, she pressed her lips together again, not daring to let out any more sounds …

After several seconds, she heard Gu Pingsheng tell her in a voice that seemed as if it was both laughing and sighing, “Don’t move about … Be good and just lie there.”

When she crawled out of bed the following morning, she truly did not have the energy to make breakfast, so slacking off, she went downstairs, bought some *jianbing*, steamed stuffed buns, and soy milk, and brought them back up.

The person selling *jianbing* downstairs recognized her. While making her order, the woman kindly reminded her that the Lunar New Year was fast approaching, so all the vendors who sold breakfast would be returning home to celebrate. She exhorted Tong Yan that she must prepare breakfast everyday or else she would only go hungry.

Tong Yan assured her she would and said, “Don’t put cilantro in this one.”

“Yes, yes,” the older woman making the jianbing chuckled. “I know. Your husband doesn’t eat cilantro.”

“It’s not exactly that he doesn’t eat it.” Tong Yan sighed, “He says that cilantro is the hardest to wash thoroughly clean, so he usually just doesn’t eat it unless I personally wash it. He was once a doctor, so he’s relatively more fussy. When he used to drive, he was the same, refusing to open the car windows all year round. That’s why it is actually rare that I come out to buy anything to eat. Usually, I

cook everything myself.” A sweet sense of joy filled her as she said this.

The first thing she did after she stepped in through the door of their home was to take a chalk and record on the little chalkboard hanging in the living room how much time she had used. The amount of time she spent on bedrest each day was fixed, so she only had that tiny bit of time where she could move about as she wished and even that needed to be strictly recorded for Gu Pingsheng to see.

This all sounded very troublesome, but in reality, when she thought about it, the feeling of having her own private doctor was actually pretty good.

“We’ll spend Lunar New Year’s Day in Beijing”—he had slipped noiselessly up to her, his chin nuzzling behind her ear—“and the rest of the time we will go somewhere for a vacation?”

The warm air that he breathed out tickled Tong Yan. Moving to avoid it, she turned her head and rejected his suggestion, “We finally get a ten-day holiday. Let’s just stay at home and sleep. Don’t tire ourselves out.”

He gave an “mm.” “We can find a hotel that is most suitable for sleeping, and everyday, we’ll sleep until the sun sets and then continue over to the beach to catch some moon rays. We won’t participate in any activities.”

That did sound pretty good.

While Tong Yan was still mulling this over, Gu Pingsheng had already made the decision. “We’ll leave on the day after Lunar New Year’s.”

Tong Yan nodded, still trying hard in her mind to determine if there was anything wrong with this. When he tilted her chin upward, she automatically went along with his action and lifted her head.

“Mrs. Gu, women who think too much age easily.”

“You actually have a lot of male macho-ness. You never give a person the chance to refuse.” She grinned, “But I really like it. Very much like it.”

As the two of them were speaking, the sound of a key being turned in the lock of the front door was heard. It should be Grandmother coming back from her

morning exercise. But when the door was pushed open and her eyes turned toward it, she saw two people.

It was Grandmother and her father.

[1] 东北 “Dongbei.” The Northeast region of China refers to the three provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang, which together historically were known as Manchuria.

[2]童言无忌 “tong yan wuji.” What Shen Yao actually said after the “ptooey” was the idiom from which Tong Yan’s nickname is taken, which, recall in footnote [5] of chapter 1.2, means “children’s words are spoken without filters or reservations.” That also implies that if something is spoken wrongly, it can be ignored and you need not fear that it has broken taboos. Here, Shen Yao is crying out in alarm that Tong Yan’s words should be taken like they are child’s words, and so she did not break any taboos and jinx herself. The spitting is like getting rid of those unlucky words that were spoken before declaring “No jinx!” or “Touch wood!’

[3]乌鸦嘴 “wu ya zui.” This literally means “crow’s mouth” or “crow’s beak” and is used to describe someone who is acting as if he or she is tempting fate by constantly speaking about misfortunes.

Additional Comments:

Something is stirred within me in that conversation between Tong Yan and Shen Yao and my eyes start to sting when I read it. I don’t think anyone can fault Shen Yao for saying the things that she said. In all honesty, it’s the stance the majority of people would take. It takes a person with a special heart to see things from Tong Yan’s perspective (Don’t you admire what she said, that “none of the matters of tomorrow will affect my decision today”?), but there are also people like her out there as well. I feel like this story shows us so well the different sides of the world, different types of people. Despite the secondary characters actually making only brief, occasional appearances, their purpose, I feel, is to contrast

Tong Yan (and Gu Pingsheng). From Wang Xiaoru and her “I don’t care attitude,” to Wen Jingjing choosing to find a relationship that can get her somewhere in life, to Shen Yao’s realist approach to love, to Tong Yan. How can you judge whether one person is more right than the other?

The scene struck a chord with me and stirred up some sort of emotions that I thought I needed to write something to get them out, but when I put my fingers to the keyboard, I found that I’m incapable of expressing anything. So please forgive the babbling.

On another note, boating (intimate) scenes just don’t get any easier for me. They take me forever to translate, even the short one in this update, and I just can’t seem to write them. :p

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

54 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 18.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 18.3

May 21, 2016 by hoju 18 Comments



Though we all wish it was true, did you really expect that her father's visit really was merely for a visit? The psychological burden of having such a father is so great.

Chapter 18.3 – What Life Looks Like (3)

Instinctively, she clutched at his shirt. Gu Pingsheng seemed to deduce something, and his hand that was resting on her waist gently patted her.

"Yan Yan." Grandmother had not spoken, and it was her father who first opened his mouth. His hands were carrying two large, orange bags. "Dad remembered that you love to eat mandarin oranges, so I specially went and bought a few pounds of them for you."

Her mother was known for being a beautiful woman, but in contrast, her father seemed very old. As he spoke, he pulled off his cotton hat. He had not even reached the age of fifty yet but already more than half of his hair had turned gray.

“Perfect. We can serve these to guests who come during the New Year’s celebration period.” Smiling, Grandmother took the orange plastic bags and headed toward the kitchen. “Today is Friday. You can stay here for the day, and when Little Gu gets home from work, we can have a nice meal together.”

This entire time, Tong Yan had been leaning against the side of the cabinet beside the chalkboard with a rather dazed expression, uncertain how to cope with this meeting that had come about so abruptly. Gu Pingsheng had never seen her parents before, nor had he ever asked her about them. She had always hoped to wait until one day when the opportunity arose, and then she would tell him everything.

She had not expected that this ordinary morning would catch her completely off guard.

Her father opened the shoe cabinet and carefully bent over, looking about inside and trying to find a pair of slippers that was meant for guests to wear. As he gazed at those dress shoes and sneakers that were neatly lined up inside, though, he was at a loss, and tentatively standing himself back up straight, he looked toward them with a sheepish smile.

Tong Yan shifted slightly, but she was unwilling to even utter a sound.

In that period of hesitation, Gu Pingsheng had already stridden over with a few steps and pulled open the second compartment of the shoe cabinet. Taking out a brand new pair of slippers, he bent down at the waist and set them beside her father’s feet. “You can wear this pair. The size should be about right.”

“Little Gu, Little Gu, don’t trouble yourself …” her father said hastily and reached to support Gu Pingsheng back up by the arms.

Gu Pingsheng did not see his words so did not answer. When he straightened himself and saw her father looking as if he had just closed his mouth, he immediately smiled, “There are some problems with my hearing for the time being. In the future, if you want to say something to me, just let me see the shape of your lips and that will work.”

Tong Yan walked over as well and instinctively reached for his arm.

“No problem, it’s no problem. Your grandmother told me everything already.

It’s no problem.” While repeatedly telling them it was no problem, her father rather flusteredly changed out of his shoes and, in the end, even did not forget to set them on the doormat so as to avoid getting the floors dirty.

Seeing her father looking so uneasy, the icy expression she had been wearing from the outset gradually began to melt. However, since Grandmother fell sick, her father had only ever made a few appearances and had his eyes on the money from the sale of the apartment. These were things that had left a dark imprint on her heart. She watched as he walked over alone to sit down in one corner of the sofa, an almost elderly man who was grasping his hat with both hands, and still did not know how she should break her silence.

Gu Pingsheng cast a glance at the time and hurriedly sat down to have a couple bites of breakfast before grabbing his suit jacket from the bedroom to get ready to head into the office. Tong Yan followed behind him closely into the front entryway where, behind a narrow corner, the two of them were hidden from view.

“Come back earlier.” She looked at him tensely.

With a slight smile, he placed one hand on the stone wall of the front entryway and then, bringing his head down, he wordlessly kissed her. The tip of his tongue still carried the taste of soy milk on it. Her back leaned against the uneven surface of the stone wall, and her hands held onto his waist.

From the kitchen, a noise was suddenly heard, and out of reflex, she shifted her head away and strained her ears to listen.

“Yan Yan, listen to me.” Gu Pingsheng’s voice slid into her ears. When she turned back to him, he had already switched over so that his words were being silently mouthed. “For cancer patients, the most important factor is their emotional state and how good or bad it is. For the health of our elderly grandmother, you need to try to be a little happier today.”

Slowly, she nodded. Taking two of his fingers in her hand, she swung them slightly as she entreated him again, “Come back earlier.”

Gu Pingsheng’s dimple gradually deepened with his smile. “Okay.”

She also smiled. This person before her and the shoulder he offered had long since become the support most worthy of her trust and that she could lean upon.

Watching as he opened the front door, she at last lightly exhaled a breath, turned around, and walked back out of the entryway. But she had not expected that, in the instant right before the door was about to shut, Gu Pingsheng would suddenly lift his voice and call out, “Dad, I’m heading into the office first. I will be back a little earlier tonight and will have a nice dinner together with you.”

Her father, who was sitting on the sofa, stood abruptly and answered toward the direction of the door, “Alright! Walk carefully.”

“Alright now. Little Gu already said that he cannot hear,” Grandmother laughed.

Looking at the genuinely happy smile on the elderly woman’s face, Tong Yan’s heart also softened. “I’m going inside to read. Sit and make yourself at home.”

She spent the entire day lying on her stomach in the bedroom, patiently and unweariedly reading the books for the National Judicial Examination. Page by page, line by line, she went through, reading each word and taking them even more seriously than when she had been actually studying for the examination.

Through the single door, she could faintly hear the activities and sounds outside the room, which generally consisted of Grandmother taking her father to have a look through this new home and slowly and carefully introducing each corner of it to him.

The words that she heard most frequently were “Little Gu.”

During dinner that evening, she could not contain a feeling of dread, as if her heart was in her throat, for fear that something would happen. Fortunately, everything was quiet and uneventful, and by the time they saw her father out, she still could not believe that there truly could be such a family dinner, one that was so warm and comfortable it felt as if it was a dream …

“Actually, when I was in primary school, Dad was still quite good, an especially honest guy. He didn’t like to talk and just loved to work.” She was lying with her belly on the bed, looking into his eyes as she explained, “Later … maybe because he and my mom divorced, he changed. He still didn’t like to talk, but he became obsessed with stock trading and would find every possible means to borrow money to play the stock market. He’s always saying, ‘If I had five million, I’d make all those people who look down on me open their eyes and see me with newfound respect.’”

Gu Pingsheng sat on the carpet, his left hand resting on the edge of the bed, and smiled as he said in an understated tone, “Just those things are not worth you losing a father over.”

Tong Yan’s eyes gleamed as she gazed at him.

Obsession in those things was equivalent to being addicted to gambling, where a person would fall deeply into debt and not even pass up any money within the household that could possibly be used. To have paid no heed to raising and nurturing his own child. To have ignored his duty to support those who relied on him … She had wanted to list these out one by one, but then she remembered that certain person who was his father in name only, that well-known associate chief physician of a nephrology department. That person who, to him, seemed only to be a name. In these thirty long years, he had not even seen that person a handful of times. “Parenting” and “nurturing” should not even be mentioned.

The glow of the wall lamps was very soft. She extended her hand to touch his face, from the bridge of his nose down to his lips until in the end, with a very serious manner, she even poked her index finger into that shallow dimple. “Every time I see you, I especially want to take care of you … But you’re almost ten years older than me. So weird.”

The skin beneath her hand was very smooth and was so beautiful it made people jealous.

Gu Pingsheng’s brows lifted. “What was that you said?”

“Nothing. I’m talking in my sleep.” With a grin, Tong Yan tugged on the down quilt and covered herself with it. “Finally, we get to celebrate the Lunar New Year. So nice … May I go pay New Year’s greetings to your family at their home?”

Full of hope, she gazed into his eyes, the reflection of the wall lamps shining inside them. Only when she heard him say okay did she pull the down quilt over her head, a wordless smile breaking out across her face and an excitement like what she had felt when she was first accepted into university filling her.

After so long, she could at last legitimately go to his [maternal] grandfather's home.

As the Spring Festival neared, snow unexpectedly fell for a consecutive three days and two nights. Traffic in the entire city of Beijing was nearly paralyzed, and taxicabs were difficult to find. Since the projects Gu Pingsheng was working on were all transnational ones, his work did not lighten at all due to the approaching Spring Festival. In fact, because he was trying to free up his time to go on vacation with her, every day he was working overtime until late into the night.

At the start, Shen Yao had still called to complain to her about Beijing's frigid weather when it snowed, but she later discovered that during every phone call, Tong Yan's thoughts were always elsewhere. Gradually, she realized that she was being ignorant about the situation and, with a sigh, lamented that Tong Yan truly had fallen into the mentality of a good little wife, sitting at home every day, yearning for her love's return …

Tong Yan could not even be bothered to shoot back any replies, and after managing to send Shen Yao away, she arbitrarily picked up a book from beside Gu Pingsheng's pillow.

Opening it, she saw that written densely all over inside were numerous annotations. Most were scrawled in English, and though she did not really understand, she could ascertain that this must be a reference material he was using as a source for his lectures.

"Yan Yan."

Grandmother opened the door and stepped into the bedroom.

She set down the book. "Why aren't you sleeping yet?"

Grandmother walked over to the bed and sat down. "Grandmother would like

to discuss something with you.” After she finished saying this first part, there was an inexplicable moment of hesitation. Tong Yan faintly felt a bad sense of premonition. Sure enough, the next words that Grandmother opened her mouth to say had to do with money. “The money that came from selling the apartment and that was used to pay for the medical bills, Grandmother wants to use it to pay off all your dad’s debts in one go.”

“No.” Tong Yan abruptly sat up straight, but the pain in her tailbone caused her to turn onto her side. “That money needs to be kept.”

Indeed, she still should not hold out any hope for him.

She pondered out each step, her brain filling in for her how her father had appealed to Grandmother using all kinds of words. In silence, she gripped tightly onto the edge of the down quilt. But when she saw the look on Grandmother’s face, Gu Pingsheng’s words echoed beside her ear. She must not get angry. She must not affect Grandmother’s emotional state.

Continuously persuading herself in this way, she forced herself to control her voice and say, “You are already at such an old age. It’s better to keep some money to support your retirement. If by some chance … something happens to me, then what? Whom can you count on then?”

Grandmother’s voice was calm, but her stance was very firm. “This time, your dad really is sincere. You know it wasn’t easy for that family either. They just wanted to earn some interest and that’s why they lent the money to your dad. But no one had expected that this loan would last seven, eight years and still not be paid back …”

Grandmother rambled on about those things of the past, pulling out those old matters and talking again about them.

Each word spoken was of old, bringing up anew all those facts she had purposely tried to forget.

Eventually, Grandmother even began to say that, in this lifetime, the person she worried most about was not her granddaughter, who was mature and sensible, but her disappointing son. If she, as his mother, died, how would her son possibly survive with all that debt? …

As she reached the end of her words, her tears were streaming relentlessly.

Tong Yan began to sob from merely seeing this, and reaching with her hand, she wiped away at Grandmother's tears. "I honestly am not saying I won't provide for him. When he is old and can't move and doesn't have the strength to play the stock market anymore, I definitely will provide for him …"

Never had she seen Grandmother weep before her like this. This elderly woman, who had not not cried once regardless of how excruciating chemotherapy had been or how the pain had caused her entire body to be drenched with sweat, was now actually sitting like this in front of her, choked with sobs. In the end, she was crying so hard she began to tremble. She did not know what to say and could only weep.

The door was suddenly pushed opened.

Gu Pingsheng's head was down, and it was only after he removed his tie from in front of him and lifted his head that he saw the scene inside the bedroom.

He tossed his tie and suit jacket onto the bed, walked over and patted Tong Yan on her shoulder, and then turned to crouch down in front of Grandmother, consoling her in a warm, calming voice. He did not inquire at all for any explanation or reason, only assuring her that nothing was too big an issue and that he and Tong Yan would surely resolve it.

Perhaps because he had once been a doctor, his words always had the ability to bring about trust and to comfort people's hearts.

After some time, Grandmother let go of her persistence to persuade Tong Yan of anything and merely noiselessly brushed away the tears at the corner of her eyes.

From the bathroom, Gu Pingsheng brought out a towel that had been rinsed in warm water and handed it to the elderly woman. "It is so late already. Go get some rest first. I will talk to Yan Yan."

"Things are not easy for the both of you … Truly not easy."

Stating this over and over, Grandmother rose and closed the door behind her

for them. The click of the door latch was remarkably distinct.

He sat down close beside Tong Yan. Her head was bowed, and using the edge of the down quilt, she wiped at her tears until her eyes were red and swollen. Still, though, her tears continued to spill down.

At last, Gu Pingsheng sighed, and lowering his head so that his forehead rested against hers, he actually chuckled, “My heart isn’t very good. If you keep crying, I reckon I’m going to have a heart attack right away.”

The more he said words like those, the more Tong Yan’s sobs increased until they choked her throat.

Such was the deplorable state of her family situation. And such was the physical condition of Gu Pingsheng’s body. Though he had spoken in jest, she still could imagine the possibility of him having a heart attack. If she allowed herself to think deeper on this, however, she would also feel great pain in her own heart.

For the first time in her life, she was scared that, because of her, something truly would happen to him.

And also for the first time in her life, she discovered that she perhaps was actually a burden on him — a burden on his already extremely weak and frail body.

He could not hear her crying, but as he watched the ever-increasing tremors that racked her shoulders, he truly felt rather helpless. “Yan Yan?” He pulled her close and held her in his arms. “What’s wrong?”

In his embrace, her tears continued to flow for a long while, and finally, with red eyes, she began to slowly explain the situation to him.

The general idea was merely that, these years, Grandmother had already off and on paid back a lot of debt for her father, but the sum he owed to his biggest creditor was simply too great and she was powerless to help with that amount. Fortunately, that family had someone who was an old co-worker with her father from the factory he had once worked in. During the first two years, the creditor had been rather lenient, but this debt had been owed for seven or eight years

already and even the closest of friends would end up falling out. That family had shown up at their home many times. They had still gone to her father's rented home in the beginning, but after a while, they had simply time and again come to seek out Grandmother instead. Back then, Lu Bei had had an encounter with a vicious-looking husband and wife couple who had come to collect, and without asking for any explanation or reason, he had gotten into a brawl with the man.

Over the years, the Court had mediated the case and old neighbours had talked, and what this all left for her were too many memories that were too painful to recall. She understood the principle that "a father's debts should be repaid by his son," and she had originally planned to wait until after she graduated and saved up enough money to pay it off for him. Grandmother's sickness, though, had unexpectedly caused the situation to become more complicated. Grandmother did not know how much money remained after paying for her medical treatments, and in this matter, Tong Yan had her own personal motive. She wanted to secretly keep the money with Gu Pingsheng to set aside some funds as living expense money for Grandmother in her elderly years. Furthermore, she had to take into consideration the possibility of cancer recurrence in the elderly woman.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

55 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 19.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 19.1

May 25, 2016 by hoju 9 Comments



Oh gosh, what terrible situation for Gu Pingsheng to be in. And can you imagine the guilt Tong Yan must be feeling?

Chapter 19.1 – During That Season of Time (1)

Gu Pingsheng went into the bathroom, held a towel once again under warm water, and then wrung it out, giving it to her to wipe her face. Throughout the entire time as she spoke, he watched her quietly, and after she had finished saying everything, he finally lay back onto the bed and patted his arm.

Tong Yan understood and lay down as well, nestling herself into the crook of his arm.

“These are things that need to be resolved. It is just a matter of sooner or later.” He closed his eyes to rest and in a gentle tone, stated, “Since this is ‘a son repaying his father’s debts,’ then our elderly grandmother’s money should not

be used. This weekend, I will give three hundred thousand to your father."

Tong Yan put her hands on the bed, wanting to push herself up to sitting, but he reached up with his arm and pulled her back down so she was pressed against his front. "You don't need to fight me for this. Everything of mine is yours."

His chin rested on top of her head, and it would rub against her hair as he spoke. "Today, I learned a saying from my assistant. 'Gold and jade adorn the exterior, rot and decay fill the interior.[1]' That's actually my situation. From the outside, I look to be pretty good, but when you truly live with me, you will become aware of all my real shortcomings. Just now, when I pushed open the door to come in and saw you crying, my heart ached so much."

He paused for several seconds, then repeated, "My heart truly did ache."

These words of his not only twisted the meaning of the idiom, the way he said them also so very saddened the listener.

She understood that he was not only speaking about what he had felt emotionally but also physically as well. Enclosing her arms around his waist, she wrote with her finger on his back through the thin fabric, "Sorry."

She contemplated quietly for two days. As Gu Pingsheng had said, this situation was a reality, and it was simply a matter of whether it would be resolved sooner or later. A sickness of the body could be treated, but a burden eating away at the heart was difficult to cure. If Grandmother was going to fill her mind with worries all day about this, it would actually affect her body and health anyway.

In the end, she accepted Gu Pingsheng's suggestion to pay back the money for her father.

"If you give the money directly to my dad, I'm worried he'll just take it and throw it into the stock market …" Tong Yan's gaze was somewhat evasive. These words that brought her such shame were ones she had never thought she would one day say aloud. "How about I personally go repay the money to them and get the IOU slip back?"

"Alright. I have a very important meeting on Saturday morning. When it's done, I'll come home to pick you up and go with you there," Gu Pingsheng told

her unhurriedly.

“How about I go myself?” She did not want him to also have to face the harsh, derisive words of people.

His answer, of course, was no.

Fortunately, the situation turned out to be much better than she had imagined. After all, regardless of how great the disputes in the past had been, someone was still personally bringing over three hundred thousand to make up a debt that had nearly become a sore on the heart. That former colleague of her father even very ruefully told Tong Yan, “Your dad was quite a good guy before, but once he got involved in the stock market, he changed.”

Tong Yan smiled wordlessly, not wishing to speak a single word more than necessary.

In the main lobby of the bank, many people were lined up waiting for their number to be called. There, the of them sat in a row, maintaining an awkward silence between them. Electronic announcements that politely and mechanically called out numbers were constantly sounding out. There were people standing up from their spot in the waiting area while there were also others who could wait no longer, and crumpling in their hand the paper with their number and tossing it into the trash can, they would get up and leave.

She counted along with the numbers, praying in her mind that their turn would come quickly, that they could quickly transfer the money and quickly put an end to this matter. Reassuringly, he patted the back of her hand.

Tong Yan smiled and was about to ask him if he wanted to step outside to get some air when, out of the blue, someone spoke up from behind them. “Teacher Gu?” The voice was rather hesitant and could even be said to be disbelieving.

Tong Yan turned her head to look. Following her movements, Gu Pingsheng also shifted his gaze in that direction, and to his surprise, he recognized the boy standing behind them. “Dong Xiaofeng?”

This boy named Dong Xiaofeng made a sound in acknowledgement, his eyes fixed on both their faces.

Her dad's colleague suddenly stood and with a smile, asked, "Xiaofeng, you know each other?"

With an "mm", the boy answered, "… This is my university professor."

"University professor?" The creditor was also somewhat incredulous. After taking quite some time to recover, he finally smiling said to Gu Pingsheng and Tong Yan, who had risen to their feet, "My apologies. This is my nephew … Teacher, please don't take offense. It was just that, the last time I went to Tong Yan's home to … pay a visit, I ran into a ruffian kid who beat me up so that I ended up staying in the hospital. I was worried I would run into a thug again this time, so I asked my nephew to come help out. If I knew the person coming today was a university professor, I definitely wouldn't have told him to come."

That man's wife also stood, all the while throwing meaningful looks at the man as she smiled and smoothed the situation over.

That family was putting in great efforts to be ingratiatingly friendly, likely because they were worried that in the future, Gu Pingsheng would try to make things difficult at school for the boy.

As she listened to these words of her dad's colleague, who was trying with all his might to explain, she did not actually dare even to look at Gu Pingsheng's face. She only heard him give a few sentences in response, and nothing unusual or wrong could be perceived in them. Had he not wordlessly given a gentle squeeze to her hand, she would absolutely have fled this place.

Such a cruel coincidence, to have shoved him into such a humiliating circumstance.

After the procedures were completed, she no longer had a sense of a weight being lifted from her shoulders, and in fact, she felt even more dismayed.

The bank was very close to his university, and on their way back, Gu Pingsheng suddenly said that he needed to stop by the school to pick up some material. The two followed the sidewalk and turned into the main gates of the university, strolling down the pathway that led to the administrative offices.

The campus during the weekend did not have many students. On the corners

of the flower beds by the wayside, there were several piles of snow that had long since frozen into humps of ice.

Her hands were in her jacket pockets as she followed Gu Pingsheng's footsteps. With her head lowered, she focused entirely on walking, and it was only when she heard the noise of a basketball hitting the ground that she realized she had already arrived with him at the basketball courts.

On each of the six half-courts, there were groups of twos and threes taking shots at the hoop. The most eye-catching group was on the right side where several boys, all wearing proper athletic shorts and shirts, were playing a game of three-on-three in the biting wind. Surrounding the edge of the court were quite a few people. Some of them were hopping and covering their faces to block out the wind while cheering on the players, and others who looked as if they knew what they were doing had brought over a chalkboard and were keeping score.

"Is this your faculty's tournament?" She recognized some familiar faces.

"It's a school-wide tournament. This university's law school is bigger than your school's. Each year has seven to eight separate classes of students, so they are having an internal basketball competition first."

"My school? That used to be your school, too, eh." Tong Yan felt an unexplainable sense of jealousy. "Gee, some people forget their roots once they're in one of the top law schools of the country."

Gu Pingsheng sized her up for a moment and then, in a slightly musing tone, remarked, "You, as my student, are being jealous?"

She shot back an "of course."

Several students had already noticed them and were excitedly waving with cries of "Teacher Gu, Teacher Gu!" as if they were very surprised that he would come watch the faculty's basketball competition.

Gu Pingsheng walked over to them and asked with a smile, "Who's winning?"

"Right now it's Class No. 2." The student in charge of keeping track of scores flipped through his notebook. "But the third year students haven't even started playing yet. I'm guessing that in the end, our senior brothers [senior male fellow

schoolmates, in this case, faculty-mates] will be representing our faculty in the tournament."

"Teacher Gu, do you know how to play basketball?" One of the people resting on the sidelines downed a few mouthfuls of mineral water as he asked this.

"I do." Gu Pingsheng casually made a motion like he was shooting a ball into a hoop. "When I was in university, I often played basketball as a pastime." His action had very beautiful form. Even Tong Yan, as a complete outsider to basketball, could tell that his posture and form were not a bluff.

All around, the students instantly became animated, and they began rowdily crying for some of the players who were resting to play with Teacher Gu.

"Teacher Gu, we will absolutely be courteous and gracious when we play. No need for a ref. We'll just score by totaling up the number of baskets made, how about that?"

The students knew he could not hear, so naturally, they thought of an effective way to play.

Gu Pingsheng did not have a preference one way or the other, and after stressing that he could only play a ten-minute scrimmage with them, he removed his down jacket and handed it to Tong Yan. When he took off his glasses, Tong Yan rather worriedly gave a discreet tug on the corner of his shirt and inaudibly mouthed to him, "Is it really okay for you to do this?"

"Occasionally exercising for ten minutes won't cause any issues." He placed his glasses into her hand. "I heard Zihao mention, the college girls in China particularly like boys who play basketball?"

After saying this, he turned only the corners of his lips up slightly, but this still could not hide his good mood.

"It seems that really is the case." Infected by his smile, Tong Yan made a show of seriousness as she recalled, "I've watched a lot of basketball games, too, all played by students who were recruited by the school specifically for basketball. Such a pity. Back then, if I had fallen in love with one of them, then there would be no chance for you later on."

"Is that so?" His smile was unruffled.

A ball happened to be tossed their way at that moment, and catching it with a single hand, he headed directly onto the court.

Tong Yan stood amongst a group of female students, facing into the sun as she watched the game. It seemed, since she had met him, he was either the proper and dignified doctor or the university professor, and it was rare to see him in such a moment, where he was so active. It was still a game of three-on-three, and he, dressed in his thin dress shirt, was mixed in with several boys who were wearing sleeveless basketball shirts.

Possibly due to the cold weather, he had not been warmed up at the start, so the way he held the ball was not very smooth. But after only a minute or two, he had become the main driving force on his team, constantly making mid-range jump shots and three-point shots.

Every turn, jump, and breakaway captivated people's attention. Watching him against the background of light, it seemed as if there was always sunlight surrounding him, blurring the outline of his body and giving a warm, soft feeling.

"Little *Shiniang*," the girl beside her could not help nosily inquiring, "back then, was it because you saw Teacher Gu playing basketball that you fell completely in love with him?"

Tong Yan feigned a sigh and replied in a soft voice, "Very sadly, this is also my first time seeing him play basketball …"

Gu Pingsheng was unquestionably a person with self-restraint. When he saw Tong Yan signal to him, reminding him that the time was up, he immediately stopped all motions with the ball in his hands.

After the game had ended and the people had dispersed, Tong Yan was still absorbed in the various marvelous images in her mind of him taking shots at the hoop. She handed him a moist towelette, then tilted her head slightly to the side and stared adoringly at him like she was gazing at her idol.

"What's up?" He took it from her.

"I must say, not only are your basketball skills good, they're also very suitable for just watching and admiring."

He chuckled, wiping his fingers with the towelette as he asked, “Are you extremely happy, then, that you didn’t fall in love with someone else and, instead, persevered in waiting until I arrived?”

[1]**金玉其外，败絮其中**. This saying, “gold and jade adorn the exterior, but rot and decay fill the interior,” is describing something that looks wonderful on the outside but is actually broken, of no use, inferior, *etc.* upon closer inspection. This can be used to describe things or people, for example, an object that is beautiful but impractical, or a duplicitous person who purposely looks good to people but is hiding an ugly heart, *etc.* Gu Pingsheng has a twisted understanding of this saying because, when applied to describe a person, it generally is describing “moral rot,” someone who may look good on the outside but his ethics and morals are ugly. It’s definitely not meant to describe a situation where someone may look healthy but in reality, his health, a factor completely out of his control, is not ideal.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
56 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 19.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 19.2

May 28, 2016 by hoju 9 Comments



You can see how the presence of one of Gu Pingsheng's students at the bank and repayment of debt has really affected Tong Yan and the experience has sunk into her heart. And it's another Lunar New Year, but this time, Tong Yan gets to legitimately meet his family. Will it be a happy day?

Chapter 19.2 – During That Season of Time (2)

"Oh yes." Tong Yan very solemnly raised her fingers and counted off the years on them. "From when I was born, I waited thirteen years before I finally got to see you, but then we quickly separated. It was eight years later before you were finally willing to bestow me the honour of appearing before me again. So no matter how you look at it, no one has had to have a more agonizing wait than me. In the future, if someone has the misfortune of falling for you and wants to ruin our relationship, you must very sternly tell her to first save up another twenty years before saying that to you."

Tong Yan felt that she was being so brazen the skin on her face must truly be

as thick as a city wall[1]. Stating that, she lowered her head and laughed gleefully for a while.

Her bangs slipped down, and from his angle, he could only see her lips, which were slightly pale from the cold, and discern that they were curved obviously into a smile. But, in that moment when she had lowered her head, a large tear had slid down.

For a nationwide calamity, where many dying had needed to be saved and wounded had needed to be rescued, he had lost the health that he should have rightfully possessed, but not many people knew of this.

And yet her own family situation was causing him to have to face the talk and gossip of people.

Seeing how these students worshipped Gu Pingsheng, she genuinely was very fearful that after the student from this afternoon returned to the school, he would secretly broadcast everything. Or maybe that student would say, “Look at that. The father of Gu Pingsheng’s wife is actually a gambling addict. He owed a debt for so many years and still didn’t pay the money back …”

Tong Yan glanced lightly over at Gu Pingsheng.

He was reaching down with his hand and pulling up the zipper of his jacket. So handsome was he that people could not even shift their gaze from him.

Furtively brushing away her tears, she stretched out her right hand, slipped it into his pocket, and took hold of his hand.

As the two of them left the basketball courts and the countless keenly friendly students, she silently prayed that from this moment on, the rain in their lives would clear to sunshine skies. She dared not think too deeply about the future … because she could not bear it — she could not bear for Gu Pingsheng to have to face this sort of humiliation another time.

When she set the IOU slip in front of Grandmother, Grandmother once again could not refrain from wiping at her tears that fell.

To Tong Yan, her parents were like a debt she had to pay, but to Grandmother, was Tong Yan’s father not also like her debt that she was using an entire lifetime to pay? During Tong Yan’s earlier, rebellious period, she had blamed

Grandmother for letting her father go unchecked and for being unwilling to cut off all ties and the mother-son relationship with him, but as she matured, she more and more understood what Grandmother was feeling. That was why, when the elderly lady mentioned that she wanted Tong Yan's father to come back and celebrate the Lunar New Year with them, Tong Yan did not refuse the request.

It was the eve of the Lunar New Year, and Gu Pingsheng actually drank some alcohol with her father.

Wordlessly, she kept count for him the number of glasses he drank and kicked him at least four or five times, but it was to no avail. It was fortunate that the alcohol content of the beer was not high. Nevertheless, the sight of glass after glass being consumed like that until past eleven o'clock at night was still quite frightful.

"How about having some water?" Sitting on her knees on the bed, Tong Yan held a glass up to his lips.

"I probably won't be able to get any water down tonight." He could not help chuckling, "It's no problem. The alcohol content wasn't high, so I won't need to drink water to dilute it."

Perhaps because he had consumed alcohol, his voice somewhat carried the quality one gets from being tipsy.

A little low, and so sexy it was captivating.

Resignedly, she obliged him, setting the glass down off to the side, and with a towel, she wiped his face for him. "I heard that you shouldn't bathe after drinking, so don't shower tonight. Just wipe down your face and hands."

The dark blue towel followed its way down his forehead to his cheeks as well as his chin.

She was wiping meticulously and so gently it was as if she was doing it for a child. Gu Pingsheng simply allowed her to pour out her overflowing motherly love.

"Give me your left hand."

Seeing her say this, he held his left hand out to her. Tong Yan had just let go of his right hand before it was already reaching up to caress her face. “Mrs. Gu is twenty-two years old already.”

His fingers glided over her eyes, down her nose, and came to rest on her lips. “I love you, Yan Yan.”

He could not hear that, right at this moment, there was the increasingly enthusiastic noise of firecrackers outside the windows.

Every year, they were prohibited, but every year, despite the repeated bans, there still would be mischievous children from various families who would sneak to buy some firecrackers and fireworks.

This was the first Lunar New Year they were celebrating together since they became a couple. This was his homeplace, but this Lunar New Year celebration of his was so quiet. He could not hear the joyful laughter of the Spring Festival Gala that was showing on the television. He could not hear those annoying messages of blessings and celebration that came from the various consulates of the different countries. He could not even hear the noise of the firecrackers outside the window. A quiet Spring Festival.

Even with her by his side, would he occasionally feel a sense of isolation? The noises were overly raucous and shrill, and she could not hold back a frown from creasing her brows.

Gu Pingsheng was slightly taken aback by this. “What’s wrong?”

“Firecrackers. The noise of the firecrackers outside is especially loud.” Seeing the relief that came over him in that instant, Tong Yan at once realized that he had misunderstood. “I love you, too. I love you more. I especially love you, the type of love where it will be impossible for me to fall in love with anyone else …”

Towards the end, even she could not help laughing.

“So sappy.” She continued to wipe down his hands with the towel.

As he gazed upon her expressive face and her lips which were moving incessantly, a streak of light from the fireworks unexpectedly flashed across the window. The sudden brightness as well as she, sitting there before him, were both quietly rousing the alcohol in his blood.

All of his sensory perceptions had been magnified.

Likely because the expression in his eyes was too bewitching — too plain and direct — Tong Yan's feelings were soon aroused. Turning her lips up in a pout, she motioned with them to him that they should sleep. "We can't tonight. Absolutely can't. We have to get up early tomorrow to go to your grandfather's house …"

"I know." He gave a slight smile.

Amid the deafening clamour of firecrackers, she lifted up the down quilt and snugged herself tightly against him, sitting with him as they watched together the ever more dazzling fireworks outside. She did not know what he was thinking, and underneath the blankets, she sought out his hand with her own and squeezed it. Gu Pingsheng pulled back his gaze to look at her. "Not sleeping yet?"

"I still want to ask you, do you tend to get particularly energized when you drink?" Tong Yan grinned, "Normally at this time, unless you had to work overtime, you would already have been asleep for a long time."

As she said this, she had thrown her leg on top of his already and found a nice, comfortable sleeping position.

"Don't move," he considerately reminded her.

Naughtily, she deliberately rubbed against his leg with light motions.

Gu Pingsheng very easily captured her ankle. At once, she settled down like a good girl and changed the topic. "Why do you have a particular fondness for blue?" While she was hanging up the towel earlier on, she realized that all the things in the bathroom were various shades of blue. Normally, she did not even notice this, but now that she was really paying attention, she discovered that there were so many it was unimaginable.

"From a psychology perspective, the colour blue generally is an expression of melancholy or instability in a person's mood." Using simple terms, Gu Pingsheng did a self-analysis. "That's why you will notice that the plural form of 'blue,' the word 'blues,' means 'a feeling of sadness or melancholy.'"

Tong Yan merely laughed, pondering on his words. "Too much blue is blues,

and blue's plural is its singular's melancholy." Saying that sentence made the teeth ache. "If we keep talking about this, we're going to turn into those artsy youths."

"That was just a simple psychological analysis." Gu Pingsheng was also chuckling. "The real answer is, my mother used to especially like using this colour. It's something I've gotten used to since I was a child, so I've just never changed the habit."

With a nod, she lay on her side, wrapped her arms around him, and, like a good girl, closed her eyes to go to sleep.

It seemed as if Heaven was truly starting to turn its favour on them. Those problems she had once thought unsolvable were all starting to gradually resolve. Tomorrow, they would be going to his maternal grandfather's home. On the first day of the new lunar year, there should be many people present that she would see …

Many people whom she had never seen before but would be family in the future.

She had only ever once been to the home of Gu Pingsheng's maternal grandfather, and it had been a circumstance where they elderly man had not even known. This second visit, however, she was formally meeting the family elder. Sitting in Gu Pingfan's vehicle, Tong Yan was extremely nervous the entire way and constantly asking Pingfan all sorts of things. The reason for this was that Gu Pingsheng truly did not know anything at all …

"I asked him, 'Who will be there today?' He said he didn't know. I asked him, 'Are there a lot of relatives in your family?' He said he's also seen only a few of them … I asked him, 'What sort of topics does your grandfather like to talk about?' He said again that he didn't know …" Tong Yan was talking away until she grew gloomy. "Big Sister Pingfan, how can I not be nervous? I'm so nervous I'm going to jump from the car."

Gu Pingfan was about to die laughing from listening to her. "Don't be nervous. Everything he said is the honest truth. Those relatives in my family only visit during Lunar New Year or other festivities, but he wasn't even in the country so

of course he wouldn't know. What does my [paternal] granddad like? I grew up by his side since I was a kid and didn't leave until I graduated from high school. You can ask me."

"Mm, you tell me then." Tong Yan deferentially sought advice and guidance. "Does Grandfather like the lively, animated type of kid or the graceful and quiet type."

"Can't really say. I actually even think that he doesn't like any sort of kid." Gu Pingfan was intentionally teasing her, but seeing Tong Yan's frozen expression, she right away comforted, "He likes kind-hearted kids. You need to trust the eyes of the elderly. Basically what a kid looks like on the outside is not important. The eyes of the elderly can tell in one glance what you really are like."

Kind-hearted? Such a vague and hard-to-grasp word …

"In his early years, he worked in the Bureau of Culture, and he can be classified as a relatively stern type of person. It'll be fine once you get used to it, though." Gu Pingfan turned and cast a quick glance at her. "It's alright. You still have me and TK. TK didn't grow up by his side, but my granddad actually loves him most. He just normally doesn't say it out, that's all."

She answered with an "mm-hmm."

"But Granddad has been sick these last few years, and his energy and mental state as well as mood have not been very good. You need to be mentally prepared."

She was startled by this, and turning her eyes to Gu Pingsheng, she asked, "Your grandfather is sick?"

He nodded. "Two years ago, he had a liver transplant, and even though it was successful, his creatinine levels have remained very high and he has never stopped dialysis."

Tong Yan's heart sank a little. Although she did not know what "never stopped dialysis" signified, simply from the word "dialysis" alone, she knew that it must be a very serious matter. But all this time, Gu Pingsheng had never told her about it.

She wanted to ask him but did not want to do so in front of Gu Pingfan. In the

end, she secretly pulled his hand over and placed the question into his palm: “Why?”

After writing this, she tilted her head to the side to look at him. He seemed to have guessed that she would ask, but with only a smile, he turned his hand over, took hers in it, and said, “I will tell you when we get home.”

She nodded, not pursuing the matter any further.

Gu Pingsheng’s family seemed very amiable and pleasant, and there were even two aunties who, after seeing Tong Yan, hurriedly said they had not brought enough red packets[2]. This, however, caused Tong Yan to feel even more uncomfortable. Fortunately, Pingfan was constantly helping by speaking for her, saying that this was the first time the little girl had come to the home and they must, by all means, not frighten her with their overenthusiasm.

Gu Pingsheng left her in the living room on the main level and first went upstairs himself to see his grandfather. A long while passed, though, and still he did not come down. At the outset, Tong Yan had not thought anything about this, but later, she began to feel that the amount of time was truly excessively long. Looking at Pingfan, she appealed with her eyes for help.

Even though their family members were all very friendly, this was her first time visiting, and she still needed to be by Gu Pingsheng’s side to feel assured.

“It’s been nearly twenty minutes?” Pingfan took a glance at her watch and, understanding her meaning, smiled, “I’ll go up and have a look.”

Tong Yan nodded, clutching in both hands the mandarin orange Pingfan’s mother had handed her and continuing to answer those various earnestly friendly inquiries. From her parents’ occupations to her home address to her major in university, the questions addressed everything and did not differentiate between big or trivial matters.

All of a sudden, from upstairs, the heavy thud of a hard object striking something sounded out. She leapt to her feet in fright.

Pingfan was only halfway up the stairs, and hearing this sound, she, too, was startled. A cry of “Oh no!” slipped from her lips, and she hurriedly sprinted

upstairs. The seven or eight people in the living room had mostly risen to their feet, the expressions on their faces now serious, and his two uncles also strode quickly up the stairs. She dared not act rashly by dashing up as well and merely stood dazedly in that same spot, her heart inexplicably beginning to race.

[1]When someone is said to be 厚脸皮 “hou lian pi” or “have thick skin on the face,” it means that person is brazen and unabashed.

[2]红包 “hong bao.” The “red packets” or “red envelopes” refer to monetary gifts put in a red envelope. While they are given during other occasions (e.g. weddings, etc.) and festivities as well, these are very commonly seen during the Lunar New Year, given by parents, grandparents, and other elders to children or those who are of a younger generation and still unmarried. They symbolize good luck.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
57 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 19.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 19.3

June 1, 2016 by hoju 7 Comments



It's not quite the Lunar New Year Tong Yan was expecting. Finally, we have a full picture of what happened on the fateful night that Gu Pingsheng's mother left the world.

Chapter 19.3 – During That Season of Time (3)

Pingfan's mother patted her on the shoulder. "It's okay, it's okay."

Tong Yan did not even know what had happened; why would she need consolation? But within her, she had the foreboding feeling that something very bad had occurred upstairs. This sort of conjecture was quickly confirmed. When the sound of footsteps coming downstairs was heard, she and Pingfan's mother simultaneously raised their heads. Alone, Gu Pingsheng stepped down the staircase. On his forehead was a very obvious gauze pad that someone had hastily applied for him.

White gauze applied on with white adhesive tape.

So white it was a horrible sight to see.

She stood in that spot, almost stupidly, watching as he came down, walked toward her, and came to a stop in front of her. "Yan Yan, let's go home."

Tong Yan stared into his eyes, suddenly unable to speak. In the end, she simply gave a nod of her head and without asking any questions, followed him toward the front door.

A moment ago, when Gu Pingsheng was walking down those stairs, the lighting had suddenly seemed starkly white and cold. It called up in her memory the "him" from their first meeting long ago, an extremely young man sitting on the floor, his back leaning against the snow-white wall, his one arm draped across his knees, and his hand holding a thin sheet of white paper.

At that time, it had also been this same feeling.

The expression in his eyes when he looked at her was as if the entire world had nothing to do with him. Only she and he were the same.

For reasons unknown, her heart began beating at an increasingly faster rate, as if it was releasing the shock and fright from earlier on.

Normally, from their home to workplace, they only needed to take the bus. Therefore, other than that time she had taken the metro here late at night to find him, it had been many years since she had truly ridden it.

Today, however, they opted to take the metro.

It was not a work day, and there were not too many people. The train car they were sitting in even still had some empty seats. Their seats were on the far right of this particular train car, and leaning against its wall, she every now and then would allow her gaze to wander over to him.

Gu Pingsheng sensed her eyes on him. "Just now, there was some unpleasantness between Grandfather and me. His spirits have not been very good these last couple of years, and his temper has been a little bad." He finally pointed at his own forehead and in a rather resigned tone, said, "Luckily, the house is always prepared with these things, and luckily, as well, there's Pingfan, the still-not-graduated doctor." His tone was very casual as he downplayed everything.

It was more or less as she had presumed. Wordlessly, she gazed at him, and only after some time did she say, "Was it because of me? Earlier, on the way

over, Pingfan said that your grandfather is sick. It's been so long and you never mentioned it all this time. Back when you were teaching in Shanghai, you would frequently say that you had matters in the family. Was it because of your grandfather?"

She ran through the timing of everything in her mind. They had all overlapped: her family matters, his own matters, and the matters in his family. Basically, it had been one successively after the other …

"He doesn't like me?" Tong Yan asked another question.

The metro train happened to come to a stop at that moment. It was a transfer station, and many people, with large and small bags in hand, flooded onto the train car.

No matter how noisy his surroundings were, he still only ever remained within his own envelope of silence. He fixed his gaze on her. "Yan Yan, this whole thing has no direct relation to you, personally. Because of what happened with my mother, Grandfather is very much against relationships between teacher and student, and sometimes his reaction is a little on the extreme."

None of the answers were very unexpected. That was, aside from the wound on his forehead.

Fortunately, since the two of them were heading on vacation, Grandmother had risen early, left the house with them, and then went to Tianjin. Otherwise, when they returned home, it would only lead to another scare.

Possibly for the reason that he had once been a doctor, Gu Pingsheng kept a simplistic first aid kit readily available at home. Following his instructions, she step by step helped him treat his wound. Listening to him caused her heart to quake, and though the wound was not considered deep, that purple-red cut still caused her heart to ache dully when she looked at it. With her head down, she asked him, "Do you need to go get a tetanus shot?"

"No," he chuckled, "the object that hit me was very clean, and when Pingfan treated it, she was very clean and sanitized about it as well."

She made a pout with her lips and carefully secured a white gauze pad over his

injury. “My beautiful one, your face has been marred. But trust me, regardless of what your appearance may become, beautiful one, I will never find you repulsive.”

Saying this, she leaned in and gently kissed that layer of gauze on his forehead.

She changed the position she was in and took a seat. Face to face, the two sat with legs crossed, he looking at her and she staring back at him. In between them was a first aid kit that had not yet been closed.

Because she was to meet his grandfather today, Tong Yan had specially put care into her dress and adornments. She wore a delicate, blue hair ribbon and her long hair flowed over her shoulders, framing her face so that it appeared even slimmer. Her complexion was milky, her frame slender. She had always been one who, no matter how much she ate, would not grow chubby.

“Yan Yan, you are very beautiful today,” he said very slowly.

Her eyes curved into crescents as she smiled, “To be one of the school’s master of ceremonies, you have to have the makings of a beauty. I’ve just have been by your side all this time, so the radiance of my beauty has been temporarily overshadowed.”

He stretched out his hand, bent his finger, and flicked her on the forehead. “So that means, in the future, my daughter should be very beautiful.”

Tong Yan unabashedly nodded her head vigorously. However, she immediately became a little disheartened as she looked at him and said, “How come it’s been so long but we still haven’t conceived a baby? …” She was, after all, still young, so when she mentioned this, she nevertheless felt very embarrassed and straightaway stuck out her tongue lightly, unable to carry on any further.

“It’s because of me,” he stated forthrightly.

Tong Yan’s mouth fell open in an “ah,” and she stared wide-eyed at him. “Your aftereffects from SARS also include not being able to have children?”

He paused in surprise, then suddenly broke out in a laugh. “Don’t let your thoughts go the wrong way. I just didn’t want you to have to bear such pressure, so I’ve been using contraceptive measures.” Before Tong Yan had recovered from this, she felt a weight on her head. Reaching over, he patted her lightly on

the head. “We’re lucky that was the case. Otherwise, if Grandfather found out today that you were pregnant before getting married, I reckon he probably would never see us again.”

The weight was lifted from Tong Yan’s mind. The topic, though, had returned back to the unpleasant situation of today. Setting her elbow on one of her knees, she propped her chin on her hand and looked at him. “It’s no big deal. So many things have already happened and passed. This is just ‘another thing,’ that’s all.” She took the words he had once told her and repeated them back to him. “You said before that these things need to be resolved, and it is just a matter of sooner or later.”

He smiled, “You are a good student, indeed.”

Their flight to Saipan for their vacation was at night.

The original plan had been, on Lunar New Year’s Day, to have dinner at the home of Gu Pingsheng’s grandfather, then return home to get their luggage and rush to the airport. The timing of their arrival would have been just about perfect. Now that this incident had occurred, the entire daytime of Lunar New Year’s Day was unoccupied. Tong Yan changed out all the window curtains and bed sheets to new ones and then, without stopping to rest, began to do the laundry.

It seemed as if only in such busyness was she able cease thinking about what happened this morning.

As she stood beside the washing machine with nothing to do, she decided to take out their clothes that they normally did not wear and soak them in a washtub. Using this way to fill her time, she managed to exhaust an entire bottle of laundry detergent.

The messages coming into Gu Pingsheng’s mobile phone had not stopped the entire time. She could roughly guess that Pingfan was discussing with him their family’s matters. While her mind was thinking too much on everything, Gu Pingsheng suddenly came to the door and handed the phone to her: “Pingfan wants to wish you a happy Spring Festival.”

Wiping her hands dry, Tong Yan took it from him.

“Yan Yan?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“No one expected what happened today. My [paternal] granddad was truly hurt too deeply by what happened to my little [paternal] auntie[1]. But yet, by such coincidence, you and TK were once teacher and student, too, so it’s not unexpected that he cannot accept this. I originally wanted TK to tell a fib in regards to this, but you’ve been together with TK for so long; you should know that he can sometimes be so stubborn that it’s quite annoying.” Gu Pingfan gave a resigned laugh. “But it’s okay. None of these are big problems. I will slowly work on the elderly one’s mindset and thinking.”

“Mm, I understand.”

“Yan Yan, I really especially like you. Honest. Since we were kids, TK and I have been particularly close. The first time I saw him, it was his first time in China, when he was five years old. Back then, his spoken Mandarin was really bad, let alone his Beijing dialect, and he had such handsome looks as well, so all the kids in our family didn’t like him. But as luck would have it, I was learning English, so I especially liked being around him, the fake American boy …”

She had never heard Pingfan speak of these things before and was somewhat surprised.

Gu Pingsheng leaned against the doorframe and watched her talk on the phone, not saying anything himself. Hearing an alert sound out from the washing machine, she pointed in that direction. Soon, he had stridden over, and following her gestures, he very unfamiliarly opened the lid and pulled out the window curtains that had finished washing.

“Sometimes he could be so annoying. As long as it was something he liked, he wouldn’t let anyone touch it at all and absolutely would not share it. But as you came in contact with him more often, you discovered that it was something you could accept because the number of things he actually liked was very few. For example, he liked to eat broccoli, and for the entire meal, he only ate rice and that one dish of broccoli. As long as you avoided it, you could eat however much fish and meat and the good stuff you wanted. He would only eat his broccoli and

would not even bother looking at you."

Tong Yan could not help giggling. From Pingfan's words, she could imagine that when Gu Pingsheng was young, he must definitely have been a kid who was so annoying it was cute.

"So, Yan Yan, he loves you so much; that means you will undoubtedly be happy and blessed."

Tong Yan answered with an "oh," and joked, "As happy and blessed as broccoli?"

Pingfan also broke out into chuckles. "Definitely more happy and blessed than broccoli."

Gu Pingsheng did not know why she was laughing and gazed at her in amusment. At once, Tong Yan pointed at the balcony, indicating that he should go hang out the curtains to dry. Waiting until he had left the bathroom, she at last asked Pingfan, "Is it really because of his mother that he's refusing to wear a hearing aid?"

An unexpected silence fell over the other end of the telephone receiver.

After quite a long time, Pingfan finally replied to her. "He especially loved his mom. That's why, in this lifetime, he may never forgive himself about that incident. I only ever heard him talk about it at Little Auntie's funeral. That day, it was because he initiated an argument with Little Auntie and said some very hurtful words that my little auntie committed suicide."

Tong Yan listened in stunned silence.

"My little auntie had a very serious mental illness and would frequently declare hysterically that she was going to commit suicide. Actually, each time, she would just be bluffing, doing it only as a cry for attention and care from people. That day, after TK had finished quarreling with her, he was in the room next door to her bedroom. He heard noises in her room but didn't go to check, thinking the whole time that it was another melodramatic act. But who would have thought? It really did become reality."

And hence, he was unwilling to let himself hear any more sounds — any more sounds of this world …

Pingfan afterwards said some more words, trying to comfort her. Tong Yan, however, could only think about his mother's suicide. The complete truth of the whole story. She finally understood why someone like him, on that day of their first meeting, had involved himself in her matters and had actually raised his hand to strike a young girl who had no relation to him in any way …

At the time, had he not also been filled with extreme despair, treating her as if she was himself?

As she set the mobile phone down beside the sink, her mind was somewhat unfocussed, but she still continued stuffing the dirty bed sheets into the washer drum. The light and shadows in front of her seemed to shift slightly, and she looked behind her. She did not know how long Gu Pingsheng had been leaning against the side of the door, simply watching her quietly like that.

Beside her ear was the rumbling sound of laundry washing, its rhythm distinct.

And in this way, her gaze seemed to intertwine with his, unable at all to ever separate again.

"Just now, your big sister [cousin] said that you used to have a really bad temper. Why, later on, did your personality suddenly change?"

Discovering that she had already completely squandered away the laundry detergent, Tong Yan pulled out a new bottle from the cabinet beneath the sink. Then, she heard him say, "My mother passed away, and then very shortly following, I experienced a situation where I was confronted with life and death. I suddenly saw the light and accepted many things. Since my life was already so terrible, the only thing I could do was to treat other people well."

As he spoke, he approached her.

After Tong Yan had set the wash cycle time and heard the washing machine begin its normal operations, she turned around once again and slipped her arms around his neck. "When I was on the phone earlier on, I remembered a saying. It was spoken by Mencius[2]." She eyed him with a look of playful mocking. "You know who Mencius is?"

He gave a low "mm-hmm."

“Then you must have heard this saying before.” She put on a stern face and one word, one sentence at a time, spoke it for him to see. “Thus, when Heaven is about to bestow Tong Yan upon Pingsheng, it first exercises his mind with suffering, and his sinews and bones with toil; it exposes his body to hunger, and subjects him to extreme poverty; it confounds his undertakings. By all these methods, it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature, and supplies his incompetencies.[3]”

Gu Pingsheng carefully watched her every word.

When she finished speaking, he smiled and, supporting her from the underside of her thighs, lifted her up so that she was like a koala bear, clinging to him as he held her in front of himself. “That saying is pretty good. But back when I heard Pingfan say it, it seemed like there were a few words that were different?”

Tong Yan poked his dimple with her finger. “Just remember my version. This is our family maxim.”



Thus, when Heaven is about to bestow Tong Yan upon Pingsheng … it first exercises his mind with suffering … and his sinews and bones with toil … It exposes his

body to hunger … and subjects him to extreme poverty … It confounds his undertakings … By all these methods, it stimulates his mind, hardens his nature … and supplies his incompetencies.

[1]小姑姑 “xiao gu gu.” 姑姑 “Gu Gu” means paternal aunt, *i.e.* the sister of one’s father. The 小 or “little” added in front implies that she was the younger sister of Pingfan’s father.

[2] 孟子 “Mengzi.” Mencius (372-289 BCE) is a famous Confucian philosopher.

[3] Reference: Legge, J. (1861). *The Chinese Classics : With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena, and Copious Indexes.* Retrieved from https://play.google.com/store/books/details?id=oJ49Fe-drvcC&rdid=book-oJ49Fe-drvcC&rdot=1. Tong Yan modified the very beginning of the saying. The original text is “Thus, when Heaven is about to confer a great office on any man, it first exercises his mind with suffering …” (James Legge, 1861).

Additional Comments:

Besides his sickness, Gu Pingsheng has seemed almost perfect. However, as we’ve progressed through the story, as layers are peeled back and we gradually get a bigger picture of life, we’ve seen how this man is plagued with guilt and is still unable to fully share things that have been too painful for him to recall, even with Tong Yan, the one closest to him. Refusing to wear a hearing aid is like a self-punishment — a punishment for not listening carefully to the sounds coming from his mother’s room that fateful day.

“Since my life was already so terrible, the only thing I could do was to treat other people well.” The warm, gentle man of today was bought with a steep price — loss of health, loss of his dreams and aspirations, loss of his mother.

Perhaps Tong Yan is the only one who can truly understand him. She, too, held

her family situation — her gambling addict father and her mother who was a third party intruding on a marriage — in her heart. As she had thought, it was not that she was deliberately hiding thing from him but that some things needed the right timing to be spoken aloud for they were just too painful to bring up otherwise. And I suspect that is why Tong Yan has never probed further with him about what happened with his mother and is only trying now through Pingfan to understand, and why he has never asked about her family. It is mutual respect and understanding.

We will soon learn a little more about Tong Yan's story on that day they first met and why she genuinely can understand what he is feeling.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

58 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 20.1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 20.1

June 4, 2016 by hoju 15 Comments



Finally! After a disappointing Lunar New Year, they get to relax, right? Or do they? Well, at least for a day…

Chapter 20.1 – Blessings in the Simple Things (1)

Due to the two projects Gu Pingsheng was currently working on, their couple's vacation unexpectedly turned into a group trip consisting of more than a dozen people. Gu Pingsheng's secretary was sighing incessantly over how the little boss had foresight by selecting an island where a visa was not required of them. Otherwise, with these last few days running into the Lunar New Year, they would not have had enough time to obtain a visa …

Listening to this, Tong Yan secretly peeked over at Mr. Gu, whose expression was one of openness and ease. She believed unquestionably that it was not that he had had foresight, but that he happened to have been unlucky and had a nasty trick played on him by the big boss.

The flight was a night one, but it was still as lively as a market.

When Gu Pingsheng went to use the washroom, the woman sitting on Tong Yan's left side was so bothered by the noise that she ripped the sleep mask off

her eyes. “The thing you’re afraid of most when taking a plane is that a tour group is on the same flight as you … especially late night flights.”

Her words were spoken to Tong Yan. Tong Yan gave a polite smile, still adjusting to the effects high-altitude flying had on the eardrums.

The few times she had taken an airplane had all been after she and Gu Pingsheng had started their relationship and had been limited to the short flight between Beijing and Shanghai. Consequently, she had no true experience to share on the topic regarding encountering tour groups or similar.

These colleagues of Gu Pingsheng’s were essentially all people who were outstanding and amongst the finest, and as they conversed in front and behind, all manners of subjects came up. There were work discussions as well as casual conversations, and most of the topics were new and interesting to listen to while a small portion consisted of ones that she did not even understand what she was hearing.

While he was returning to his seat, he happened to be stopped by the outstretched arm of a person two rows forward, and an unexpected dialogue on work topics began.

This was actually the first time she had seen him talking about work with someone else.

With one hand leaning against the seat, he would occasionally fall into contemplation, but the greater part of the time, he would be engaged in discussion, returning each point brought up by the other person with one of his own. Her seat had been adjusted into a leaning-back position, and she could comfortably watch and admire him. You know, people sometimes truly could very easily be made proud. In this particular moment, Tong Yan finally understood the feeling of “owning” a coveted, luxury good.

Her gaze glided from his face to his arm, which was resting on the seat, and ultimately fell on that unassuming, but ever-present ring. All of a sudden, she remembered that afternoon.

That moment when he had held the ring in his hand, waiting for her to slip it on him.

Their room had been reserved very early on and was on a separate floor from everyone else.

The majority of people who came to this island were here for a honeymoon vacation. The design and décor of the hotel room exuded romance, and the furniture was all comprised of wicker. When she pushed open the door and stepped inside, a breeze happened to blow in from the balcony. The pale blue curtains were lightly billowing upwards, then drifting back down.

After finishing a several-hours-long flight, this sort of room was indeed the most suitable place to settle into.

This was her first time out of country, and to say that she was not excited was not possible. Gu Pingsheng went to take a shower, and all the while, she leaned against the balcony railing, gazing out at the ocean in the distance.

She was not aware of how much time had passed, but he eventually walked out. She turned around to look at him. “Do you need to go out this afternoon? If you have things to do, feel free to go. It’s such a beautiful room. Even if you locked me up in the room to just sleep for five days, I would have no objections.”

He had offhandedly slipped on a pair of beach shorts and was still shirtless. It was broad daylight. Luckily this was a private balcony that they were on.

Tong Yan remembered how, on the plane, a few girls who had given him a high score had all the while said he was *yingjun*.

The word, “*yingjun*” [英俊 handsome, exceptionally talented, as well as elegant bearing and demeanor] was so tacky, and very few people nowadays used it in describing a man. The criteria encompassed in it were simply too high. In addition to having outstanding looks, the man needed to exude poise and an elegant demeanor and also needed to have exceptional intelligence and talent. But as she seriously mulled it over, he truly was entirely worthy of that word.

“There is nothing important for today. I have already warned them that they have to at least leave me one full day today.” He told her, “There still has to be a limit to being a workaholic. At the very least, the first day of a honeymoon vacation should be left to the wife.”

“Honeymoon vacation?” she repeated and after thinking about it, grinned. “This is indeed a very unique honeymoon vacation.”

Not long ago, his secretary had secretly pointed at the luggage of two paralegals and remarked that the contents inside consisted completely of materials and information that they had printed out. She had only taken a single glimpse, and then instantly, her mind called up images of the thick stack of printed English data and information found in every class of International Commercial Arbitration during her third year of university. Absolutely gave her the shivers.

“Back when I was in your class, every time I had to flip through those three hundred A4 sheets of information, I’d get a headache.” With her back leaning against the railing, she could not help accusing, “Do you know how painful it is to have to read material written in English? And especially when you have to write out the case analyses in English. Simply a nightmare.”

“Your marks weren’t low.”

“That’s because it was your class. Sometimes having a pretty teacher can actually improve education quality.”

He laughed, “Even though the idea of that is a little weird, if it can achieve the desired results, then it’s still pretty good.”

“I’ll tell you a secret.” She said, “In the stuff that I packed back with me from school, there is a calendar. It’s from that semester. Every date prior to December 24 was crossed off with a pen.”

December 24. Christmas Eve.

Naturally, he remembered the significance of that very special day. He simply did not know why it was connected somehow to a calendar.

“From the first day I saw you again, I started counting down the days — counting down to when you would leave the school.” She continued reminiscing over the memories of that period. “Every time I went to your class, I felt especially stressed. It seemed as if you were the only person who knew all those deepest secrets of mine. That was why, to me, you were like a ticking time

bomb.”

“What about later on?”

“Later on …” Tong Yan sighed, “Later on, I fell for you, and that made me even more scared. Mr. Gu, first off, you were, to me, my teacher. Next, the halo that seems to glow about you is too dazzling. That feeling of liking you but knowing for certain that I would never have you was very dismaying.”

“So every day, you hoped that I would leave?”

“Before December 24, yes.” She held his hand that had the ring on it. “But afterwards, I didn’t.”

Here, in an unfamiliar, foreign country, listening to the one he loved most tell him all those secret feelings of the very beginning. Those near and far memories were even more so able to touch the heart than a pure confession of love.

With his hand, he touched her forehead lightly, and tender mirth could be found in eyes. “You’ve perspired quite a bit. Do you want to take a shower?”

“Sure. I’ll be out soon. After I’m done, we can head out to the beach and take in some sun.” She finished saying this but then deliberately added, “This is my first time out of the country and also my first time seeing the ocean.”

From her luggage, she pulled out her most revealing strapless dress and a very wide sun hat, and tossing them onto the bed approvingly, she stepped into the bathroom. As he had just finished using it, inside, the surrounding glass was all covered in a layer of white condensation, and there was the scent of shower gel as well.

Twisting on the shower faucet, she removed her outer short-sleeve layer while, at the same time, adjusting the water temperature. With her arm movements, the strap on her shoulder slid off from it. Behind her, a hand reached out and settled on her shoulder, gently stroking its narrow roundness.

She heard his voice, intermingled with the sound of water and somewhat indistinct. “It’s really easy to get a sunburn if you go out at this hour. We can wait until some time around five o’clock before we go to the beach.” After

stating this, he brought his face down and began feathering kisses on her shoulder.

She turned and wrapped her arms around his waist. His skin was genuinely so nice, so smooth and soft.

“We just took a five-hour plane ride. You’re not tired?” But while she asked this, she was already compelled to move with his step-by-step forward movement, retreating herself backwards until she was beneath the spray of water. The water temperature, which she had not yet finished adjusting, was slightly chilling.

“Not too tired.”

The water drenched her dress, and it clung to her body, highlighting her every curve and contour.

His beach shorts were also already sodden.

He took her wrist and felt her pulse.

“Your heart is beating very fast.” His voice was low and was one that a person could not resist.

She felt as if her arms were limp, but still, she very responsibly and dutifully used her left hand to feel for the shower’s metal faucet handle. “It’s really cold. Let me adjust the water temperature first,” she told him in an indistinct voice as she fiddled with the lever, uncertain whether he had gotten a clear view of her words.

During their dialogue, Gu Pingsheng’s hand had already slid down the contours of her body and removed that dress that had been moistly hugging her legs. Her hand had not yet left the metal handle before her entire body was already completely lifted up into his embrace.

On both sides, they were enclosed by glass, and she could not find any place to bear some of her weight. She could only cling tightly with her arms around his neck. The warm jets of water that were coming down from above and his movements that were thrusting up from below were both repeatedly colliding against her body, dissolving away her awareness.

Until, in the end, he finally lifted his head and looked at her.

She very quickly dropped her own head and brought her lips to him. Under the steady stream of water, the two of them relentlessly kissed one another. She even had the illusion that his kisses were suffocating her, that she was drowning away …

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

59 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 20.2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 20.2

June 8, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



A long update. An abrupt end to the vacation, Tong Yan's side of the story on what happened that fateful day they met, another matter in their lives to worry about, and a glimpse into what Gu Pingsheng does not want Tong Yan to see.

Chapter 20.2 – Blessings in the Simple Things (2)

Aside from that peaceful day on the second day of the new lunar year, the entire honeymoon vacation became their law firm's "trip for overtime."

Gu Pingsheng was a very easygoing person. Since this was supposed to be a honeymoon vacation, their bedroom was quite a bit larger than the rest of the people, who had reserved their rooms last minute. In order to facilitate the work of so many people together, their room ended up unofficially becoming an office.

In the beginning, his colleagues had been very hesitant and apologetic about the arrangement, but after three days, they had gotten to know Tong Yan and

discovered that she was an even more easygoing person. Not only did she offer up the room to them, she even acted as their assistant, free of charge.

However, the subtle interactions and exchanges between the two of them truly brought about all sorts of envy.

Eventually, even his secretary, who had graduated not long ago, started to grow jealous and declared several times that she could not take it anymore and that she absolutely needed to marry herself off before the end of the year …

Sometimes, when they did not need her assistance, Tong Yan would "get outta there" of her own accord and head over to the hotel's private beach to sunbathe.

In this top honeymoon destination, couples could be found everywhere.

She sat beneath a large sun umbrella and, with her bare feet, played with the delicate sand.

Gently blowing out a breath, Tong Yan lay back on the beach chair.

It was seriously hot. Was he feeling very uncomfortable there in the room?

She ultimately could not shake the worry and secretly sent him a message: *What's your heart rate?*

Very soon, his reply arrived: *97. Within the range of normal. TK*

She felt slightly reassured with that. *You working like this, around the clock and not sleeping or resting, really makes my heart ache.*

If today I choose to live an easy and comfortable life, in the future, Mrs. Gu may be the one faced with working around the clock without rest. By that time, I'm afraid what I would feel would be more than just heartache. TK

She could not think of how to respond to him, but he had sent another message with his instructions: *If a lifeguard is not nearby, don't go in the ocean yourself. TK*

Lying on her back on the beach lounge chair, she typed slowly on her keyboard: *Mm. I'll just lie down and read. I won't go in the ocean.*

She sat in this way on the beach until dusk. Hugging the books that she had brought from the room, she strolled leisurely back in the direction she had come. There was a hotel-run event on the beach today, and men and women alike were all stepping out from the lobby. Only a scattered few were heading in the opposite direction.

She walked up in front of a row of elevator doors and tapped the up button.

The doors suddenly opened, and as before, a large number of people stepped out. To her surprise, Gu Pingsheng was also in the crowd. The two of them caught sight of one another at the same time, and retreating back two steps, she stood against the wall to wait for him.

“Just one second earlier, I was thinking whether you had finished up yet, and the next second, I saw you. Would you say that was like our minds were in sync?”

For once, he did not banter back with her. Taking the magazines from her hands, he informed her, “I’ve changed our plane tickets. We’re taking a late flight back to Beijing tonight.”

“Weren’t there supposed to be another two days? Is something the matter in the family?” Out of intuition, she asked this.

“It’s something with my grandfather. I told you that two years ago, he had a liver transplant, but after the surgery, his creatinine levels have stayed very high and he’s never stopped dialysis. We have always been keeping an eye out for any problems with his kidneys. He unexpectedly started passing blood in his stool last night, and today, a gastroscopy confirmed that he has an ulcer in the descending duodenum that has developed into bleeding. He is now in Peking Union’s ICU.” He tried as much as possible to use terms that she would understand.

“Alright. I’ll go back right now and pack our things.” She dared not delay and returned at once with him to their room.

Their plane tickets had been changed last-minute, so naturally, there was no opportunity for them to be selective about the time of flight. The two of them raced against the clock to the airport and nearly missed their flight. Their seats

were in the last row and could not really be adjusted. While they still did not feel too much discomfort in the first half of the journey, after two hours into the flight, they were already sore from their waists up to their necks.

He spoke very little and also ate little.

Never before had Tong Yan seen him like this. In the latter half of the night, most of the people on the plane were beginning to sleep, but he was still flipping through the magazine in his hand, turning the pages at a very fast rate. He appeared to be reading, but perhaps, this was purely for the purpose of having something to do.

Setting her hand on top of the page he was currently on, she waited until his eyes had turned to her and then, with knitted brow, she suggested softly, “These seats are really uncomfortable to sit in. You didn’t even sleep for a few hours these last couple of days. Will your body be able to handle it?” She decided of her own accord to reach over and unfasten his seat belt. “While the flight attendant isn’t looking, lie down on my legs and get in a little bit of sleep.”

There were only the two of them seated in the last row, so with all the armrests raised, it would certainly be no problem lying down across it.

She knew that this was absolutely an extremely dangerous thing to do, but she could only think of this method to comfort him.

Gu Pingsheng seemed to understand her intention, and rolling up the magazine in his hand, he rapped her on the forehead with it. “If you’re without a seat belt and encounter a situation where the plane suddenly drops, you could very easily be thrown out of the seat and slammed into the ceiling of the cabin.”

But once he finished saying this, he leaned over and lifted up each of the armrests in the row. Then, he blatantly lay down so that he was face-up on her lap. “Wake me up in ten minutes.”

She gave a nod and placed her hand on top of him, enclosing him in her embrace.

Without saying anymore, he closed his eyes.

Tong Yan let her forehead rest against the seatback in front of her, gazing down quietly at his sleeping countenance. As his projects were for clients in

different time zones and those countries also did not have a so-called Spring Festival holiday, these last several days truly had been very exhausting for him.

Within two minutes, his breathing had already gradually become regular and soft.

She recalled his remark from a moment ago. Carefully avoiding bumping into his face, she quietly unfastened the seat belt at her waist. It seemed that she actually felt more settled after doing this. If they did encounter a situation where the plane suddenly dropped, no matter what, she could not let Mr. Gu slam into the ceiling of the cabin by himself, right?

The plane landed some time past five o'clock in the morning.

Pulling their luggage behind them, they got into a taxicab, and Tong Yan immediately stated the name of the hospital. Gu Pingsheng stopped her, however, and decided instead that they would return home first. "Even though it's a hospital that is relatively acquainted with us, this is not a suitable hour for visiting," he reminded her.

Tong Yan instantly realized he was right and felt that, when compared to him, she was the one behaving much more anxiously and at a loss.

When they actually arrived at the hospital, it was already past two o'clock in the afternoon. The two passed through a long corridor and arrived in the waiting area, which was packed full of people seated closely together, outside the ICU. Pingfan was there right then, her arms clasped across her chest, talking to two doctors who were standing by the doorway. Her back was to where they were so she did not see them, and it was the two doctors who halted the dialogue first. One of the doctors waved at him while reaching behind to press the switch that opened the door.

This place was one that she was truly too familiar with. Back during their first meeting, it was here that his mother had passed from the world while her own mother had also been given emergency medical procedures in this place.

Tong Yan chose herself to stay outside that closed glass door. There were no

empty seats, so she remained standing in a corner beside the elevators.

After some time, it was Pingfan who first stepped back out. Stating that she had kept vigil outside for the entire night and was now so exhausted that her feet were unable to hold her up, she half-tugged on Tong Yan's arm and brought her downstairs to look for a place to rest.

She had said she was hungry, but in the end, after they took their seats, she merely ordered two cups of hot tea.

With both her hands, she clasped Tong Yan's hand, and her tone slowly became sorrowful. "Do you know why I study medicine? Because I feel that people do really easily get sick. Before I got into medicine, I thought that a hospital could heal any sickness, but after studying it, I actually now feel that life truly is fragile. You let your eyes look far and wide, and you'll see that the vast majority are people who are very difficult to cure."

Tong Yan had not experienced the feelings of a medical student, but she, too, felt helplessness in the face of life, death, and sickness and could not find any words to offer as comfort.

Pingfan said only these words of lament and then did not speak anymore, merely aimlessly blowing at the tea inside her cup. After a while, she finally forced a smile. "Look at me. I'm twelve years older than you, but in some aspects, I can't compare to you. At the time, when I was accompanying TK in the U.S. and heard his schoolmate say that your grandmother had gotten sick with such a serious disease, I could not even believe it, that you really did not say anything at all and just took care of everything yourself for several months."

Tong Yan shook her head. "I'm actually pretty weak and fragile myself, but what could I do, since he also has such a serious sickness? I was basically forced to take on everything myself."

"Yes, you're still a kid. Being frail and vunerable are expected." Drained, Pingfan supported her head with her hand to ease the fatigue from a night without sleep. "I asked TK. His physical condition is irreversible, and it is certain that it will only become worse and worse. So if, one day, you can't take it anymore and break-up with him, what will he do?"

Once these words were out from her mouth, Pingfan very quickly felt that they

had been a little too cruel and hurriedly gave a self-denunciation. “Please don’t be offended by what I just said. All doctors tend to speak without filtering and are accustomed to trying to predict the worst possible outcome.”

“I don’t mind. I am also used to thinking of the worst-case scenario first, and then suddenly everything will become clear.”

Pingfan smiled, carrying on with the topic from a moment ago which had not yet finished. “And then, he spoke those words that I said just now. Or I should say, I was the one who stole what he once said. He said that you’re still a kid, so being frail and vulnerable are expected.” She intentionally ensured that her tone was relaxed. “So, Yan Yan, if the day comes where you feel weak and frail and vulnerable and you can’t handle it anymore, no one will blame you. I won’t. TK — even more so — won’t.”

She could roughly ascertain that these words Pingfan said were implying the possibility that they would break-up. She did not provide a response to this hypothetical situation of Pingfan’s. Later, Pingfan changed the subject and began to speak about the condition of her eldery grandfather’s illness and also the bit of effort she had put in after the two of them left.

“When people get old, they always become more and more stubborn. Just like children, you need to repeatedly coax and cajole them, and slowly, they will reach a point where they will accept it with a beaming smile on their face.” She seemed very full of confidence. “When he was admitted to the hospital this time, my granddad’s first words were to tell TK to come back. That’s why I believe that the warmth of spring and its blooming flowers [good things, new beginnings] are just around the corner, and nothing will be an issue anymore.”

Tong Yan nodded in agreement.

Sicknesses and diseases, sufferings and calamities, rejection by family — to her, those were never issues at all.

There was a secret that had remained within her heart since her telephone conversation with Pingfan.

That day had been her birthday. Her mother, so as to celebrate with her, had

waited outside her school from seven o'clock in the morning until the school's noontime break before she finally saw her. But she had used all possible malicious and cutting words to spurn her mother. And that had been the reason for the incident afterward. Her mother, alone in her room, had drunk several bottles of *baijiu* [traditional Chinese alcoholic drink with very high alcohol content] and, after she was discovered, was rushed to the hospital for emergency resuscitation and treatment.

Her birthday was the day emergency resuscitation had been performed on both their mothers. And in the end, it also became the day of his mother's passing.

That day, after she had been forced to sign the papers, she had left the hospital. Later, she found out the truth behind why her mother had needed to be resuscitated. That instant of stiffness and numbness overtaking the hands and feet and intense terror and retrospective fear seeping into the heart was completely inconceivable unless a person had personally experienced it. Hence, she understood everything that he felt.

And to her, just how important was Gu Pingsheng? The answer to this was one that even he likely could not imagine.

The entire time, she continuously glanced restlessly at her mobile phone.

Despite knowing that Gu Pingsheng was merely in the ICU, she was still hounded by an unsettled feeling, one that could neither be waved off nor driven away. Gu Pingfan had kept vigil for an entire night, but aside from a complexion that did not look very good, there was nothing different about her.

According to Pingfan's own words, people who wanted to be doctors needed to have exceptional physical health. Otherwise, how could a person endure through the frequent 36-hour shifts that could come up at any moment?

"TK's health used to be extremely good." Looking over the bill in her hand, Gu Pingfan pulled out her card and handed it to a server. "In order to ensure that he could be a good surgeon, he had always paid a lot of attention to his physical stamina and made sure to workout. Plus, he even learned from me how to cut veggies …"

“He mentioned that.” Tong Yan’s head was lowered as she fastened her scarf around herself. “He’s left-handed, like me. He said that, in order to improve his right hand’s dexterity, he would julienne twenty potatoes every day, just so that later, when he performed surgeries, he could use both his right and left hands simultaneously to work.”

She clearly remembered the astonishment she had felt the first time she laid eyes on the julienned potato strips Gu Pingsheng had cut. The knife work that had created such evenness and uniformity was most certainly a result of hard work and practice.

“Yeah.” A sense of loss and ruefulness accompanied Pingfan’s smile. “He put in so much effort, but he still never got the chance to be a good doctor. I used to be particularly jealous that he could live outside of China. That was in the ‘80s, and it wasn’t as commonplace as it is nowadays. Later, I gradually got older, and after I understood those things about my little auntie, I felt he was especially deserving of pity. And then, so many things happened, one thing after another, and never stopped.”

Pingfan finished looking over the receipt the server had brought over and scribbled her signature, which, at the same time, concluded the conversation.

When they both returned to the hospital, Gu Pingsheng had already stepped out from the ICU and was in discussion with several elders regarding Grandfather’s condition. As Tong Yan walked over to him, he briefly halted the dialogue, telling her that he was going to stay to keep watch and that she should return home first to rest.

Although she was a little worried about his health, she did not say very much.

Upon arriving at home, Tong Yan brought in from the balcony the items that had been hung outside to dry prior to the vacation and thoroughly cleaned the bedrooms and bathrooms. After flying on a plane for an entire night and spending the daytime with her heart in her throat, plus the high-intensity physical labour now, she had finally spent all her energy. Hurriedly, she took a shower and climbed into bed.

The bedroom curtains were custom made, and once they were drawn, no light

could be seen coming through. They were very suitable for having a deep slumber. But, as there were too many things weighing on her heart, in the end, she did not fall into a deep sleep.

It was uncertain how much time had passed, but she suddenly started awake from her dream. Because of the layer upon layer of images that had been in her world of dreams, she could not tell whether she was at school, at home, or still on the island where they had been vacationing …

Ultimately, it was the unique scent of home on the down quilt that allowed her to gradually break out of her stupor.

She did not know what time it was. Beside her, the bed was still empty.

Her throat felt rather dry, and languidly, she shifted her arm, wanting to rise to go pour some water to drink.

But she had just stretched out an arm and had not sat up yet when she saw that figure beside the bed. He was back? Tong Yan reached over to feel around the bedside table to turn on the lamp, but right as her hand touched the switch, her entire body froze.

A moment ago, when she first opened her eyes, she had not yet adjusted to the darkness of the room. Now, as she looked over again in that direction, she discovered that he was in a position that seemed almost as if he was crouched or kneeling. Leaning against the edge of the bed, he cautiously and slowly pulled something out from his pocket.

He seemed very afraid of waking her.

She could hear a slightly muffled clinking sound, like pills sliding around in a plastic bottle.

Tong Yan dared not move any further, and with one hand resting on the edge of the bed, she kept her eyes fixed on him. He brought his hand to his mouth, swallowing those pills directly. And then, for a long time, he continued to maintain that position — one that caused a person’s heart to ache — and lean against the bed.

She did not know how much time passed.

He finally twisted his body around, slid down against the side of the bed, and sat on the carpet.

In his previous position, Tong Yan could still determine at any time whether something was the matter with him, but now, as he sat there in silence, she truly did grow panicked. Very swiftly, she turned on the lamp and sat up in bed.

“Why are you suddenly awake?” He quickly rose and moved close to her. “Did I wake you up?”

His voice was beside her ear, its tone partially soothing but also carrying a husky quality and sense of fatigue in it that he, himself, was not aware of.

Rubbing her eyes, she smiled softly, “I had a nightmare just now and was scared awake.” She carefully suppressed her tears, and when she set her hand back down, her eyes were completely red from being rubbed. “Did you just get back?”

He gave an “mm” and touched her cheek.

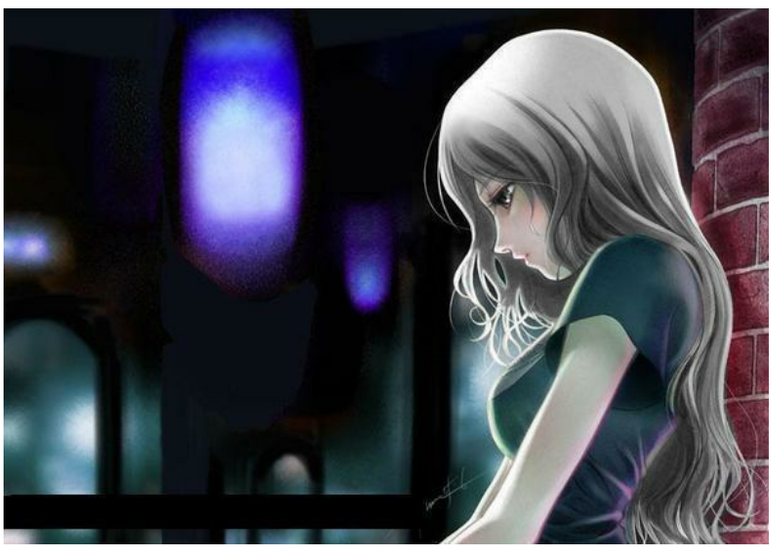
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Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Chapter 20.3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Chapter 20.3

June 11, 2016 by hoju 16 Comments



I've said before, I think Fang Yunyun is the only character in this novel for whom I have absolutely nothing good to say , and Tong Yan nails the reason why. Anyone sense the underlying tension that is building?

Chapter 20.3 – Blessings in the Simple Things (3)

She did not so much as mention what happened on that night. It was as if she had not seen anything.

However, she used much of her free time in her internship job to search for various types of tutorials on emergency first aid, medicinal and herbal foods, and other such information and worked hard to gradually learn these things.

Gu Pingsheng had never tried to hide from her anything regarding his physical condition, and during every monthly medical examination, he would bring her along. Therefore, she was not worried that he would neglect his own health, but it was still necessary to prepare for the future.

One time, the big sister-like court clerk who was mentoring her saw what she was doing and found it puzzling. "Do you have someone in your family who is critically ill?"

“No.” She minimized the webpage and gave an arbitrary response to brush over the topic. “There will always be a use to reading stuff like this.”

“Kid, you are so amusing.”

The big sister court clerk patted her on the head and left with a grin.

Previously, apart from going home, Gu Pingsheng only needed to travel back and forth between his office and the university.

Now, due to Grandfather’s health issues, he would every day have fixed periods that he spent at the hospital. Tong Yan knew that now was not an appropriate time for her presence there, and the only thing she could do was prepare some nutritious things for him to bring every time he went to the hospital.

Perhaps due to the long times spent at the hospital, he would occasionally tell her some things about his former internship term in Beijing.

He mentioned that one time, when he was resuscitating a patient, there had been no time to do the systematic physical checks before the patient was wheeled into the operating room, and only the next day was it discovered from tests that the person was an AIDS patient.

When he told her this, she was peeling a boiled egg for him, and her eyes instantly widened. “What could you do? What if, some time during the surgical procedure, you were infected, what could you do?”

She brought the egg up to his mouth. He took a bite of the egg white but did not eat the yolk. Tong Yan pressed her lips together but ate the yolk herself and then placed the remainder of the egg white into his plain rice porridge.

“Those types of situations were not uncommon. Usually, we would see a few every month.” Gu Pingsheng gave a faint smile, the corner of his lips curving only slightly upwards. “Every profession has its own risks. It’s unavoidable.”

Tong Yan nodded her head, then nodded again, lost in thought as she watched him eat his rice porridge.

A white porcelain spoon in his hand, Gu Pingsheng ate two mouthfuls before

he finally detected her gaze. Raising his head, he looked smilingly at her. “What are you thinking? Or are you still not fully awake?”

“I’m thinking you must have been a really picky eater when you were a kid.” A mysterious grin touched Tong Yan’s face. “You don’t even eat egg yolk.”

Gu Pingsheng smiled, “I was indeed a very picky eater when I was young.”

“You still are now.”

Tong Yan added this sentence and then continued to peel another boiled egg for him.

His face had always tended to be on the lean side, which highlighted the angles of his face. Now, though, he looked a little too thin. Tong Yan’s eyes swept from his fingers up his arm, and with her pinky finger, she poked him. He lifted his eyes to meet her gaze.

“You’ve lost weight,” Tong Yan remarked, not without tones of regret. “To the feeder and keeper of a household, this is such a heartbreaking trend.”

“I’ve really lost weight?” Gu Pingsheng tilted one side of his lips up and made a somewhat childish expression. “I want to eat braised chicken with chestnuts.”



栗子烧鸡 Braised chicken with chestnuts. The braising liquid is soy sauce-based. (Image credit)

Tong Yan nodded in delight. “Will you be home for dinner this evening? Once I leave the courthouse, I’ll head straight to the supermarket to buy the ingredients.”

“I’ll be home tomorrow evening.” Seeing that it was about time, he swiftly finished eating the rest of his rice porridge. “I’ll be at the hospital in the afternoon. Grandfather has a very important consultation with the specialist, and I may not be home until after dinner.”

Every time he had an eight o’clock morning class, he would leave home a little earlier than her.

But the time he arrived home would also be much later than her.

This was not something she could allow herself to dwell too much upon, nor dwell too deeply upon. There was not a single day that passed where she would not long to graduate, long to start truly working, to share the pressures that he was bearing. Yet, she could only patiently wait.

Worried that the supermarket would not have chestnuts, she purposely went to the market that was a little farther away to buy the ingredients to bring home.

As she was afraid of watching the chicken being butchered, after she had specially selected one, she ran to a far off spot to watch from a distance until the stallkeeper had completely taken care of it. Only then did she step forward again to pay and take the bloody plastic bag.

“Little girl, are you scared of blood?” the stallkeeper asked her in amusement.

“I’m actually not too scared of the blood.” Tong Yan thickened her skin and honestly admitted, “I am particularly scared of seeing something that’s alive getting killed, so a lot of the time, I’ll buy the frozen ones from the supermarket …”

“The ones at the supermarket are no good. They’re not as good as the ones that are butchered on the spot.” The stallkeeper grabbed a bunch of scallions from his own vegetable stall and handed it to her. “Here, it’s for you to calm your nerves.”

Owing to this bunch of scallions, Tong Yan broke out into an amused smile, and after saying her thanks, she took it from him.

The location of the market was very strange. There were no buses that she

could take, and if she walked, it would take more than twenty minutes. Despite it still being winter, she nevertheless managed to break out into a sweat as she walked back to the community compound.

It was past six o'clock, and the sky was already completely dark. The lights in the community had long since turned on, and the briskly moving people near and far around her were all rushing home.

Since it was not dinnertime yet, her pace was actually not hurried, and leisurely, she strolled toward the building of her home. However, while she was passing the greenspace that was downstairs of the building, she saw two people standing not far away.

It was Lu Bei and Fang Yunyun.

The two's movements were large, and in the half-open entranceway of a building, they were mutually yanking and jerking at one another. When Tong Yan saw them, they had not yet caught sight of her. All throughout, one was continuously pulling on the door, trying to enter, while the other was unrelentingly blocking the way but also not willing to have a direct confrontation. The security door had been kept open for too long, and as a result, it was sounding out with a piercing alarm.

This was her apartment building's entrance.

She could roughly deduce what was happening, and she wanted to avoid the situation but was also worried that Fang Yunyun really would charge upstairs.

While she was still hesitating, Fang Yunyun finally noticed Tong Yan standing beneath the streetlamp, and straightaway, she flung off Lu Bei and rushed her way. Her strides were rapid and tense, as if she was afraid Tong Yan would try to escape.

Since avoidance was not possible, she might as well simply face it.

Tong Yan watched as she came up in front of her, but before she had thought of how she should greet her, Fang Yunyun suddenly raised her arm and viciously slapped her across the face. "You owed me that. What I owe you, I will settle all of it up with you …" As Fang Yunyun spoke, tears were already splattering down her face.

Her voice was frightfully loud. In the quiet, wide, open space of the community compound, it was especially shrill to the ears.

Tong Yan stood there, and for several seconds, her mind was blank. The pain on her cheek was starting to slowly spread, but she could not seem to clearly hear what Fang Yunyun was saying.

Lu Bei dashed over and jerked Fang Yunyun by the wrist. “Have you gone crazy? From yesterday to today, you’ve been making a huge fuss. Are you done yet?!”

“I have gone crazy. Lu Bei, what exactly are you not happy about? I’ve genuinely given you all my heart. What is it that you want?” Fang Yunyun was desperately trying to break free of his grip, wailing as if she did not care about anything else. “It’s been four years. What is it you want to do? Get a divorce? Be with her? Fine, I’ll help you achieve that. I’ll help you achieve everything …”

The two were both yanking on each other with all their might. Off in the distance, many people had halted their steps to watch and were beginning to speculate what the situation might be here.

The noise of their wrangling voices and all of the dialogue charged forcibly into the ears.

Tong Yan closed her eyes briefly, then opened them again. All the emotions that had been weighing down in her chest these last few days unexpectedly surged upwards.

“Let me talk to her.” She suddenly opened her mouth to say this and stepped toward them. Lu Bei’s eyes were red as he gazed at her, but while he was still wavering over whether he should let go of Fang Yunyun, Tong Yan had already turned toward Fang Yunyun, whose eyes were wide and face was streaked with tears.

She had never expected that she, the one who had been struck, would still remain so calm.

Fang Yunyun was torn with rage, and with both sobs and mocking laughter, she sneered at Tong Yan. “Say it … I know you want to say a lot of things …”

Smack! In the same way, Tong Yan slapped her across the face. “You owed me

that. I never owed you anything. Never have I in the past, and never will I in the future. Regardless of whether you want to divorce or not, don't come trying to find me. No one's life is as good as yours. You only know to love melodramatically, like it's life and death, and don't know how hard life actually is."

When she pulled back her hand, there was a slight tremor in it that she could not control.

This was the first time in her life she had raised her hand to hit anyone. In that instant when she had brought it back down, the one who came to her mind was actually Gu Pingsheng.

That time when he had struck her with his hand, had he also been like this, overcome by a trembling that could not be suppressed, feeling more grieved than if he had been the one who was hit? … When the security door of the corridor closed, Fang Yunyun's sobbing could still be heard.

In a daze, she walked toward the stairwell and climbed up three or four floors before finally leaning herself against the white wall. Standing there numbly for a long while, tears at last began, after the fact, to roll down her face.

Eventually, her whole body was drained of strength, and she simply sagged down to sit on the steps, hugging her knees and allowing herself to cry to her heart's content.

The world was simply that unfair. There were some people who would spend their entire lifetime making life and death revolve only around love, and they did not need at all to even consider any of the difficulties or challenges of living. And then there were others who asked only for just a minute slice of a quiet, peaceful life but always ended up having to face all sorts of deliberate hardships sent from Heaven. Prior to meeting Gu Pingsheng, she had always thought of herself as being truly worthy of pity. Her parents were like her debt that, in this lifetime, she would never be able to free herself of.

But after she met Gu Pingsheng, her heart ached only for him.

He had so longed for motherly love, but had indirectly caused his mother's

death. He had so desired to be a good doctor, but had had no choice but to forever give up that dream. In this world, the number of people who had any blood relation to him was becoming less and less, and though he tried with all his might to hold onto them, it ultimately was in vain …

Tong Yan extended a finger, and on the snow-white wall, she carefully wrote his name.

One stroke at a time, she wrote out “Gu Pingsheng.”

His name was chosen so well[1]. Merely gazing upon it like this was able to bring a feeling of warmth.

Laying her head down on her own arms, Tong Yan sat in this way on the step of the staircase, her head tilted to look at those three characters as she thought of him. Her face still stung like fire. Earlier on, Fang Yunyun truly had been filled with extreme hate for her, for she had used all her strength. But the slap that she had given Fang Yunyun in return had not really used any force. Perhaps because there was no hatred, she genuinely could not make herself strike hard.

The sound of her mobile phone suddenly rang out. In that empty stairwell, it was very clear and distinct.

She sat herself up straight, pulled out her phone from her pants pocket, and, in that dark stairwell, stared at the blue light of the screen: *I forgot to say, Mr. Gu loves chestnuts. TK*

Seriously …

Tong Yan burst out in giggles, the action tugging at her swollen eyes from crying: *Alright. I’ll make just braised chicken leg with chestnuts for you. An entire pan of chestnuts with only two chicken legs placed inside, how about that?*

Sounds pretty good. TK

She took a glance at the time on her mobile phone. It was already past seven o’clock. If she still did not head upstairs, Grandmother would certainly become worried. But if she did go upstairs like this, she reckoned Grandmother would

likely be even more worried … While she moved her arms around to loosen them, still hesitant over what to do, her eyes fell again on his name that was written on the wall.

Leaving it there would, after all, not be good.

But after reaching forward and scratching away the word, “Gu” with her fingernail, her gaze remained fixed absorbedly on the remaining two characters. After a while, she finally brushed the dirt and dust of the wall off her fingernails, and then, behind his given name, she intently wrote a complete sentence:

> ***Pingsheng*** *yi* ***gu****, zhi ci zhong nian.*[2] [*What began as a single glance has henceforth become … together forever.*]

[1] 顾 “Gu” means “to look upon” or “look back at.” 平生 “Pingsheng” means “one’s entire lifetime.” Gu Pingsheng’s name can be interpreted as, “to look back upon one’s whole life.”

[2]平生一顾，至此终年. This line was kept deliberately in pinyin as it begins with Gu Pingsheng’s given name. You will also see that his entire name is actually embedded in it, in the first, second, and fourth characters. The final four characters are the title of the novel. This is actually a beautiful, poetic-feeling line that, in a mere eight characters, expresses the wonder of finding true love. The translation within the body of the text is trying to maintain as much as possible the conciseness of this line while still communicating the meaning, as Tong Yan is writing on a wall and a wordy translation with feelings explicitly spelled out would ruin the moment. What this line is saying, though, is

> “*What began as one of the many glances I will take in life became something that I will keep with me to the end of my days*.”

Or,

> “*Our beginning may have been just one of the many glances I will take in life, but henceforth we will remain together until the end of our days.*”

Additional Comments:

That final line that Tong Yan wrote on the wall is almost like the essence of this story. In a most unlikely circumstance, two people were brought together. A single glance, but somehow it was meant to be. And they want that moment — their love — to carry on to be something that is forever. The line is beautiful. The words are subtle, not expressly declaring love, yet those who know about them will know how deep the feelings are. They were written like graffiti on a wall, so they are concise. At the same time, they are poetic. I kid you not, I was stuck on this line for days and had about twenty versions of it, but unfortunately, I still am not satisfied.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

61 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Part 1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Final Chapter Part 1 of 5

June 15, 2016 by hoju 8 Comments



We're heading into the last stretch and the final chapter.

Gu Pingsheng thinks about their future. And on top of first aid and medicinal and herbal foods, Tong Yan is learning massage and acupoints as well as driving. She's putting so much pressure on herself.

Final Chapter (1)

Vital signs monitor, intravenous infusion pump, ventilator, syringe pump … The green lights of these various pieces of equipment were flashing. There were doctors and nurses, garbed in isolation gowns, discussing in low tones and checking the numbers on the equipment.

All these had once been very familiar to him.

This was the hospital he and his mother had once worked in, and therefore, his access to and time in the ICU were not being restricted.

He waited until the elderly man was sound asleep before he stepped into the isolation change room outside the ICU and removed his isolation attire.

“The chief physicians of the various departments are all carefully keeping watch on Elder Gu’s sickness. Nephrology even brought over 301 Hospital’s [301 Military Hospital] Dong Changting. He’s considered an authoritative voice and leading professor at the transplant centre.” Beside him, the doctor who had always had quite a good relationship with him, Doctor Liao, was speaking in a quiet voice. “The situation may not be considered a good one, but you were in this profession before and should be able to accept whatever comes.”

When Dong Changting came today, he had arranged ahead of time to have dinner with Gu Pingsheng.

Gu Pingsheng purposely did not show up.

In regards to this person, Gu Pingsheng had probably let go of all resentment toward him after his teenage years. As a young child, when he returned to China with his mother, he had still held some expectations and hope in his heart, and after over and over missing chances to see him, some bitterness had even started to build.

And hidden behind that bitterness were actually very clear and evident feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

To a teenager, the term, “father,” itself, encompassed a power within it that could not be suppressed. Furthermore, that man truly was very outstanding, so outstanding that a sense of inadequacy and low self-esteem from being rejected had been produced in Gu Pingsheng, a mere ordinary Catholic school student at the time.

But after navigating through that age of feeling bewildered and hesitant about the future, the power held by that word had naturally dissipated.

Without answering, he handed the isolation gown to a young nurse. There were traces of dampness on his body from perspiration.

“Why hasn’t your wife come all this time?” Doctor Liao also handed his gown over.

“We haven’t officially gotten married yet, so it’s not very suitable.”

“Back when I was on internship with you, you could be considered the beau of the faculty. I never would have thought you’d be enchanted by a young girl.” Doctor Liao let out a chuckle. “But that little girl really is a great girl. Just look at the divorce rates after SARS. This type of thing is not something that you can just say you’ve accepted it and then it happens. I’ll say, what are you waiting for, not getting married all this time?”

“She hasn’t graduated from university yet.” His tone when he answered was placid as still waters. “After she has successfully graduated, we will marry.”

Doctor Liao gave an “oh” and pressed the switch that controlled the glass door.

When the door slowly opened, he at last finished his musings, and with a faint smile, he patted Gu Pingsheng. “Born in the ’90s?”

This question really did leave Gu Pingsheng taken aback.

After he had walked out of the hospital and sat into a taxi, he thought about that phrase again.

From when he began teaching Tong Yan’s class, he had noticed that this generation of students was very unique. He had not grown up in the country, but when comparing Pingfan’s approach to life with those students’, they truly were quite far apart.

He very distinctly remembered that one time, he had seen a girl, with her hair dyed pink and wearing a sky blue-coloured bow, dashing into the office to beg the teacher for the Foundations to Law course to “cut her some slack,” and he had suddenly had the urge to laugh.

And there were also those pink love letters with heart shape cutouts that he had received when he was teaching Tong Yan.

When Gu Pingfan saw them, she had once sighed over how, in the past, if something like that were to occur, it would at most be an anonymous confession of feelings. The kids nowadays, though, were acting as if they were worried people would not know they had a crush on their teacher …

But after all, they were still just kids.

As he leaned back in the front passenger seat, he remembered those words she had once said: “to have a child who can miss you with me.”

A big kid raising a little kid?

It seemed one was not enough, either. Supposedly, foreign nationals in China had no limitations on their family planning. But Pingfan had also mentioned that if both parents were only-children themselves, the couple would be allowed to have two children.

In that case, including her, there would be three. The responsibility of providing food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities for the three kids would fall on him.

It seemed, this truly was quite a nice idea.

Tong Yan left that sentence on the wall.

Worried that her eyes were too swollen, in the end, she still made a phone call to Grandmother, stating that she might be home a little late. Fortunately, it was winter, and the meat did not need to be placed into the refrigerator straightaway. So, carrying a bag of chicken dripping with blood, she strolled to a KFC near the community compound to take care of dinner for herself.

It was not certain whether it was because of the chicken or because her face was swollen after being hit, but when she was ordering, the server took several extra glances at her.

Standing beside a sink, she soaked a napkin in cold water. Then she selected a table in a corner and took a seat, pressing that wet napkin against her cheek while she gnawed on a spicy chicken wing.

The glass wall in front of her faced the road as well as the main entrance of the community compound that was across the way.

After nibbling down two chicken wings, she happened to notice a taxi stopping in front of the fresh fruits store, and her intuition told her it was him returning home. As predicted, the person who stepped out from that low interior of the vehicle and quickly straightened himself was Gu Pingsheng.

Clamping a wing between her teeth, she pulled out her mobile phone and swiftly used the selfie mode of the camera to look over her own face.

It was completely better. Sure enough, her body was one that withstood attacks.

That person off in the distance was selecting fruit with head lowered, and the fruit storekeeper's wife was holding something up and chatting with him. Due to his height, he had politely bowed his head somewhat to watch the storekeeper's wife speak.

Tong Yan sent a text message to him*: I got off work late. Oh, very poor me. I'm eating junky fast food right now.*

She saw him, on that side of the road, pull out his mobile phone from his pocket and look down at it.

She carried on with chomping on her chicken wings, but her eyes were fixed on him. Although the glass was a little dirty, it did not hinder her from admiring the beauty.

Putting away the change the fruit storekeeper's wife was handing to him, Gu Pingsheng slipped his wallet and phone back into the pocket of his trousers. He set the fruits he had just bought onto one of the fruit stands for the time being.

Then, he turned around and began to cross the crosswalk that was on the road. Halfway across, he happened to encounter a red light, and he stood amongst the vast throng of people, waiting patiently for the red light to turn green.

Perhaps because she had experienced a very unpleasant situation earlier on, as she watched him strolling over now, he — such a wonderful and fine-looking person — created such a perfect picture. Simply looking at him like this caused her heart to pound.

When he saw her, he did not step inside and instead, stood on the outside of the glass wall, gazing at her with a light furrow in his brows.

Tong Yan wiped her mouth clean with a napkin and silently formed the words to him: "I was wrong. I won't eat junky fast food anymore."

She did not know what he was thinking, but anyhow, he did not speak.

Tong Yan lifted up the bag containing the chicken meat, and as if presenting a treasure, she beamed at him. “Braised chicken with chestnuts.”

Gu Pingsheng raised his eyebrows slightly, a smile spreading across his eyes, but still remained unspeaking.

Behind him, a vehicle by chance was heading his way, and its headlights soon streaked by beside him. She still wanted to say more, but all of a sudden, he opened his mouth and concisely spoke three words: “Let’s go home.”

Nodding, she swiftly put away her mobile phone and dashed out of the KFC.

The type of excitement she was feeling was truly like a little child who had forgotten her key, and after waiting and waiting, her parent had finally returned home …

That night, while she was standing beneath the showerhead in the bathroom, she was still wondering when she had become so able to simply let go of things. The incident had occurred only several hours ago, but it felt as if it was another lifetime. It seemed that anything that did not have to do with Gu Pingsheng was something she did not want to concern herself with.

When she stepped out, wrapped in a bath towel, Gu Pingsheng was sitting at the bay window, reading through some material.

That very first time when he had first brought her to look at the apartment, the feature they had both loved the most was the large bay window in the bedroom. With a thick sheepskin rug, a low table, and several throw pillows, it had become a little space for reading and enjoying tea.

Gu Pingsheng was wearing grey, cotton workout pants and sitting barefooted there with his back against the glass of the window. All sorts of documents were scattered beside his feet and on the low table. Because he was working on an Argentinian project, all of that photocopied material was in Spanish.

He was an individual who very much had professional ethics and integrity. Since all the projects he was involved with were business confidential, naturally,

the materials that he brought out of the office were preferably all ones that people would not be able to understand even if they saw them. Over this last while, she had seen plenty of them, so though she did not know the meaning of the content, she could still recognize the written language.

As she approached him, he at last raised his head out of all those various documents.

“It’s such an advantage if your first language is English. You can still spare some effort to learn other languages.” Copying him, she crawled barefooted to the window and, with a grin, poked his foot. “Sir, do you need a foot massage?”

She had already been experimenting on him for several days and had even, with printed sheets of instructions in hand, looked very proper and knowledgeable as she memorized hand techniques and acupoints. She now nearly remembered all of them, and her manner was just like that of a master of traditional Chinese medicine.

Gu Pingsheng could not contain a laugh. “It’s Friday night. Let’s rest for a day, okay?”

“I can’t let myself be lax.” In a rather hurt tone, Tong Yan persuaded, “Practice brings genuine knowledge. Didn’t you notice that I’m not holding the acupoint chart anymore? I’m telling you, you should be grateful. The other day, a few of the judges at my courthouse were complaining that nowadays, the foot massage places outside cut corners and use the knuckles of the fingers to give the massage. Less and less are actually conscientious like me and use the pads of the fingers to massage, you know?”

He threw up his white flag in surrender, letting her, this novice who was not even as proficient as an apprentice, practice on him.

“I want to go learn how to drive.” After she had completed all the steps, her fingers were already feeling somewhat sore. She was mimicking him and leaning back against the window when she out of the blue thought of this. “That way, if there’s any urgent matter in the family and we can’t get a taxi, there’s still another person who can drive.”

“There is no need to deliberately learn how to drive. If anything happens, there’s still Pingfan.”

He really was not bothering to be gracious at all …

Tong Yan deeply felt that Gu Pingfan could go crazy with frustration from having this little cousin. “What if Pingfan gets married one day? Or it just so happens that she’s not in Beijing? She can’t always just come whenever you call.”

He finally relented. “You can wait until the weather has warmed up a bit.”

She, however, could not wait to begin. “How about I start this weekend? Take advantage of this time while I’m still on internship and relatively idle.”

Unless Gu Pingsheng re-took his driver’s license examination in China, it was not possible for him to drive anymore. Therefore, she treated this matter as her own assignment and was much more earnest and diligent than anyone else in her driving school. But only when she began to carry out her mission did she discover that China’s driving schools were extremely unreliable. Basically, if she wanted to be able to unruffledlly take a vehicle out onto the road, she still needed to find a secluded place every night to practice with Gu Pingsheng.

The instructor who taught her loved chatting and even asked her what her boyfriend’s occupation was.

“A lawyer.” She smiled, “He’s in the same field as me.”

“That’s great. I’ll recommend some cases to him in the future. People these days love having lawsuits. I have quite a few neighbours who are always looking for a lawyer to fight their lawsuits for them. You know, all those things like real estate, alimony and child support. Serious, people are haggling more and more over petty things.”

“He is not qualified to represent anyone in litigation in court … He’s a solicitor. He provides non-litigation legal counsel.” Tong Yan could not think of many ways to explain. “So, when people invest in a project, he will help people look over the contracts, agreements, legal negotiations, and stuff like that.”

She actually could not say exactly what he did every day.

She just remembered one occasion when she had gone to wait for him to get

off work. The secretary of the department had explained to her that he still had a video conference regarding the legal negotiations around a hedge fund investment. When she walked up to the door of Gu Pingsheng's office, the frosted glass door of the conference room across the way had happened to be pushed open.

Inside that conference room had all been highly experienced solicitors, dressed in suits in the uniform colour of black. His back, perfectly erect, had been toward her, and moreover, his voice had contained a composure and steadiness she had never before heard. "The amendments that have been annotated here are not in line with market convention. We refuse to accept such unjustifiable requests …"

The remainder of his words had been cut off by the slowly closing glass door.

That evening's negotiations had went very late. It was not until she had completely destroyed in her belly all of the crackers in his office that the meeting finally came to an end. When he returned to his office, he had undid his tie, tossed it onto his desk, and sat down, his entire body radiating fatigue.

It had pained Tong Yan's heart to see him like so, and sitting close up beside him, she had kneaded his shoulders and arms. Noticing that his mind still seemed to be immersed in his work matters, she had arbitrarily sought out a nonsensical question and interrupted his thoughts. "I've never had an English name. What do you think would be a good one?"

He had contemplated on this for a few seconds, then answered with a smile, "Eve."

"Eve?" Tong Yan mulled over the meaning. "As in 'evening'?"

"Eve, the biblical character."

She had been at a loss for words at this. "A name like that isn't really suitable for people to use to address me …"

"If you stay and continue working in the courts, you probably won't get an opportunity to use an English name anyway." Gu Pingsheng had more and more seemed to feel that this name was quite good. "We can just use this name at home."

Eve. Because of the story of the rib, this had become the most wonderful name.

Turning the steering wheel, Tong Yan continued listening to her driving instructor talk about all sorts of civil disputes, but her mind had already drifted far away.

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
62 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Part 2

Together Forever (至此终年) — Final Chapter Part 2 of 5

June 18, 2016 by hoju 14 Comments



This is a terribly busy time of the year for me, and I am particularly swamped for the next week. My apologies in advance if I don't respond to comments within my normal timeframe. However, I have set-up my updates to post automatically for the next week, so even though I may not be around, you'll still see the posts. (This update today is the first of the batch of auto-posts.)

Tong Yan finds out that something she had thought might be solved was really only patched with a Band-Aid, that "the rainstorm actually had not turned to blue skies."

Final Chapter (2)

The day she obtained her driver's license was also the day she completed her internship term at the courthouse.

A large red stamp was affixed on her internship evaluation form, and holding it in her hand gave an indescribably carefree feeling.

The afternoon sunshine in the park was very nice, and in fact, it could even be considered a little strong. She had accompanied Grandmother here to feed the stray cats, but because she had nothing to do in the afternoon, after forcing Grandmother to return home for her midday rest, she ended up staying an extra half-hour herself.

From the large, used cola bottle she was holding, she poured out some boiled water into a dish.

The dozen or so cats had long since grown thirsty after eating, but they still waited in an orderly fashion, a few at a time, for a turn to have a drink. Beside Tong Yan, there were seven or eight little children, all only a few years old, who were there with their nanny or grandparents. The elderly adults sat on benches, watching them from afar, and aside from a couple of guardians who were concerned about hygiene, none of them stopped the children as they surrounded Tong Yan from behind her and watched the cats drink water.

In front was a circle of cats. Behind was a circle of children. Those who did not know would think she was a preschool teacher bringing a group of children out to experience things of life.

Gu Pingsheng was on and off sending text messages to her because that European market hedge fund project was requiring him to take a last-minute business trip. Furthermore, he needed to leave tonight.

This news had come rather abruptly. As she grasped her mobile phone, her mind was somewhat preoccupied, and though the bottle was in her hand, she forgot to replenish the water.

Seeing that the cats had finished off the water but Tong Yan was still not making the next move, the children anxiously urged her, “Big Sister, pour some water.”

“Big Sister will let all of you take care of the kitties, how about that?”

The several children had all long been itching to do something as they watched, and now they hastily nodded their heads in agreement.

After handing the bottle of water to the oldest girl of the group, she walked

over to a bench that was four or five steps away and took a seat. Then she began asking in detail and discussing with him what things he would need to bring.

Gu Pingsheng needed to head into the ICU unit again, and as a result, he only hurriedly said a few sentences before he temporarily shut off his mobile phone. According to his estimates, the trip would take at least half a month. Silently, she gauged how much luggage he would need to bring, but owing frustratingly to a lack of experience, no matter how she thought it through, she still felt she would forget something …

While she was lost in her pondering, beside her, someone had already taken a seat. It was the person who would come only once every two weeks to visit Grandmother — her father.

“I bought some fruits and left them up in the home. Your grandmother said you were here feeding cats.” Her father was trying hard to speak in a loving, familiar tone, and it was obvious that these were opening words he had deliberated over for a long time.

She hesitated for several seconds but then smiled.

Perhaps due to Gu Pingsheng’s influence, toward this father of hers from whom she had long been estranged, her heart was finally beginning to soften.

They sat there, father and daughter, side by side together. They had no common topics to talk about between them. Mostly, her father would ask her a couple of questions, and she would give an “mm” or a short, two or three-word answer. Although the atmosphere was awkward, it was not unbearable.

After some time, those stray cats had had their fill of water, and in groups of twos and threes, they slipped into the thick grass. At last, carefully hugging the bottle that had been poured empty of water, the little girl ran over to return it to Tong Yan.

With both hands, Tong Yan took it from her and said a sincere thank you.

“This is three thousand yuan here …” When the little girl had turned around and bounded far away, her father unexpectedly handed an envelope to her.

Tong Yan paused in surprise. “There’s no need. We’re not really lacking in money.”

“Last time when I came, you weren’t here … Little Gu truly is quite a good man.” Her father spoke obscurely. “You’ll have to wait a couple of years for the three hundred thousand from the first time. When I’ve completely turned over and become a success in the stock market, I’ll withdraw the money and give it to you two. This here is to pay back last time’s. It’s not a lot, but I’ll just slowly earn money and eventually I’ll be able to repay everything. This last while, all stocks have been rising …”

As her father talked about how the stock market outlook was looking great, his eyes gleamed slightly with seldom-seen excitement. She, however, had vaguely gathered hints of something in what she had heard, and whipping her head up, she interrupted, “When I wasn’t home, he gave you money?”

“There were a couple of people who were pushing me hard to pay back some money. I borrowed some from Little Gu just to pay that back first. I’m not really going to take your money.” Her father once again handed the brown money-containing envelope to her. “This time, there were two stocks that had a really good rise in price …”

“You borrowed money from someone else again? He helped you pay off a debt again?” Tong Yan stared incredulously at her father.

This face that was before her had not even reached the age of fifty, and more than half the hair on its head was already gray. That cautious smile. That perpetual belief that he would succeed in using this gambling-style method to win his money and recover all the familial love he had lost.

It was not that she had never tried to seriously discuss things with her father. She had even attempted to threaten him with severing their father-daughter tie. But in the end, her father still always believed that the fracturing of their family and his daughter’s aversion to him were a result of the fact that he was poor, that he had no money. The more extreme his thinking became, the more he threw himself into those ways. Several decades of setback and defeat had fostered her father’s extreme way of thinking and refusal to communicate, and to him, all words that tried to convince or advise him otherwise were spoken

because people looked down on him.

She had not even imagined that there was a possibility things would change.

That was, until that incident that occurred several months ago had caused her to genuinely think that she could finally see hope, that there was no longer a pit of debt that was unfillable, and that she did not need to face a future of uncertainty and worry …

Her father started to submerge himself into his own world, and with extreme zeal, he described a few of the stocks that he held. She, though, only felt pained. And in this sadness, her heart gradually seemed to empty and become hollow.

For some reason, two kittens from earlier on leapt onto the bench and snuggled close against her, laying themselves down dociley beside her leg.

She gave them a pet and mechanically scratched them under their chins.

This city was the place she was born and raised. Growing up, all the schools she had studied in had had very many students with unfathomable backgrounds, and one such as Fang Yunyun's could only be considered "not bad." When she was a teenager, she had not truly understood where the disparity existed and merely felt pained due to her parents' divorce and ashamed over her mother's morals, which did not agree with her own.

Later, with Lu Bei's incident, she finally understood the true disparity that could exist from one family to another.

She had been too weak and had not been able to bear that heavy burden.

Going to Shanghai for her studies had become the only way of escape. Alas, though she had always believed that life would eventually change for the better, she forgot about the cruelness of reality.

"In this world, you have the right to choose anything. The one exception is your parents. You cannot choose them and you cannot give them up." At the time, when Gu Pingsheng said these words, how much had been spoken from responsibility and how much out of a sense that there was no other alternative?

The kittens were very content with the scratches she was providing and gave a soft little mew.

Her father finished saying all that he wanted to say, and then, as expected, using a very desperate voice, like he had been backed into a corner, he said, “Yan Yan, do you have thirty thousand yuan on hand? I need to pay off the interest first.” Once he finished saying this, he quickly also told her, “When I’m old, everything I have will be left to you …”

Tong Yan patted the kittens on the head, and without a word, she rose and began to leave from there.

“Maybe Little Gu …”

Instantly, Tong Yan ceased her steps.

“I’ve broken up with him,” she heard her own voice say. “It happened just these last few days. Don’t go to find him anymore. The money that we borrowed before, I’ll pay it all back to him slowly. Anything else, I can’t help you with.”

When she returned home, she locked herself in the bedroom and began to pack for him the clothing that he would need to bring tonight on his trip.

Based on the estimate that it would be for a duration of nearly half a month, she moved the largest suitcase in from the balcony and began to, one by one, take the suits, dress shirts, and ties out from the closet, tossing them onto the bed.

The good thing about being in the field of law was that, in any sort of public setting, the uniform dress code was a black suit, a dress shirt, and a tie. There were no outstanding colours so there should not be any big problems with combining them into outfits.

Gu Pingsheng had once said that if his accommodations were in a hotel, then at most, he would only need to bring four sets and that would be sufficient.

Silently, she kept track of the numbers, but her brain was moving rather slowly and she actually needed to count three or four times. The dress shirts, on the other hand, were folded very meticulously. With her finger, she drew two

creases on the backside of the shirt, folded it across the collar, and tugged on the sleeves to straighten them … Midway through, her mobile phone gave several rings, but she did not notice. When she had finished folding those four dress shirts and had carefully placed them into the suitcase, tears suddenly started to flow.

Drop after large drop fell onto the clothing.

All along, she had poured her heart and mind into being good to him — not bearing for him to have to eat even half a bite of anything that he did not like; every night, even if she was extremely sleepy, ironing the clothes he would be wearing the next day. She had learned, with all earnestness, medicinal and herbal foods and massage so that he could become progressively healthier. Even learning to drive had been because she was worried that he would suddenly fall ill and she could promptly rush him to the hospital.

Yet this same man — the one whom she used her whole heart to love and cherish — was also, because of her, bearing more pressure than the average person. Granted, he had a high-paying salary, but so what? He still needed even more money to manage his health issues of the future. But if he continued to be with her, he would continuously be earning money, then continuously be emptied of all of it. And there was even Grandmother's health that he would need to consider and be prepared for …

She remembered how Gu Pingsheng had, in front of his own student, paid off her father's debts for him.

At the time, she had vowed that never again would she let him face such humiliation because of her. But what good was a vow? There would be no blue sky after the rainstorm in her life. Everything would unceasingly replay itself, over and over again.

And why should Gu Pingsheng, because of her, have to shoulder so much?

As she thought and thought in this way, her tears dried.

She carried on packing the remainder of the items, then went into the bathroom and took a hot shower. When she was nearly done showering, Gu

Pingsheng suddenly pushed open the door and walked in. Her body completely unclothed, she stared stupidly at him as he drew near.

“Why were you showering with the lights off? If Grandmother hadn’t said that you were at home, I would not have known that you were in here.” Gu Pingsheng’s voice was directly by her ear, and his hand was against her back.

Tong Yan extended her arms and encircled them around his waist, nuzzling her dripping wet hair against his chest. “I really can’t bear to part with you.”

“What bad things are you saying about me?” His voice carried laughter in it, and from behind the door, he took off a towel and gently rubbed her hair.

The bathroom after a shower was very humid. She had forgotten to turn on both the lights and the bath fan. Still, she shamelessly refused to go out and simply remained like that, the side of her face resting against his chest, her body pressing tightly against his. He was for once wearing a plain black dress shirt, and perhaps due to the fact that he had just returned home, he had not the opportunity to remove his tie yet. Hence, there was actually a seductive feeling, one that could lead a person to sin.

“All along, I’ve been stressing to the other party that I’m still in my newlywed, honeymoon phase, so it’s not suitable for me to be away from home for a long period.” He was smiling the entire time as he tried to coax and comfort her. “So it shouldn’t take as long as fifteen days. It’ll be about ten days and then I’ll be back.”

She gave a faint nod.

His flight was taking off at 7:30 p.m., and he did not even have time for dinner before he was to immediately head out.

Tong Yan made up an excuse so as to not see him off at the airport and only helped him carry his luggage to the doors of the elevator. For some reason, they waited for a long while but still did not see the elevator coming to their floor.

Gu Pingsheng glanced at his watch. “Let’s take the stairs.”

He had just finished speaking this when someone pushed open the wooden

door of the stairwell and, looking toward them, grumbled, “Don’t bother waiting. The elevator suddenly stopped working. Good thing there are only five floors. Just take the stairs.”

The lights in the stairwell were sound-activated.

Every time she walked down another floor, she would stamp her feet to allow the lights of the next two floors below to turn on.

Their way ahead was lit, but the lights behind them were extinguishing one floor at a time. As they passed by the few steps where she had once sat and wept, Tong Yan cast a deliberate glance at the words she had written with her fingernails. Such faint markings. Unless a person was carefully looking, no one would notice them.

When the two of them reached the ground level, Tong Yan all of a sudden closed her fingers into a little fist and slipped it into his hand.

“I remember, the first time you came to class, you were wearing a white dress shirt and light-brown trousers. Your sleeves were rolled up, and I could see your tattoo.” The corner of her lips turned up. “You were especially handsome. I’m sure I must have fallen in love with you from that moment on.”

Gu Pingsheng had an expression of amusement on his face. Closing his hand around her fist, he told her, “Be good. Don’t be pouty. I’ll be back really soon.”

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
63 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Part 3

Together Forever (至此终年) — Final Chapter Part 3 of 5

June 22, 2016 by hoju 27 Comments



This one hurt my heart to translate.

Final Chapter (3)

This particular project was unexpectedly problematic.

After Gu Pingsheng had arranged last-minute to switch around his class schedule for all the classes that he taught, he had only had time to return home to grab his luggage before hastening to the airport. Of course, even amid all this hurrying around, he still made a visit to the hospital. For so many years, his elderly grandfather had been tormented by sickness, and even after his liver transplant, he needed to take anti-rejection medications for the rest of his life. Hence, one could certainly imagine both the physical and psychological pressure that weighed on him.

During Gu Pingsheng's visit this time, however, the elderly man for once actually showed some smiles on his face. With tones of self-mocking as well as pangs of heartache for him, Grandfather uttered, "Both of us, grandfather and grandson, can be considered to have the worst health in the family." Seeing him dressed in his suit and carrying a suitcase, the elderly man could deduce his

upcoming plans. “Business trip?”

Gu Pingsheng set his suitcase down beside the bed and took a seat on the chair. “There’s a last-minute need for me to go to London. I will be back in about ten days.”

This grandfather and grandson pair seemed to both have words to say, but as they looked at one another, both smiled and neither of them spoke first.

He did not have the time to stay too long. When he was about to leave, he suddenly stated, “Last time, there wasn’t the chance for the two of you to meet. This time, when I come back from London, I will bring her to formally see you.”

Possibly because he was physically feeling quite well today, the elderly man, surprisingly, was not very much opposed to this.

“That student of yours is graduating this year? Have the two of you considered where would be a suitable workplace for her?”

“She just completed her internship term.” Once Gu Pingsheng finished saying this, he quickly added in a joking tone, “But her grades are just average. A lot lower than mine. If she wants to find a good, suitable job, she’s going to need to put in a bit of effort.”

The elderly man laughed with amusement. “Oh, you … Vain. Still so vain. You’ve never been humble.”

During this project in London, he unexpectedly ran into an old classmate. The two of them were on opposing camps, and in the meeting room during the daytime, they would contest over every word, as if each one was worth gold. Although the two of them were old friends, due to this project, there was not much private social interaction between them. It was only after the true legal negotiations were complete that they learned they were both staying in the same hotel.

The coincidental encounter occurred in the hotel’s elevator lobby.

“TK.” The beautiful blonde woman beside his old classmate gave him a warm hug, and with non-fluent Chinese, she asked in delighted surprise, “How are you?

Are you doing well nowadays?”

“Extremely well.” Gu Pingsheng’s answer was given in Chinese as well as he patted her briefly on the back in a platonic gesture.

That old classmate did not understand the greetings they had exchanged and, when they released each other, only grinned and joked that now that two old flames had seen one another, he, the new flame, had no importance at all.

Amid the nonstop jesting and teasing, there were people getting into the elevators as well as people getting off with hurried steps. Only when he heard them talk about their child did Gu Pingsheng at last, somewhat after-the-fact, ask in pleasant surprise, “Since when?”

“Last year. Last year at this time.” The beautiful woman made an expression of marvel on her face. “The kid is just too adorable. I’m even thinking I want to get married. If we have another kid, we will get married.”

Gu Pingsheng once again gave her another hug and offered his extremely sincere well wishes to them.

If it would have been possible, he very much wanted to leave London immediately.

To return home to see his own little girl.

These last several days, she had communicated distractedly with him. It seemed something might be wrong.

Ten days. One week plus three days.

On the seventh day, Tong Yan suddenly called Shen Yao. “Are you still in Beijing? I want to go to the amusement park today. How about I treat you to some fun at Beijing Amusement Park?”

The sounds coming from the other end of the phone line were noisy and seemed to echo in an open space. In a very loud voice, Shen Yao threw out a cuss of “Sh*t!” and said, “I just arrived at Beijijng Capital [International Airport], and I’m flying out in an hour. You did it on purpose, didn’t you?”

“Leave one day later, how about that?” She sat on the couch, her voice for

once softening.

Shen Yao remained silent for several seconds but then let out another curse of “Sh*t!” and told her, “Tell me the address. I’ll see you in an hour … Wait, no. Wait at home for me. I need to leave my luggage at your home.”

As she stood outside the amusement park, Shen Yao began to immerse herself into character, examining with seriousness how they could reasonably use their time to go to all the attractions that they wished to see. She even took a pen and carefully drew out a route on the map, circling the key attractions that they wanted to go to.

Tong Yan was somewhat preoccupied.

“I’m telling you, Tong Yan, if it weren’t for the fact that I’m going to be leaving the country right away and won’t be back in the short term, I would have ignored this type of unreasonable request from you. You’re really treating me like I’m your boyfriend, eh? I was at the airport already, and I ended up being called back by you, just like that …” Biting on the end of the pen, she suddenly lifted her head and stared musingly at her. “What terrible thing has happened?”

Tong Yan’s hand held down her sun hat, its wide brim concealing more than half her face.

“You broke up?” Shen Yao sighed, “Women are the strongest creatures, but once they break up with their love, it’s like an injury straight to their very sinew and bone.”

“You’re talking as if I’ve never been in a break-up before.” She strolled forward unhurriedly.

Shen Yao thought for a moment. “I’ll tell you something, but you can’t get mad. Prior to Gu Pingsheng, I’d never seen you with a boyfriend when we were in school. So, before I came, I gave my man a call because I wanted to know what exactly you were like when you broke up with the one you loved. That way, I could at least prepare ways to respond and counteract.” Extending her arm, she draped it around Tong Yan’s shoulders. “To be honest, my man has never said anything good about you. His views about you are truly on the extreme end, but

for this particular matter alone, he said you are more of a man than a real man."

Tong Yan still remained unspeaking.

"Not a single tear shed. Your ex-boyfriend, on the other hand, cried like crazy… Tong Yan Wuji, you are truly callous."

Shen Yao's tone was light as she teasingly mocked her, but when she saw Tong Yan turn to look toward her, she completely froze.

Where was this callousness that was spoken of?

Tong Yan's gaze was dull as it fixed on her. Though her eyes clearly were red, no tears were found in them.

Shen Yao had never seen her like this before and, like a silly fool, only knew to hug her. "What is it that's wrong? Teacher Gu's about to die? That can't be it. The last time I saw him, he was still so handsomely attractive it was tragic to the world, and he looked absurdly healthy …"

As Shen Yao spoke, she worriedly touched Tong Yan's eye.

Dry. She truly was not crying.

But this was more alarming than if she was crying.

Tong Yan shoved her hand away. "Get lost. Don't you go cursing him!"

"……"

"You guys really have broken up?" Shen Yao gave her a nudge. "If you want to cry, just cry. Don't hurt yourself holding it in. You're just going to be sad for a few days. If it's really bad, you'll be sad for a few months, at most a few years. Once you've forgotten, you can find someone even better than him … But that will be hard. Based on all the people I've seen and assessed over these last twenty years, I honestly haven't met anyone better than Gu Pingsheng."

That brought a smile to Tong Yan. Never had she seen anyone console a person the way Shen Yao was doing. "And I've never thought about ever trying to find someone better."

After a break-up, you could always find another person.

Thereafter, you could say goodbye to the previous relationship, and, with that person you had once loved, you would never again set foot in one another's lives.

In this city, in its every corner, every minute, every second, this same scene was playing out. But she and Gu Pingsheng were different. The reason why she wanted to leave him was because her family was unsuitable for him and not one of those other ridiculous, messy reasons.

She originally had come to keep Tong Yan company, but in the end, Shen Yao forgot about that initial objective and became crazily immersed in all the various high-risk rides and games.

Tong Yan did not really dare ride roller coasters. Shen Yao, in contrast, was not satisfied after one ride and went again to stand at the end of that long, long line-up, ready to embark on that hell's journey once more.

She bought a mineral water and sat down at a rest area, watching Shen Yao from a distance.

It was not yet summer vacation, and therefore, sitting in the shade of the trees were mainly young parents with their little children or couples who looked to be university students. As Tong Yan sat there, the young husband and wife couple on the bench behind her were discussing special interest classes to enroll their child in and were wrangling away. The man was in favour of self-directed development while the woman wanted to purposely cultivate the child in all areas…

Tong Yan glanced at her mobile phone. It was already past two o'clock in the afternoon. He should be awake by now?

She hesitated but still sent him a text message: *Awake yet?*

Just woke up. TK

She had received a response, but now she did not know how to continue.

While she was still lost in stupor, another message suddenly came in: *I'll be on tonight's flight back to Beijing. TK*

Her heart suddenly tightened.

The shortening of his itinerary was his special surprise for her.

But Tong Yan did not have the courage to break up with him face to face. Her right hand gripped her phone, and after thinking for a long time, she finally asked him: *Is your schedule packed today?*

Negotiations have successfully come to a conclusion. Strictly speaking, today can be considered a rest day. TK

Rest? Rest was good.

Tong Yan stared fixedly at her phone's screen, and very slowly spelled out the words that came next: *There is one thing I have been thinking about for a long time. I don't have the courage to tell you face to face. I'll use texting, okay?*

Clutching her phone, she waited for a lengthy while, but he still did not reply.

Tong Yan was somewhat panicked, so panicked that her hands were trembling. Another while passed but there was still no message. It was uncertain whether he had not seen her text or he truly had guessed something … At last, she simply could not endure the wait any longer and followed up with another question: *Did you see my message?*

This time he sent a reply back very quickly: *Go ahead to say it. TK*

A short few words and his name. His emotions could not be determined.

Tong Yan felt as if the inside of her chest was swelling. Slowly, she managed to type out a few words, but she could not keep going with it. She lifted her head and inhaled a deep breath, watching Shen Yao off in the distance, so obliviously happy, hop excitedly into the roller coaster and wait for the lap bar to be secured over her.

For the first time in her life, she was a little envious; in fact, it could even be called jealousy.

She remembered she had once heard a story.

In Thailand, the white elephant was considered a national treasure and only the royal family could possess it. There had once been a king who bestowed a white elephant as a reward to an official. Initially, the official had been delighted

at the privilege and had brought the while elephant home to painstakingly take care of it. However, he gradually discovered that taking care of such a treasure required a tremendous expenditure each day. In the span of a dozen or so years, he had spent all his money because of it and had drained his family fortunes.

Back at the time, the person who told the story had remarked, people longed to possess things that were perfect, but they forgot that not every person could afford such perfection. It was like the official in the story, who had obtained a treasure that was symbolic of the royal family's esteem and honour but had ultimately been incapable of undertaking the responsibility.

The love between her and Gu Pingsheng was the same.

She had once stubbornly believed that she was worthy of possessing happiness. However, she had forgotten to consider whether she had the ability to take on such a love and relationship.

"In sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer, I will always be with you." When she had originally declared this to Gu Pingsheng, she had been full of self-confidence, believing that she could strive her hardest and would be able to assume the duty of caring for his daily life.

But, what if she was that person who was exacerbating his sickness and bringing poverty upon him?

She kept her head lowered and finished typing out all there was to say:

I want to separate. It's too exhausting. I never know what tomorrow will bring and only know that it will be worse than today. I'm sorry. I couldn't perservere to the end.

Such a dull, matter-of-fact tone, without any superfluous words.

She did not even have any recollection of how she had typed out these words and sent them out just now.

An endless wait.

The entire time, he did not provide a response.

Behind her, the increasingly heated dispute between the young husband and wife couple was being deliberately suppressed because they did not want their child to hear the sound of their quarreling. Tong Yan was absorbed in listening to them, yet she also could not remember what she actually heard.

After another dozen or more minutes, Shen Yao finally stepped off from the roller coaster and walked shakily over to her side, proclaiming how awesome it felt. “It’s such a pity for people like you, coming to the amusement park but not even riding the roller coaster.”

She handed the mineral water to Shen Yao.

When she bent her head down again, she noticed at last that, at some unknown time, there was one unread text message in her phone.

She opened it. It was very concise: *Give me some time. Let me think about it. TK*

Additional Comments:

Such a good effect. The bustling of the amusement park, the excitement of the people surrounding Tong Yan. Can you imagine the carnival music and sound of the roller coaster on the tracks, the laughter or even the day-to-day bickering of the couple behind her? And amongst all this, she has to carry out the action of letting go of the one she loves.

sigh Who am I kidding? I just needed to say something to distract myself from the dull ache in my heart that I’m feeling after I translated that.

<u>Completed:</u>
1 of 1 Prologue
64 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Part 4

Together Forever (至此终年) — Final Chapter Part 4 of 5

June 25, 2016 by hoju 27 Comments



Apologies for those who read this ahead of time. A slip of the finger published this before its usual posting time and before I got the edits complete. (This proves I should not attempt editing past midnight.) :p

Oh gosh, this one hurt even more than the last one, especially that text message from Gu Pingsheng.

Final Chapter (4)

He never did return again.

When it was time for her graduation ceremony, Tong Yan went back to the university.

She had arrived in Shanghai one day prior and completed all the necessary formalities for graduating from the school. That night, she stayed at Shen Yao's home and arrived at the university the following day.

Of the twenty-three students in her class, twelve were admitted directly or by recommendation into other universities for graduate studies. Five or six of the remaining students had received offers from the prestigious schools they had desired. Shen Yao's wish was fulfilled, and she truly was accepted into Yale.

Zhou Qingchen, on the other hand, was not going to continue studying and rather, had obtained a job working in the Singapore government. Jingjing, hence, had unexpectedly become like the swallow that had flown up to the top of the branch and transformed into a little phoenix[1] [a woman who has transformed from rags to riches], busily accompanying him to carry out the formal procedures and paperwork while incidentally also making her own preparations to go abroad with him.

Graduation was a fork in the road of life, but there were no road signs.

After July, everyone would begin embarking along his or her own road, moving towards utterly different lives.

Very early on, during the internship period, the dormitory had basically been half emptied.

The beds were empty, their deep green metal frames as well as wooden bed boards bare and exposed, just as they had been when they first entered university. The shelves were also bare, a layer of dust cloaking them. Shen Yao stepped in but strolled only one circle around the room before she broke down, left, and began going to every other place to find people to say goodbye to.

Unable to sit there in the dormitory room, in the end, Tong Yan could only head over early to hang around in front of the auditorium, waiting, with nothing to do, for the ceremony to begin.

The previous night, she and Shen Yao had squeezed together on one single-size bed to sleep, and now she finally felt that her lower back was a little sore.

She sat down on the steps and drew her legs up to her chest, resting her chin on her knees as she watched the people going in and out of the main doors of the auditorium to prepare for tonight's graduation celebration.

She remembered the previous year's celebration had been outdoors, and she and Shen Yao had stood crammed against the entrance of the library, joining in

on the excitement. Time had passed with a *whoosh*, and now it was her turn.

Apparently, the previous couple of days had been gloomy with continuous rain, but today the weather had cleared. The morning breeze blew in her direction, carrying a touch of moisture on it. Her arms were wrapped around her calves while his name repeated over and over again in her mind.

So much time had passed, yet she could still remember, that day, the weather had been very nice. The morning sunlight had shone in through the window, and he had been completely enveloped in its glow. Casually, he had held the chalk and written his name: Gu Pingsheng.

Four or five people walked out from inside the auditorium, all of them junior schoolmates who were part of the Sunshine Theatre Society.

And there was also Ai Mi, who had already started a job at a television station.

After the numerous commendations of “congratulations on graduating,” Ai Mi stayed and sat down side by side with her. “So, what will it be? Is your future one of a great lawyer or a judge? Or maybe a prosecutor?”

“Don’t know.” Tong Yan genuinely did not know. “I don’t want to do anything that has to do with law. I really, especially don’t.”

If it was possible, she truly wanted to be willful and give up what she had majored in.

Because it was connected to him.

“You were in the liberal arts stream. If you don’t work in your field of study, you’re not going to be worth much when you head out into the real world, right?”

“It seems that’s the case.” She pondered seriously for a moment. “Other than reciting and memorizing from books, there’s not much I know how to do. Now that I think about it, the sciences and engineering are better. At least you’ll come out with specialized knowledge or skills.”

“You know how to sing.” Ai Mi laughingly reminded, “And what’s more, your singing is particularly nice to listen to. Go take the Putonghua Proficiency

Test[2]. I'll put in a recommendation for you to do an internship at the TV station."

She gave an offhand answer, continuing to rest her chin on her knees and stare vacantly ahead.

Beginning tomorrow, she would start again to consider matters about the future. Today was the last day of being a student.

The graduation ceremony lasted for two hours, and wearing her bachelor's gown, she stood at the very back, her shirt inside completely dampened. When at last the conclusion of the ceremony was announced and all the graduation caps were flying into the air, Tong Yan's first action was to remove her gown to allow herself a breather.

Her sweat-soaked, short-sleeve shirt clung to her body. As she bowed her head to pull out a tissue, Shen Yao, who was standing behind her, sudden gave her a hard nudge on the arm.

"Gu Pingsheng."

She had not even had the chance to react before Shen Yao was already dragging her to the outer perimeters.

From this particular angle, they had a view of all the teachers of the Law Faculty as well as the dean. He really was standing there beside the dean, watching the elderly gentleman speak. He was dressed in a very simple, casual button-up shirt, his complexion fair and the outline of his facial features distinct, his expression still collected as before. In this way, she stood and gazed upon him from afar. Each subtle motion, in her eyes, was infinitely magnified.

Whatever Shen Yao said afterward, she did not hear at all.

Soon, the more than three thousand people in that courtyard began to disperse, and the scene was even more crowded and hectic than the train station. Embraces of farewell, photographs taken together and signatures being signed, tears and laughter as well as wild, senseless fun.

The once most-popular teacher had returned on this day of the graduation

ceremony, and naturally, memories were evoked in many people.

Apart from Shen Yao and her, almost everyone stepped up in their bachelor's gowns to take a photograph with him as a keepsake.

The esteemed, elderly dean of the Law Faculty had hence become a supporting role, standing beamingly to the left of all of the students, while Gu Pingsheng was inundated with various requests and obligingly accommodated memento photographs.

Her classmates all thought that Gu Pingsheng had purposely come today to be with her, so naturally, they also presumed that Tong Yan was keeping such a far distance to avoid rousing negative attention. Several classmates who were relatively more acquainted with her had, after fulfilling their photograph wish, even approached Tong Yan and expressed their "apologies" for occupying Great Beauty Gu.

In the end, she was the one who left first.

Without any place to go, she stepped into the auditorium to watch the final rehearsal for the night's celebration.

She was a former master of ceremonies, so of course no one would stop her from entering.

When it was time for the Sunshine Theatre Society's act, she was backstage and standing behind the immense stage curtain, watching seven or eight students use an artistic type of voice to act out a scene of graduation and departure from school. The audience seats in front of the stage were largely empty, with only some of the cast and crew sitting in them and observing.

A few people coming from the side stage curtain at the back unexpectedly looked in her direction and politely called out, "Teacher Gu."

Tong Yan suddenly grew nervous…

Behind her, someone answered, "Thank you for your hard work."

It was not his voice.

Even her hands had gone somewhat weak, but she was thankful that it truly

was not him.

The teacher behind her seemed to be the new supervising teacher for the Students' Union and did not know Tong Yan, only communicating in low tones with those students about the plans for the evening celebration. While she continued watching the onstage people whom she knew rehearse the play, an alert all of a sudden rang out from her phone.

She lowered her head and glanced at it. It was a text message from Gu Pingsheng:

> *I had originally wanted to say a few words to you, but I realize now that that is not a very easy thing for me to do. Student Tong Yan, congratulations on your successful graduation. TK*

"Who has their mobile phone turned on backstage? Don't you know the rehearsal rules?"

Since this was the rehearsal for a stage play, there was a sound system and speakers on stage, and the sound of these words was enough to disturb everyone.

The eyes of all the people backstage turned toward her. As she stared at her mobile phone, Tong Yan dimly realized that she had committed a wrong. Lifting up the stage curtain, she confessed apologetically, "I'm sorry, Teacher Du. It was me."

"Oh, it's Tong Yan." When Du Half-A-Beat saw it was her, his face quickly transformed into a smile. "Our school gala emcee of previous years. I think this is your graduation year. So how about it? Are you heading into graduate studies?"

Shaking her head, she exchanged a few words of pleasantries with this teacher whom she had collaborated with for several years.

That night, she directly departed from Shanghai without going to watch that graduation celebration that belonged to her.

Her ticket was for a sleeper berth on the train. In the middle of the night and unable to sleep, she stepped out into the corridor to take a seat on one of the

chairs there. Text messages were coming in incessantly from Shen Yao, telling her how many people had jumped into the lake as a way to commemorate this graduation and how many people had posed with the statue of Venus to take a photograph. This way of bidding farewell to one's era as a student was truly both wild and heartrendingly poignant.

The rumble of the train speeding over the tracks was mechanical and rhythmic.

She read and read until she fell asleep, sprawled on a little table. When the sky was beginning to lighten at five or six o'clock in the morning, Tong Yan awakened. The corridor already contained early risers who were starting to move about. She had just pulled out some toiletries from her bag when she received a call on her phone from Pingfan. Pingfan's voice was still friendly as before, and she did not say very much, only that she was coming to pick her up at the station.

Tong Yan could surmise that she was coming regarding matters related to Gu Pingsheng, so she did not refuse her.

Pingfan's vehicle was stopped opposite the railway station, separated by a road. Though she had thoroughly prepared herself mentally, when she saw Pingfan, she still felt extremely awkward.

Pingfan could detect her apprehension, and after she was seated in the car, she quickly said, "Don't put too great a load on your mind. I told you before that no matter what choice you make, I will understand." Saying that, she pulled out a stack of printed documents from the back seat and handed it to her. "TK personally wrote this up and requested that I bring it to you."

Tong Yan took it from her. It was a home purchase contract. The seller was Gu Pingsheng, and the buyer, of course, was her.

"When I got this, I was actually very perplexed. Why did he not choose to gift it, and rather, he made it a sale?" Gu Pingfan's tone was intentionally light, and with a smile, she jokingly mocked him. "He said that it is relatively complex to gift it and would require that he is present before it can be conducted. A purchase and sale transaction is much simpler. You only need to sign your name and then I can help the both of you carry out the remainder of the procedure."

As Pingfan stated this, she was already handing a pen over to her. Tong Yan did

not take it .

“Yan Yan, he is doing this because he is respecting you. In our hearts, we already view you as his wife. Even though the two of you have to separate, this is also something that he must do. And trust me, if you won’t accept it, he will certainly also persist and just change to find a different way to give this apartment to you.” Pingfan set the pen on top of the document and smiled, “You know that he’s really stubborn. It’s pretty annoying.”

“Let me think about it,” she answered.

“Also, I’m going to open a joint account and transfer all the money you kept with him into the account that you and I will jointly own. I will, right off the bat, provide my authorization for any withdrawal and use of considerable amounts, so in reality, I’m just a safeguard that’s there in name only.”

Pingfan continued with all her explanations, regardless of how large or trivial the matters were.

The air conditioning inside the vehicle blew against her skin. So cold. His every arrangement was very well thought-out and did not have a single flaw.

After Pingfan finished saying everything, her eyes were already noticeably reddened. Spreading her arms, she wrapped Tong Yan into her tight embrace. “Alright, I still have a lot of other things I need to do. That little bro of mine who spares me no worry has never let me just relax.”

Tong Yan hugged her back. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t say that.” Pingfan told her, “Although the ending wasn’t good, we still were once family, after all.”

Family. She had once so greatly yearned to have a whole, intact family.

If he possessed a healthy body, how wonderful that would be.

She would unquestionably cast off all heed regarding matters of her family and shamelessly attach herself to him. After all, Gu Pingsheng genuinely was very outstanding and would be very capable of earning money to support the family anyway. But the reality was, his health was so poor. Perhaps there were only twenty years remaining in his lifespan, but as a result of throwing himself into

work, it would be shortened by another five or ten years or even more.

This kind of consequence was one that she dared not even think about.

The best now would be if he could leave and go to any other place, one where he did not need to have too much in savings and also did not have too many burdens weighing down on him.

Even without romantic love, for the many people in his family who loved him, he would still take good care of himself.

[1] “飞**上枝**头变凤**凰**” is a line from the poem《圆圆**曲**》*Song of Yuanyuan* by Ming dynasty official and poet, Wu Weiye. This line describes a woman, originally of the lower classes of society, rising abruptly into the upper class, like a lowly swallow that once wallowed in the mud but, after managing to fly to the top of a high branch, has now become a glorious phoenix.

[2] **普通**话**水平**测试. The Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi (PSC) or the National Putonghua Proficiency Test is the official test in China for native speakers of Chinese that tests for oral mastery of standard Mandarin. Certain jobs in China, such as radio and television broadcasters, teachers, *etc.* require a minimum level of achievement in this test.

Additional Comments:

Everyone repeat after me: Hoju only translates stories with happy endings.

Let’s talk Tong Yan.

From the very beginning, I’ve been saying that this story is grounded in reality. The situations — especially Tong Yan’s — are things that can happen to real people, the characters have their flaws and hence, their decisions may also be flawed.

The author modelled the character of Tong Yan based on the real life

experience of someone she knew. (Gu Pingsheng, however, is purely fictional and was created to honour the real angels in white coats of the SARS tragedy.)

Tong Yan's decision was highly discussed, not only in the comments here but also amongst Chinese readers as well, with varied reactions ranging from, "What in the world? She should just cut the ties with her father and then problem solved. Who cares about the addict? She's just too weak," to "How heartbreaking. I don't know if that's what I'd do, but I understand," to "I would do the same. What other alternative did she have?"

I, myself, tend to the middle one. I actually don't want to discuss right or wrong, though, and instead, "Why?" Why is this decision completely consistent with the character that Mo Bao Fei Bao has been presenting to us over the last 20+ chapters? (If you read my review in SSB, I shared very similar thoughts there. Just wanted to place them here, too.)

Tong Yan and Gu Pingsheng have a wonderful relationship where they care about one another and wish with all their heart to take on the other person's burdens. However, they do not wish to put their own burdens on the other person. There's several examples of this. During their separation, in chapter 13.2, "Gu Pingsheng, as before, would send her an email every two or three days, but never in any of them would he talk about his medical condition and recovery. And every time she replied, she would also only write things like, the weather was getting hotter, her schoolwork was really light and easy, or similar. Privately, though, she kept a diary of everything that had happened over these last several months, and when he returned, she planned to pull it out to show him and say, 'Look how strong and positive a person Mrs. Gu is.'" See how she did intend to share, but only after she pulled through it herself. Also, in chapter 15.2, "It would be just like when he was in the United States when Pingfan's secret video recording of him had shown that he was already lying in the hospital, but the next day, he had still sent her a video of him out sightseeing and having fun, using this to try to obscure her perception and mislead her … So, it would seem that he was 'only desiring to partake in life's sweetness together and unwilling to share the bitterness.'"

So, it is not inconsistent for Tong Yan's character to not tell Gu Pingsheng about seeing her father that day in the park and the resulting decision because

“ever since she was a child, she had been the type of person who would only report good news and would hold back any news that was unpleasant” (chapter 6.2). She acknowledges herself that this is a fault of hers.

Also, remember the discussion that they had in the bedroom, where Gu Pingsheng said he was selfish because, despite knowing that his health was poor, he still insisted on being with her. What did Tong Yan take out of that? “His words seemed to settle down into the depths of her heart. So long as she was not occupied with anything, her thoughts would turn to these words of his. According to his logic, she knew that her family had many issues, but she still decided to drag him into the messiness of it all. If he had been healthy, perhaps he would have had the strength to bear all of this with her, but to make him, who was already in this condition, face this together with her, wasn’t that even more selfish?” (chapter 16.2) A guilt settled into her heart and ate away at her from that moment. And that guilt was only confirmed when she felt that, because of her, he had faced a terrible humiliation in paying off her father’s debts in front of his own student. So, that guilt must have flared up again when her father approached her in the park. It felt like a never-ending cycle, and to her, wasn’t she being selfish if she continued to let him face this with her? She knew he would be selfless and tell her it didn’t matter, but to her, that did not mean she should be selfish. So, she did not want to let him know the true reason behind the break-up.

Lastly, I mentioned this in my reply to some comments, but have you noticed the pressure that Tong Yan has been bringing more and more onto herself? She wants more than anything to care in every way possible for Gu Pingsheng, but to teach yourself first-aid, to learn driving, to learn about herbal foods, to learn massage… Why? Because of worry for his health. She has never voiced that worry to Gu Pingsheng because she probably doesn’t want him to feel bad, but she is very stressed. Grandmother’s health, Gu Pingsheng’s health… things that she cannot control, but she feels she needs to shoulder them. And she’s only 22! She’s terribly mature for her age and sometimes we forget, but she is actually so young still. As Gu Pingsheng and Pingfan said, she is “…still a kid. Being frail and vunerable are expected” (chapter 20.2), and it is normal for someone at that age to not be able to look at every angle. Hence, when her father came, it was like a straw that broke the camel’s back. She can’t think of anything except that this

cycle is unbreakable. And if she can't get out of it, the least she can do is shove him out of it.

So, were there better ways for her to deal with it? Possibly. Do I agree with her choice? Maybe not. But to be honest, I don't know if I, myself, could have done any better. Her feelings are very human, and every human being will react differently in such a situation when your mind is not clear. But what I can say for sure is, the author has created a very well thought-out, consistent character (and one that you can relate to and feel for, if not agree with). While, at first, the break-up may have seemed unexpected, when you really think about it, you will see that her reaction is within character.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

65 of 66 Main story segments

0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Part 5

Together Forever (至此终年) — Final Chapter Part 5 of 5

June 29, 2016 by hoju 45 Comments



And here concludes the main story. There are two epilogues to follow, broken into three segments.

Sometimes, the only thing you can do is leave things in the hands of Time.

Final Chapter (5)

June of this year was the crazy month of the UEFA European Championship.

Inside the radio studio, there sat only her. The program was about to begin, but the other person had not arrived yet.

Tong Yan propped her head up on her hand, somewhat tired owing to an entire night without sleep, and flipped casually through the stack of script she was holding. Inside her headphones, the radio director was drinking soy milk while also instructing her in a slightly cross tone, “Another five minutes until

seven o'clock. If Mai Ming is late, give a live report on the traffic first."

She raised her left hand and made an "okay" sign with it.

When only two minutes remained, someone tapped her on her shoulder. It was her late-arriving partner.

"So close, so close." With his hand still on her shoulder, her partner sat down, panted deeply a couple of times, and cleared his throat.

"You should just request to switch over to the evening program." Tong Yan handed a headset to him.

"Why are your eyes so red, too?" The other person took the headset from her.

"Last night was the anniversary of my grandmother's passing. I couldn't sleep." She quickly finished what she was saying and gestured to him to be quiet.

In that two-hour, live radio show, they were continually reporting traffic updates as well as jesting and chatting with one another. Mai Ming especially loved football and, in particular, was a hardcore fan of the German team, so the conversation topic naturally moved in that direction. Tong Yan did not really know football and would only provide some casual responses, letting him guide the mood and response of the audience.

For one and a half hours of that live program, he spoke until his mouth was parched, and the last thirty-minute call-in segment of the program, he tossed to her to handle.

With such radio shows, the majority of audience participation and interaction was through text messaging. Each month, there was only one day of interaction through telephone call-in, and she and a special-guest police officer would take the calls together.

"Little Ke, I'm a long-time listener of the traffic station. I've listened all along to both your morning live show and your nighttime program."

Mai Ming was accustomed to this sort of situation already and could not help grinning as he mouthed, "A long-time fan."

Baring her teeth, Tong Yan made a face at him while responding to that

enthusiastic listener, who was still professing his love. “Thank you.”

This was supposed to be a discussion time on the policies regarding a new road, so they had not expected that after that listener finished declaring his feelings of “I love you so much,” he would hang up the phone of his own accord. This time, even the traffic police captain, who had been specially invited onto the show, broke out in amused chuckles.

There was approximately only another five minutes before the program was going to end, and with a stern expression, she warned the person beside her that she needed to have a drink of water. Mai Ming at last pulled himself together and, using his pure, yet also magnetic voice, he assumed the job of interacting with the audience. “Hello.”

“Hello.”

The voice was deep and warm, with much texture to it.

In that instant she heard it, she froze.

It was impossible for her to ever forget that voice.

It had been so long since she heard it, yet she still clearly remembered it.

“Can … you hear me speaking?” Tong Yan hesitantly asked him.

“I can.”

It was Gu Pingsheng.

She sat there, the entire time not saying another sentence. Because she had suddenly jumped in to answer, her partner beside her was also a little baffled, but seeing that she did not intend to continue speaking, he immediately professionally carried on the dialogue. “Today, our topic is Xicheng District’s …”

The phone line suddenly let out a noise of *beep, beep, beep, beep*.

The reception had likely been poor, so the call had been disconnected.

Such a situation occurred often, so her partner merely laughed and joked to the listeners, “That listener heard the voice of everyone’s idol, Little Ke, and was so nervous he hung up.” Saying that, he began to switch over to take the next call.

After the program had completely come to a close and all the people, including the traffic police captain, had removed their headphones and were standing for a stretch, Tong Yan still remained in the same seat, looking as if she had lost her soul somewhere. The director prompted her again that it was over and then turned around to begin berating the bloke who had been so absorbed with watching football he had almost been late. Only then did Tong Yan, half a beat slower than everyone else, begin to gather her things, taking off her headset and tossing it to the side.

She walked to the door, took hold of its handle, and pushed it open.

As she stepped outside, a colleague happened to be coming her way and smilingly said to her, “Tonight–”

The other party’s words had just left his lips before Tong Yan had immediately spun back around and, with a bang, slammed open the door.

“Li Xing, give me the phone number of that caller from just now.” She grabbed ahold of someone, suddenly extremely anxious.

That person was rather shocked. “Just wait. I’ll look it up for you. Which person’s did you want?”

“The one who only said one sentence and then his line got cut off right away.”

The person who was looking up the number gave an “oh” and asked with a laugh, “Who was that? Was it an old acquaintance? You’re so flustered.” All the while, he copied something down on a piece of notepaper and then handed it to her.

While he was still trying to extract a couple sentences of gossip, Tong Yan had already dashed off, the paper clutched in her hand.

Finding an empty, small, glass-enclosed room, she locked herself in it from the inside. Her eyes were fixed on that string of numbers on the notepaper. But all of a sudden, she began to hesitate over whether she should dial that phone number.

Two years ago, on that night, late into the hours, when Grandmother passed away and she had been so racked with grief she felt she could die, she had finally been unable to restrain herself and called his number. It was then that she

learned he had changed his contact information. Later, she also changed her phone number and address and never again did she try to contact him. Whether it was when she had encountered setbacks initially at her work and had sat on the curb of the road, staring blankly, or when, after Grandmother died, her father had finally completely awakened from his ways, she still never attempted to find Gu Pingsheng again.

Life would always consist of great and unexpected changes. In the present moment of despair, one still would never know what the next second might bring. She did not want to talk about too many “what ifs.” The change in her father had come about as a trade, using her Grandmother’s death as an exchange. In the harshness and cruelty of life, this could be considered a long-awaited slice of hope. And hence, she would never think to herself that if she had known all along that this change would happen, she would not have separated with him.

But she would always think of him, sometimes more, sometimes less. Passing by certain places, on special days, she would think of him.

Shutting the blinds of the glass room, she input the number and pressed dial.

The call was picked up very quickly. “Hello.”

“This is Tong Yan.”

On both ends of the line, there was a long period of silence. In the truest sense of the word, this was the first actual telephone call between them. These last few years, from her internship until she had entered broadcasting, she had taken hundreds, even thousands of calls, but never once had she been this nervous, not daring even to breathe.

“I just heard your program.” He at last spoke.

“I know …” She repeated, “I know.”

“I only remember your voice from when you were thirteen years old. It’s changed a lot.” He paused, then added, “But I could still tell it was you.”

His tone and manner in which he spoke truly had not changed.

It seemed as if the two of them had not been apart for a long time and had only parted yesterday, saying, “See you later.”

“I have so many things to tell you.” Her voice suddenly choked up.

He gave a light chuckle. “I’m listening.”

“Many things. Very many things …” Warm tears spilled over from her eyes, but she did not know what she should say to continue.

“I’m on the Airport Expressway right now. If Beijing’s traffic is as congested as it was in the past, it will take thirty minutes for me to reach the city centre. Tell me your address.” He was still smiling, his voice warm and gentle. “I have two days planned here. If that is not enough for you to say all that you want to tell me, I can request to take my annual vacation time. If you still think that is not enough time, I might need to request to transfer back to the office in China so I can take my time to listen to you.”

His words were continuously coming through the phone.

She was crying and laughing, and when, finally, her strength was exhausted, she crouched down, her mobile phone pressed tightly against the left side of her face as she focused all her efforts on listening to his every word. A voice so clear in her ears. And he, as well, could hear every word that she spoke.

No questions would come forth from her.

Gu Pingsheng, why did you suddenly appear? Why were you able to hear my radio program? Why did you dial that call-in-number? Why … are you at last able to hear me when I speak and, moreover, without any difficulty at all, very clearly hearing each individual word? She truly could not make herself speak, not even a single word.

“Yan Yan?”

Her breath caught on sobs, she answered with an “mm.”

“Listen to me. Send me your address. And then, wait for me to come find you.”

She gave another “mm,” still weeping continuously until the call was hung up.

When she sent over the address, she also very unassuredly asked: *Is the driver an old, experienced one? Does he know this place?*

Gu Pingsheng's text message reply soon came: *My driver said, this address is one that anyone who drives in Beijing would know. TK*

A familiar tone. And a familiar sign-off.

On this rather unextraordinary morning, he had suddenly come back into her life.

Tong Yan stared at that row of words, reading and re-reading it, over and over. It was only when she heard someone knocking on the glass door that she recovered herself and realized that she had occupied this conference room for a long time. In that instant when the door was being pushed open, someone apologized with a laugh, "There's going to be a meeting in here right away–"

The voice cut off abruptly.

The three or four colleagues who were standing at the door were somewhat stunned. Tong Yan's image at this moment really could not be considered a good one. Her make-up was obviously ruined from crying, but her eyes were brimming with smiles.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry." She bowed repeatedly in apology. "I forgot. You guys have a meeting."

Then, amid that shocked silence, she swiftly sprinted away.

Gu Pingsheng's vehicle was coming from the airport. She even knew exactly all the possible routes he could take, but she still could only wait here for him. Because, he had told her, "Wait for me to come find you."

She only had time to rush into the washroom to rinse away all the make-up that had melted on her face, beginning at the corner of her eye and using a napkin to meticulously dab her face clean. In the amber glow of the light, the Tong Yan inside the mirror was completely unadorned.

Like how she had been when they first met.

She could not wait a second longer and went directly to the main lobby downstairs.

There were sofas there for anyone waiting to head into an interview in one of

the various departments, or perhaps for the fans and supporters of the celebrity who was there that day to do a special program. From the moment she stepped out of the elevator, someone had already recognized her. There were people who were talking in low tones, and a few young girls were even raising their camera phones to secretly record this DJ who had once conversed with their idol.

Tong Yan no longer had eyes for any of these things.

She only stood in front of the glass near the revolving door, staring at all the possible places where a vehicle could pull over and park.

He had said, “I have two days planned here. If that is not enough for you to say all that you want to tell me, I can request to take my annual vacation time.” He had also said, “If you still think that is not enough time, I might need to request to transfer back to the office in China so I can take my time and listen to you.”

So, that means it is still only you, that you are still single right now, right?

It had been so long. She had thought that after he left her, he would need someone by his side to care for him. She had even prayed, “Oh God, you have to help Gu Pingsheng find someone who is ten times — one hundred times — better than Tong Yan to take care of him, cook for him, wash his clothes for him. When he is sick, that person will stay right by his side, and when he needs her, she will show up, regardless of where it might be.

“That person must have a very happy and, furthermore, well-off family.

“That person must love him deeply.”

But now, she learned that it still might only just be him.

She suddenly was thankful — thankful that her prayer had not come true.

Many cars stopped and then drove away again. The entire time, though, he did not appear.

From the airport to where she was, it was only a forty-minute drive, but now, one hour and forty minutes had already passed. As she gripped her mobile phone, she gradually began to feel somewhat apprehensive. Loud shouts and

cries unexpectedly rose up from behind her, and she turned around to look. It was the celebrity who had come to do a special event for a program today. Because of this celebrity's arrival, all passageways and routes instantly became jammed with people.

Her phone all of a sudden vibrated. She looked down at it. *There are a lot of people here. I can't get inside for the time being. TK*

Tong Yan whipped her head back around. Through that two to three-metre high glass wall, she saw him there before her.

Only that single wall of glass. Gu Pingsheng was standing in a spot that was separated from her by a single glass barrier, his white sport coat slung over his arm, and wearing a soft, stylish, white dress shirt and beige trousers. His sleeves were rolled up so that his tattoo could faintly be seen.

Nothing at all had changed.

Including the way he looked at her and said her name: "Yan Yan."

Separated by the glass, Tong Yan was bumped and crammed away by the sea of people, and though there was only a single revolving door, she was unable to reach it. But Gu Pingsheng was on the other side of the glass watching her. Both her hands were pressed against the glass. Suddenly, struck with fear that he would leave, she anxiously mouthed silent words to him. "Listen to me, please, Gu Pingsheng." She paused, drawing on all her courage to tell him, "I need you back."

Besides Gu Pingsheng, no one in this circumstance of soundlessness would be able to simply see and then understand what she was saying.

Through the noiseless motions of her lips, she told him that she still wanted to carry on loving him.

With one hand on the glass, Gu Pingsheng slowly moved in toward it. Gazing deep into her eyes, he answered her, "I never left."

Afraid that she could not understand, he silently repeated this three, four times.

I never left.

Tong Yan at last managed to break through the crowd and dash out of the building. “I saw it, I saw it!” There was an obvious wide smile on her face, but her eyes still could not help tingling. “Gu Pingsheng, I love you. I’m sorry. I didn’t want things to be so hard and stressful on you, didn’t want you, someone so outstanding to …”

She could continue speaking no more. The vulnerability and frailty at the time. The vulnerability and frailty of a twenty-two year old.

For those several years, her low self-esteem and feelings of inferiority had crushed down upon her until she could not even breathe. She truly had not wanted him, such an outstanding man, to have to bear those things as well.

She walked over, stretched out her hand, and touched his face. Her voice had long since choked over from her weeping. “But I still love you, so much that I do not even dare dream about you.”

She could not believe that the man before her had truly forgiven her. There had been no questioning, no cold and aloof manner. So easily, he had forgotten all the words she had once said, forgotten their long period of separation.

“Don’t cry.” Gu Pingsheng bent his head down and looked at her, his hairs falling softly downward so that they half-concealed his eyes as he allowed her to over and over again caress his face.

When she had wept until her legs were weak, he finally reached forward to enfold her in his arms, and outside the revolving door of the building, he took all her breath away. The firm tip of his nose brushed across hers, and, tilting his head to the side, he continuously deepened this kiss. The sounds of their two heartbeats blended together, interweaving with one another, and neither of them was willing to ever let go of the other again.

From when they had been mature enough to understand, he and she had both begun to learn how to give consideration to the too many things around them. To control their own emotions and to suppress their own desires. To give up the person they loved and had and to accept an unfair lot.

They learned to help fulfill everyone else’s needs and desires, but no one truly helped or allowed them to fulfill their own.

Gu Pingsheng held her in his arms. For the first time in his life, he actually felt his eyes begin to sting, and his gaze even began to cloud over.

This girl — the only girl he had ever loved deeply — was at last not going to disappear anymore.

Though looking back showed a journey covered in dense, thorny brambles; though from birth, their fates were harsh.

Time, in the end, had still been kind to them.



Additional Comments:

I remember reading a review by a Chinese reader that the author had “copped out” and had to use time as a device to “fix” everything and bring them back together. Even after my very first read, you will see in my SSB comments that I had originally thought the last bit of the novel was abrupt. Bam, they separated; bam, several years passed and they were back together. But, there is something about this novel that has always made me dwell upon it, and after pondering over the ending, I changed my opinion.

Have any of you ever been in a situation where, after trying and perhaps

making some (or many) mistakes along the way, you had reached a point where you had exhausted all options? Perhaps there was someone who you could not let go of, but you had did and said all that you could, and the only thing you could do was let time take over, hoping that somewhere along the journey, something would happen and that person would wake up to the error of his ways?

I have. Like Tong Yan, it took several years and something drastic for the person in my life to "wake up" and change. The waiting for that change is painful, and in between, you honestly do not know what Time is going to do, whether the situation will ever come to a good conclusion. In the meantime, you can only live your life as best as you can.

Regardless of whether you agree with Tong Yan's decision for break-up, it was done. She could not turn back, even when her father had changed his ways. And in the meantime, she carried on with her life, carrying on as she used to do, trying to live her best life with what she had… except, there was an emptiness in her heart that only a man named Gu Pingsheng could fill.

I have always felt that this novel strives to have a realistic view on life, and after pondering on this ending, I truly think that giving the situation over to time was a very "real" choice of the author to make.

Though she lost her grandmother, Time also brought about a change in her father. And thankfully, Time brought them back together again. "Time, in the end, had still been kind to them."

Completed:
1 of 1 Prologue
66 of 66 Main story segments
0 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Epilogue 1

Together Forever (至此终年) — Epilogue 1

July 2, 2016 by hoju 28 Comments



I had originally planned to split Epilogue 1 into two parts, but while I was prepping this post, I changed my mind and hurried to translate it all in one go. So, today, you have an extra long update, two posts in one. I will accept hugs, ramen, and creme brûlée as expressions of your love. Actually, this epilogue is quite sad. I cried several times, and hence, I didn't want to drag your heartbreak out over two posts. No, they don't go through any more hardships. The epilogue just explains some things during the time when they were apart. Next post is the final one for the novel, and it will be pure sweetness.

Epilogue 1 – The Goodbye I Owe You

The winter of the year he and Tong Yan separated, he returned to Philadelphia and also changed to a different firm.

Originally, due to issues with his visa, he had needed to leave the country for seven days and while he was there, he would do a post-surgery physical

examination. However, after he completed the examination, he had soon received his new project, a joint collaboration between the Philadelphia and China offices on a hedge fund investment project.

Grandfather's health was gradually turning for the better, so it seemed there was no reason compelling him to return. In the end, Gu Pingsheng decided to indefinitely extend his original seven-day leave from China and stayed in Philadelphia.

When Christmas came, coincidentally, both Luo Zihao and Pingfan went to visit him.

Luo Zihao arrived earlier, while Pingfan, because she first went to visit a friend, did not arrive until the evening of Christmas Eve. Outside, there was a thick holiday atmosphere, but when she pushed open the door, there were only two men sitting across from each other, typing and staring ceaselessly at their own computers.

"Today is Christmas, right?" Pingfan felt as if she had stepped into the wrong dimension.

Luo Zihao breathed out a long sigh. "Merry Christmas. Finally, there's a live person here to talk to me."

Gu Pingfan burst out in chuckles.

If Gu Pingsheng wanted to ignore someone, it was simply too easy to do. He needed only to shift his gaze away and then his world would belong only to him. Absolutely no one would be able to intrude on him.

Irrespective of where she was, Pingfan would still spend Christmas with fellow Catholics and go to hear Mass.

Luo Zihao could not bear the feeling of lonesomeness and went with her to experience a festivity of the Church. When the two returned, it was already early the next morning, and Gu Pingsheng was in the kitchen warming some milk. In that quiet kitchen, aside from the sounds of cooking, there were no other noises.

Without warning, a manila envelope blocked his sight, and raising his head, he

saw Gu Pingfan say, “I got it done for you.”

Opening up the envelope, he pulled out all the documents but discovered that one piece was still missing. “It seems the alimony piece is missing.”

Gu Pingfan took out some bread from the refrigerator, cut herself two slices, and took a bite into her mouth. “My great lawyer, don’t forget I’m your elder and senior sister in this field. How could I possibly not get this done properly? The problem is, your Mrs. Gu also has a law background, and she honestly read through word by word, for fear that she might be taking advantage of you somewhere … It’s almost done. Sometime before the Lunar New Year, I should be able to get everything to you. I never represented any such case before. A divorce, but both sides are scared that the other party is going to be shortchanged.”

He looked back down again, reading through each page at a time.

This kitchen was truly overly clean. Pingfan, herself, was someone who did not cook, but even in her eyes, it still somewhat gave off the sad feeling of a lonely bachelor. Leaning against the refrigerator door, she suddenly pressed her lips together and looked him over.

Gu Pingsheng sensed her gaze, and tilting his head to the side, he signaled that she should speak directly if she had words to say.

“When Tong Yan broke up with you, what exactly did she say to you?” She thought about how she should word what she wanted to express but in the end decided to simply to cut to the chase. “I actually hinted to her before that you and I both would not take it to heart if she left you first …”

After a short silence, he answered, “It does not matter what she said. None of it could be considered as the truth.”

Gu Pingfan raised her brows. Finishing off the remainder of her slices of bread, she suddenly commented, “I remember you weren’t like this when you were a kid. Whatever you liked to eat, you wouldn’t ever let me even touch it. If that particular dish wasn’t there, you would rather eat plain white rice than touch any other dish. TK, aren’t you really possessive?”

The glass contained milk in it. Raising it to his lips, he slowly took a couple of

drinks. Still a bit scalding. Before, when he had drank it at home, from when Tong Yan finished heating it to when she set it down in front of him, the temperature would always be just right.

“If you had tried to vie for it, Tong Yan would not have been so insistent,”Pingfan stated.

“If she was your little sister and I had no relation to you, would you still say those words? Still try to persuade your little sister to accept a sick man who would never completely recover?”

Gu Pingfan fell into silence, then gave a smile. “When all is said and done, there will always be a difference to people between close and distant relationships, related and unrelated. If you get to the bottom of it, I’m still selfish.”

“If your future husband could leave this world at any time, would you, every day, be worried and distressed about it? Or perhaps feel pessimistic and filled with despair?”

Gu Pingfan laughed, “You crow’s beak [stating misfortune]!”

She did not provide a direct answer, but that was equivalent to tacitly agreeing with these arguments.

Seeing that the time should be about right, he tested the temperature of the milk again. Still not right. He did not know what sort of patience she must have had in order to be able, every day, to do all these little types of tasks perfectly.

There were still other points, but he did not carry on speaking.

All along, Tong Yan had purposely concealed certain things, unwilling for people to know the reality of her family circumstance. Pingfan and even her best friend, Shen Yao were only aware that her parents had divorced but did not know just how disappointing they actually were.

He remembered, when he was twenty-two years old, the thing he could not even speak out about was that sense of humiliation and shame brought about by his closest kin.

Though he deeply loved his mother, because of his mother's yearning for a married man, because of his own identity as an illegitimate child, he also had only been able to live his life as if it was hidden away in the shadows behind the sun. Those feelings that had tortured him for twenty-two years were now being reenacted on Tong Yan, those feelings of being unable to forsake her kin, yet also deeply ashamed.

She, as a twenty-two year old girl, was not even completely mentally and emotionally matured.

Yet, because she loved a man named Gu Pingsheng, what she had to endure was far more than even him of the past.

The Tong Yan who had first drawn him to her had been the girl who stood in a royal blue evening gown beneath a brilliant spotlight, her brows lifting and lashes batting coquettishly at the piano accompanist while she sang, deeply immersed in the feelings of the song. And the last impression he had of her was a girl who was starting to learn everything possible, often very solemnly feeling his pulse and measuring his heartrate, and needing always to know where he was and whether or not he was safe.

There had been too many times where her eyes were reddened, yet still she would smile at him.

He had considered and thought through too many things, but the one thing he had overlooked was her psychological state. Thinking back upon it now, likely after some time, she would have had a complete mental breakdown. All those emotions that had accumulated since her teenage days as well as the remorse and guilt she felt toward him.

Was there a way to defuse those?

He did not know. After all, wasn't he also still holding himself captive in an unnecessary persistence, refusing to hear any sound?

Soon after Christmas passed, it was the New Year. Due to the serious sickness he had suffered this year, Grandfather had specifically requested that Gu Pingsheng must return to China for the Lunar New Year.

On the eve of the new lunar year, the young children in the family all ran outside to watch firecrackers being set off. Once a person passed the age of thirty, he would feel that time flies. He could even still clearly remember how, last year at this time, Tong Yan had lay in his embrace, pouting cutely that she wanted to go the next day to see Grandfather, and how, after receiving his consent, she had beamed so happily, not caring at all about her image.

But after joyfully coming here, she had not even gotten to see the elder.

Gu Pingsheng seemed particularly well-loved by the children of the family. Once the time had passed midnight, those little tyrants had played enough outside and all of them, not even bothering to remove their down jackets, crowded up by his side, asking all sorts of questions.

“Little Uncle, fingers crossed.” A tiny little girl crossed the index and pointer fingers of her right hand and made a praying motion. “Did I do it right?”

Gu Pingsheng could not hold back his smile. “Little Auntie taught you that?”

“Nope.” This little niece was terribly proud of herself. “Yesterday, I was sitting in daddy’s car, and a big sister on the radio was teaching this. She said that someone taught her that if she was worried she wouldn’t pass her physics, she should just do this ‘fingers crossed’ and pray for good luck.”

Perhaps that scenario was simply too familiar, for he thought of Tong Yan.

The little niece extended her hands, folded them together, and very solemnly said, “Great-Granddad must live a healthy, long life. Little Uncle also must live a healthy, long life.”

This short, little conversation was one he would think about, even when he returned to Philadelphia.

At the conclusion of a video conference, when all the lawyers were gathering their documents, he suddenly spoke in Chinese to address the several assistants in the China office. “I need some information.”

The people inside the screen instantly became energized again and grabbed their pens and paper to take notes.

“I need the recordings of the evening programs from all of Beijing’s radio stations during last year’s Lunar New Year. The precise date is the twenty-ninth day of the last lunar month. Should be the programs that aired between five and eleven o’clock.”

The other side recorded the request, not suspecting anything, and, remembering his uniqueness, immediately said, “We will prepare a written transcript.”

He replied, “Alright.” Pausing for a moment, he added, “Send me the audio files as well.”

That evening, he received the files the China office had sent over. Flipping through all the files, he finally found those words that had seemed so familiar. Despite the fact that it was fully a textual recording, reading between the lines, he was still able to confirm that it was Tong Yan.

It was an evening traffic program. The name of it was very simple and down-to-earth: *There’s Me to Keep You Company*.

There were two hosts, and Tong Yan was one of them, as the “intern radio host.”

In this particular instalment, she actually had not spoken very much, except when the program was nearing its end and a call was received from a student in her last year of high school. It was a science stream student about to take her examinations, but all this time, she was worried about her physics grade.

Originally, there should have been all the reason to simply comfort and motivate this student. But she, instead, had pulled out her own experiences of failure in physics to tell that young, senior-year high school listener, no exam was worth being afraid of. Even someone like her, who had retaken university-level physics four times, was still able to successfully find a job and now sit there as a radio host.

Gu Pingsheng could not hold back a chuckle. Her experience of having to retake university-level physics was deeply stamped in her memory.

As he stared at those rows of text, he could even imagine the expressions and

gestures she had had when she spoke. The person who transcribed the recording had been very diligent and had even carefully recorded, “the intern radio host laughs quietly.”

“Fingers crossed. Wishing for you that you successfully pass your exam.”

At the very end, she said, before her very last physics examination, someone had taught her to do this particular sign: put your middle finger on top of your index finger so that they are crossed together and then pray for good luck.

He read through that transcription for a very long time. Finally, he rose to stretch and move about.

At that time, she had been about to return to the university for final examinations, and on the entire drive to the airport, Tong Yan had fidgeted restlessly. Gently, she had rubbed her cheek against his shoulder, and when he finally looked down at her with amusement that he could not disguise, she had very troubledly asked him, “If I don’t pass my physics this time, I can’t graduate, and then what should I do? …”

“You scored eighty-six on the mock exam paper that you did last night. Right now, this is just a mental barrier for you.” Taking her hand in his, he placed her middle finger on top of her index one and then taught her to make a praying gesture. “Before your exam, make a ‘fingers crossed’ sign. For sure you will pass then.”

Tong Yan responded with an “oh.” Then, she extended both her hands and folded them together, solemnly saying, “Fingers crossed. Pass my physics, successfully graduate, and then register our marriage.”

The winter of the year she and Gu Pingsheng separated, Grandmother’s cancer recurred.

During that entire time, Pingfan communicated with her about the various terms and agreements. On one hand, she needed to carefully avoid all the “traps” in them that Gu Pingsheng had dug for her, while on the other hand, she needed to conceal the poor mental state she was in as a result of this long period of caring for Grandmother in the hospital.

Luckily, Gu Pingfan very shortly later needed to return to the United States to officially begin her residency at a hospital.

Worried that she would hold up Pingfan's work, she finally signed the alimony agreement. Her only condition was that everything had to be deposited into her joint account with Pingfan. Gu Pingsheng had originally instructed Pingfan to set-up this joint account because, concerned that she would be dragged down by her father's debts, he was leaving her some savings that her close kin would not be able to take from her.

Therefore, this sort of condition was one that he very quickly accepted.

In the spring of the following year, Grandmother's cancer cells finally metastasized to all parts of her body, and after holding out in the hospital for less than two months, she passed on. Tong Yan remembered, that night, it had been 2:43 a.m.

Due to a prolonged duration of being unable to ingest food, when she left the world, Grandmother was already gaunt and wasted, looking nothing at all like a normal person. In those final dozen or so days, it was her father who took turns with her on the night vigil.

Nearly every day, Grandmother's eyes had been red and swollen. She thought her father had done something again, and at first, she had pulled him aside to urge him that, if he wanted money, he should wait until Grandmother had pulled through this illness. Afterwards, there had been one day where she had hurried back over in the middle of the night after finishing her radio show, and she had happened upon a raucous scene in front of the hospital room.

While the nurses and her father were not watching, Grandmother had actually run out of the hospital room in only a shirt and shorts.

Right as she stepped out from the elevator corridor, she saw that several nurses were all unable to stop Grandmother, whose mental ability and awareness were somewhat in turmoil. There had been incessant whispers from the onlookers of how the elderly woman's cancer must have spread to her brain so that she had now gone a little mad. In an instant, the picture of her father, standing in front of the door, utterly helpless to do anything and with tears falling ceaselessly from his eyes as he cried, "Mom," had caused her to lose all

her calm and reasoning.

She did not know at all how she had bolted over there to hug Grandmother tightly and quietly console her. In fact, when some nurses stepped forward toward them, she had driven them away with a wide swing of her arm. That night, it was as if she also had gone insane, and dragging her father by the arm, she had thrown him out of the hospital.

When she returned to the hospital room, all the eyes — pitying, sympathetic, empathetic, indifferently observing — had been shut out by her after she drew the bed curtains. The forceful removal of the intravenous needle had caused that hand, which had already been very difficult to insert a needle into, to become swollen. Gently, she had massaged it for Grandmother, all the while smiling as she said, “Why were you being so naughty? Oh, you. The older you get, the more you act like a child.”

Afraid that she would wake the other people in the room, Tong Yan had maintained a low voice when she spoke.

She had purposely talked about some of the interesting things from her radio show, most of which had been either calls in from some of the younger listeners or the jumbled, inarticulate words of men and women pining for their love[1]. At the end of her narration, even she, herself, had not been able to hold back a laugh.

“Yan Yan.” Grandmother pointed at her own head and in a hoarse voice, told her, “Grandmother is very clear and sound up here. I’m not confused.”

Tong Yan gave an “mm.”

“I did that because I want to make your dad feel guilt — a guilt toward us.” Grandmother patted her on the hand. “I’m scared I won’t be able to wait until the day he suddenly and completely wakes up to the error of his ways. In the end, the only one remaining and who will have to suffer is you.”

Her nose instantly began to tingle, and tears nearly tumbled down. She, however, could only do her best to smile as she said, “It’s twelve o’clock already. You’re still not going to sleep?”

“Little Gu’s illness this time, is it very serious?” The elderly woman had already closed her eyes, but then she thought of him. “Last time, he also left for four months. This time, it should be nearing nine months now?”

“It’s not very serious; it’s just that he needs rehab.” Her voice contained a slight sense of heartache in it. “His health isn’t very good, either. When he left, he told me repeatedly that I should not let you know. I also haven’t dared let him know that you’re staying here right now because otherwise, he’d definitely find a way to come back to China.”

“Yes, yes.” The old woman hurriedly patted Tong Yan’s hand. “You are both young. His health is so poor, and he needs to carefully look after his own treatments. It’s alright. Grandmother understands.”

Tong Yan pressed her lips together and smiled. “That’s why you need to be good and recuperate, or else, if he comes back, he definitely won’t let me off the hook. As for me, I will be responsible for working as hard as I can to earn money and allow the both of you to live lives that are a little better — and better some more.” She halted her words briefly, then added, “Our boss asked me if I also want to sub in for the morning traffic show. The original host just had a baby and needs to rest for several months. That way, I also have more chances of getting a pay raise. At the very least, my bonus definitely will be bigger.”

“Morning show? The one you’re doing right now starts at nine o’clock, and you also have to commute back and forth from the hospital.”

“When you’re young is when you fight and work hard.” Tong Yan tucked Grandmother’s hand under the cotton blanket and instructed quietly, “No more talking. Go sleep, go sleep.”

The elderly woman clasped her hand again and urged rather long-windedly, “These last few days, I feel like I’ve had much more energy. They say that if your mood is good, your cancer will naturally get better. Absolutely don’t have Little Gu come back. If he is to come back, it must be when he is healthy.”

Tong Yan nodded. She knew that Grandmother would not take it to heart, would not take exception to an unwell person not coming to visit.

However, if the elderly woman learned that she and he had already separated, that, she was afraid, would be the fatal blow. Fortunately, Grandmother had

long ago been, unspokenly, well aware of his illness, so after the four-month long separation of last time, these eight, nine months had been easy to explain.

She did not know at all how long she could drag this lie out.

Her only thought was, any extra day that she could was one extra day gained. Later, there was no more “later.”

During that period, she had requested the longest leave she had ever taken since she began working. For a full week, she took care of all of Grandmother’s funeral and after-death arrangements.

Afterwards, she never went back home to stay and instead, co-rented another apartment with her co-worker.

That home had been hurriedly bought by Gu Pingsheng for her and Grandmother to live in when he had rushed back to China that time. And when they separated, he had also insisted on leaving it to her. She had refused everything, but the sole exception was this apartment, which seemed to have helped her by providing her with a kind-intentioned lie that Grandmother could believe.

The granddaughter whom she always kept on her mind and in her heart would be well. Regardless of what might happen, there would still be someone who treated her like she was his precious treasure and loved her.

When the intention of that lie had come to its end, she dared not live in such a big apartment alone. Since she was doing the live morning traffic show and the nighttime program concurrently and also needed to attend planning meetings during the mornings, she entrusted full authority of the apartment’s sale to a real estate agent. She had originally assumed that, because Beijing’s home purchase policies these last couple of years had been harsh, the apartment would not be that quick to sell.

According to the agent’s boastful assertions, this truly was an apartment with excellent fengshui. Seeing that Tong Yan was not anxious for it to be off her hands, he searched unhurriedly for a suitable buyer, trying as much as possible to bring the selling price up. However, in merely one month, there was someone

who directly paid the price in full.

The day she went to sign the contract, the weather was dry and hot, and she just so happened to have a summer cold as well. She wrote down that bank account number that she knew so well by heart, unwilling to go another time to the bank. The buyer of the apartment was good-natured and simply went to the bank with the agent to transfer the money.

She and another younger real estate agent stayed in the apartment. With nothing to do, she decided she might as well slowly take another walk through it.

Over here, right there. She carefully took it all in with her eyes.

The young real estate agent did not understand and thought that she had lost something earlier on. “Miss Tong, what are you looking for?”

She gave a sheepish smile. “I’m not looking for anything. I just don’t really want to say goodbye to it.”

“If there’s no ‘out with the old,’ there will be no ‘in with the new.’” The young agent laughed, “Supposedly, it was because this apartment has good fengshui that the selling price ended up being pretty good. If you throw in a bit more, you could buy one that is extremely good. If Miss Tong wants to buy another place, I have some on hand right now.”

Owing to this last half a year of working both mornings and nights, she had lost quite a bit of weight. Her build had originally already been petite, but now even more so, it appeared delicate. Since she was a radio DJ, she did not have to show her face, so her dress was very casual and she still looked like a student.

Such a pretty girl, yet she was capable of selling, by herself, an apartment like this one. It even appeared that there was no family to restrict and control her. The young real estate agent’s imagination naturally read a little too much into this, so he even more so thought there was business to be made.

She listened to this, uncertain whether to laugh or cry, and shook her head, not trying to clarify.

There was a limit to the amount that could be withdrawn from that joint bank

account, but there were no limitations at all on how much could be deposited. Looking at the sum written in the bankbook, she felt a sense of satisfaction, like that of the new-rich.

Gu Pingsheng, you must have forgotten: gifting is legally considered a unilateral act, and it is not necessary to obtain your approval. Mrs. Gu's Contract Law grade was ninety-one percent. Even if she were to die, this portion of her assets would have nothing to do with her father and would wholly belong to him.

As Christmas neared, *There's Me to Keep You Company* seemed to have turned into a hotline for people to discuss love and feelings. According to her leaders, they could even work with any particular needs of a show and occasionally play a song for the listeners as a way of setting the atmosphere.

For the program that had been planned for Christmas Eve, she specially invited Ai Mi to attend.

In only three brief years, because she hosted a talk show, Ai Mi had become a highly thought of host of a local television station. Even her coming here to Beijing to do a program on a traffic radio station had caused quite a few listeners to call in ahead of time and express their excitement.

"You want me to call you Little Ke, but I'm really not used to that." Ai Mi stepped into the radio studio with her in advance and sat down on the swivel chair. Unable to contain a laugh, she asked, "Why not use your real name? I think your name is particularly easy to remember, and what's more, it doesn't seem like a name that an ordinary person could give to someone. If you were to say it was a stage name, absolutely no one would suspect otherwise."

"I'm not a high-profile person like you." Tong Yan tossed the script over to her. "I don't want my old classmates to hear me hosting a show. I can just imagine how they would burst out laughing while they listened."

"You'll gradually get used to it." In a sincere and well-wishing tone, Ai Mi patted her on the shoulder and told her, "Back when I first hosted my program, my mom even deliberately saved the video from online and then burned copies onto discs to hand out to every single relative. Let's not mention how embarrassing that was."

“Be content. That’s because she’s proud of you.”

“The two of you …” The director yawned, “Just one glance and we can tell that you’re old, ‘leftover women[2]‘ [old maids], eh. It’s Christmas Eve and all that you’re caring about is to talk with an old schoolmate. You haven’t had a single phone call? No date after the show ends?”

They both ignored the director’s teasing goading and carried on chatting in low tones.

When nine o’clock sharp arrived, they immediately resumed their professional voices and switched into working mode.

Tonight’s show was a special program, a radio talk program hosted by well-known female television host, Ai Mi, and Little Ke. These two women with beautiful voices casually conversed and occasionally would take calls, most of which were song requests or, interperspersed between, memories of previous Christmas Eves.

“Little Ke and I are old schoolmates.” Ai Mi threw her a meaningful look. “Back then, she once had a courtship in university that caused a huge sensation. I dare say that every night in the dormitories, there were girls who would prick voodoo dolls and curse her. Tell me, did you ever spend a very romantic Christmas Eve with that one who was the desired lover of the masses?”

“Yes. That night, it was the first time we kissed. Really corny, actually. It was in a cinema.”

“Whooooa!” Ai Mi narrowed her eyes, so jealous she was about to go mad.

Even the director became gleeful, crying nonstop in their headsets, “She leaked it herself, she leaked it herself!”

The light music playing in the background was all old American or European songs.

After saying this, her mood seemed to improve greatly, and she easily shifted the topic away. However, all the subsequent phone calls became ones that inquired about what type of date she had had that Christmas Eve, and some

people even very excitedly shared with her that their first kiss had been in a cinema as well, or other things along those lines. She finally felt that she truly had brought trouble onto herself.

The drawback of inviting someone well-acquainted with you was that, at every single moment, she was trying to spill out things from your past. By the time the program was about to come to a close, Tong Yan was lamenting her decision so much she wanted to die. Ai Mi still was not letting up in the least, divulging that Tong Yan had once won third place in the university's singing competition, and her specialty was singing technically difficult foreign-language songs.

The director's mood was immediately aroused as well, telling her to sing something a capella and then they would gradually fade in the original song to bring an end to the program.

She could not fend off their coercing. Suddenly, she remembered the song she had played on repeat all through the nights during that period of time when she and Gu Pingsheng had first separated. The melody was very familiar, and she also knew that the recording engineer here would definitely have a copy of this song.

An old song of Jessica Simpson from 2001, "When You Told Me You Loved Me".



The musical introduction for this song was unexpectedly melancholy, but it would always cause her to remember how, that night, for the first time, she actually got to see him at a loss for ideas on what to do. Standing beneath the twinkling trees and brilliant lights of Xintiandi [New World District], he had not known what they should do next, had not known how to have a date.

Softly, she hummed the melody line, and the recording engineer very soon recognized what song it was.

Gradually, the music faded in. The slow melody. Her increasingly clear singing.

In the lyrics of this song, there was one line that was repeated over and over again:

When you told me you loved me
Did you know it would take me the rest of my life?

[1] 痴男怨女 “chi nan yuan nv.” This translates literally as “smitten men and grudging women” and is a saying used to describe a couple, deeply in love but unable to fulfill that love.



剩女 “da ling sheng nv.” Literally, this means “old, leftover women.” It equivalent to the term, “spinster” or “old maid” as it is describing a ho has passed the “suitable” age for dating/marrying. In China, this ns to apply to an unmarried woman approximately between the ages 7. The reasoning behind this is, at that age, the woman would be r a spouse in his 30s, but men at that age who are a decent catch have ed careers and are more financially secure. Hence, with their assets, d look for the younger girls, age 24 or less. Women older than that and ached are therefore considered “leftover” and thought to have a much ance of marrying.

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nal Comments:

n’t he also still holding himself captive in an unnecessary persistence, refusing to hear any sound?” Later, though he still had not accepted the hearing aid, when he was asking for the recordings of Beijing’s evening radio programs to search for Tong Yan’s show, did you catch that he said, “Send me the audio files as well”? In their reunion, Gu Pingsheng can now hear. He has chosen to release himself from being captive to his unnecessary persistence. He has finally forgiven himself and let go of the guilt that he was the catalyst for his mother’s suicide, so he doesn’t need to punish himself anymore. While the text doesn’t say explicitly, I feel like those audio files were *his* catalyst for doing that, that for Tong Yan and her love for him, he would let go and make himself a better person, to live free. And when he did, he could listen to his little girl’s voice. (Just my little interpretation.)

Tong Yan’s biggest reason for breaking-up with Gu Pingsheng had been guilt — guilt that her family situation was dragging him down and placing undue pressure on him, which could ultimately affect his health. Gu Pingsheng’s reason for unquestioningly accepting the break-up was… also guilt — guilt that his declining health was only causing her to bear pressures that she, a 22 year old girl, should not have to face and affect her mental state.

sigh

Anyways, they’re back together again. See you next (happy) post!

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

66 of 66 Main story segments

1&2 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.

Epilogue 2 and Preface

Together Forever (至此终年) — Epilogue 2 and Preface *NOVEL COMPLETED*

July 6, 2016 by hoju 69 Comments



This is it! The ending! Post contains the last epilogue, the author's preface, a little scene taken from Weibo, and, as customary, some closing comments from me for the end of a project. Thank you to all readers, whether you followed along from the get-go or are just hopping in now as the story comes to its ending. This story is very special to me, so completing its translation is oh-so-gratifying.

I'm sure you can guess from the picture above what this epilogue might be about. "Time, in the end, had still been kind to them."

Epilogue 2 – Returning the Happiness I Owe You

The morning light filtered through the white tulle canopy and landed on the grass.

Like all other ordinary wedding scenes, there were all sorts of guests who did not know one another but who were all amiably appraising each other. Resplendent dress and elaborate adornments. Good wine and delectable delicacies. Everyone was conversing in low voices, all discussing the same topic.

Such a soon-to-be newlywed couple, yet none of the people close to them

knew anything about their courtship.

“I honestly do not know.” That well-known DJ, who, only a few days ago, had been late for work because of the UEFA Euro, was truly being interrogated so much by all the people around him that he did not even know what to do. “Just think. At night, she does the late-night show, and in the morning, she does traffic reporting. Then during the daytime, there’s the selection meeting for show topics. She doesn’t take time off during the year, even during holidays and festivals. There’s never been any vehicles picking her up or dropping her off. She never has any personal phone calls. How could she possibly have a boyfriend?”

“One week. Just one, single week, from when we got our invitations to today’s wedding. She sure is able to keep a secret.” The girl who was Tong Yan’s partner on the nighttime program was also sighing. “Her hubby is one of the partners in the largest foreign-based law firm here, and his annual salary is so high it’s not even countable.”

And the most important point was, he truly was good-looking — the type of good-looking that made women envious.

“Tong Yan is everyone’s idol, the idol of the public. There are so many letters for her in the office every day you can’t even read through them all.” Only the director was acting rather mysterious, as if he seemed to know everything. “I heard that that person is a longtime listener of our station. Maybe he really is one of Little Ke’s faithful fans. So now you all know what the advantages of being a DJ are, right? You have a good reputation but you’re also still a public figure. So suitable for marrying a good man.”

The director’s spoke his words as if they were well-reasoned and persuasive.

Amongst Tong Yan’s colleagues, there was no lack of unmarried young women, and they were all aiming their gazes at the several men on the other end of the long table, those men who were the best of the best amongst Chinese lawyers. This sudden perfect marriage, this lovely and romantic encounter that made people jealous — if Tong Yan could come by one, then people could certainly believe in some things.

However, they did not know that these right-hand men of Gu Pingsheng’s were

also feeling as if they had fallen into the misty clouds.

Originally, this had been a last-minute business trip and they were only passing through this city of Beijing, but suddenly, it had become a request for transfer back to China. The most important piece was, the reason for the transfer request was very simple and direct: to return to China to get married and then permanently reside there.

From the head office to the China office, no one knew that he had a girlfriend. With Little Boss's curriculum vitae and looks, in the head office, he had broken the curse that ethnic Chinese men would not be popular with the ladies and had attracted all sorts of eager, ardent women swarming him like overenthusiastic bees and butterflies. And in the China office, the name "Gu Pingsheng" itself was like a legend.

Every time there was a video conference, there were numerous female lawyers who, because they needed to give a one-minute report to him, would prepare in detail beforehand so that they could sufficiently respond to his questioning that would cover every possible angle.

"My mom and dad are fans of Little Ke. When they heard I would be attending the wedding, they asked me ahead of time for TK's personal details. They were honestly being even more rigorous about it than if they were selecting their own son-in-law. But when they asked me about the development of their romance… I really could not answer."

The paralegal who had accompanied Gu Pingsheng to China this time could not hold back a sigh. "Love actually. The wedding date was set the day after TK returned to China. Prior to that, no one in the entire company even knew that he had ever had a girlfriend. This is true love. You don't even need love at first sight. It's 'love at first listen.'"

"What is the bride like?"

"… I still haven't gotten a chance to see her. Don't be anxious. She'll be out right away."

Love at first sight?

Tong Yan had been asked too many questions along those lines. She did not know how to explain or describe this very long story. In the end, she decided to simply keep her silence and let it be taken as tacit admission. Yes, the story's beginning truly was simply that most old-fashioned and corny "love at first sight."

A long, long time ago, on that night, outside of the ICU room in Peking Union Medical College Hospital, when she stood with her backpack on her back and saw an extremely young man sitting on the floor, his back leaning against the snow-white wall, she supposed, something truly had been stirred in her.

Love's beginning truly is merely a simple stirring of the heart. Perhaps from an image, perhaps by a voice.

The makeup artist was very diligent. From six in the morning to the present, she had already been busily working for more than three hours.

Her makeup was too exquisite, so Tong Yan dared not eat too much, only nibbling instead on her straw as she drank sips of milk.

"Hungry?"

A voice carried in from the doorway. In the mirror, she watched as Gu Pingsheng appeared.

All these years, she had always thought that he was most handsome when he wore a suit. Perhaps because he had resided in the United Kingdom for a long period of time, he was particularly fond of putting a pocket square in his suit jacket's breast pocket. Refined, elegant, gentlemanly, sophisticated. How she wished she could use every possible adjective to describe him.

But ultimately, those were not enough.

Because this was Gu Pingsheng. The one, unique Gu Pingsheng.

He seemed to sense that her mind had wandered and only casually loosened his tie, walked over, and sat down beside her.

"We're nearly done, Mr. Gu." The makeup artist packed up all her things, but

all of a sudden, she caught a glimpse of Tong Yan's fingernails. They were still plain and completely unadorned. "Mrs. Gu, you didn't paint your nails last night?"

Tong Yan gave a cry of "Ah!" and redness inexplicably tinged her cheeks. "I forgot."

The makeup artist said, "It's alright," but all the while, she frettingly rummaged through her own bag, murmuring that she should have brought the fake nails that could be directly glued on.

Tong Yan felt even more embarrassed. "We'll just let it be. No one will notice these little details."

"That won't be good." The makeup artist shook her head with a smile. "The bride has to be the most beautiful on this day. Every single detail has to be perfect. If we can't find any fake ones, we'll just use nail polish and paint them directly. After all, there are still more than ten minutes to go."

Sure enough, after saying these words, the makeup artist lined up seven, eight bottles of nail polish.

"I think she should be a little tired." Gu Pingsheng rested his elbows on the back of her chair, smiled, and broke in on their dialogue. "Why don't we first let my wife rest for ten minutes?"

The makeup artist hurriedly agreed and then, very perceptively, left the room.

"I'm nervous." Gazing at him in the mirror, she blew out a long breath. "My heart is beating especially fast. It feels especially like that time back when you and I were emceeing together, and I was so nervous my palms were all sweaty …"

Resting his chin on her shoulder, he exaggeratedly inhaled her sweet scent. "Why were you nervous?"

She shook her head, pretending to be clueless and innocent. "Back then, I thought it was really weird, too. I'd emceed so many events prior to that, so why was it only when I collaborated with you that I got nervous?"

“I had always found this very strange. Before you arrived, the supervising teacher for the Students’ Union had told me, ‘The person who will be working with you is our school’s most veteran host and emcee. She is very experienced.’”

Turning around, she looked at him. “I guess it’s because you are too outstanding. When I stand next to you, I will lack self-confidence.” She paused, then uttered softly, “But I like this type of lacking in self-confidence.”

Regardless of what I have grown-up to become, I will still feel that I need to be dependent on you.

This sort of lack in self-confidence, was it not also a form of pleasure?

From this angle, she could see he was smiling, his dimple etched deeply on his cheek. Setting her chin on the seatback of her chair, Tong Yan looked intently at him. No matter how much she looked, she could not get enough.

She did not shift in the slightest, and Gu Pingsheng also simply gazed at her.

After some time, Tong Yan at last took one finger and hooked it onto the cuff of his dress shirt, lightly swinging it as she requested gently, “Please, tell it to me again, one more time.”

He suddenly chuckled. “You still haven’t gotten sick of listening to it?”

Because he needed to speak to her, he had leaned forward slightly.

He was completely swathed in the sunlight shining in through the window, which softened and blurred the outlines of his features.

All the guests had already arrived, but the two appeared to be in no hurry. In contrary, they seemed more like people who, after waking up one morning on an arbitrary weekend, were idly leaning back on the couch, chatting casually.

Apart from her white organza train cascading onto the floor. Apart from his impeccable suit.

“The itinerary for this trip had not included Beijing but I wanted to truly have a listen of your voice, so I changed it last-minute.” Gu Pingsheng fulfilled her wish and began recounting once again those things from that morning that she had not known. “I had originally planned out the timing. I would exit the airport by

seven o'clock and would be able to hear your entire program. Unfortunately, the flight was delayed."

She gave an "mm-hmm," listening so earnestly it was as if this was the first time she had heard this.

"Luckily, I still was in time to hear the last, interactive segment of the program. I never thought that you would have so many supporters. The driver my company sent to pick me up at the time is your loyal listener."

"I have lots of fans," Tong Yan said cheerily, her finger still hooked on his shirt as she swung his arm with quite a sense of pride.

"That driver said that Little Ke is his favourite female program host. During her show, she frequently takes phone calls that ask her for advice and turns a good, normal traffic program into a time for free legal aid and consultation." There was obvious mirth in Gu Pingsheng's voice. "He even said that you are especially adorable."

Tong Yan nodded, beaming as she looked at him.

What came next was what she most wanted to hear, a dialogue that, regardless of how many times it was repeated to her, she would not tire of it.

Discovering that she was rather happy with swinging his arm, he also stretched forward a finger and hooked it around her finger.

"At the time, I thought I probably needed to very clearly declare where I stood. So, I told him, 'This girl is my wife.' That driver didn't really seem to believe me, so I dialed the radio call-in number. But right when I heard your voice, the phone reception got cut off." The entire time, his gaze remained affixed to Tong Yan and did not move away. "Afterwards, I called that number again, but the line was busy the whole time until the program ended."

"What if I didn't call you?"

"Yan Yan," he told her, "at first glance, every minute that we live may seem to be random. However, when you look back, you will discover that no matter how many times we were to repeat those moments, the outcome would still be the same."

“So, no matter how many times you were to repeat that moment, when the driver told you he was my loyal listener, you would still very seriously tell him that I am Mrs. Gu. And you would also definitely make that phone call to prove that you are my husband. Then, I would once again get the chance to find out your phone number and would end up finding you.”

He smiled lightly, staring into her eyes and tacitly admitting this fact.

“And so,” Tong Yan began, curling her fingers into a fist and slipping it into his palm as she teased him, “no matter how many times you were to live, you would still stubbornly be fond of eating broccoli.”

Gu Pingsheng could not help laughing. “Yes. So, no matter what, Gu Pingsheng can only ever have that one Mrs. Gu.”

His words were never purposely polished, but they were always so moving.

“I never even thought about falling in love with someone else,” she softly told him. “Never at all.”

“Neither did I.” He used the same answer to provide his response to her.

Out on the lawn, the music flowed continuously. It was about time.

“Do you want to go out yet?” he asked her.

Tong Yan nodded, but then, she immediately clutched his hand anxiously. Smiling, Gu Pingsheng leaned in a little closer to her.

In her mind, she was still running through the script she had written, those words that she needed to say for the wedding. “What if, later on during my speech, I suddenly forget what I’m supposed to say? What should I do? …” Her co-workers would laugh at her for sure. But, no big deal. My wedding, I’m the boss …

“If you forget it, then you forget it. It’s okay.”

“Oh no.” She looked at that row of nail polish bottles. “I still haven’t painted my nails yet. If they’re all bare, they’ll look really ugly …”

“I’ll apply it for you. You taught me how before.” When he finished these

words, his face suddenly leaned in closer, and then, lowering his head, he brought his lips directly to hers.

Beside their ears was the sound of the door being opened, but then it was quietly shut again.

There were several seconds of only stillness, and then, he finally tilted his head, enclosing her lips completely in his.

Just like their first time in the cinema, the way he started always caught her utterly unprepared.

In this time. In this place. The start time of the wedding ceremony had already quietly slipped by, but the groom and bride were still in the dressing room, unwilling to come out. Even from simply thinking this, she was already unable to contain her giggles. Who knew what sort of comments and discussions would be taking place outside? …

Gu Pingsheng's hands were holding her waist, lifting her up entirely from her chair and into his arms.

The train of the wedding gown he had custom-ordered for her was several metres long. As it followed their movements, its layer upon layer of white material splayed over the entire floor.

Her arms encircled his neck, and she let him set her down on the dressing table, the two of them pressed tightly to one another and not separating at all that entire time. Not caring how many guests were outside, nor caring whether the most auspicious time had already passed. This was their wedding ceremony — a wedding that should have taken place long ago. Everyone else was simply there to accent the ceremony.

Hence, Gu Pingsheng rightfully disregarded everyone else, apart from his bride.

And amid his lingering kiss, Tong Yan also told herself one thing: from this moment, from this day onward, besides Gu Pingsheng, she was no longer going to worry about anyone or anything else. Mrs. Gu would use an entire lifetime to care for and love Mr. Gu.



What began as a single glance has henceforth become … together forever

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Preface

An author writing her own foreword is such a weird thing.

Well, then, I will just say a few words about the story behind this novel.

In regards to Together Forever*, on the day I finished writing it, it could also be said that I fulfilled a special desire of mine. In the very beginning of the beginning, I had merely wanted to commemorate in a very simple way that SARS outbreak. I know that there are many people who, even if they had been in the hardest-hit areas of Beijing and Guangzhou at the time, do not have such intense sentiments about it. Sometimes, a disaster may repeat itself a hundred times but still only be a term, a noun to some people. Only when someone close to you has truly experienced it does it bring about the sorrow and pain that is like having your flesh cut from your body.*

Perhaps because I knew people and had family in the severe disaster area of Beijing during that time, I heard a little more about it than other people. That year, there were many angels in white coats who resolutely moved in, wave after wave, all carrying the mentality that they were heading to their deaths as they succumbed and fell. But afterwards, few people remembered this.

And so, he appeared in my mind.

Gu Pingsheng.

He is the male lead of this book and, in my heart, is also the best way to commemorate that calamity. Although the setting of this story is a little heavy, I believe that if you flip open this book, what you will read will be how a person who experienced life and death is continuing to live his best life.

And then, in the story, she also appeared.

Tong Yan.

When this story was still being released in instalments online, there were many readers who quietly sought me out, regarding me as a safe confidant, and they told me about their own life experiences and family backgrounds that were similar to Tong Yan's. Therefore, Tong Yan is not an isolated case. In this world, there will always be some people who try hard to live their lives but are helpless to the irresponsibility of their parents. Not everyone's family situation is like beautiful spring days all-year round, nor is everyone's life filled with great stresses and pressure. There are people more fortunate and happy than her, and there are people who are more unfortunate than her. And the story that I desired to write was definitely one where the "happiness and fortune" were greater than the "misfortune."

I believe that when each storyteller writes a story, he or she is trying to convey something. In my case here, I am not trying to say that "life is hard," but rather, I want to express, "Look. Gu Pingsheng and Tong Yan have such a hard life, but they can still be so happy. So then, what reason do you have to not live an even better life?"

What if you meet a teacher who was once a surgeon? In that year when you were thirteen years old, both his and your mother were being resuscitated in the same hospital. However, six or seven years later, he can no longer hear any

sound, nor can he work in an operating theatre. He has picked up the books and become an ordinary university professor.

What if he and you are alike, having a mother who abandoned you and a father who cannot be spoken about?

What if, for a nationwide calamity where many dying needed to be saved and wounded needed to be rescued, he had lost the health that he should have rightfully had?

What if he loves you?

Could you bear not to love him?

— Mo Bao Fei Bao
February 18, 2013, evening

Extra Scene from Weibo:

If you followed along with *Really, Really Miss You* and *Beautiful Bones*, you'll remember this.

Released February 19, 2015, Lunar New Year's Day at 12:01am.
MBFB asked fans what they wanted for a Lunar New Year's present. Everyone had requests for new scenes from their various favourite novel(s). In the end, she posted a giant post with a scene each for the leads from nearly every single one of her novels at the time, in which a theoretical email was sent out to them asking them to recap the first night they did *it*. Here is the one for *Together Forever.*

On a certain day, in the middle of the night, Mo Bao Fei Bao sent an email to all the leads of her novels: "Hey dears, do you still remember that

night?”

Tong Yan: (Tosses fresh chestnuts into the pan. Tonight, it is once again braised chicken with chestnuts. He loves eating it.) He was going back to the U.S. for his surgery. I wanted to go with him, but he wouldn’t let me. So I…

Gu Pingsheng: (Fingers drumming rhythmically against his ceramic cup) I’m listening. Carry on with what you were saying.

Tong Yan: …… I’m done talking. (Stabs forcefully at the chicken with a metal spatula.)

Gu Pingsheng: (Walks over and rests his chin on her shoulder.) Then how about you listen to me say it?

Tong Yan: (Turns on the hood fan.)

Gu Pingsheng: I asked you whether you wanted to turn on the light. You didn’t refuse. But when we really started into it, no matter what, you absolutely refused to turn on any light–

Tong Yan: (Begins cooking and stirring with all her might.) Behaving so inappropriately for your older age…

Additional Comments:

While the preface is actually at the beginning of a book, I thought, in our case, it would be more apt to include it here at the backend, after you had read through everything. Hopefully this helps give you insight into the author’s mindset at the time.

I had mentioned before that Tong Yan is based on a real person and real experiences of someone who, at age 20, hated her father and fell into depression; someone who, as she got older, realized that blood relation was actually something that you could never truly let go of. And it truly did take a death to, in exchange, bring about a complete awakening and cause her father to snap out of his ways. In an interview from a couple of years ago, when asked if the “real Tong Yan” was happy now, Mo Bao Fei Bao’s answer was, “Yes, very happy because she is very positive. In a person’s lifetime, the joys and sorrows should be weighed against each other. Everyone is the same, and there should

be no reason for us to wallow in self-pity and bemoan our fate, no reason that we *let* ourselves be less fortunate than others, right?"

I remember finishing this novel for the first time and reflecting… over and over again. I've mentioned so many times that my love for this novel is very personal, that it has a special place in my heart. The reason is not simply because of the beautiful love story, not only because the emotions and situations inside the story feel so genuine that they resonate on a very personal level with me. I realized something.

I realized that we, as human beings, are actually caring and supportive. In the wake of a calamity, how many times have we seen news reports that people everywhere are pouring in to places like Red Cross to donate, sending in help, sending well wishes? But at the same time, I also realized that we, as human beings, are very forgetful. It's not intentional and perhaps it is even a self-defence mechanism for us to move on and continue with life, but very shortly after a disaster, when news reports stop showing up everywhere in our news feeds, we then forget about it. But the victims can't forget, and they are left to pick up the pieces of their lives.

As I read up on the SARS calamity, I was struck by one particular photo of a very lonely man on a hospital bed who had fallen to SARS but had, like Gu Pingsheng, recovered… to a life of after-effects and failing health. Initially, people had rallied behind him, the media declaring that everyone would be there to help him and not forget him. However years later, it was only him. No one remembered him, and now he is merely left to pass many of his days in the hospital, despairingly alone. And he is not an isolated case. Though that particular man was not a medical worker during that time, there are so many more victims and most of them had worked the front lines during that disaster.

Perhaps, the scariest thing is not having to face sickness, even death. Perhaps, the scariest thing is facing it alone.

Mo Bao Fei Bao once said, she does not know how to rescue the sick and heal the dying. She can only write and use this way to commemorate those angels in white coats who had sacrificed themselves for others. And the only thing I can do is to remember them and offer my deepest respects, even if they don't know. Hence, this translation came about — to be honest, quite nervously, for fear I

would not properly express what the author hoped to convey — so that maybe more people can remember them with me.

To all of you, wherever you may be, whatever life may bring you, I wish the best for you. Hope this might have encouraged you to live your life so that your happiness is greater than your misfortunes. Cheers all, and thank you for reading. See you in my next project, *Stewed Squid in Honey*.

Completed:

1 of 1 Prologue

66 of 66 Main story segments

3 of 3 Epilogue segments

Categories: Together Forever | Tags: C-novel, 至此终年, Mo Bao Fei Bao, Together Forever, Translation | Permalink.