

Guardian Translation

Translator's note: Hello, we are [@yilnglaozu](#), [@ineffablebfs](#), and [@fandoestrans](#)! We will be translating the last chapters of Guardian with occasional excerpts from [@dtriad](#) with permission! Enjoy!

Chapter 82: As She Finished Speaking, It Was Like She Handed Over Her Own Life, Nervously Waiting For Zhao Yunlan's Reply.

As Zhu Hong and Lin Jing needed to plan their trip, they made a deal and took advantage of the sun not yet rising to return to No. 4 Bright Avenue to find Wang Zheng.

Yet as they entered, they saw their leader, who hadn't been replying to texts all day, curled up on the couch with his pajamas on, covered by a thick wooly sweater that was obviously not his type of clothes.

Da Qing was crouched in front of the couch, the plate before him had only a messy pile of dried fish. He was licking his paws, a satisfied gleam in his eyes.

Zhu Hong made care to soften the sounds of her feet hitting the ground, asking Da Qing in a low whisper, "Why is he asleep here? Isn't he scared of catching a cold?"

As Zhu Hong finished her sentence, she raised the temperature on the remote and took off her jacket, placing it gently on Zhao Yunlan.

Lin Jing looked down at Zhao Yunlan with an air of fake melancholy, touching his own lower jaw. He said, "Not returning home on New Year's... he is hiding something. The way I see it, he is not forced to marry, but forced to separate!"

At this moment, Zhao Yunlan raised his head. His hair was an unruly pile of straw on his head, the dark bags under his eyes heavy. He glared at Lin Jing, an aura of 'I'm pissed off you woke me' emanating off of him. "Shut up, fuck off!"

Lin Jing was cheap, and he was quiet for two seconds before giving in to the urge of being a busybody. "No, no. Look at him, who can bear it--if your wife came early in the morning with a meal painstakingly cooked, and told you to wake up, would you say the same words you did just now?"

Zhao Yunlan could not bear it any longer. Raising a hand, he grabbed a small bonsai plant, and hurled it Lin Jing's way.

Zhu Hong and Da Qing watched silently. Lin Jing hesitated after seeing Zhao Yunlan truly mad, and the cheap mouth could only sheepishly find a broom and clean up the glass pieces on the ground, muttering, "Amitabhha, may I be safe."

Da Qing leaped onto the couch, shaking Zhao Yunlan's shoulder with his paws. "Hey, are you alright?"

Zhao Yunlan sighed and lay back down, burying half his face into the sweater. The sweater was Shen Wei's; he had only realised it when he walked out the door because he noticed the fragrant smell on the sweater.

After a while, Zhao Yunlan said, "I'm fine. Lin Jing, leave that there, I'll clean it up later. I didn't mean to direct my anger at you. I'm feeling awful right now, so can you guys leave me to lie here for a while? Do what you need to do."

Da Qing pawed at Zhao Yunlan's beard. In response, Zhao Yunlan ruffled his fur with his hand, before landing a slap to the cat's ass. "If you have time, go and do some research for me on where the hell the 'Book of Ancient Secrets' came from."

Da Qing huffed. "Commanding your old ancestor cat? Where's my red packet? Where's my New Year's money?"

Zhao Yunlan closed his eyes and felt around Shen Wei's sweater. Eventually, he found some spare change and pulled on Da Qing's collar, shoving it into his nametag. "You have some guts to ask, huh? The damned money printer can't even compare to your age. Now scam!"

Da Qing wanted to knead the sweater and trim his claws, but Zhao Yunlan moved quickly, putting his arm in front of the shirt. Even though Da Qing retracted his claws, he still left a snowy-white mark on Zhao Yunlan's arm.

With his rights of even just trimming his claws taken away, Da Qing paused, before jumping off with an irked expression. Zhao Yunlan, this bastard, took this old, powerful cat for a donation box!

Due to the many rules of the New Year and springtime, and the fact that most of the people who worked at the SID were not human, they normally only returned to work on the fifteenth.

The situation with Shen Wei made Zhao Yunlan feel both uneasy and a heartache. The glorious No. 4 Bright Avenue in the morning was just an empty yard. Zhao Yunlan was thus determined dream about his whole life so far, and to sleep fifteen days off.

When he awoke once more, even the cat was gone. He picked up the fallen jacket from the floor, dusting it off. He paused. Hurriedly, he shoved his feet into a random pair of shoes and ran

out. It was only when outside did he realise it were a pair of leather shoes, and that it was a bit chilly.

When he looked down, he saw that the shoes he normally wore were neatly arranged, and even had pairs of thick socks tucked in them. On the sofa's arm were his clothes, ironed smooth. His underwear tucked right in the middle, out of sight, and on his clothes were his phone, wallet and keys. Only his jacket was missing, and Zhao Yunlan realised that was probably why he had Shen Wei's one.

Out of nowhere, a voice said, "Professor Shen came by. I was going to wake you up, but he didn't let me."

Zhao Yunlan pinched his nose and turned around to see Zhu Hong surfing the web to kill time.

"Where is Shen Wei?"

"He left." Zhu Hong's gaze shifted down from the monitor.

With a hoarse voice, Zhao Yunlan asked, "Where did he go? What else did he say?"

"Oh, he said it was cold outside, if you're done with your work you return home, and to not worry about not seeing him because he went back to his place," Zhu Hong parroted Shen Wei, before continuing. "After that, he probably went home. Speaking of which, what did you guys choose the New Year to fight?"

Zhao Yunlan didn't reply. He knew where "his place" referred to--it definitely wasn't what Zhu Hong thought was Shen Wei's condominium apartment. His heart felt like it had been pierced with a dozen knives, yet in front of others, he only had a frozen expression.

After sitting for a while, Zhao Yunlan pulled on his socks and walked toward the bathroom to change out of his pajamas. His hands gripped the sink tightly, watching the pristine, clear water in it. He buried his face under the icy water.

He didn't want to miss Shen Wei. He didn't *dare*. For the first time in his life, he knew what it felt like to yearn for someone so much, it felt like a hole had been carved in his heart.

He was in the bathroom for an abnormally long time, and Zhu Hong got worried, walking over to knock on the door. "Chief Zhao, are you alright?"

Zhao Yunlan gave a noncommittal grunt, wiping the beads of water on his face. Finding the shaving kit in the bathroom, placed there for night work convenience, he faced the mirror and shaved his face. Carefully putting himself together once more, he straightened his back and walked out.

Zhu Hong had been waiting at the door. At the sight of him, she opened her mouth, but Zhao Yunlan beat her to it. "Is there anything to eat? I'm starving."

"... There's probably something in the canteen. Do you want to go and see?"

Zhao Yunlan nodded, turning and heading up the stairs to the second level. Zhu Hong was even more startled--Zhao Yunlan had never in his whole career got his own food. He would sit at his table, legs propped up, and yell at the closest person to "bring this powerful man some food." It was only a few times a year the man would pick himself up to head to the canteen himself.

Zhao Yunlan asked for a simple set of breakfast as he reached the canteen. He sat down without a word and began eating. He seemed to give off a melancholic, resigned vibe. Zhu Hong quietly followed behind him. It felt as if even if the sky came crashing down, Zhao Yunlan would give it a single glance before continuing his breakfast without a single expression. This was even more disconcerting.

When he finished eating, it felt like his stiff limbs finally had some sort of energy. Zhao Yunlan then gave Zhu Hong an odd look. "Why are you here today?"

Zhu Hong didn't speak for a while. "I was supposed to go with Lin Jing to see the black dog and corpse today via train."

"Ah? Then why didn't you?"

"I was worried about you, so I let him go alone."

Zhao Yunlan wiped his own mouth and stood up, returning his own tray. He carelessly said, "There's nothing to worry about. If there's nothing you have to do, you can return home."

Zhu Hong didn't reply, only following after him.

Zhao Yunlan returned to his office and opened his laptop as usual. He gave Zhu Hong a sideways glance. "Why are you still following me?"

"What's up with you?"

Zhao Yunlan opened his drawer for a cigarette, lighting it before saying lightly, "Nothing."

Zhu Hong refused to let it slide. "If nothing's wrong, why didn't you return home to sleep, and instead come to the office?"

"Oh." Zhao Yunlan took a drag out of his cigarette. "I just bantered with him."

“Bullshit,” Zhu Hong spat. Her eyebrows twitched. “You think everyone’s blind? You treat the one named Shen as your darling, your heart. If it were really a little bantering, you would have gone back sooner than when the sun came up, writing a long sappy letter of regret. You wouldn’t be here, talking to me.”

Zhao Yunlan pressed his lips into a thin line.

“Did he do anything to let you down?” A dangerous gleam entered Zhu Hong’s eyes, like if Zhao Yunlan gave the order, she would eat Shen Wei whole.

“Stop with your bullshit.” Zhao Yunlan flicked off the ashes on his clothes. “You know gossip women can’t get married easily?”

Zhu Hong scoffed angrily. “The person I like doesn’t like me back anyways, so what’s the point? I can’t even get married.”

Zhao Yunlan understood what she was saying, but acted oblivious, thus leaving himself speechless. He decided to escape, grabbing his briefcase and shoving his phone, wallet, and the like inside. He didn’t bother to close his laptop before turning and heading in the direction of the exit.

Zhu Hong didn’t let him go, and chased after him. “Where are you going?”

“I have a meeting with a department chief. Why the hell are you still following me?” He glared at her from within the car.

Before Zhao Yunlan could lock the door, Zhu Hong slid in and buckled the seatbelt unceremoniously. “I’m coming with you.”

Zhao Yunlan let out a heavy sigh. “Grandma, could you give me some space?”

Zhu Hong turned away from him.

Zhao Yunlan suppressed his frustration and turned on the ignition. Damned Zhu Hong.

He didn’t speak for a long while. Zhu Hong snuck a few glances at him, but all she saw was a cold and expressionless face. She was at her wit’s end, and finally attempted small talk. “Who’s the chief of the department?”

“Little Guo’s second uncle. Speaking of which, there’s no use in bringing you along anyways, so help me look into just who’s the one that meddled around and brought Little Guo into the SID.”

“Meddling? With Little Guo? What can he do? Why?”

Zhao Yunlan didn't reply.

His suspicion narrowed itself onto the bowl in his father, who had likely borrowed his father's body to mess around, but why? Why Guo Changcheng? Other than a heaping amount of virtue, what good was the kid? In the whole of SID, Little Guo was the most human, so where did he come from?

If he could, he wanted Kunlun's memories and powers back. If not, he wanted to know, at the bare minimum, in these murky waters, what were the truth and what were lies. He couldn't act rashly.

Shen Wei... these two words seemed to revolve around Zhao Yunlan's mind, making him dizzy, like a ball of flames were burning his energy. He was enduring it, but to what extent? He had to seem like he was normal, calm, and sane in his own seat. Sometimes Zhao Yunlan would realise that when no one had been beside him for three or less minutes, a furrow would develop between his brows.

Sometimes, a scene would appear in his mind. There was no light, only the neverending bleak gray. A place with no life. Shen Wei's body were half in the oblivion, yet he only lifted his head to look at the rich blue skies. His gaze could not penetrate the unending dullness. He dropped his head in disappointment, and finally allowed the darkness to grab at him and swallow him whole.

Someone shoved Zhao Yunlan. He startled awake, cold sweat beading on his forehead. It was Zhu Hong. She said, “We're here.”

Zhao Yunlan blinked. It was a nightmare. He had exchanged a few cups of tea with Little Guo's uncle, before leaving. Zhu Hong had took over the wheel, and somehow he had fallen asleep.

Zhu Hong asked, “What did you dream of? You called ‘*Shen Wei*’ so heartachingly.”

Zhao Yunlan felt sulkish, so he pretended he didn't hear the question.

“Yunlan.” Zhu Hong called out.

He stopped in his fidgeting.

She fished out a small box, and took out a pearl that was hung on a red string. “My fourth uncle wanted me to give this to you. It's to thank you for the many years of looking after one from the snake tribe. I...I'll be leaving with him in a while.”

“Leaving? Where?” His brows furrowed slightly.

"I don't know, maybe back to the tribe." A bitter smile floated on Zhu Hong's lips. She saw that he didn't take the necklace, so she reached over and put it on for him. "This is our tribe's spiritual device. It can protect you. If you... if you have anything for me to do, now's the time to say it. I can't do much else for you."

Zhao Yunlan said after a while of silence, "Dragon City isn't suited for cultivation. You should return to your tribe, learn more from your fourth uncle. You might have a future, and who knows? The tribe might be yours to lead."

He spoke as if he were talking to a colleague, making her heart twist in agony. Zhu Hong blurted, "Chief Zhao. If you give me one sentence--just one, I'll break off all ties with my tribe. I'll be there with you no matter what."

In the end, Zhao Yunlan only avoided her gaze, laughing at himself. "We have no feuds between us. Why should I bring you down with me? If you're safe in the future, I'll be happy."

The light in Zhu Hong's eyes flickered and dimmed in the span of a second.

Zhao Yunlan had already exited from his side of the car.

Chapter 83: The Soul of the Living, The Heart of the Dead, The Sin of Redemption, The Return that was Unfinished, Part One

Da Qing was about to tear a hole through the Criminal's Investigation Division's floor. Zhao Yunlan and Zhu Hong returned, one walking behind the other.

Even though the atmosphere between the two of them were obviously off, Da Qing thought that as a cat, it would be best for him to stay out of fickle human matters and feelings, instead picking up the 'Book of Ancient Secrets' with his mouth and depositing it at Zhao Yunlan's feet. "The resentful energy residing in this book is strong. I checked, and it was from Antique Street."

Zhao Yunlan picked up the book, using his sleeve to wipe off the cat's drool on the cover. "Antique Street?"

'Antique Street', true to its name, was a street full of shops which sold unique, odd antiques. Most of it were useless fakes, but occasionally one or two authentic artifacts are unearthed.

However, the 'Book of Ancient Secrets' had, without a doubt, been photocopied. Any human with an average intelligence would realise the book not to be any ancient artifact, and that the abundance of resentful energy came not from it, but the eucalyptus tree that most people overlooked, hiding in the furthest shop on Antique Street.

The tree, if Zhao Yunlan were to describe it, was like a transportation hub of sorts. A train station, if you will, where all forms of “trains” were to bring you to all sorts of destinations. Some to hell, some to the mortal realm, but they all had to pass through there first.

The tree leaves were connected to the mortal realm, the roots firmly linked to the yellow spring. It was a non-human, non-ghost entity.

Zhao Yunlan looked up and met Da Qing’s eyes. “What you’re saying is that this book came from the underworld?”

The black cat nodded his head.

Zhao Yunlan asked again, “Who bought it?”

Da Qing licked his paws. “It isn’t stated, and I couldn’t find the buyer history. Maybe it’s the previous Guardian...”

“That’s impossible.” Zhao Yunlan carelessly flicked through the book with no publisher nor identification number. “Based on the colour of the print and the pages, it’s pretty new. It’s definitely after I became the Guardian; the past Guardian would be too far back the timeline.” “Then we have a conclusion: it was sent along with the cat food.”

What Da Qing was saying was that, someone had, somehow, slipped it between bags of cat food and brought it in. The person had to know the Ancient Secrets very well, even the seals on the column had been written carefully.

The SID were very organized when it came to their books, having bright coloured labels and numbers stuck on the spine of every book. It was the reason why the illiterate San Zang could arrange the books in order, back at their original spot. So why would this book of ancient secrets be tucked between “Nuwa Creates Humans and the Skies” column?

“This is a ‘black leather book’,” Da Qing butted in. “Black leather books’ were referring to the workers on the night shift, who had gotten books not from the human realm through some way. Books not from the human world were opposite from the ones who had only been in contact with the human world; known as the ‘white leather books’.

When Da Qing decided to claw his way through the book, an ebony mist hissed the minute his paw came into contact. The smell was indescribable and odd. Da Qing retracted his claw, saying, “Very suspicious. Even we didn’t label the book. If you want to follow up on it, I suggest we head to the Antique Street when night falls.”

When the sun finally set, and the golden glow dissipated into a dark, cold shade of gray, the moon high in the sky, Zhao Yunlan could not resist any longer, and called Shen Wei. On the other end was the cold, robotic voice of a woman. "The number you have reached is not available..."

Zhao Yunlan stared dazedly at his phone for a while. Finally feeling what "not seeing a day was equivalent to failing to experience three autumns" was like, he stood there until Da Qing came over and swiped at his arm. "Stop dallying, let's go."

He then picked up that failure of a cat, and walked out to see Zhu Hong, silently waiting beside his car.

At the sight of Zhao Yunlan, she laughed self-mockingly. "You must think me cheap--the shitload of words I offered you, and yet here I am still, following you."

Zhao Yunlan was stunned for a second, rendered speechless, before saying, "... I was just going to remind you to wear your down jacket."

Two humans and one cat travelled to the Antique Street in a sort of awkward atmosphere. They arrived under the eucalyptus tree.

Zhao Yunlan turned his head to see that beside the eucalyptus tree was a store. It had two bright paper lanterns hanging from the door. The words on the lantern were ripped, and one could only barely make it out to be the words 'Town Spirit'.

Zhao Yunlan finally remembered something he had overlooked. He patted Da Qing's shoulder, asking him in a low voice, "What does 'Town Spirit' really mean?"

"The soul of the living, the heart of the dead, the sin of redemption, the return that was unfinished." After Da Qing finished that sentence, he reverted back from his literary genius to a cat with words that were enough to make a human convulse. "Isn't that written on the back of the Guardian Order? You blind?"

It was rare that Zhao Yunlan had less experience than Da Qing, so he asked again, "But why did Lord Kunlun write 'Guardian Order' on it?"

And what did Shennong's utterings about life and death mean?

Zhao Yunlan was pondering over everything. He walked into the eucalyptus tree, and once he followed the path down, it would be the yellow spring.

The path to the yellow spring was often unsuccessful when attempted, but amongst the three of them, two were not human, and one had the Guardian Order. It could be considered a special

case. With the echoing of the water all around, and the cold that felt like it could freeze ice with a touch... no one would dare to scream and shout in anger in fear of angering the resentful ghosts walking around.

The “people” that walked by had their mouths agape, and were being herded like a flock of sheep with a shepherd.

In his whole career, Zhao Yunlan had of course travelled through here before. It was just that every time he did, he would walk at a fast pace, keeping his gaze directly ahead of him.

Seeing the narrow path of the yellow spring, one would feel like it were the pathway to Heaven. The malachite-green stone floorboards and bubbles that would appear on the surface of the spring felt like at any moment something would claw their way to the surface. On each side of the path were lanterns, every ten-*chi* there would be one. They flared brightly, forming long shadows that seemed to drag on the ground.

Zhao Yunlan pondered for a moment before realising: It was the Lantern of the Guardian.

A while ago, he had read about it in an article, which said the lantern had guided any lost souls on the yellow spring. The length of the yellow spring was based on the amount of things in one’s life left unforgotten, but once the golden light of the lantern washes over you, and you drink the water that would cleanse your soul of any memories of your soon-to-be past life, you would be ready to reincarnate.

Your past life would be washed down to nothing. Though the light of the lantern seemed dim and insignificant, it had the ability to pull out new, clean souls.

Zhao Yunlan couldn’t resist the temptation to bend down and peer at the small lantern, whose bottom had carved four neat words; “The Path of Life till Death.”

The truth about reincarnation.

Suddenly, a blur flashed across his eyes, and Zhao Yunlan’s heart felt a sudden pain, as if he had been stabbed in the chest with a knife. He stumbled backwards to be caught by Zhu Hong. “What’s wrong?”

Zhao Yunlan was deathly pale, yet he pushed down the bark of pain rising in his throat, shaking his head at her before pursing his lips together and continuing on, hand pressed against his chest.

Once they reached the Ghost City, Zhao Yunlan fished out a few talismans. They split it amongst themselves, pressing it down against their tongues. This way, their living energy wouldn’t be detected, and they wouldn’t be of any suspicion to the ghosts there.

When Zhao Yunlan was younger, he came here to hunt down a misguided living soul. He hadn't been able to bring him back, but had to watch as the ghosts in the city pounced onto the poor living soul, ripping it into shreds until none of its energy could be felt anymore.

Then, he had been young, and it had left an impact on him anyways. Him, a living person, who understood the concept of "What joy is there in living, what fear is there in dying?"

Dead souls yearned for the thrill and power the souls of the living could provide. They were as bloodthirsty for it as a man who had gone without air for days; going berserk without it, a crazy sort of violence.

It was why, at moments like these, Zhao Yunlan's heart ached for Shen Wei. Sometimes, he felt like Shen Wei neglected himself, even to the point of ignoring his own nature.

Zhu Hong had never been to the Ghost City, and thus shot Zhao Yunlan an uneasy look. He said, "No matter what, don't spit out the talisman in your mouth. If you do, it would be messy; some of them are small like ants, yet can chew through a whole elephant. These ghosts are stronger than you think."

Zhu Hong nodded.

"How about you wait outside," He suggested. She shook her head. Actually, she didn't know what help she would be inside; she just felt like, wherever Zhao Yunlan went, if she went to take a look as well, she would be less jumpy.

They walked to the end of the street, and paused at a place where the door simply said, "Please."

On the door were things similar to the ones by the eucalyptus tree, two white lanterns that simply said, "Guardian."

Zhao Yunlan took the initiative and walked forward, pushing open the door. With a creak, the dilapidated door opened. He stuck a lense onto the door before walking in.

His foot had not yet landed when a high-pitched girl voice rang out. "A lense to guide the ghosts. Does our esteemed guest have any pressing matters?"

Zhao Yunlan tilted his head, signalling for Zhu Hong to shut the door. A girl with two braids walked forward. She only reached the waist of an adult, face the shade of paper, a pitiful shade of white. Her cheeks had two spots of red, and her eyes were black and pitiless, her lips cherry red and her face expressionless.

To be frank, one would not find her cute, and instead terrifying.

Zhao Yunlan didn't beat around the bush and took out the Book of Ancient Secrets. On top, he put a Guardian plaque as a paperweight, saying, "Little maiden, I have need of your assistance."

Her eyes landed on the plaque. "Ah, it's the Guardian himself, gracing us with his presence. How is my brother?"

"Dare not, dare not. Your brother is doing well, I just sent him some kilograms of bacon," Zhao Yunlan says politely. "I would like to ask this maiden, if this book belongs to your store?"

The girl reached over for the book. Coldness emanated from her figure, and her fingers trailed across the book as she flipped it. "Correct, the book belongs here."

She turned the book over to its last page, at its most insignificant corner, were a gray marking. "This is our bookstore's seal."

Zhao Yunlan smiled. "Then may I ask once more, why was the book in the human realm?" As he said this, he took out a pile of paper money and used his lighter to burn it right in front of the girl.

She smiled. "Guardian is too kind. Wait here, and help yourself to some tea."

Two humans and one cat entered the hut, and he of course picked up the cup, but didn't drink from it. It would take a fool to drink from the dead knowing themselves to be alive.

The girl hauled a book of records, and flipped through the pages before suddenly saying, "Found it."

The girl lifted her head and shot Zhao Yunlan another smile. "Dare I ask the name of Guardian?"

"Surname is Zhao," He said, eyebrows furrowing, dread rearing up in his heart. "Zhao Yunlan."

"Then it is correct," The girl said, pushing the open book towards him.

The page recorded its buyers, and on it read: 'On the noon of July 15th, Guardian, Zhao Yunlan.'

translator's notes:

- “not seeing a day was equivalent to failing to experience three autumns” → 一日不见如隔三秋. I have no idea what it means, but based on my understanding of Chinese, it’s not seeing the sun for a day feeling like not seeing it for three autumns.
- “Town Spirit” is Zhen Hun. I had no idea if it meant Guardian or Town Spirit, so I just put the literal translation.
- I miss Shen Wei so much please for the love of god come back I’m begging Priest

Chapter 84: But When Zhu Hong Remembered Why He Cherished The Jacket So, She Could Not Laugh At All.

Zhao Yunlan paused, not hurrying to say that it was impossible. After a moment, he asked, “What year did I purchase the book?”

“2002,” The black cat calculated. “What were you doing that year?”

“I was working hard under the Guardian Order,” Zhao Yunlan remembered. “I couldn’t handle my jobs, and almost got kicked out of school to become a professional stick. I was stopped by my father, and it was that year I suggested setting up the SID. My father agreed, and helped me where he could.”

Zhao Yunlan furrowed his brows. “So was it my father, or was it...”

His last words couldn’t be heard, and Da Qing had a suspicious glance in his eyes as he patted the cat’s head. “When we get back, I’ll tell you everything in detail.”

He turned to the girl. “I must ask, how do you verify the buyer’s identity? The buyer doesn’t write their own details, right?”

She replied, “The records in here are organised meticulously. Whatever is written; the buyer’s name, surname, or identity, will be identical to what is written on their birth and death certificates. Does Guardian have any other questions?”

Zhao Yunlan nodded, picking up the book and left without another word. It was as he reached the door he remembered something, turning around and asking, “The ‘me’ that came to buy the book eleven years ago... does this maiden still remember what he looked like?”

The girl tapped the corner of her crimson lips, saying deliberately, “At first, I could not recall. But with Guardian’s enquiries, I suddenly remembered--then I looked at your features, and realised it was someone I had met before. If Guardian had not said, I really would not have known eleven years had passed.”

What the girl was hinting at was that, the 'Zhao Yunlan' back then was not much different from the Zhao Yunlan now.

Zhao Yunlan pondered for a moment. "Thank you."

After this, he walked out briskly, Zhu Hong hot on his tail. The girl called after him, and this time she lowered her voice, making her sentence sound horrifically creepy. "I would like to warn Guardian that these few days may have bloody disasters, so do be careful."

Zhao Yunlan had not reacted, but Zhu Hong asked worriedly, "What bloody disaster?"

The girl merely used her hollow eyes to stare at them, the ghost of a smile floating on her pale expression, and didn't speak. Zhu Hong was about to walk forward to push, but Zhao Yunlan grabbed her and hauled her away.

Zhu Hong protested, "But..."

"She is returning the favour that I had given her brother. How much do you think a few kilograms of bacon can hold against her?" Zhao Yunlan speedily exited the area, and warned Zhu Hong. "Even if she dared say the rest, I wouldn't dare to listen. In the Ghost City, ethics don't matter, and logic before acting is practically nonexistent. You cannot use the ways of the living to reason with the dead; why do you think Hell left them here to fend for themselves? Remember, the owed debt of a dead person is not an easy debt repaid."

Zhu Hong was quiet for a moment before saying, "Why are you suddenly telling me this?"

"Though I do have a lot of people on my side to do these things, I never thought you'd leave." Zhao Yunlan smiled. "If I did... remember, even if you do cultivate to the point you become Nüwa herself, remember this person here still needs your help. I can't negotiate with eight thousand year olds."

Zhu Hong's eyes and nose turned red.

"Sh, keep the talisman in your mouth. Let's wait till everyone in the SID is back, before giving you a grand farewell party. This isn't the place to be crying." Suddenly, Zhao Yunlan pulled Zhu Hong behind him, blocking her. All he saw was that on the cobblestone, someone had been crouching there for god knew how long.

He... or maybe she... or even it looked like a hairless monkey. Raising its head to look at Zhao Yunlan, its mouth split open into a smile that reached the sides of its face. It stood up, its neck twisting at 180 degrees. Baring its dripping teeth, it shot toward Zhao Yunlan and Zhu Hong.

Zhao Yunlan had pulled out his gun, but before he could pull the trigger, the two-faced thing fell to the ground. Twisting its head back, it used its shaking head to assess Zhao Yunlan before breaking into peals of laughter.

When Zhao Yunlan saw this, he aimed his gun at it, instructing Zhu Hong to walk on the other side, leaving this thing a good distance away.

When it saw that they were going to leave, it started babbling, "Men and ghosts walk different paths, men and ghosts walk different paths--"

This practically shot an arrow straight into Zhao Yunlan's heart. His face drained of colour, and he turned around to glare at the two-faced creature. With a cold voice, he snarled, "I care about my face, and don't want to be on bad terms with Hell, yet you lot just keep fucking ripping apart your faces again and again."

The smile on its face promptly disappeared, and Zhu Hong pulled at his shirt. "Detective Zhao, let's go."

Zhao Yunlan had clenched the gun until veins were popping out from his hands, yet as they were about to leave, the two-faced creature spoke once more. "Humans or ghosts? You have to choose one. The living or the dead? You have to choose one. The world or the nether? You have to *choose one*."

Its voice got higher and higher, until the point it was shrill and almost pierced the eardrums. The words "You have to choose one." were like waves, rippling through the city, echoing again and again.

Inescapable.

Ghosts spilled from the corners of the city, emerging from the cracks. Their eyes held a dangerous glint as they hovered around, eavesdropping rather conspicuously.

Zhao Yunlan was holding Zhu Hong, and just as he was about to pull her away, the creature suddenly jerked in front of them, saying, "There is a living ghost here. There is a living ghost here."

When it finished uttering this sentence, a racket had been caused, and Zhao Yunlan didn't hesitate to draw his gun and shoot at the two-faced creature. The gun ripped through its skull, burning through its skin. No more than a while had passed before the creature was not but a pile of ash.

But a large number of ghosts had bottlenecked there, and were hungry for a taste of the living. Not even the hissing black cat could stop them.

Zhao Yunlan cursed under his breath, drawing his gun and shooting at the nearest ghost, who burst apart in mad shrieks. Unexpectedly, the ghosts closest to it didn't even acknowledge the doom of a fellow ghost. To them, fear, or logic, didn't exist. Soon, a mob of ghosts encircled around Zhao Yunlan, Zhu Hong and Da Qing.

Zhao Yunlan had only come to investigate; he had no preparation for a fight, and thus his bullets were quickly used up.

Zhu Hong reverted to her snake form, a large python rising amongst the ghosts. One snap of her jaws devoured four to five ghosts at once. It wasn't enough, and many of them clung to her body, biting and baring their teeth. With a sweep of her lower body, the ghosts clinging onto her had been squashed.

But there were just too many of them! There was a saying: You could hide from one mighty ghost king, but not from his unending ghosts.

Ghosts yet again swarmed Zhu Hong. Though she swung them off, they stood up and came again. One even raked at her skin with nails, slicing off a portion of her flesh.

A dagger swept out from behind, slicing the ghost that clung onto her scales into pieces. What was disturbing was that, even as the ghost was destroyed, it still stuck out its neck in hopes of taste of blood.

The dagger-wielder, Zhao Yunlan, exclaimed, "What a bloodthirsty ghost!"

He pulled at Zhu Hong's tail, saying, "Shrink, quickly!"

He swung out with the dagger between his words, hacking at the ghosts that dared come near. Somehow, he had found time within this precarious situation to take off his coat, hugging it in his chest. It really was "Break off the head or make it bleed, but do not get a drop of oil on the clothes"!

But when Zhu Hong remembered why he cherished the coat so, she could not laugh at all.

She became a small snake, hiding inside his pocket and swirling around his wrist. Zhao Yunlan picked up the reluctantly-transformed-into-a-ball-of-fur Da Qing with one hand, and used the other to light up a wind-borrowing talisman. He really hadn't wanted to use the lighter; it had had only one spark of true flame left...

The mad cyclone of fire spiralled out, and ghosts screamed from all four directions. Zhao Yunlan rubbed the scratches from a fierce ghost from his back, muttering, "The bloody disaster came this fast?"

After this, he didn't waste a moment, and charged towards the exit, using a hand to shield himself from the roaring flames and light.

When they reached the entrance of the Ghost City, it had already been closed! As they turned, the hungry ghosts had also swallowed the true flames. Though some smaller ghosts combusted upon consumption, it didn't affect the others at all.

Da Qing screamed, "Meow Oh Meow Oh!" Using his claws to scratch at Zhao Yunlan, he whined, "Fucking hell, now what?"

Zhao Yunlan was expressionless. "What else can we do? Barge."

As he spoke, he fished out his phone and took pictures of the hungry ghosts, before brandishing the Guardian Whip. "Bring this back as a trophy."

Da Qing shrieked, "Have you lost your mind? Taking photos at this time? Do you want a group photograph with them, to show that you've been here before, you jerk!"

"What are you shouting about?" Zhao Yunlan pushed down Da Qing's screaming head irritably. "This isn't even much, my wife ran off and I still haven't done anything."

Da Qing was quiet. He didn't know what happened, but Zhao Yunlan was most probably shocked badly by Shen Wei.

In that moment, Da Qing gazed at Zhao Yunlan's seemingly calm face, and suspected Zhao Yunlan treated this whole thing as a destressing activity. Based on Da Qing's knowledge of him, the bastard really could do something like this!

The first crack of the whip cleaved through the dead energy in the Ghost City.

Zhao Yunlan felt a force guiding his attacks, as if he were always meant to wield the weapon. As if something was awakening in him.

Then, a human-sized hole was blasted into the gate. A man, fully-clad in black strode in, grabbing Zhao Yunlan's whip and retracting it before shoving it back on his arm. Zhu Hong, which was wrapped around his wrist, was thus silenced.

The man had a longsword in his hand, and a swing of it shook the whole Ghost City. The rocks on the ground trembled along with it, and dozens of spirits and fierce ghosts were broken into many pieces under the blade.

The man had an arm braced against Zhao Yunlan's waist, as if he had to drag the man against the ground, he would, to get Zhao Yunlan out of the godforsaken hellhole.

Zhu Hong ascertained their safety and transformed back into a human. She joyously called out, "Ghost Slayer, your honour!"

All her revered, admired Ghost Slayer said was, "Why are you here." His voice was cold.

Zhao Yunlan's expressionless mask finally cracked. His arm was too tired, and thus he let go of Da Qing, who fell to the ground nimbly. He cared not about the occasion and walked over, embracing the feared Ghost Slayer in two steps. "Come back with me."

... It was too bad Zhu Hong had just transformed back into a human. As she witnessed this, due to her unstable legs and shock, fell on the ground.

It seemed like being chased and hunted by hundreds of hungry ghosts really wasn't anything.

Chapter 85: "What?" Shen Wei Said Lightly. "I Can't Kill?"

Zhu Hong pointed a quivering finger at the Ghost Slayer. "H-he-he is..."

"Shen Wei." Da Qing licked his paw, an odd sense of superiority overcoming him as he waited patiently for the girl beside him to regain her view of the world.

Shen Wei's hood had fallen onto his shoulders, revealing Professor Shen's gentle and elegant features, which was somehow violating this peculiar situation. After this, he gently shrugged off Zhao Yunlan, holding the hand that had been scratched by the ghost, his eyebrows scrunched. Shen Wei's fingers that were on Zhao Yunlan's wrist tightened, before he moved the other hand to make a clawing gesture. A slim black line appeared on his wound, before dissipating in the air. The bloody wound healed rapidly afterwards.

"Leave this place." Shen Wei was possibly being curt.

It was then a stream of ghosts scurried by, a judge puffing, yet hot on their heels. Those ten kings were really something, even now they would throw their weight around. The one doing all the hard work eventually fell on the old judge's shoulders.

Panting, the judge ordered the ghosts to patch the door and suppress the ghosts. There was a secretary standing at the side, nervously wiping his own sweat as he checked how many ghosts were left standing after the swing of the Ghost Slayer's blade.

Shen Wei and Zhao Yunlan didn't care about them, and walked away together. Zhu Hong and Da Qing scrambled to their feet, chasing after them. The judge was wiping his sweat as he frantically called out, "Your honour! Sir!"

Shen Wei didn't respond, and only arched his brow as he looked back, his face expressionless.

"This... this Ghost City... no matter whether they have sinned, or if they are waiting for reincarnation... they are all counted! Your honour... you... this..."

"What?" Shen Wei asked lightly. "I can't kill?"

The judge was quiet.

Shen Wei tilted his head, putting his hands into his black pockets. He spoke with a tone that bordered on humble. "My prestiged judge, though I was born in the slums, and not talented in any form, I have truly never heard of anything my Ghost Slayer blade cannot kill or cut through. If this is harassment or trouble in any form, I am sorry."

... It was like he was sincerely apologising.

When the judge saw his smile, he felt like his whole body was filled with ice. The judge wiped at his lips and hastily said, "Yes, yes, of course..."

Shen Wei looked at the judge with a hint of a smile, before dragging off Zhao Yunlan.

Zhao Yunlan stopped in his tracks, feeling like Shen Wei's smile was like a stranger's. Maybe it was because Zhao Yunlan never saw him force others. He turned back to look at the judge who was wiping cold sweat from his forehead, asking, "The two-faced creature that blocked me was a premeditated event. Hell? What benefits would they gain?"

The smile slid off Shen Wei's face, and he lowered his head, frowning in thought. Why? These ghosts were only trying to give one a taste of what an evil ghost was like, reminding one that there were worse ghosts out there.

"Shen Wei!" Zhao Yunlan nudged him. "Stop acting mute, I asked you to come home with me, so talk to me!"

"...Leave," Shen Wei only spoke quietly when they reached the yellow spring. His voice lost that cold and disinterested tone when they had spoken to the guard, and it was low and tired. "When the living stay in the yin realm for too long, it isn't good for their health. If you continue dragging on your stay, you'll fall sick."

Zhao Yunlan let go of him, stopping in his tracks.

After a while of mutual silence, Zhao Yunlan said hoarsely, "I won't die of sickness. Come back with me first."

Shen Wei didn't even move an inch.

Zhao Yunlan clenched his teeth. "Fucking hell, I really do need to handcuff you to the house."

The Shen Wei behind him, where Zhao Yunlan couldn't see, suddenly laughed. It was as if he had heard the sweetest sonnet on Earth, and even the gloom in the air seemed to lighten to the point of blooming flowers.

"If I do come, will you be willing to eat your medicine?" Shen Wei asked.

"Nonsense!"

Shen Wei paused, turned, and looked at Zhao Yunlan for a while. He sighed under his breath. "I am a ghost, Kunlun. No matter what Kunlun gave me, no matter what Kunlun changed me into... those are all myths. My bloodline will always be a ghost. Ghosts are unlucky. When there were first villagers, there were even rumours that if anyone saw ghosts, they would not have a gentle nor happy ending; death with no evidence of burial."

Zhao Yunlan looked at him, trying his hardest to stop the anxiety burning his. He took a deep breath, and finally formed words. "I don't believe that. I don't care, come back with me first. We can solve other problems. Even if we can't be together, at least let me see you, then I can stop worrying."

"Where you can see me." Shen Wei repeated quietly, the corners of his lips twitching gently. Yet, it failed, and became a bitter smile. After a while, he said softly, "Yunlan, please stop torturing me."

"Till now," Zhao Yunlan heard Shen Wei say. "my biggest regret is that I intentionally provoked you, and then failed to control what happened. Now that I think of it, maybe it was because my cultivation wasn't high enough, I wasn't determined enough, and that my heart was too soft that this was the result."

Zhao Yunlan seemed to realise something, and lunged; yet his outstretched hand came into contact with air. Shen Wei, while facing him, had leapt backwards quickly, his body almost becoming a black streak.

Zhao Yunlan had watched him disappearing with his own two eyes, leaving only a voice that seemed to stretch further and further away. "I can only accompany you till here. Leave quickly."

"Leave." That one word reverberated in the air like a curse.

Zhu Hong saw that in that moment, there were tears in Zhao Yunlan's eyes. He had only blinked furiously, leaving bloody veins in his eyes.

"You head back first." Zhao Yunlan stared in the direction of Shen Wei, using a calm tone to talk to Zhu Hong. "Bring Da Qing along--By the way, there's specific times to leave, right? If so, tell Wang Zheng to help me arrange..."

Zhu Hong interrupted him. "Detective Zhao, what is this?"

Zhao Yunlan waved a hand, not wanting to say more. "Nothing, just go."

"Go where? I'm not going anywhere!" Zhu Hong's voice became loud. "He... Shen... Ghost Slayer... gah! If you love each other, you love each other, don't act in this manner to each other! Why did you say you can't be together? What medicine did he force you to take?"

Da Qing leaped onto Zhu Hong's leg, staying there, lifting his head to look at Zhao Yunlan. Suddenly, he said, "There has always been the idiom of 'Men and ghosts walk different paths', but this old cat, in all my years, have truly never seen real yin and yang opposites, yet who won't leave each other. There have only been rumours that if they are together, the dead person would suck the energy out of the living; probably the rules of nature. Their energy is easy to lose, but it is not easy to return. It is necessary for the other party to voluntarily contribute a part of their body that is godly. The ghost king is born to be able to compare the saints, and probably there is no such thing as the transform-into-a-demon elixir. So it would probably be... blood from the heart?"

Zhu Hong sucked in a breath audibly when Da Qing finished, he was still expressionless and unmoving, the light from the yellow spring washing over his face.

Zhu Hong didn't know what to say, but a human's heart was biased, and her heart had Zhao Yunlan in it. She cared for the happiness and sadness of him, pulling it along with her like a rope. The more she thought of it, the tougher it felt for her to breathe, until she finally could not bear the sadness, and yelled, "He's trapping you in evil!"

Zhao Yunlan's eyes finally looked at her. His eyebrows furrowed slightly. "What did you say?"

"I said, he's trapping you in evil!" Zhu Hong seethed. "If he didn't hint at you from the start, would you chase after him for no good reason? If he didn't keep pushing, would your dad still be called Li Gang? Would you rob boys? The Ghost Slayer is so magical, If you didn't want something, could you force him to follow suit?"

Da Qing slid down from her leg. Did this woman forget she was speaking about the Ghost Slayer?

Zhu Hong got angrier the more she spoke. "He's obviously leading you on! If you two couldn't be together, he should have told you from the start, forcing you to, forcing you to..."

Zhao Yunlan took out the last cigarette in his bag, puffing out a ring of white smoke. "Forcing me to what?"

Zhu Hong had momentarily been cold, and now she said, "Forcing you to be unable to leave him, forcing you not to leave him even when you fall into the yellow spring from a cliff, forcing you to only have him in your eyes, and everyone else to be left behind! I think he's always had motives in his heart!"

Zhao Yunlan laughed softly, patting her shoulders and directing her toward the tree. "Alright, now that you're done nagging, go."

Zhu Hong stomped her foot on the ground. "Were you even listening to me?"

Zhao Yunlan took a smile and hung his eyes and shot the ashes: "You silly girl, this emotional business really makes one anxious, too much to talk, do you know what is sparse? He is mine, there is a problem between us, whether it is he is wrong or I am wrong, it is our own business. An outsider giving me their opinions, it is no different from hitting my face--this is me, too lazy to acknowledge you. Now stop spouting nonsense, leave quickly, go back and have a good night's sleep. You've worked hard these past two days, just treat this as your work over your leave."

Zhu Hong said, irritation flitting across her expression, "I'm an outsider?"

"Of course," Zhao Yunlan side-eyed her. "Anyone outside the two of us is an outsider."

Zhu Hong yelled, "You bastard!"

Zhao Yunlan spread out his hands. "Where am I bastardly?"

Zhu Hong finally forced out that cliché sentence. "In your eyes, where do I not compare to him?"

Da Qing, who had his hands over his face this whole time, came to the horrifying conclusion that he actually liked these generic love triangles.

Zhao Yunlan could only sigh. "You're gentle, kind, and beautiful, and a girl. You're better than him in every way."

"Then why can't I?"

Zhao Yunlan thought for a while, after a while, revealing two small dimples, bowed his head and smiled softly. "Probably because my eyesight is shitty--in fact, you won't be much better, you see. As a smoker in a new era, I am a poor man with a bad temper and a bad temper. I can only pretend to be gentle and caring for less than three days. A failure to my family, even my mother can't stand it, kicking me out of the house when I was young. You're a big beauty, what can't you understand?"

Zhu Hong had tears in her eyes. "Stop pretending to be good!"

"Really, you don't know," Zhao Yunlan slowly enjoyed the last cigarette in his hand. "In fact, you don't know: I don't even bother to wash my socks. I buy seven or eight pairs. After I'm done, I pick them up and and arrange them according to the horridness of the smell. Then I randomly stuff them into laundry bags. Slowly, they all disappear. It was only after Shen Wei moved in that I could wear a complete pair of socks."

As he spoke, a smile tugged at his lips, painting an image of tenderness. "Sometimes I don't understand how he can stand me. You also probably can't come up with scenes where he's nice to me. Go back to your clan, and whenever you want to return, I'll welcome you with open arms. My only condition is that we speak of anything except this, yeah? People better than me walk the streets everyday, surely you can find someone better than me."

Zhao Yunlan crushed the cigarette under his foot, standing up tall. He ruffled Zhu Hong's hair with some force. "I'm a useless piece of crap, why would you want to be with me. Come, goddess, I'll give you a way to relieve your anger another day, to call me a jerk. Just say you look down on me, that you don't want me, okay?"

Zhu Hong's tears finally couldn't be held in, and flowed down her cheeks in a rush. She choked out, "Hmph, asshole. Only a ghost would look up to you, only a ghost would want you."

Zhao Yunlan pondered for a moment and realised her words had a meaning; like blessing him and Shen Wei. He thus laughed. "You're right, only a ghost would."

After he finished, he walked onto a bridge, flipping nimbly off it into a boat, scaring the ghost inside. He patted its shoulder. "Hey, brother, can you tell me how to get to the sealed land of disrespect?"

The ghost was pale and trembling. It didn't speak a word, and instead leaped off the boat into the water, not even making a splash.

Zhao Yunlan realised only one of his sentences had caused a ghost to dive into water. He rubbed his nose, sitting on the wavering boat to ponder.

Zhao Yunlan watched the calm waves beneath the boat, and decided to put Shen Wei's coat on the boat.

A curious ghost popped out from under the water, attempting to touch it. Zhao Yunlan didn't even turn his head. "You dare to touch the Ghost Slayer's clothes?"

The ghost seemed to be terrified, disappearing under the waters again.

Zhao Yunlan rolled up his pants and shirts, diving into the water himself, to the shout of a faraway woman and cat, at the same time scaring away a bunch of ghosts underwater.

It was so cold, like someone dipped the whole place into a freezer. Zhao Yunlan's watch flickered gently. He planned to use all his energy to swim, before going up for breaths. Unexpectedly, the necklace around his neck glowed, and he found himself able to breathe underwater.

"This is a bit too much, isn't it?" Zhao Yunlan held the mythical water dragon pearl in his hands, a thankful sigh escaping his lips. He gathered his courage and dived deeper.

After a while, the faint glow from the boat disappeared, and above him was nothing but black, mirroring the waters below him.

The ghosts around him gradually disappeared, and it seemed even the water stopped moving.

With no light, no sound, no nothing, Zhao Yunlan found his heart to be extremely loud, to the point where even as he covered his ears, he could still hear it, like the beat of drums.

After a while, even the glow from his watch disappeared. His surroundings were nothing but a wash of ebony. After being immersed in the darkness for a while, Zhao Yunlan had a thought: it felt like his surroundings were not without light, but that he had gone blind once more.

Chapter 86: The Paper-white Face Of The Young Ghost King Reflected All Of His Desires, Saying Frankly, "Good-looking. I want to hold you."

translator's note: some of you guys may hate me for this, but I have not translated the parts where Zhao Yunlan and Shen Wei weren't in for 86. A summary of those parts would be: Chu Shuzhi returned to Dragon City, found Guo Changcheng doing charity work. Da Qing and Zhu Hong return, and Wang Zheng reveals that Shen Wei was the Ghost Slayer. They also tell Chu Shuzhi and Guo Changcheng that Zhao Yunlan jumped into the water. It settles in for Chu Shuzhi a few moments later, and he's horrified because of all the tricks he played on Shen Wei.

I may translate the whole of 86 when I have time, but for now, that's all I can do.

*Peace,
Haely :)*

Zhao Yunlan had lost all sense of time. Though he was trapped in darkness, it was completely different from when he had been in the tree.

It felt like he was being squeezed together, the feeling of water pressure pressing against his chest; the deeper it went the more obvious it was. He didn't even dare to move his head, and he felt that even a slight tilt of his head would cause him to faint. His heart felt like it was going to leap out of his chest, and his heartbeat was so loud to the point he could not bear it.

It was then, he saw a faint light.

It was dimmer than that of a firefly, but because Zhao Yunlan had become used to darkness, he had to cover his eyes. Slowly, he swam in the direction of the light, mesmerised.

It was a huge ancient tree. The branches were not visible at first sight. It was almost 100 meters wide, but it was a dead tree. There were no leaves on it. Only the branches of the dead knots were rough

Zhao Yunlan is shocked. Is this the Virtue Tree?

He walked down nearly a kilometer and finally saw the roots of the ancient tree. Zhao Yunlan's feet found the land after a long time. He first walked around the Virtue Tree on one side. Stone monument, through the faint glow of ancient tree, Zhao Yunlan saw the things engraved on it.

Words he had never seen before, but somehow recognised -- "The land of the emperor, the town of the unliving, the disrespected land."

"Nüwa..." Zhao Yunlan didn't know why, but he called out this name.

His voice was like the ripples of water, gently cleaving apart the waves, his breath like the sound a *qin* made, triggering the flickering darkness. Zhao Yunlan didn't realise, instead reaching out his hand. When his fingertips brushed the stone, white light and static filled his head. He momentarily couldn't see, but it felt like he had fallen through time, into the body of a lady with the tail of a snake.

The unfamiliar, yet familiar voice spoke. "Kunlun, what if Shennong was wrong? What if we were all wrong?"

Shennong was wrong? What was Shennong wrong about?

The voice spoke again. "But we cannot turn back."

Wait!

The lady seemed to have tears in her eyes. She ran toward him with her arms outstretched, as if wanting an embrace. Zhao Yunlan opened his arms, but before he could even touch her, Nüwa was like the fragmented pieces in space, and shattered into thousands of pieces. in front of him.

"No..." Zhao Yunlan accidentally opened his mouth, but no words came out.

Then, time reversed. Zhao Yunlan realised he had returned to a very long time ago, and for a moment, he could not tell if he was Kunlun or some mortal from five thousand years later, immersed in the manipulation of time.

He felt like he guarded the Virtue Tree everyday, lying on a slab of cobblestone, if he had nothing to do he would stare at the tree and daze. He dazed the whole day away sometimes.

After that, he didn't know when, but a handsome yet peculiar boy would follow after him anywhere, everyday, like a tail.

Lord Kunlun ignored him at first, but finally couldn't hold it in. "We're already in your territory, why are you still following me around?"

The teenager said, his expression open, "I like you."

Lord Kunlun had always been called impolite by everyone. For once, he had the chance to call someone other than himself impolite. Thus, he took the opportunity, and with furrowed brows, "scolded", "Impolite."

The young ghost king looked at him in bewilderment, not understanding where he was impolite.

The paper-white face of the young ghost king reflected all of his desires, saying frankly, "Good-looking. I want to hold you."

Lord Kunlun sneaked a glance at this bold little ghost king, not feeling harassed, but rather interesting. He teased, "You don't know how to pursue; I despise you."

While the young ghost king didn't understand why he was being despised, he felt like what Lord Kunlun said made sense, and so he lowered his head in shame.

Lord Kunlun waved his hand. "Come here, I'll teach you unconventional little thing some morals."

Chapter 87: Those Of The Ghost Tribe Were Not Living Beings, But In That Suspended Moment, He Thought He Heard His Non-existent Heartbeat.

When the floods first settled, it was the holy Shennong that graced the earth to try to save the common people. He disguised himself and preached amongst the people. Lord Kunlun had listened to a bit while he was in the crowd, and as he told the young ghost king all he remembered, but he made up most of what he didn't remember. It was to kill time for Lord Kunlun, but the confused young ghost king didn't dare miss a word, treating Lord Kunlun's every bullshit sentence like gold.

Over time, in such a despair-filled place, they had somehow starting depending on each other.

The teenager's infatuation toward Lord Kunlun didn't fade, yet he knew embarrassment. He knew that if he parroted off of Lord Kunlun it wouldn't be good, and so he never said them, instead finding many ways each day to make Lord Kunlun happy.

It was a pity that what he could make, or pull tricks off with, were very limited. The disrespected lands weren't fun. Fauna didn't survive, and so what they could only do to pass time were to catch two low-level beasts and pit them against each other, watching them tear each other apart, until one finally ate the other.

But the young ghost king didn't like this, so Lord Kunlun would naturally probably not like it either.

So the young ghost king spent all his effort and gathered the teeth of thirty-six beasts, using his own hair to tie them together into a necklace, gifting it to Lord Kunlun.

It was just... when Lord Kunlun received the necklace, his expression was odd, even odder than the necklace. He felt like his teeth hurt, but he still suppressed his feelings, forcing out a smile, thanking the young ghost king with gritted teeth.

The young ghost king realised from this that he didn't like the necklace--Lord Kunlun hadn't worn it even once, and everytime he mentioned it Lord Kunlun would avoid the topic.

But he really couldn't think of anything else. One day, when the young ghost king was sitting on the branch of the Virtue Tree, he suddenly said, "There's a type of flower. It looks like a bell. It comes in all colours. When one gets close enough to smell it, it is very fragrant."

Lord Kunlun turned his head to look at him. "En?"

The youth's expression was full of longing. "It's very pretty. If I make a necklace from it, would you like it?"

Lord Kunlun was silent for a while, before smiling. "You want to make me happy, so you can leave this place, right?"

The youth paused, before hastily shaking his head.

Lord Kunlun teased, "Then what is it for? I guard this place so that not one of you can leave. Not even one."

For... the young ghost king stared at him, welcoming Lord Kunlun's steady gaze. He wanted to speak, yet he didn't know what to say. Emotions swirled in him, but he could not find a suitable statement to speak up with.

He only thought that those words sounded too rough, and rough words were not necessarily able to express his feelings.

The ghost king was unable to speak up, and sharp claws protruded from his hands, a gloomy frown taking over his face.

Lord Kunlun burst out laughing, gently hooking his lower jaw, bringing the boy over and delivering a kiss to his clean and ethereal forehead.

The young ghost king froze dazedly for a second. The deadly energy radiating from him had disappeared at a point in time, and his face was flushed red; all the way to his jawline and the tips of his ears. He stood up. It felt like he was drunk, even his legs were soft as jelly. He fell from the branch of the Virtue Tree.

The boy, as one of the ghost tribe -- even if he was an abomination of the ghost tribe -- what he saw every day, were only what the low-level ghosts desired or hoped for. He had never experienced what it was like to be kissed. This was his first time, and it felt like he was covered in a cloak of hot air, gently floating in mid-air.

Even the forgetful waters didn't give him this sensation of hovering above ground.

The young ghost king wordlessly ran into the seal, jumping straight into the disrespectful lands, to not be seen for decades.

When the young ghost king once again appeared before Lord Kunlun, he seemed to have matured, his body growing leaner and longer. He was about to be as tall as Lord Kunlun, the

lines of a youthful and naive boy hardening into sculpted lines. Other than the slight change of his eyebrows, he looked identical to when they first met.

He carefully held a sphere of golden light in his hands, and offered it to Lord Kunlun.

“This is...”

“This is your soul flame on your left shoulder. It was scattered around the seal. It took me fifty years to collect them all.” The young ghost king outstretched his cupped palms carefully, reluctantly handing the orb over. “For you.”

The smile on Lord Kunlun’s lips slowly faded. After a while, he faced the boy and asked, “And what do you want in return?”

“The...” The youth seemed to pause, unable to convey his thoughts. Finally, he pointed at his own forehead. “The... Can you do it again?”

Lord Kunlun assessed the youth in front of him, who started shifting around nervously. Suddenly, Lord Kunlun reached out and held the young ghost king’s lower jaw. This time, he very gently kissed the lips of the youth, folding his hands together lightly, letting the young ghost king hold his soul flame in his grasp.

Lord Kunlun seemed to ponder for a long while, before sighing. “I am rich with the wonders of the world. When you think of it, they are nothing but a few running creeks and lush mountains -- nothing to be awed over. Out of everything I have, the only thing worth something is my sincere heart. You want it? Take it.”

In that moment, the youth’s expression instantly brightened. He wasn’t aware that what he had been unable to express could have been a term called “sincere heart”. Merely two words, yet could make a person never recover.

“And this, if you like it, keep it,” Lord Kunlun patted the youth’s palm. “My heart’s blood has formed the Guardian Lamp’s wick, my body the lamp holder. Only my consciousness is here, so wanting it back would be of no use to me. The rib I gave you last time, do you still have it?”

The youth hurriedly nodded.

“Take it out for me to see.”

The boy peeled apart the layers of clothes on him that made him seem like a caveman, taking out the rib.

"I'm made from Kunlun Mountain," Lord Kunlun lightly touched the rib. "Just a shake could change the weather.

As he spoke, he made a complicated gesture with his fingers, and the rib glowed golden. Following Lord Kunlun's fingers, it inserted itself into the boy's forehead. That moment, the youth felt that he had heard the sound of the swell of the sea and the hundred thousands of mountains.

He was speechless. He could see every mountain river, rushing, and rippling.

Lord Kunlun's voice, though not heavy or sounding, was extremely penetrating: "From now on, the hundred thousands of mountains will listen to you. Although you cannot rid yourself of your ghost tribe bloodline, at least now half a fairy and half ghost, you can freely travel to the Three Realms in the future. I will no longer care about you."

The youth interrupted him. "I won't leave!"

After a while, he added in a polite manner: "You are here, I do not want to go anywhere."

"I won't stay longer," Lord Kunlun said, turned his head and looked at the water that I couldn't see at the top of the river. "I am just a god, I can't walk, I haven't stayed for a long time. I suddenly felt my days." It's coming soon."

The young ghost king hurriedly asked, "Where are you going? Where are you going?"

"Don't go anywhere, I am going to die," Kunlun said calmly.

"Impossible, how can a god die?"

"A god can die. Pangu, Fuxi, Nuwa, Shennong, aren't they all dead?" Lord Kunlun said, "Now it's my turn."

After listening, the youth's expression turned ferocious. "If there wasn't the seal, if you hadn't helped Nüwa seal the four pillars, if the Guardian Lamp wasn't your body, you wouldn't need to die, right? Then I'll chop off this tree, I'll kill this goddamned tree!"

The young ghost king, at times, was like a small, fluffy-haired wolf pup; If one raises their hand and smoothes his hair, he will roll on the ground. However, he will always have fangs in his mouth--not notice for a moment and it will slide out.

Lord Kunlun had long gotten used to it, and patted his head, murmuring, "To not die, and live forever... a stone is immortal, but in the end it is only a stone. Shennong said to not die or to vanish is to not be a god. I used to think it was a load of bullshit, but now I slightly understand."

The ghost king slapped his hand away, not wanting to know what he understood. "You dare?!"

Lord Kunlun shifted his hand, and saw that his hand was suddenly translucent. The simmering youth was taken aback, and immediately grabbed his hand, flipping it around and over as if to ascertain that Lord Kunlun still existed. He asked, again, "What if I cut down the Virtue Tree?"

Lord Kunlun laughed. "You've inherited the authority to do basically anything. You can destroy the forbidden lands; what would the Virtue Tree be?"

The ghost king said, "Then I can cut down this tree, destroy this lady's goddamned rock!"

Lord Kunlun laughed bitterly. "Yes, of course, but I would likely die faster."

"I can..." The ghost king hesitated slightly, before saying mercilessly, "I can kill everyone in the world, slaughter every living being, stop the mountains from turning green, the waters from flowing, scatter corpses everywhere, leave no humans for miles and miles."

Lord Kunlun raised an eyebrow. "Wow, that powerful?"

The ghost king squeezed his hand. "You can't die. I can do anything, will do anything!"

"Shennong was correct again," Lord Kunlun's expression icy, his voice cold. "We should have killed you earlier."

The youth stubbornly stared at him.

Yet, Lord Kunlun suddenly laughed, gentle as the first thawing during the end of the winter. "From when Shennong borrowed my shoulder's flame... No, from the war of gods and ghosts, Nüwa's creation of humans, even from Pangu opening the world, this was destined; destined that at this time, at this place, I would die. Even if you made the heavens close up again, you would only make me die without reason, and not stop anything."

"You don't understand." The beautiful god, with a gentle and patient voice he rarely used, said, "The acclaimed fate, it's not a thousand paths with the same outcome, and there's nothing in the dark binding you, but at a certain time, you know that there are many paths you can choose, but you will only ever choose that one path. These things, I didn't understand when I was a child. When you are older, you will understand."

The young ghost king finally found himself with no words to retaliate. For the first time, he realised how useless he was. All he was capable of was killing, destroying, and fighting. He really could end all life on the world, dead or alive.

But what use would that be?

He still wouldn't be able to save his most loved person.

Lord Kunlun watched the eyebrows of the wrathful youth slowly press closer to his eyes. After all, he hadn't learnt what it felt like to bottle up feelings of happiness, sadness, and grief. After a moment of dazed staring, he burst out in tears.

Lord Kunlun seemed to watch him with a mix of love and pity, thinking to himself that he wouldn't see the little beauty grow into an adult beauty.

A blink of an eye, and five thousand years would pass.

Zhao Yunlan jolted back from the rock as if he had been electrocuted, suddenly sensing a person behind him. The person laughed, and Zhao Yunlan had barely turned before he drew the Guardian whip, moving back two steps, pressing his back against the rock and facing the ghost face ten steps away.

The ghost face looked at him, swaying his head slightly, a smile revealed on the fake ghost face. "I've heard that that contains all of Nüwa's memories. What did you see?"

Zhao Yunlan laughed coldly, his feelings not warming. With a harsh tone, he spat, "Why should I tell you?"

Ghost face imitated Zhao Yunlan in touching the rock, saying, "Five thousand years ago, he and I were clearly twin ghost kings, yet Lord Kunlun held him in favour. Five thousand years later, one of us is trapped inside, the other is outside. One in the prison, one the prisoner."

The upturned lips on the ghost mask curved downwards, and he turned, lowering his voice, pausing after every word. "The seal's about to break, and that's the only reason why I can walk in and out freely--in the end, everything will die. You, Lord Kunlun, if my foolish brother hadn't suddenly played his cards, and preserved your spirit, stuffing it into the reincarnation wheel to turn you into a mortal, you would have long been gone like all the gods in the world. Is Shennong a fool? No forcefully taken thing can be long, and if it is long it will only die."

As he spoke, his ice-cold fingers traced Zhao Yunlan's cheekbones, sighing. "But 'death' was lit by your soul flame, and thus made us... not living, not dead creatures. Is this not a fault in yin and yang?"

Zhao Yunlan scrunched up his eyebrows. What exactly happened to his soul flame? He had heard many versions so far, and wasn't sure which was correct.

So, he asked, "Was my soul flame not taken by Shennong? How did it appear in the forbidden lands, and why say 'death' was lit by my soul flame?"

The ghost face suddenly blanked, his mask seeming to go fully white for a second, as if not understanding what Zhao Yunlan was asking, before rocking back and forth with peals of laughter. "Hahahahaha... and how innocent I thought he, how saintly... really..."

His voice suddenly stopped - because the soul of a knife cleaved through the air, the force able to split his whole person into two halves of hostility, The ghost face quickly dodged, and the remaining wind forced Zhao Yunlan to step backwards.

Zhao Yunlan said, "Shen Wei?"

Shen Wei raised his hand to grab him. "To come alone to this kind of place, you must be mad!"

But before he was able to touch Zhao Yunlan, the ghost face grabbed onto Shen Wei's arm and warped into black mist, slamming it into Zhao Yunlan's grasp, effectively stopping the whip in his hand.

After that, the black mist enveloped Zhao Yunlan, and cackles erupted from his lips.

The next moment, his laughter abruptly stopped, and the black mist reformed to become the ghost face. There was no one there anymore.

The ghost face paused, seeming to be shocked as well, murmuring, "Someone took him away, who?"

Guardian Chapter 88: Zhao Yunlan was almost stunned as he listened...Shen Wei and Shennong...how did they become irreconcilable?

At that time Zhao Yunlan felt as if someone covered his head with a sack. As soon as he took it off, he found that he had teleported.

The scene in front of his eyes first turned black and then white. When he opened his eyes he found himself in a place he did not recognize...at least it wasn't below Wang Chuan (lit: stream of forgettance basically one of the rivers in lore that you cross to reach the next life). He agitatedly fidgeted with his whip and looked around. Suddenly, in the vast whiteness that almost rendered him blind, he saw the back of a lonely figure walking in the far distance in front of him.

Zhao Yunlan was tall with long legs and was able to catch up quickly. He clearly saw that the silhouette was a small old man.

Even if the old man stood up straight, he would only probably come up to Zhao Yunlan's chest. His back was bent like a cooked shrimp and he carried a large basket that was commonly used by the people in the Yunnan Guizhou province for moving. When Zhao Yunlan looked into the basket, he found that it was empty. Although there was nothing inside, the old man seemed as though he was carrying something that weighed several hundreds of kilograms, weighing him down to a point where he couldn't even lift his head. He could only face the ground with his back to the sky and struggle to walk forwards.

Zhao Yunlan reached out, lifted the big basket, and muttered: "Is it that heavy?"

The old man finally stopped walking and wiped off a forehead of trailing sweat. When he lifted his head, he revealed a weathered and tanned face, looking like the old man carrying water in the famous oil painting "Father". He looked at Zhao Yunlan and smiled tiredly: "Come. Come with me."

"Wait. Where is this? Who are you?" Zhao Yunlan furrowed his eyebrows and asked.

The old man didn't reply, just lowered his head again and kept walking forward like an old ox pulling a plow. His shoulders sunk down from the weight of the empty basket and a pair of shriveled and protruding collarbones were revealed at his neckline.

"It's you who brought me here? Ai, what is all this? I finally cornered my wife and didn't even get a chance to say a word before you cruelly interrupted."

The old man listened to his complaints with a faint smile, neither explaining nor answering.

Zhao Yunlan continued to ask: "Where are you bringing me? What are you carrying?"

The old man suddenly hummed a phrase following the pace of his footsteps: "suppress the soul of the living, calm the heart of the dead, redeem the sins of those not yet dead, return after reincarnation—"

He dragged out his voice. Using a melodic, longing tone, he uttered the words one by one. No matter how many times he spoke, he only said this phrase. The sound was deep and rolling, along with these bizarre words it was reminiscent of funerals in the past where flag-bearing people would scatter paper money while they walk, repeating the same "this family grants 120 yuan" sentence as they follow the coffin.

Zhao Yunlan saw that he couldn't get an answer from this man and so stopped asking. The whip in his hand turned into the black paper with red letters that was the Guardian Order and he rolled it into the shape of a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth to stave off his craving. He listened to the old man's voice as he silently calculated his next steps.

He suddenly had a sort of feeling as if he was walking on a road towards the heavens.

Wait...road to the heavens...isn't that road on Buzhou Mountain? Didn't Buzhou Mountain already collapse?

As he thought of this, Zhao Yunlan's footsteps abruptly stopped. A sound of a sigh came out of some unknown location in the air. As if he suddenly was reminded of something, he stared at the old man's figure closely and blurted out: "Could you be Shennong?"

The old man's footsteps stopped yet again, he turned his head slowly and wordlessly looked at him.

The muscles on Zhao Yunlan's body immediately became tense.

Ever since he determined that the so-called "memories" in Da Shenmu (the name of the tree "big godly wood") was fake, there has been a kind of suspicion in his heart—Mount Kunlun wasn't a place where just anyone can climb up, not to say the people who can alter the Da Shenmu can be counted on one hand. Later Zhao Yunlan reflected on that memory countless times, the section about the soul fire on his left shoulder was very vague and the section about Buzhou Mountain was rigid and abnormal.

Who was it that was lying to him?

In this way, Shennong seemed to be the most suspicious. In that memory, Shennong always appeared with a type of proper and indifferent attitude. At first glance, Shennong seemed to be very righteous, but after careful thinking, it didn't seem right.

The memory was a complete story. If any one of the people who appeared in the memory got removed, there would be a different ending. In other words, their every word and movement were connected to various causes and consequences, with the exception of Shennong—even if the story didn't have Shennong, the beginning and ending of the story would be the same, nothing would be affected.

Later, he met Shennong Bowl who was attached to his father, heard Gui Mian (lit: ghost face/mask aka yezun in the drama) seemingly accidentally say the sentence "Shennong borrowed your soul fire", all of which seemed to confirm his suspicions.

Additionally in the stone at the Big Seal, Nuwa's seemingly right but evidently false statement: "Shennong is wrong" again stimulated Zhao Yunlan's nerves.

Zhao Yunlan clenched his fist: "So the one who messed with the Da Shenmu, is it you or not?"

The old man didn't respond, his face revealed a sense of worry. In that moment, Zhao Yunlan felt that he heard the wind of Buzhou.

As his voice fell, the snow-white world suddenly fell apart and a strong piercing light appeared. Zhao Yunlan hurriedly covered his eyes, only lowering them tentatively and slowly a long while

later. Through his eyes that were flowing with tears from the stimulation, he saw that he had returned to the ordinary world.

Zhao Yunlan looked at his surroundings and was stunned for a moment. An incredibly weird feeling of familiarity and strangeness suddenly rose in his heart.

He didn't realize why for a long time until he saw the ice cream store on the street corner.

Zhao Yunlan's eyes opened wide—this place was near his home, only that the ice cream store across the street had long gone bankrupt, five or six years before it had already become a hot pot restaurant.

For a while, he was a little confused and paused in place until finally he walked over in big strides. He used what little change he had and bought a bowl of shaved ice. Like a fool (sha bi), he stood within a group of young girls, leaned against a window, stared at the big "Year 2002" displayed on the calendar hanging on the wall of a shop, and expressionlessly used a sort of very bitter method of eating to chew the shaved ice with a "ka zhi" sound.

It looked like he was there to collect fees and smash the shop.

Zhao Yunlan felt that he was either dreaming or watching a bad movie where the scenes kept switching, in one moment it's on the sky and the next it's on the ground. He was finally able to go back to the ordinary world only to find himself landed 11 years earlier.

At the moment when he's eaten half of the shaved ice, he suddenly glimpsed a person. He immediately sat up straight, and, like a fox, extended his neck to look out from the ice cream shop window. Because the image of a "fierce handsome man eating shaved ice" was so eye-catching, several girls couldn't stop looking at him and thus, uncontrollably followed his gaze, extended their necks, and looked outside.

This resulted in forming a basketball team of meerkats.

Zhao Yunlan saw a familiar car drive out of the little neighborhood that his house was in—the old car that had carried countless memories of his childhood that was ultimately mercilessly replaced by his dad!

Zhao Yunlan immediately threw away the food that he didn't finish and rushed out with a speed as if he was trying to catch a cheater in the act. He flagged down a taxi along the road, pulled out a tattered work permit, and flashed the police badge in front of the taxi driver: "Please tail that car in front for me!"

The taxi driver didn't expect that he would be able to pull a 007 in this lifetime and immediately became excited. He stepped down on the gas and the car kicked back and then shot out,

turning the taxi into an F1. The acceleration flattened Zhao Yunlan against the front passenger seat.

Zhao Yunlan's dad drove all the way to the antiquated street. If he went in any more he would reach the little alley full of shops which no motor vehicles were allowed to enter. From about 100 meters away, Zhao Yunlan saw his dad park the car against the roadside, walking in sporting big paparazzi repealing sunglasses that celebrities wear.

"Shifu (master), stop here, stop here!" Zhao Yunlan's eyes were glued to his dad's back. He hurriedly grabbed his wallet but just as he was about to pay, the taxi driver sternly refused.

Zhao Yunlan: "Hurry up and take it, don't waste time...I'm going to lose track of the person."

The taxi driver gave a heroic salute and then gave Zhao Yunlan a strong handshake. With force, he said: "Comrade, go. I won't take your money...I want to serve the people!"

Zhao Yunlan: "..."

After being speechless for a second, he decided not to be polite anymore, jumped off the car, and ran away.

The antiquated street from 11 years ago wasn't as standardized as it was now. In the narrow road, stalls were everywhere: from jewelry and jade to antiques and paintings, the alley contained all sorts of things. As long as it looked lively, it didn't matter if the items were real or fake. Thus, the road seemed to become narrower and was incredibly not conducive to trailing a person.

Zhao Yunlan dry swallowed a concealed piece of yellow talisman. The talisman was drawn by Chu Shuzhi. Chu Shuzhi was so poor that all he had left was self-confidence, and he thought of himself as incredibly cool. He claimed that this talisman would be more than effective even if it was to be used to investigate the romantic relationships of the great ancient gods.

Even though Zhao Yunlan thinks he's full of bullshit, he couldn't help but put his hopes on the talisman. However, he didn't dare follow too closely.

As such, he lost his dad as soon as he turned the corner.

Zhao Yunlan carefully poked his head out at the door of each store but still didn't see him. His gaze landed on the big banyan tree that connected with the netherworld. He knew that the person he was following was not his pompous father but a scum who dared to use the body of a living person to go down to Huang Quan (Basically where souls cross over, lit: yellow spring).

Zhao Yunlan took a deep breath. This would be his second time going down Huang Quan today. In his heart he wished he could beat up that broken bowl.

There was sense in Shen Wei's recommendation that he leave as quickly as possible. It definitely wasn't a great experience for a living person to walk the Huang Quan road. Even for a person like Zhao Yunlan who dared to walk downstairs barefoot in the cold winter months, the bone penetrating chill can still be clearly felt on this road.

"Father Zhao" waited on Huang Quan road for a bit. He consistently rubbed his hands and his brows continually became more furrowed. It seemed as though he was waiting for someone.

Huang Quan road is thin and narrow and the people and ghosts on it could be seen clearly. Zhao Yunlan didn't dare to reveal himself, so he could only suffer through crouching in the big banyan tree, feeling as though he was trapped between the two worlds of yin and yang.

Just as he thought he would become paralyzed from crouching, a familiar person suddenly walked over from the other side of Hang Quan road. That person was very eye catching; everywhere he went he seemed to leave behind a sense of disaster (idiom: 寸鬼不留 changed from 寸草不留...basically a sense of no ghost is spared), even the ghosts who calmly gamble their lives couldn't help but to lower their heads and back away, giving an effect of Moses parting the sea.

At a glance, Zhao Yunlan's mood immediately became conflicted. Anyone who found out that their own "wife" already met their father-in-law eleven years ago would probably be unable to restrain themselves from having this feeling.

Shen Wei wore the long cloak of the Ghost Slayer and didn't show his face. He walked up to five paces away from Zhao Yunlan's dad and stopped without uttering a word. The chill emanating from his body was even more unbearable than the desolate Huang Quan.

Zhao Yunlan's dad also stopped walking and rubbing his hands. The two stood silently stood there in a suppressed and heavy atmosphere.

After a while, Zhao Yunlan's dad opened his mouth and said: "The evening paper that Yunlan brought home has Your Honor's scent."

Shen Wei didn't explain, only emitted a quiet, cold laugh.

Zhao Yunlan had never heard this kind of cold laugh from Shen Wei before. In that instant, he suspected that the person within the black cloak wasn't Shen Wei at all but the enigmatic Gui Mian.

Although a powerful soul had taken over father Zhao's body, the body is still made of flesh. Not long after he was on Huang Quan road, the cold made his lips turn pale and purple. On closer inspection, they were even gently trembling. However, his voice did not falter at all: "Don't forget what you promised when you insisted on sending Kunlun's soul into the reincarnation cycle all those years ago."

“Huh?” Shen Wei finally slowly opened his mouth. “I only looked at him from very far away. When he approached I hid. Even if this immortal can’t believe my character and worry that I will not follow my word, do you also not trust the valuable contract with Shennong?”

His tone sounded as warm and polite as ever, but Zhao Yunlan was used to listening to his words and his tone. He sensitively picked up on a sense of belittlement and an indescribable sarcasm from this short sentence.

Zhao Yunlan’s dad furrowed his eyebrows: “But what is going on with The Great Seal? Why would the Houtu Great Seal become loose?”

This time, Shen Wei was silent for a while and then his voice became slightly lower: “If this Immortal still remembers, the Fuxi Great Seal was only a few hundred years old when it was broken by the sky pillar. You can say it was destroyed and then erected again. Since Nuwa’s fall, the newly established Houtu Great Seal already lasted for who knows how many thousands of years. Water droplets can erode stone...the Great Seal loosening under our eyes is something no one can prevent. Even I am helpless.”

“The Houtu Great Seal is created by Nuwa’s sacrifice and it is also from Kunlun’s painstaking effort. Of course I’m not implying you did something you shouldn’t to it, but if the Great Seal completely collapses, what do you plan to do?”

“Yes,” Shen Wei paused and then lightly continued, “what do I plan to do? I am very slow-witted and only now I am finally understanding what the immortals meant by ‘no death, no extinction, no godhood.’ In fact, I wasn’t originally meant to be born from the sky and raised by the earth, or be a God respected by the people.”

“Don’t think that Shennong’s agreement can’t restrain you on the day the Great Seal breaks. If my son...”

Father Zhao’s voice got to this point and then suddenly came to an unnatural stop, as though it was a movie that had its speakers break down halfway. He opened his mouth but no sound came out.

Shen Wei’s face was hidden behind a black fog but Zhao Yunlan could sense that he was smiling.

He heard him slowly say: “Son? Immortal you must be too immersed in the play. If ‘Ling Lang’ (honorific for son of the other party aka ZYL) knew that you are giving up your role of an Immortal to attach yourself to not just any mortal but his dad’s body, do you think he would acknowledge you or not?”

Father Zhao’s throat emitted a cackling sound. He used both hands to clasp his throat and his eyes were full of anger but he couldn’t say a single word.

Shen Wei looked at him calmly for a bit. Finally, he laughed lightly and waved his hand. As though someone punched him, Zhao Yunlan's dad backed up many steps before steadying himself: "You..."

Shen Wei folded his hands into his long sleeves and nodded his head slightly: "So Immortal please be careful about what you say. Some things everyone know but are better left unsaid. What do you think? The sage Shennong is a noble character of high prestige, of course I also highly respect him. But respect is respect, if he was still alive, I would still be unable to reconcile with him. I still don't think much of the three ancients of the past. This Immortal is born as Shennong's treasured bowl...I'm afraid that you haven't cultivated the same level of power as him yet?"

Father Zhao's whole body was shaking but Shen Wei only continued indifferently: "I don't want to do anything disgraceful either. I'm willing to peacefully talk sense with you. Hopefully Immortal you can also conduct yourself well, don't stretch your reach too far, manage too wide—if there is nothing else, I won't see you off."

When he finished speaking, he didn't even spare a glance at Zhao Yunlan's dad. He turned and walked down Wang Chuan (lit again: stream of forgettance), further into the depth of Huang Quan.

Zhao Yunlan was almost stunned as he listened...Shen Wei and Shennong...how did they become irreconcilable?

No wonder that day Shennong Bowl ran away before he could clearly say what he wanted to say. Shen Wei was there so he didn't dare say it!

How did his gentle, graceful, easy to bully lover become a commanding terrorist in front of his cheap dad?

What was going on with Shennong's valuable contract?

Right...if Shennong was the one who borrowed the soul fire in his left shoulder, if the things that happened in the Boulder of the Great Seal were true, then how did the ghost tribe get ahold of the soul fire after?

What happened in the middle?

If the memory within the Da Shenmu (lit again: Great Godly Tree) was manipulated by Shennong, what was he trying to hide?

Seeing that Father Zhao had almost come up, Zhao Yunlan hurriedly climbed up the banyan tree and hid amongst its leafy branches. He only stuck out his head once Father Zhao was far away.

He went back down to Huang Quan and stared at the direction where Shen Wei disappeared off to. He pondered for a long time and still felt that things weren't true. He was becoming used to being lied to to the point where he was almost developing a persecutory delusion, suspecting that nothing was real.

At this time, Zhao Yunlan suddenly got a flash of inspiration and thought of the "Secret Ancient Records" rolled up in his arms. He hurriedly took it out to look at it only to see that the book had already become blank. The pages within and the cover were all empty; the words disappeared without a trace and left nothing behind.

Zhao Yunlan's gaze became heavy—eleven years ago, which was to say 2002, was also the fabled "Renwu" year (60 year cycle...so 1942, 2002, 2062).

If the scenes he saw today were true, then if he were to go to the store at the end of the Ghost City and buy the "Secret Ancient Records" would that be the book that appeared at No. 4 Bright Ave?

Guardian Chapter 89: Shen Wei only now realized that he'd been fooled. "So...you're ok?"

So what would happen if he didn't buy that damn book then? What if he just threw this roll of white paper directly into the water of Wang Chuan?

Zhao Yunlan thought of this and so he did it. With a lift of his hand he threw the white roll of paper into Wang Chuan with a "gu dong" sound. After a splash it slowly sank down. He waited for a while and yet nobody came to give him a fee for littering.

Zhao Yunlan turned his head and walked towards the banyan tree.

He decided to first go buy a pack of cigarettes to wash out his lungs and then book a room at a hotel, eat a good meal, and sleep. After that he will once again go stalk Shen Wei and have him come up with an idea to send him back...Zhao Yunlan's footsteps suddenly stopped.

Can he affirm that the Shen Wei he just saw was actually Shen Wei?

Maybe that's why "intelligence" and "wisdom" were two completely different concepts. At the time Zhao Yunlan threw the book, he actually chose the right response—some things aren't supposed to be investigated, when you're supposed to be confused you should stay confused.

However, in that moment when he turned around, he couldn't control his own thoughts. When he catches tiny strands of information, he couldn't help but to want to string them together. This had almost become an instinct and he did it without thinking.

Zhao Yunlan's pace slowed down subconsciously. He thought, if he really just left things behind here and went back to eleven years later...

If it were all fake then there would be no issues. He would need to ponder on who created such an environment and made him hear such words that he couldn't make heads or tails of.

But if we were to assume that the things that happened here were all real, then if he didn't buy that book home, eleven years later the SID would not have "Secret Ancient Records" and he would also be unable to find those secret stories that allowed him to infer that Nuwa created people and then became Houtu Great Seal etcetera. Not to mention in order to stay safe, he might have never even gone up to Kunlun Mountain. He wouldn't have known where the Brush of Merits landed, wouldn't go to look at what's inside the Dashen Mu (Godly Tree), and the following would never have happened.

In that way, he might never even have gone down Huang Quan. Even if he came back here by chance, he would not have known that his dad's body was taken over by Shennong Bowl. He may have gone home to look at his mother, not caring at all what his dad was doing. Of course he wouldn't have secretly flagged a taxi to follow him and wouldn't have squatted on Huang Quan road pondering the stupid question of whether he should buy a book—because that book didn't exist.

According to the famous Grandfather Paradox mentioned by garlic nosed Einstein, none of this would have happened unless he entered a parallel universe, in other words a completely different world.

Unless...

Zhao Yunlan stopped. He closed his eyes. In his ears all that was left was the murmuring sound of the water of Wang Chuan, the netherworld becoming as quiet as though it was an empty abyss. Zhao Yunlan suddenly thought of what he heard in Houtu Dafeng (Houtu Great Seal)—the words that seemed to come out of his own mouth: "Fate is but one moment...you can go to heaven or go down to the earth but you will only ever leave one path for yourself..."

His breathing gradually slowed down.

Zhao Yunlan obviously knew the thoughts in his own heart. Like crazy, he wanted to know whether Shen Wei and the medicine bowl that was inhabiting his dad's body really did go behind his back to meet and say those words eleven years ago; he wanted to know if Shen Wei really had a contract with Shennong that he didn't know about, if he had a side of him that's completely different from the gentlemanly appearance that he puts on.

Additionally...did Shen Wei really not know that the underworld had always been using him? If he knew, how could he completely not care? Or...could he have a plan already?

Half a minute later, Zhao Yunlan finally turned back around without saying a word. With a piece of essence-concealing leaf in his mouth, he took long strides towards the Ghost City.

The little owner of the general store had the appearance of a 7 or 8 year old girl. She didn't seem surprised to see him. When Zhao Yunlan asked for the "Secret Ancient Records", she merely lightly quoted him the price in the form of bank notes for the dead. Then she brought over a huge book used for bookkeeping and had him write his name down.

In a flash of white light, "Guardian Order Chief" and the year appeared behind the words "Zhao Yunlan".

This time, no one in Ghost City discovered that he was a living creature. Zhao Yunlan successfully walked away with the "Secret Ancient Records" in hand. He headed straight towards his own home, concealed his breath, flipped over the wall, and climbed into his bedroom through the double windows.

Neither Zhao Yunlan nor the Da Qing of eleven years ago were there. On the table there was only one computer and a pile of messy college English final exam review materials. Next to it was the word "bullshit" written in a wild scribble that was full of unique character.

Zhao Yunlan couldn't help but to gently touch that indecent word and laugh. He felt as though he was looking into a mirror reflection of his younger cocky and full-of-it self.

Then he turned and gently lifted the board on his bed—that was where he used to hide all his unorthodox books, cinnabar, yellow talisman paper, and tools.

Zhao Yunlan easily found the section meant for hiding books. For the sake of preventing the book from being too conspicuous, he used the same method that he used of hiding the other books. From his drawer he pulled out an expired calendar, pulled out a page from the middle, and agilely wrapped it around the cover of the "Secret Ancient Records". On the snow white cover he wrote the small words: "Nuwa created people, mended the sky..."

He originally meant to write "Nuwa created people, mended the sky, and then transformed her body into Houtu, Fuxi created the big seal using the eight trigrams, Shennong sacrificed himself to taste hundreds of herbs, Gong Gong the mystical dragon struck Buzhou in anger" and the other information that were useful to his future self on the book. Who would have thought he only managed to write a few words before a person's voice drifted in from the hallway corridor.

Zhao Yunlan hurriedly threw aside the book and closed the board, narrowly missing getting caught.

The ears of the person outside, however, were atypically sharp. A knock sounded on the door and he heard the voice of his mom from eleven years ago: "Little scoundrel, where are you in the house? Why are you making all that nonstop racket?"

Zhao Yunlan's throat moved but he didn't dare reply. The knocking from the person outside increased: "Zhao Yunlan?"

Zhao Yunlan had no choice but to pitch his voice thinly and say: "meow—"

"It's a cat?" The woman outside muttered, "I thought it doesn't come home until night time. Maybe it's pregnant? I've been saying that we should have brought it in for neutering."

Zhao Yunlan: "....."

He couldn't imagine how Mister Da Qing would react if he heard this.

Fortunately, he was able to fool his mom. Just as Zhao Yunlan was about to be relieved and fill in the rest of the sentence on the book, he heard the sound of a car outside. He opened his window, carefully looked out, and discovered that his split-personality family-ruiner dad had come home.

This idea was too rigid. Zhao Yunlan promptly made a decision, immediately jumped agilely out the window again, and landed soundlessly on the grass. He circled from the opposite direction that the car came from and successfully became a thief in his own home for the first time.

He went through the little housing community and emerged into the big street, unsure of what he should do next. Suddenly, Zhao Yunlan felt the ground shake violently. At first he thought it was an earthquake, but when he looked closely, he saw that all the people were still walking calmly. The houses on the sides were also standing still. Not even a speck of dust fell.

Zhao Yunlan recovered his senses and realized that his world was the only one that was spinning. Everything around him suddenly collapsed and the ground underneath his foot disappeared. When he lifted his head again, he found that he was back on that white road and the person in front of his eye was once again the person who he suspected as Shennong.

Zhao Yunlan walked over in big strides and grabbed the old man's collar: "Tell me clearly, this is..."

The old man finally opened his mouth. Using a very strange tone he interrupted his question: "Do you know what 'death' is?"

Zhao Yunlan's brows furrowed deeply. They stared at each other for two seconds. When he judged from the old man's eyes that he would not be able to get any information through coercion or deception, he slowly released his hand, thought for a while, and then tentatively gave the other a straight and narrow answer: "Death is when the body's vital signs stop?"

The old man's voice was hoarse: "Then what is soul? What are the six cycles of reincarnation?"

Zhao Yunlan quickly chose another explanation: “Then death is the end of one life and the beginning of another.”

The old man laughed widely and asked: “Then what is the ghost tribe? What is The Profane Land?”

Zhao Yunlan: “...”

After a while, Zhao Yunlan asked: “Then what do you think it is?”

Both of the old man’s eyes suddenly burst with a bright light. For a second, he seemed to even be a bit terrifying. He grabbed Zhao Yunlan’s arms, his grip so tight that he could almost go through the skin and flesh: “Did you forget? Kunlun, death actually is...”

As he was saying this, he seemed like an almost dying extra from TV shows—sniffling for a long time without being able to say the name of the killer, as soon as they spit out a hint they die—only that this old man was split open in front of his eyes.

He was split from the head all the way down to the feet. With overwhelming force, that blade cleanly cut the man into two even halves as if it was cutting a watermelon. The blade struck the ground, carrying a cold current with it, and left a deep ditch almost one meter thick. Even if there were people standing to the side they would be able to feel the ground trembling from the fierce blow.

Until now, the man who was split was still standing upright, the expression on his face fixed with an indescribable feverishness.

Zhao Yunlan was dazed for a second. After a while, he instinctively took a step back to the side. The scene in front of his eyes was really “blood splattering for three chi” (血溅三尺 where 3 chi = 1 meter)

He only slowly lifted his head after a long while to see Shen Wei standing in front of him. His throat moved slightly with great difficulty but he wasn’t able to say anything.

“Are you ok? Hurry, come with me.” Shen Wei reached out his hand but he quickly noticed that Zhao Yunlan’s pupils contracted violently in that moment. Shen Wei lowered his head and saw that his hands were covered in blood, almost like someone from a pig slaughterhouse. Immediately, he uneasily withdrew his hand and wiped it on his body with force. Despite this, he felt that no matter how much he wiped, they wouldn’t be clean. In his heart he felt an indescribable sense of nausea and disgust, and thus no longer wanted to touch him. As if he couldn’t evade quickly enough, Shen Wei brought both hands back into his sleeves. Using a repressed and restrained voice, he said: “Earlier when you suddenly disappeared from my sight, I...”

At this moment, Zhao Yunlan finally regained his senses, strode over, and grabbed Shen Wei's hand. Shen Wei shrank violently and instinctively flinched, only to be grabbed more tightly by Zhao Yunlan. Insensitively, he said: "So you are the one from eleven years later? Then do you remember how many times we had messy sex after drinking?"

Shen Wei was silent.

After a moment of silence, Shen Wei finally decided to ignore that part of his sentence and no longer talk nonsense with him. He lifted his hand and snatched the water dragon pearl from Zhao Yunlan's neck. When the water dragon pearl touched his palm, it was as if the bottom of a burnt pot was splashed in cold water. With a "si la" sound, heavy black smoke rose from it before it transformed into a piece of scale. Zhao Yunlan opened his eyes wide. Just as he wanted to look more closely, Shen Wei turned his hand over and the scale disappeared.

"Wait, what was that?" Zhao Yunlan asked, "It doesn't look like fish scales. It's a type of crawling creature...is it snake?"

"You don't know what it is yet you hang it around your neck." Shen Wei said in a nasty mood, "And it...and it comes from someone else's body. Do you not think it's dirty?"

Zhao Yunlan looked at him innocently.

They stared at each other for a moment. Then, at the end of his tolerance, Shen Wei turned his head. Behind him suddenly appeared a big hole that was seemingly ripped open. He pushed Zhao Yunlan's head down and roughly threw him inside.

In front of him lights and shadows flowed. Zhao Yunlan felt as though he was surrounded by a large body of water. He was caught off guard and forgot that he no longer had the ability to breathe underwater. He didn't hold his breath in time and lowly called out "crap!". Just as he was preparing to come in contact with the water and choke on a mouthful, his body was lifted by someone. The other person used a soft tongue to pry open his lips and passed breath into him.

Shen Wei then rapidly swam up with him in tow. Every time he was out of breath, Shen Wei would pass another breath over. Not even 4 or 5 times of this later, they had already arrived above water.

Zhao Yunlan thought back on his dive down where he had nearly fallen asleep in the middle. This time, he firmly experienced what could be called traveling at light speed.

Shen Wei lifted him up to a ferry boat without sparing a glance at the ferryman who was trembling and huddled to the side. He lifted a hand to grab Zhao Yunlan's chin. "Wang Chuan water cannot be drunk by human beings. Did you choke? How are you feeling?"

Zhao Yunlan wiped off the water on his face, carefully thought back on the seemingly short trip, and concluded: "...I feel like I came up on a torpedo."

Shen Wei let him go. Perhaps because Zhao Yunlan just came out of the water, his legs were a bit shaky. He fell heavily onto the ferry, nearly knocking it over. Within the next moment, a "putong" sound could be heard. The senseless ferryman finally couldn't bear it anymore and jumped overboard into the river.

Shen Wei was startled and quickly bent over to grab his arm. "What's wrong?"

Zhao Yunlan didn't utilize Shen Wei's strength to stand up. The hand that had been soaking in the waters of Wang Chuan was white and weak so much so that it almost slipped out of Shen Wei's grasp.

Zhao Yunlan had already been under Huang Quan for too long. His lips were almost bloodless. He leaned against the edge of the boat and closed his eyes heavily, groaning in a low voice, "I feel dizzy."

"I'll immediately send you up." As Shen Wei spoke, he tried to help Zhao Yunlan stand up. But for some reason, whether it was that Zhao Yunlan was purposefully not going along with it or that he was really out of strength, he kept sliding down. Shen Wei could only reach out with the intent to carry him. However, Zhao Yunlan wasn't some feeble bodied little girl. Even if Shen Wei didn't mind how heavy he was, Zhao Yunlan's height made carrying him very awkward. When Zhao Yunlan was passed out, it was still alright...but maybe because Zhao Yunlan felt a little uncomfortable, he kept moving around. Whenever he moved around, Shen Wei's grip would slip. In the end, Shen Wei had no choice but to change their position and carry Zhao Yunlan on his back.

Zhao Yunlan vaguely spoke against Shen Wei's ear, "There's still clothes."

Shen Wei said, "What clothes?"

As he was speaking, a little ferry ghost emerged from the water and approached a ferry boat. He put the folded coat neatly on top, leaving not even a corner messy. Shen Wei paused for a bit and had no choice but to take the coat along with them.

Shen Wei carried Zhao Yunlan on his back all the way back to his home and put him gently down on his bed. He turned to go to the kitchen to pour some hot water. Who knew that the moment he moved, the "dying" Zhao Yunlan suddenly leaped up from the bed and jumped onto Shen Wei like a tiger, pinning him to the bed. His eyes, originally closed, now shone with a devilish light. He lowered his head and touched Shen Wei's nose with his. "What are you going to do?"

Shen Wei only now realized that he'd been fooled. "So...you're alright?"

Zhao Yunlan's eyes curved and he laughed soundlessly, "I have a problem...it's a big one...my wife ran away from home. Ay...baby...you should stop running...You're so easy to be fooled. What if you get abducted and sold?"

Shen Wei was so angry he almost couldn't speak. He lifted his hand and pushed Zhao Yunlan away. Shen Wei was unable to express his feelings until finally the words "you're bullshitting" exploded out of his mouth. (lit: you are farting...which has the same connotation as bullshitting)

Zhao Yunlan grabbed Shen Wei's coat with a grin and held it like a pillow in his arms. He kept grinning and rolling around on the bed, burying his face into the coat and inhaling deeply right in front of Shen Wei.

"Aiya! You're scolding me! On this world another baby panda must have been born! It sounds good! Scold me more!"

Shen Wei felt that his actions were almost like one of a sex maniac so he reached out a hand to wrestle that coat away from Zhao Yunlan: "Give it to me!"

Zhao Yunlan kept rolling around on the bed and holding the coat like he was crazy. He opened his mouth and said perversely: "I won't give it to you. If I give it to you what will I use to masturbate with?"

Shen Wei couldn't reply. His eyebrows furrowed and his face turned completely red with some unknown thought.

Zhao Yunlan lifted his head and said solemnly: "You look like you really want to murder your husband."

Shen Wei didn't reply. He knelt on the bed and pounced over to wrestle for the coat. Zhao Yunlan kept rolling. Shen Wei grabbed a corner of the coat and pulled but Zhao Yunlan continued to roll. Then, without warning, he rolled onto the floor with a "bang" sound.

The two stared at each other. After a while they couldn't hold it in and both started laughing.

Zhao Yunlan sat up from the ground, his upper body leaning on the bed, and looked at Shen Wei with eyes curved from smiling. He suddenly spoke, "Hey, baby, let me ask you something."

Shen Wei lowered his gaze to look at him.

Zhao Yunlan used a tone as if he was only casually chatting, "Is the Houtu seal about to break? What do you intend to do?"

Shen Wei was stunned.

Zhao Yunlan continued. "Do you wish that I could be with you forever? Die together with you?"

The hand that Shen Wei had rested on the blanket clenched suddenly. Zhao Yunlan quickly reached over and held it. His smile was genuine and clear, without a hint of falsity or haziness.

“In fact, the ‘death’ that Shennong mentioned...is chaos isn’t it?” Zhao Yunlan’s gentle voice seemed like thunder in Shen Wei’s ears. “You didn’t let Shennong finish...but I could guess it.”

As he spoke, he stood up from the ground, bent over, and held Shen Wei’s tense body in his arms: “You’ve never asked me for anything...so even when I wanted to curry your favor, I couldn’t. Truthfully, if there is anything you want, you can directly tell me...as long as I have it...why would you lie to me?”

Guardian Chapter 90: Shen Wei, I cherish you, I don’t want to be suspicious of you, and if I think too much on some things it’ll wound our feelings

(Beginning excerpt taken from [@dtriad](#). Please click on link to dtriad for translator notes!)

Shen Wei uttered not a single sound. Zhao Yunlan slowly lowered his head to prop his chin in his hands, and caged the smile on his face. Though his gaze wasn’t icy cold, it appeared a little helpless and desolate—no matter what, he was incapable of treating Shen Wei in an official manner like one put on trial.

“Look at me,” Zhao Yunlan said. “The things you’ve done—I want you to be honest with me about each and every one of them. I don’t want to waste my brain cells now on wild guesses—Shen Wei, I cherish you, I don’t want to be suspicious of you, and if I think too much on some things it’ll wound our feelings, but I don’t want to hear the truth from the mouths of others. For your sake I’ve crossed countless lines, and committed countless offenses, but if you’re like this again...”

He paused slightly; and then he said, in an even tone: “Then I really will turn against you.”***

Zhao Yunlan’s expression was placid; his tone was utterly unlike that of his bad temper in ordinary times, and lacked any sense of aggression. His lowered eyebrows were absent of all his usual restlessness. In an instant, Shen Wei’s memory of the sage of the great wilderness and mountains, set far and high above the masses, was miraculously, perfectly superimposed on him without a whit of difference, as if risen from the dead.

Intense fear suddenly surged within Shen Wei’s heart. Ever since his birth he had disdained the world, and had not known what it meant to be afraid, but in this moment he trembled with fear from head to toe.

*He knows, Shen Wei thought. Even though I’ve exhausted my mind with the ruse, he still knows.*****

His fear peaked—and in that split second the Ghost King of ten thousand years past almost wanted to obey his instinct: to spring forward, kill this person on the spot, and like his fellow ghosts deal simply and crudely with the problem. Once he swallowed the enemy's flesh and blood, little by little, down into his stomach, their flesh and blood would henceforth mingle with his own. The world would no longer hold anything that could so threaten him, not even a trace of potential that could make him shiver.

Yet Shen Wei was no longer the young Ghost King all those thousands of years ago, with a heart as blank as white paper. By now he'd used certain harsh ways to suppress his instinct and innate nature, and break himself down into that which Kunlun had once described as... a gentle and proper figure.

Restraint had since become a routine near engraved in his bones.

Shen Wei stopped breathing; his already pale face became all the more like a snowdrift, without a trace of blood to be seen.

A current of nameless chill welled up from his heart, like a shining, silent spring: it was not violent, but in an instant it had suffused his whole body. When Shen Wei finally came to his senses, he found to his shock that his limbs had gone numb.

Yet Zhao Yunlan was simply waiting for him, with endless patience—he seemed as if he could give over all patience in his lifetime to Shen Wei.

Zhao Yunlan was running his fingers lightly through Shen Wei's hair, each stroke a caring caress, unable to summon up words for the feelings in his heart. Without realizing it, he'd wound Shen Wei's soft hair around his fingers, and suddenly he thought of the day he'd seen long hair spread out upon the bed.

That magnificent and matchless sight seemed like a lifetime ago.

Zhao Yunlan paused for a moment, unable to decipher what he was feeling. He knew, in his brain, that he was dealing with a serious matter, yet in his heart, did not want to even think about it.

Maybe when someone reaches the place that they can't step back or move forward, they would hope for time to just stop there. Then they wouldn't need to continue walking forward or turning back. Just stay at that one point, unmoving; lying to themselves, lying to others.

However, the clock's hands will always continue moving forward. Time cannot stop for anybody.

Zhao Yunlan hesitated. He closed his eyes before opening them again, moving the chair from the study desk to opposite Shen Wei, and shifted the tea between them. Afterwards, he shuffled

to the kitchen and opened a cabinet that he didn't know how long it was left unopened, pulling out a dusty tea set.

This person, who would normally eat from the bowl of instant noodles just to save washing another bowl, had actually spent twenty minutes meticulously washing a whole tea set.

It was like he had wanted to calm his thundering heart down in doing a thing.

He put the tea set on the coffee table, silently turning on the flames, cooking the water in the tea set. Pulling out a teapot from under the coffee table, he lifted his head and asked Shen Wei, "Is *tie guanyin* alright?"

Shen Wei didn't care if it was *tie guanyin* or *ni pusa*, he only stared directly at Zhao Yunlan.

As Zhao Yunlan headed to the kitchen, Shen Wei's gaze would follow him to the kitchen. If he was washing cups, Shen Wei's gaze would follow and turn to the dishwasher; it was as if, if he looked away for a second, Zhao Yunlan would disappear from his sight.

Zhao Yunlan silently heated the cups and washed the tea leaves, placing the first cup in front of Shen Wei.

A delicate aroma and steam rose from the cup, intertwining gently. It was a pity no one had the mind to care.

Shen Wei took it without realising. His hands were shaking to the point the small teacup had spilled out at least half of its contents.

Shen Wei only looked down, away from Zhao Yunlan, when he felt something scald his hands. He steadied his hands, maintaining the stiff position for a long time before delivering the cup to his mouth, taking a small sip and asking hoarsely, "How did you know?"

"The god's memories were made very intricately... very intricately." Zhao Yunlan tilted his head slightly, as if listening to the boiling water. "Intricate to the point that when linked up with almost everything I knew, it coincidentally gave me a completely different story. It could make my feelings rise up till I was unable to suppress myself, get could also leave enough pause in its logic, leaving me to realise instantly that something was wrong after I calmed down."

Shen Wei was expressionless. When he was expressionless, his stable and unmoving eyes and eyebrows were beautiful to the point of being demonic, almost being able to pierce one's soul.

"Actually, I should've realised earlier, if the (大神木) 's fake memories were created by someone else to misguide me, it would have been foolish. Because you were beside me then. Would I have not questioned you when I had suspicions? Once your words have any overlap with any of

the incidents inside, who should I trust?" Zhao Yunlan lowered his gaze to look at him. After a while, he asked, "So you had assumed all these things from my talk with the ghost mask, am I right?"

Shen Wei was silent for a while, before admitting, "En."

Things had already reached this stage. To mess things up or continue lying, was a disgrace; he would rather face it head on.

Zhao Yunlan said, unblinkingly staring at him, "To fabricate such an intricate and whole story in such a short time... how are you so unbelievable? Ghost Face even had the face to say that you were twins, both of your DNA has to be different; other than looking similar, I don't see any other place that you are similar in, the intelligence is on a whole nother level.

Shen Wei didn't make a single noise, and just sat there silently.

"Then, all had pointed towards Shennong. In your story, Shennong was a special role, and then intentionally used Shennong's background to say the line about long, life and death. It was because your ability to guess so many things, once Shennong's medicine bowl would definitely appear and use this type of method to remind me." Zhao Yunlan laughed bitterly. "Even this could be gambled and won. You aren't just unbelievable, but your luck is also good."

Shen Wei was silent for an even longer time, before admitting again, "Correct."

"I really do like you, really... in this life, I have never liked another person like this." When Zhao Yunlan spoke till then, there was a moment, where the expression on his face was sad, to the point it wasn't able to be suppressed any more. However, it was just the time it took for the light to flicker before he returned to normal, as if it was someone else's illusion. Yet, his voice had stopped for a second, and spoke with a rasp, "I am not willing to suspect you. When I try hard to shake those coincidentally perfect memories, guessing who was actually misleading me, I never even thought of you as one of the suspects."

Shen Wei was still a portrait of immortal grace, sitting on the chair, yet veins burst from the back of his hands.

"The second time I felt that something was wrong, it was in front of Nüwa's sealed stone." Zhao Yunlan lowered his voice, "Inside was mostly what happened when both of us were together. Nüwa only appeared for that one moment, leaving two specious sentences. Those two sentences were very clever, every word was hinting that the incidents those times were a tragedy, and the tragedy's source was Shennong. "

Zhao Yunlan gently exhaled. "But your luck this time wasn't very good. I met Ghost Face, he accidentally said something. He said that 'inside was all of Nüwa's memories'. All of Nüwa's memories, couldn't be only two lines. I was confused then and didn't react, even asking a question about the relationship between my left shoulder's flame and Shennong. Ghost Mask's reaction... was like I should have known all along."

"After that, he started to laugh maniacally, starting to tell me something, but it was forcefully interrupted by you. Now that I think of it, he probably realised that even the stone's memories were changed by you... but I think that this time, you didn't fabricate anything, but erased some, and purposely left some."

Shen Wei didn't admit or deny. It was already almost dusk, the house hadn't turned on any lights, and so it slowly dimmed, and the man looked like a statue in a temple, not happy nor sad.

"Yet I lowered my guard and removed you from my list of suspects, even if my gut feeling had already pointed the direction clear for me. Do you think I'm a bit foolish?" Zhao Yunlan exhaled. "I always thought that 'idiot' was a nickname intelligent people gave themselves, and now I realise; I'm really a full idiot."

"I held suspicion and anger toward Shennong, seeing that old man... En, was that Shennong himself?"

"No, Shennong is already dead," Shen Wei said, "That was just an illusion of him from when he was alive."

"Ah, no wonder, I was wondering why he could laugh so heartily even after being cut into half from head to toe." Zhao Yunlan murmured, reaching out to Shen Wei with a hand. "The water dragon pearl--I'm talking about the scale, can you return it to me now?"

Shen Wei hesitated for half a second, before taking out the scale the pearl had become and put it beside the tea set.

Zhao Yunlan picked it up with two fingers, flipping it over and around to observe for a while. "It looks like a snake's scale... is it Fuxi's or Nüwa's?"

Shen Wei seemed to have been transformed into an automatic robot, answering any queries he had. "It's Nüwa's."

"The water dragon pearl brought me back to eleven years ago, I followed Shennong's medicine bowl down the yellow spring, and then I saw you. You were interacting with the medicine bowl in my father's body, even just looking made me think you strange, and I had thought then that you were practically a stranger."

"I refused to believe that was real, yet also felt that it was real, so I went to the Ghost City to buy a book--the one I had investigated and found the location of two days ago. The lady boss of the Ghost City's bookstore had told me that I myself had bought the book eleven years ago. As expected, the book's existence, would be able to determine that everything I saw had happened before."

Shen Wei furrowed his eyebrows.

"The book was called 'Ancient Confidential Records', I had seen it before I went to Kunlun Mountain's moutaintop. If it wasn't it, I probably wouldn't have even gone to Kunlun." Zhao Yunlan slowed his speaking pace. Suddenly, he had an urge to smoke, and thus quietened, using the lighter and knocking it against the table gently.

Small sparks jumped up. The moment it had caught on fire, the flames consuming paper's sound was distinct.

"The book was on my body, but when I was brought back to eleven years ago by the water dragon pearl, it became a scroll of blank paper. Because in that time, there was an identical 'Ancient Confidential Records', and when I had been brought back you, it had disappeared--right, I hadn't asked yet, how did you bring me back?"

"The Ghost Slayer Blade can slice apart anything." Shen Wei gently touched the middle of his brows with his fingers. Zhao Yunlan saw from Shen Wei's eyes, the reflection of his own forehead having a golden light flash, and heard Shen Wei say, "Your soul has my mark. If I have enough time, I can find you. That book... 'Ancient Confidential Records', what happened to it?"

"The words in it disappeared when it was eleven years ago, becoming a white piece of paper, and I threw it into the eleven years ago's Wangchuan (Forget Water) river.

Shen Wei watched Zhao Yunlan. With his intelligence, he should have understood what Shennong did.

"Shennong had reminded me to be cautious of you, but had also told me one thing--it was not what he intended his last words to be, but when I was brought away by the water dragon pearl, he started to hint me about 'reincarnation'."

Shen Wei was silent, and Zhao Yunlan continued, "You see, I bought a book, if I found years later, after finishing it and suspecting something, and chasing it's source, finding that the buyer was actually myself, before being transported back to eleven years ago, confirming I had actually bought the book--this is just a smooth loop. And when I leave this loop, the 'Ancient Confidential Records' would disappear; it would forever stay in the loop. Humans living on on a giant sphere would be unable to walk to the edge of the world, the reincarnation's life and death

does not have any difference in itself, and there isn't a real meaning to "death". This also fits Fuxi's gossipy logic."

Shen Wei suddenly lowered his head, unable to stop himself from laughing self-mockingly. "There is no need to continue; I understand."

Zhao Yunlan looked up to exhale smoke, staying quiet.

"So you knew then, the holy tree's crudely made fake memories weren't of Shennong's making—being the first meant being the first, knowing the first five thousand years, knowing the last five thousand years, the illusion left behind then, Nüwa's snake scale and the audio version of the records, had probably already known that this would happen—linked together, echoing from start to end; this is truly the head of the three Emperor's writing," Shen Wei said softly, "Indeed, I cannot compare to him."

Zhao Yunlan squinted in a cloud of white smoke, lifting the teapot and pouring Shen Wei another cup of tea. "No, you are just different people, standing on different grounds. Actually, the 'me' in the holy tree, when raising the flag and causing rebellion, the anger and pain in my heart, weren't mine, but yours, am I right?"

Shen Wei lifted the tiny cup without realising, placing it beneath his nose and smelling it. Afterwards, he laughed bitterly. "I can only hate myself for not being born early and matured earlier; in the end, I was still unable to chase away that war between gods and ghosts."

Zhao Yunlan picked up the teapot, pouring hot water into it. "After lying to me so much, you can tell me the truth now, right?"

Shen Wei asked in a low voice, "You truly want to listen?"

Zhao Yunlan stared at him. "If you say it yourself, no matter what, I will not hate you."