



Illusions, Lies, Truth Volume 2: **Human Doll Contract (Part 2)**

Original novel in Chinese by: [御我 \(Yu Wo\)](#)

Translated by [Prince Revolution](#)

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Prince Revolution! (or PR! for short) was started in late April in 2009 by Erialis for the purpose of translating and sharing the ½ Prince and The Legend of Sun Knight novels (and now many others) with other fans (who unfortunately couldn't read Chinese). PR!'s crew has since exploded to include several translators who double as Chinese to English editors and several Proofreaders. They also have sister sites translating the novels many other languages.

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Prologue: Prologue

"From now on, you will be known as Hold Keeper and will be House Keeper's little brother. You got that?"

Anyways, I was lying with my eyes open.

The golden-haired man standing in front of me obviously had blue eyes, while House Keeper was black-haired with green eyes. No matter how you looked at them, be it horizontally or vertically, these two looked like the least similar brothers in history! The only point they had in common was probably the fact that they both wore strangely formal clothing.

House Keeper was decked out in a dress shirt, bow tie, and vest. As for the golden-haired fellow, he had fussed over his choices when selecting clothes to buy and had insisted on buying these gorgeous white, priest robes. Although the clothes were transformed from doll clothes, they were still so pricey that it made my heart hurt!

Nowadays, even dolls had it better than humans.

God knows! Even I myself am only wearing a singlet that's a mere three hundred and ninety yuan!

Speaking of which, even leaving the "eye-catching" clothes aside, these two didn't look like pure Asians at all. In House Keeper's case, I could possibly barely pass him off as a mix-blood; however, the golden-haired one's appearance was completely that of a foreigner's.

The fortunate thing was that there were plenty of foreigners in Taiwan, so in the worst case, I could make up some nonsense about them being half-brothers with the same father but different mothers. There weren't a lot of people I'd have to explain this to anyways. The people that I most likely would have to explain to, would at most be, the neighbors living opposite me. However, Jiang Yu is easily fooled, and her husband... He's so elusive that I have only heard about him and have never seen him, so he's not important!

As for Jiang Ziya... He doesn't count.

With that "truth-seeing eye" of his, he would be able to tell that the golden-haired one is "Not Human!" in one look.

I took a sip from the coffee that House Keeper had served. My line of thinking had started going off the rails, due to the consecutive late nighters that I had pulled to rush my manuscripts.

When he heard his name, the golden-haired one directly flipped a table in rage.

"Hold Keeper?¹ What kind of lousy name is that? I demand a change!"

"It's much nicer than your brother's name already. I originally wanted to call you 'Grounds Keeper.' This way, the older brother is a housekeeper and the younger brother is a groundskeeper. How fitting is that! You want to change your name? Fine, take your pick between Hold Keeper and Grounds Keeper."

After saying that, I was actually a little worried that this fellow would

pick "Grounds Keeper." He had recently taken to being contrary and specialized in doing the exact opposite of what I said. In the end, I had to resort to saying "Don't go" to get him to leave, and shout "Hurry up and leave" so as to stop him from leaving. *Really, what a contrary fellow!*

"That guy is not my older brother." The golden-haired man... Ah, I should call him Hold Keeper now. His mood seemed capricious as he looked at House Keeper standing at the side. Ever since he discovered that House Keeper had become a "lie," his attitude toward him, which had never been good to begin with, became even worse.

"Why in the world do I have to be the younger brother?"

So he was actually complaining about the seniority?

I actually felt slightly relieved at that. I had thought that Hold Keeper refused to recognize House Keeper as his sibling. *That would be much more troublesome...*

Although, the two of them do not necessarily have to be brothers, either. After all, other people who raise two or more "illusions" don't exactly have them live as siblings. It was only my selfish wish in the hopes that House Keeper and Hold Keeper could be siblings with a good relationship, and that it might more or less help Hold Keeper alleviate his feelings of wanting companions.

"It's because House Keeper was born earlier, and he's already a hundred and fifty something in the book. You're just in your twenties and don't even have a fraction of his age. How are you planning to

compete?”

I was originally waiting for Hold Keeper to rebut me but instead, he sat on the sofa with a gloomy face. It was a long while later before he spoke. I had almost lost my patience and was planning to ignore him when he finally asked, “Why did you create him first?”

I boldly and rightfully pointed out, “That’s because he can help me clean, cook, and brew coffee! Are you going to take over for him?”

“... You incredibly lazy woman!” Hold Keeper cursed verbally, but his expression relaxed much more.

This fellow sure likes to be picky! I was a bit exasperated. *How is his personality so skewed?*

In the book, Hold Keeper was someone who really cherished and protected his brothers. Now, he seemed intent on competing with House Keeper on every little thing. Thankfully, regardless of how much Hold Keeper sneered and provoked him, House Keeper would only ignore him with a faint smile. It takes two hands to clap, so in the end, Hold Keeper could only rub his nose as he was given the cold shoulder.

Of course, there would always be exceptions to what was deemed usual.

“Mistress,” House Keeper said, “I have already become a lie and possess the ability to deal with the artifact demon across from us on my own. There is no need for Hold Keeper to step in, so you may take back the doll that he is residing in.”

"You!" Hold Keeper stood up abruptly.

I glanced at House Keeper. *Is he deliberately provoking Hold Keeper? House Keeper is getting harder and harder to understand.*

Do these two people really stand a chance of being good brothers? Perhaps it's just a pipe dream on my end.

"All right, both of you, stop it. There's still a 'truth' with unknown strength beside the artifact demon. You think she's that easy to deal with?"

Needless to say, I would not take back the body that Hold Keeper was residing in.

The situation at the neighbors' was getting more and more complicated. To think that a "truth" would appear without causing a stir, and that it happened without my realizing. Even if both Jiang Yu and Jiang Ziya had the "calling ability," would it be possible for them to create a "truth" within such a short period of time?

On top of that, compared to the artifact demon, there were other matters at hand that caused me more unease. It seemed like there were more troubles at the neighbors' than I expected lurking under the waters.

I actually couldn't remember when they had moved in.

"Hold Keeper, don't go back to your own barrier dimension for the next

few days. Try to get a better grasp on how to control the body you are residing in and see if you can wield some of your power.”

Even though I said that, I was actually not expecting much.

The powers of an illusionary familiar are very limited, especially when they are out in the real world and not in a barrier dimension. Even if they were to acquire a body to reside in, the most they could do is just brew some coffee.

Despite that, Hold Keeper’s abilities within the book were more unique, so perhaps they could possibly be of some use. Therefore, I still did have some expectations, though the one I would truly be relying on would be House Keeper, who was already a “lie.”

“House Keeper, was the pile of vampire movies that I showed you last time useful? Could you possibly use any of the abilities depicted in the movies?”

House Keeper gave a small smile, and I saw that his face was a little prideful, which was rare. He replied politely, “Without fail, I will leave you satisfied.”

I became even more worried.

The vampire race better not come true by my own hands!

Footnotes

¹ **“House Keeper and Hold Keeper”**: Together, their name forms the pun, “household.”

Chapter 1: The Busy Patient Part 1 — The Missing Classmate

Huff...Puff...

He kept running, panting until he was out of breath. However, he was ultimately unable to shake off the thing that was hot on his heels. He was completely in the dark over how he had managed to attract the attention of such a thing, since all that he'd done was to head home from school like usual. The only difference would be that today, he was not with his classmate.

His classmate had said that he was visiting someone in the hospital, so his father had picked him up earlier.

On such a rare occasion in which he was left behind on his own, he could only head home by himself. However, it was too boring, so he had simply decided to take a shortcut.

This shortcut merely cut through an alley, saving him the trouble of walking around a huge bend. Moreover, the alley couldn't be considered isolated, for when he walked through, he could still hear the sounds of chatter coming from other people's homes. In the past, he'd walked along this path with his classmate several times, but his classmate disliked walking through this area a lot. Therefore, they rarely took the shortcut.

The moment he stepped into the alley this time, a strange feeling arose inside of him. However, a quick glance to the right and left proved that there was nothing unusual. The sky was still bright, and

the alleyway was not dark. There simply didn't seem like there was anything wrong...

After a moment's hesitation, he walked further in.

In the beginning, he could still idly think about whether he should ask his mom if he could go over to his classmate's home tomorrow. However, upon walking for several minutes blankly, he finally realized that something was wrong.

... Why haven't I reached the end yet?

He raised his head uneasily. In doing so, he could see that the exit of the alley wasn't too far off, so he quickened his footsteps.

The brightly-lit exit was obviously only a mere ten meters away, yet no matter how much he walked, he could not reach it. Panicking, he couldn't help but start to run. Usually, it would take at most ten seconds or so to cover this stretch of road that was about ten meters long. However, he ran for at least three minutes, yet the distance between him and the exit remained unchanged, still ten meters away. It was practically like he had been running in place.

He became frantic, unsure why things had become like this. His eyes were fixed on the exit of the alley, as his legs moved non-stop. The more he ran, the more he quickened his pace, the more he panicked. Finally, he couldn't help but choke down his sobs as he broke into tears.

After running and sobbing like this for a while, he was so out of breath that he could run no longer, no matter how afraid he was. He had no choice but to stop in his tracks. He looked around in confusion, hoping that he would be able to see what was wrong, but at the same time, he was scared he would actually see something...

However, he did not see anything, nor did he hear a single sound... *Wait! Why isn't there any sound?!*

What happened to the usual sounds of chatter?

At this point, he finally understood the reason for the strange feeling he had when he stepped in.

It was too quiet.

His tears flowed continuously, as he stood rooted to the spot, lost as to what to do next. He was scared out of his wits. It took a long time before he wiped away his tears and then glanced before and behind him. Though the exit ahead was much closer, he was unable to reach it no matter how much he ran, so he decided to take the way back. It was then that he saw that thing.

That thing was standing at the entrance and broke into a grin the moment it noticed him. Then, it started chasing him ferociously, with the vigor of a hunter that had spotted its prey.

The only thing he could do was to run on without stopping, and to continue running and running. Yet, in front of him was still the exit that forever lay out of his reach. Fear filled his heart, and though he

was panting until he was out of breath, he didn't dare to stop. He could only continue to run and run...

"Xiao Jun, save me—"

Ow...

Fu Jun frowned as he looked at the wound on his hand.

"Why is it that I can get injured even just peeling an apple?"

Fu Taiyi quickly dished a tissue over and asked, "Do you want to wrap it up? We're already at the hospital anyway!"

Fu Jun took the tissue from him, but shook his head as he replied, "There's no need for that. It's just a small cut, so it should stop bleeding after I put some pressure on it for a bit."

"Here, let's put a Band-Aid on that."

Jiang Ziya held out a Band-Aid. Despite that he was only able to use one hand, his movements were still very nimble, and he had managed to whip out the Band-Aid swiftly from his bedside backpack. He felt very satisfied. It seemed like in a short while, he would be able to return to his classes, as well as do part-time work at the bookstore.

Fu Jun looked at the Band-Aid that was covered in small flower patterns, his face expressionless. He didn't take it even after a long time. Instead, Fu Taiyi joyfully took it and put it on his son's finger,

even praising as he did so, "Sigh, this Band-Aid is so cute that I almost don't want to use it."

"Eh, Lu Yang gave me that. He said that since I have scrapes and injuries everywhere, I'd be able to put it to good use." Jiang Ziya explained, feeling that he needed to do so, for accusation seemed to be written on Fu Jun's face.

However, this explanation didn't seem to have helped things much, for now Fu Jun's expression became more "earnest" in pouting, looking as though he was inwardly complaining about a certain someone.

"I heard that his female junior gave it to him." Jiang Ziya added on, to prevent Fu Jun from looking at Lu Yang with this exact same accusing expression in the future.

"So it was a female junior!" Fu Taiyi immediately started grinning profoundly, and even started angling for gossip, "Have you seen that female junior? Is she a nice girl?"

Jiang Ziya could merely continue to explain, "Lu Yang has over twenty female juniors. I don't know which one of them gave it to him."

"What? Twenty of them?" Fu Taiyi was so agitated that he stood up from his chair. He said, "He's being way too much of a flirt! How can Xiao Yang do this? No way, I have to go give him a good talk, and tell him not to let down so many nice girls."

Urgh... This explanation doesn't seem to have helped at all.

Jiang Ziya went mute for a few moments, and then decided to give up on salvaging Lu Yang's reputation.

Besides, it wasn't like he had much of one to begin with.

"How could he possibly have over twenty..." Fu Jun unhappily told his rampaging father, "They are just his female juniors. Lu Yang-gē doesn't have a girlfriend."

Hearing that, Fu Taiyi finally ceased his rampage. However, he still seemed to mind it a great deal as he said, "I've still got to nag at him, otherwise he will sooner or later become a playboy."

Jiang Ziya agreed to that wholeheartedly. Ever since they were in high school, Lu Yang had indeed always been well-connected with many girls, though he was never seen with a girlfriend. At first, he had thought it strange, but now he could kind of see the reason why. Most likely, Lu Yang was too busy running around fighting demons with "Slay" and didn't have any time for a girlfriend.

After he finished peeling a plateful of apples, Fu Jun conscientiously put it on a table surface that Jiang Ziya could reach easily just by extending his hand. Then, he turned his head and said, "Ziya-gē, eat some apples."

"Thanks." Jiang Ziya picked up a slice of apple. Although Fu Jun truly was a good kid that was hard to come by, he still felt a little awkward.

Is this father and son pair really here just to visit me?

Don't they have any other intentions? Such as explaining what exactly was the matter with that call that saved me? From the moment they arrived, Jiang Ziya had become nervous. No matter how hard he thought about it, he felt that Fu Taiyi and Fu Jun were definitely not ordinary. The two of them were even stranger than Lu Yang!

At least Lu Yang still wielded a sword, even though he had still wound up losing the fight and had been cuffed to the railings on the rooftop, with both of his wrists ending up in a terrible state. Even now, they were still wrapped up like he had two donuts around his wrists. However, these two people had saved them through a simple phone call.

This gap was simply too illogical, so much that Jiang Ziya even felt bad for Lu Yang.

"Boss, don't you think there's something that you need to explain to me?" Jiang Ziya couldn't keep it to himself any longer and decided that asking it himself would be faster!

Fu Taiyi let out an "Ah," and then said, "Indeed so."

Jiang Ziya became nervous again. *So, what exactly is the true identity of the boss and Fu Jun?*

When he and Lu Yang had run into danger on the rooftop, the call had saved them. Although he had heard the voice of the one speaking, it had an inexplicable sound like an echo in the mountains. It wasn't a normal voice. Of course, he also couldn't tell whether it was the voice

of Fu Jun or Fu Taiyi. But anyways, it was definitely related to the Fu family duo.

At that time, Fu Jun was the one who said that he would give a call, so theoretically speaking, that person should have been Fu Jun. However, he was still an elementary school student! Being saved by an elementary school student would be simply too much of a shock to bear, so Jiang Ziya was more inclined to believe that it was Fu Taiyi—though looking at the boss now, Fu Jun would have been a better option!

While Jiang Ziya was waiting nervously for his “life savior” to reveal himself, Fu Taiyi instead took out an envelope and passed it to him. This thoroughly confused him. *Could this be some kind of talisman?* He took it doubtfully and opened it. What was inside, instead, was a stack of cash.

“...” Now isn’t the time to be giving out wages, right?

Jiang Ziya turned to his boss, perplexed. He felt that he wouldn’t feel as bewildered even if the contents had turned out to be an amulet.

Fu Taiyi gave a cough and explained, “You suddenly had to stay in the hospital, and that definitely would cost a little. Even though medical insurance does cover most of it, you would still have to pay for the rest of it and buy some supplements for your health.”

Jiang Ziya was at a loss for words. Indeed, Jiang Yu had recently been brewing nutritional medicine for him every day. The Chinese medicinal soup had never stopped coming, be it for building up his body or spirit

or something else. He also had no clue on how the financial situation was at home. This money was something that he had to accept.

"Thank you." He insisted, "Just treat it as an advance. Remember to deduct it out of my pay."

Once Fu Taiyi heard that, he scratched his head and commented, "Don't fret about small things like that! I have been good friends with your father for many years, and he has helped me out before. Now, I am merely returning the favor."

"... May I humbly ask for your esteemed age?"

Fu Taiyi laughed. "Aha, hiding one's age is a man's romance!"

"Boss, you really know my dad?" Jiang Ziya asked, a little disbelieving, "Why haven't you told me that before?"

He recalled his first meeting with his boss. It was a rainy day, and Jiang Ziya was in the middle of hunting for a part-time job. Since he still had to take the entrance exams that year, he was unable to work for long periods of time, and furthermore, he could only work after school. A job like that was obviously difficult to find, and his efforts in job-hunting showed no results even after a long time.

However, he had no choice but to persevere on. At that time, the financial situation at home was not looking good, not even factoring in his university fees that they would have to pay afterwards. His brother-in-law had insisted that he go to university and had promised

to take care of all his study expenses. He had claimed that even if he wanted to go for a Master's or Ph.D afterwards, it would be fine.

Jiang Ziya, however, could not watch on as his brother-in-law worked himself to the point of barely having time to sleep. Even his sister had household chores to take care of. He could not stand being the only one who was so idle, only needing to merrily go to class and study when he got home.

"Do you want to come and work at my bookstore?"

His boss had appeared at that moment.

At first, he had thought the other to be a salesperson. He was on the verge of replying back, "I don't need anything but cash," when the boss pointed at the job recruitment newspaper in Jiang Ziya's hand, and the boss asked him full of confidence, "You seem to be looking for a job, right? I have a job for you. Do you want it?"

Although it had sounded like the prelude of an abduction scene, Jiang Ziya found himself unable to refuse it. Anyways, he was a healthy and strong high-school student and also not a girl. As long as he stayed cautious and avoided eating anything random, he should be fine.

Afterwards, he had followed the boss to the bookstore. The moment he arrived, he saw Fu Jun, who was manning the store by himself. Jiang Ziya immediately dropped his guard upon seeing a child and completely forgot about not eating anything random. He even drank the cola that the boss gave him.

Thinking about it now, he was thankful that the boss really wasn't a bad person, or he would probably have been sold off to do hard labor in a mine at some corner of the world.

"Your father asked me to look after you and your sister." Fu Taiyi said with a faint smile, "I didn't tell you that your father had asked me to do so because he felt very embarrassed that he's unable to take care of you two properly, and he even had to ask his friend to do so. He thought that it was simply shameful."

That dad of ours actually knows what shame is?!

Jiang Ziya's face turned dark, and he quickly questioned, "What exactly has Dad been doing out there? Why hasn't he come home? When my sis started dating my brother-in-law in high school, it was such a big affair that the school demanded to see our parents, but we didn't know where to look for him at all! We nearly got mistaken for underage orphans and were almost taken away!"

Fu Taiyi shrugged, indicating that he did not know either, and Jiang Ziya decided not to pursue the matter further. Thinking back to that time, that dad of theirs had left home with the reason of "seeking apprenticeship to a master to become immortal." Regardless of whether that was true or false, he still wanted to give him a good kick in the ass. It was best that he did not ask further to avoid making himself angry.

Jiang Ziya put aside that bit of grievance he had toward his father. For some reason, even though their father was like that, both Jiang Yu and he had never truly hated their dad for all these years. At most, they

would just complain about him. Since he had already gone by all these years without hating him, there wasn't a need for him to start holding a grudge against him now.

What was more important as of now was to figure out who Fu Taiyi and Fu Jun were. Jiang Ziya didn't want to beat around the bush any further, and was just about to lay his cards on the table when the ringtone of a cell phone interrupted him.

He looked at Fu Taiyi, but instead, it was Fu Jun who took out his cell phone and answered the call. His reply was remarkably polite as he greeted the person on the phone, like he was not speaking to a classmate. He seemed reserved, as though he was speaking with someone older.

"No, I haven't, Auntie Xie. I didn't go home with him today." Fu Jun answered obediently, "Today, I'm visiting someone at the hospital with my dad, so I left earlier ... Huh? He hasn't come home yet? Okay, I will call you if I see him."

As he hung up, Fu Jun frowned as he said, "The classmate I usually walk home with isn't home yet. His mother called to check if I've seen him."

"Maybe he ran off somewhere to play? When I walked by an internet cafe the other day, I saw a lot of young kids loitering there," Fu Taiyi lamented.

Fu Jun shook his head. He replied, "Peilun is very obedient and wouldn't do that."

When Jiang Ziya heard the name, he suddenly remembered and asked, "Is it the boy wearing glasses who visited our store several times?"

Fu Jun nodded and explained, "His name is Xie Peilun. He's in my class."

Fu Taiyi suggested, "How about when we head back, we can search for him along the path from the school to his house? Since you two frequently head home together, you would know better than us if he had headed elsewhere."

"But we haven't gone anywhere else before. At most, we would only go to our store," Fu Jun muttered, but then nodded his head in agreement.

Fu Taiyi called out, "Ziya, we'll take our leave now. We'll drop by again to see you."

"Hurry and go," Jiang Ziya answered, for he was also starting to become a little worried.

The impression that the boy gave him was that he was a good child. Although his personality was on the shy side, he would still greet others when he saw them. He was a rather obedient kid. Indeed, he was like how Fu Jun had described him, not the type to loiter after class.

"There's no need to come back in the future. I should be getting out of the hospital soon. Don't waste your time."

If it were possible, it would be best if he could leave the hospital today. Jiang Ziya felt that there wasn't a need for him to continue being hospitalized. It wasn't like his injuries were severe to the point where he had to continue staying here.

Although it was a bullet wound, the truth was that the bullet had merely scraped him. If it weren't for the fact that he had overexerted himself when he went to pull Lu Yang up, causing the wound to tear open and drip a lot of blood in the process, the doctor probably would have shooed him out of the hospital already.

Fu Taiyi nodded, though he addressed uneasily, "Rest well. Don't overexert yourself."

Jiang Ziya gave a slightly awkward "Okay" in return. Since he had just found out that Fu Taiyi was well acquainted with his father, that would make Fu Taiyi his elder, and this sudden change felt unexplainably strange to him.

Only after he sent away the two visitors did he realize that he actually had not managed to extract any information out of them.

He could only grudgingly pick up his Foreign Language book. What he was hoping for was studying more while he could, to prevent his grades from falling. Since he was aiming to apply for several scholarships, he could not allow his ranking to drop.

Furthermore, there was one more benefit to focusing on his studies—it allowed him to ignore the peculiarities around him to the best of his abilities.

For example, that shadow squatting in the corner. After the first glance, Jiang Ziya did not dare to look its way again. He still had to stay in this ward for another three to five days, and the consequences would be unimaginable if it were to haunt him.

Not to mention that he actually did not want to look at it further. Although he had merely seen a peek of it from the corner of his eye, and had not seen a lot of detail, the red bloodstain on the shadow was a ghastly sight. It was impossible for him to pretend that he hadn't seen that clearly.

... I should probably concentrate on studying.

Loud chatter suddenly came from the bed next to him. At first, Jiang Ziya was not bothered by it. He had always been able to seize the opportunity to study anywhere, and this amount of noise really wasn't much to him.

He didn't think that the source of the sound would grow gradually louder. Since the curtains were drawn, he was unable to see the situation, but it was unavoidable for him to hear them. From what it sounded like, it seemed to be a quarrel.

It was to the point of being a little exaggerated.

Jiang Ziya could not help but raise his head to take a look. Although this was a ward for four, only three people were staying in it. The patient beside him, behind the drawn curtains, was a middle-aged man. It seemed that he had been in a car accident and had broken his leg. His wife visited him frequently.

As for the bed opposite him, it was an elder. He didn't know what illness he had, but most of the time, a hospital nurse would be watching over him.

Over the past few days, Jiang Ziya had had the most number of visitors. Needless to say, his sister had dropped by every day. As for his brother-in-law, he would visit occasionally after his work. The two little girls would of course come along.

When he had first been hospitalized, even the police had dropped by to investigate because of the bullet wound. However, Lu Yang had just given a call to a certain policeman that he was well acquainted with, and then the police were all taken care of.

Jiang Ziya was starting to feel like he didn't know Lu Yang in the slightest.

Since it had been pretty noisy on his side for the past few days, Jiang Ziya decided to overlook the noise on his neighbor's side. He tried his best to turn a deaf ear to it, though it was simply very difficult to do so, for the quarreling was so loud that even the room adjacent to theirs would be able to hear it.

"My little brother has gone missing, yet you still want me to continue staying here to take care of you!"

"I'm your husband. If you aren't taking care of me, who else are you planning to take care of? Regarding things on your mom's side, let the people on your mom's side deal with it!"

Jiang Ziya raised an eyebrow at that. He suddenly felt that his sister had picked a really good man as her husband. If he, as her little brother, were to go missing, his brother-in-law would definitely be anxiously looking around for him instead of telling his sister to get the people on her mom's side to deal with it.

"It's not like I haven't been taking care of you." The woman was so furious that she started yelling, "I just want to leave for a bit so that I can help ask around. Is that wrong?"

"If you leave, then how the hell am I supposed to go to the toilet? Are you planning to make me hold it in until I explode?"

"Ask your brothers to come and help out! There's so many of them, yet not a single one of them came to help on their own! I already told you not to bicker so much with your family members. Now this is just great. Even though you're in trouble, no one cares!"

"What did you say? When I was bickering with them, I didn't see you complaining. Now you start to argue..."

At this point, the couple were practically shrieking and roaring at each other. Jiang Ziya simply felt helpless at this situation. Although the

hospital nurse for the opposite bed was staring at the curtains curiously with wide eyes, appearing enraptured, she didn't seem to be planning to do anything about it.

Seeing that people were starting to poke their heads into the ward, Jiang Ziya could only press the call button on the bed. A nurse arrived quickly, her eyes wide. Even before she asked Jiang Ziya what the matter was, she heard the hisses and roars from the other bed.

"You better stay here, or I'll beat you to death!"

"You dare?!"

If the man's leg weren't broken, Jiang Ziya reckoned that they would have already been performing a full-scale fight scene.

The nurse quickly stepped behind the curtains and requested, "Knock it off. This is a hospital!"

After the nurse told them off, they didn't dare to talk that loudly anymore, even though they continued arguing non-stop. They had probably realized that they were making fools of themselves.

When the nurse stepped out, she shot a helpless smile at Jiang Ziya.

He quickly seized the chance to ask, "Miss, when can I be released?"

The nurse comforted, "I believe that you should be able to be released tomorrow, after the doctor gives you a check-up. Your wound has recovered very well, and there aren't any problems, just that you have

lost quite a bit of blood. Eat more food that replenishes blood—ah! I believe that I don't have to remind you about that. Your sister is already doing a very good job with that."

Jiang Ziya immediately nodded his head vigorously; his sister was indeed so good that there was nothing more to say.

"Gēge!"

The two girls dashed into the ward, causing the nurse's eye to sparkle at the sight of them. Jiang Jiang and Jiang Xue were very famous in the hospital right now, known for being a cute pair of twins. Once it was evening, many of the nurses liked to circle around this particular ward, trying to see if they could bump into the adorable pair of sisters.

Usually, these two little girls would obediently let those nurses hug and pat them, as instructed by their mother. Should those nurses like them, they might treat their brother better.

This time though, Xiao Xue evaded the nurse and leaped directly at Jiang Ziya, who was in bed. Only Jiang Jiang stayed and obediently let the nurse rub her head.

Jiang Ziya hugged Xiao Xue and realized that she was actually shivering. He asked in confusion, "What's wrong?"

Xiao Xue flinched but did not say anything.

Jiang Yu followed behind them and worriedly said, "I don't know what's the matter. Xiao Xue was unwilling to take a single step away from my

side all day. Even when I wanted to go to the bathroom, she would insist on following me in.”

The moment Jiang Ziya heard that, he knew that something must be wrong. Neither little girl in his family was normal, so if she clung to her mother and refused to take even a single step away, then it must be that in the moment she stepped away, something dangerous would happen.

However, Jiang Yu’s presence here made it difficult for Xiao Xue to explain.

“Sis, I’ve been craving potato chips. Could you go to the convenience store downstairs to help me buy some?”

“I brought you dinner. Don’t eat any more snacks,” Jiang Yu said in disapproval.

“I plan to eat it later at night, not now.”

When Jiang Yu heard that, she decided not to argue anymore. Having some late night snacks around wasn’t a bad thing, either. Seeing Xiao Xue still sprawled on top of Jiang Ziya, she asked curiously, “Xiao Xue, do you want to come along?”

Xiao Xue shook her head and said, “I’ll be fine with Gēge.”

This was actually the first time Xiao Xue had been willing to leave her side the entire day. Jiang Yu felt a little more relieved at that. She then took Jiang Jiang downstairs with her to buy some snacks.

Jiang Ziya whispered, "What's wrong?"

Xiao Xue hugged him in a death grip, crying as she said, "Gēge, the neighbors want to kill me!"

Chapter 1: The Busy Patient Part 2—Brother-in-Law's Job

The neighbors...

Jiang Ziya remembered how Yu Shu had told him to burn Xiao Xue, and his heart sank. He had indeed promised Yu Shu earlier, and had even assured Lu Yang that he would coax Xiao Xue out. However, as things stood, there was absolutely no way he could just sit around and watch Xiao Xue get burned to death!

Jiang Ziya patted Xiao Xue's back and reassured her, "Don't be scared. I'll protect you. No one will be able to get to you."

Xiao Xue abruptly raised her head, staring at Jiang Ziya in a daze.

"It's just that I need to go to school in the daytime, so I won't be able to take care of you then, and I can't bring you to school either." Jiang Ziya felt a little distressed. Though Jiang Yu was at home, it was hard to guarantee that Yu Shu wouldn't pull a trick of some kind. For example, she could distract Jiang Yu herself, and have House Keeper sneak in and kill Xiao Xue.

Both of Xiao Xue's eyes sparkled as she answered, "I can do that. I can go to school with Gēge."

Huh? Jiang Ziya felt perplexed as he asked, "Then, what do we do when Sis can't find you?"

"I can make a fake substitute and leave it at home." Xiao Xue seemed extremely happy as she said, "With Jiang Jiang around, there won't be any problems!"

That doesn't sound too bad... Like hell!

Jiang Ziya remembered Lu Yang.

Looking at Jiang Ziya's expression, Xiao Xue shyly asked, "Does Gēge not want to bring me to school?"

"It's not that I don't want to." Jiang Ziya had a troubled face as he answered, "There's a classmate at school who is also planning to deal with you. You've seen him before. He's the one we went to save last time."

At this point, Jiang Ziya felt that it was fortunate that Lu Yang seemed to be busy these last few days. He had only visited him once or twice at the start of his hospitalization. Afterwards, he had resorted to giving concerned calls, which prevented face-to-face meetings between Xiao Xue and him.

Xiao Xue pouted as she grumbled, "I went to save him, but he still wants to kill me?"

Yeah, Xiao Xue has saved Lu Yang before. Will that change Lu Yang's mind about killing her? Jiang Ziya felt uncertain, finding it difficult to read Lu Yang on that.

Lu Yang seemed very insistent on eliminating Xiao Xue, but Jiang Ziya felt that Lu Yang wasn't an ungrateful person who would kill his savior. When these two conflicting points collided, what exactly would Lu Yang do?

Jiang Ziya felt a giant headache looming. There was Yu Shu at home and Lu Yang at school, and though they *were* both his neighbor and friend respectively, why did he feel as though he was surrounded by enemies?

"Xiao Xue, could you stay in the hospital today? Like how you just said, make a substitute to follow Sis home."

Xiao Xue nodded her head, her joy evident.

In the very least, let's get through tonight first. Jiang Ziya thought with an ostrich mentality.

Not long after, Jiang Yu came back with Jiang Jiang. Xiao Xue immediately pulled Jiang Jiang to the side to speak in hushed whispers, but their actions went unnoticed by their mother, who was currently busy taking care of Jiang Ziya. She served him dinner and brought out the soup, giving the two little girls freedom to go play on their own beside her.

"I bought some bread as well for your late night snack. If you get hungry at night, don't just snack on potato chips. Eat some bread first to fill your stomach."

Jiang Ziya nodded and agreed to that. It was just an excuse anyways.

In fact, he could go to the convenience store himself to grab a late night snack too. He had only injured one shoulder, which made it a little inconvenient to move that arm. It was not like he had gone “completely malfunctional.”

“Is Jiěfu working overtime again?”

Every time his brother-in-law had to work overtime, Jiang Ziya felt very useless. Even on the days that he got off on time, he would often work at home on his computer. However, at least he could go home and see his wife and daughters.

“He didn’t call back to inform me!” Jiang Yu hesitated for a moment, then didn’t seem too bothered as she replied, “Perhaps he knew that I would be at the hospital, so he didn’t mention it. Come, let’s eat.”

She placed the food in front of Jiang Ziya using the small table, and then took out two portions for her daughters, who then sat at the sofa to the side. Only then did Jiang Yu turn to serve herself a portion of food.

As they ate, Jiang Ziya casually tried to find a conversation topic. “Sis, do you know what Jiěfu is working as?”

“An assistant to the boss. The kind that has to do a bit of everything, and has to help receive cases.”

So as expected, I haven’t been showing enough concern? To think that I don’t even know what my brother-in-law does. Jiang Ziya felt a bit shamed.

"A boss of what kind of company?" He decided to make an effort to get to know his brother-in-law a little better.

Jiang Yu didn't seem to know either, for she started guessing, "Maybe interior design? I frequently hear him say that he's going somewhere to look at houses."

"Did Jiěfu not tell you the details?" Jiang Ziya felt a little shocked at that. He didn't know his brother-in-law's job, fine. But his sis was his wife after all. *How could she not know?*

"Before, I didn't really dare to ask him, afraid that it wasn't a good job and that it would turn awkward if I asked. I was thinking of waiting until things settled down. Maybe he would get a better job, and then I could ask him about it bit by bit."

Jiang Ziya understood. At the time, his brother-in-law had been forced to quit his job as a teacher, but he had to financially support both him and his sister. Thus, it hadn't been possible for him to pick his job at will. Perhaps he had just chosen one based on whatever was available. Jiang Yu's thoughts on this were really meticulous and thoughtful.

"In another two years, I'll graduate and be able to start working," Jiang Ziya said, melancholic. He wished he could graduate right this moment.

However, Jiang Yu was not happy to hear that. She frowned, stared at him, and said, "What are you always worrying about that for? Your jiěfu is currently doing well at work, and we don't have any problems

making ends meet. Just obediently go and study. Your jiěfu is even hoping for you to continue your studies further!”

Jiang Ziya, however, did not feel that optimistic. There was still the mortgage to pay, as well as the two little girls to raise. In a few more years, they would be going to kindergarten. Nowadays, the cost of sending children to kindergarten was abnormally pricy.

“Don’t worry.” Jiang Yu looked at her own little brother anxiously. “Your jiěfu and I are both hoping that you will enjoy your university life!”

“I am.” Jiang Ziya sincerely replied, “I’m very serious in my studies. Sis, it’s not like you don’t know how good my grades are.”

“I don’t mean your studies.” Jiang Yu blinked, and said, “Promise me that you’ll enter a club, okay?”

This... Jiang Ziya found it a little difficult, and he said, “I have work at Jiu Ge after class, so I don’t really have time for clubs.”

“Then find a club that doesn’t take up much time. That’s good too. Go out more and get to know a few more people.”

Faced with Jiang Yu’s eager eyes, sparkling in hope, Jiang Ziya could only admit defeat. He agreed, “Okay, I’ll go and see if there are any clubs that can match my schedule.”

He decided to find a club in which whether he went or not made no difference, and become a member in name only. He could also

conveniently drag Lu Yang with him, and when needed, the two of them could cover each other's attendance. Though, most of the time, Lu Yang would be the one helping to cover his attendance.

"Sis, why don't you call Jiěfu and ask him when he's getting off work? The nurse told me that I can leave the hospital after the doctor gives me a checkup tomorrow. Jiěfu can come and pick you up, and you can take some of these things back with you. I'll just head back on my own tomorrow."

Jiang Yu answered "Sure" and instantly called him, but the call did not go through even after a while. She frowned.

Jiang Ziya was a little surprised at that and asked, "He didn't pick up?"

Although his brother-in-law was busy with work, it didn't seem to be a job in which he couldn't receive calls in the middle of work. Thus, there usually weren't any situations in which they couldn't contact him.

"Let's wait a bit then. Perhaps he's in the middle of a meeting or something." Jiang Yu seemed a little perplexed as she said so, having never encountered such a situation before. Not only did Jiang Qibing neglect to inform them by phone that he would be working overtime, he also couldn't be reached.

Jiang Ziya quickly nodded his head in agreement.

What they did not expect was that this "wait a bit" would result in them waiting past eight PM, and he was still unreachable. It wouldn't

be a big deal if his phone was turned off, or perhaps his phone was out of battery. However, the call was obviously ringing, just that no one was picking up.

"Sis, do you have the contact number of Jiěfu's workplace?"

"No." She started to panic, having never run into this situation before.

"Sis, why don't you go home and take a look first. Maybe Jiěfu's at home, just that he forgot his cell phone in the office?"

Jiang Ziya simply could not think of any other reason, though he was quite puzzled. It was already very late, so Jiěfu ought to have called by now. *Maybe he was too tired and fell asleep?* Ziya felt that this was also fairly possible.

"All right, I'll be going back now." Jiang Yu instantly nodded and said, "If he's at home, we'll drive back here to carry back the stuff. Don't worry about your jiěfu. Such a big person couldn't possibly disappear."

Although her words were directed at Jiang Ziya, it seemed more like she was consoling herself.

Once he heard the word "disappear," Jiang Ziya suddenly felt a little uneasy. It seemed like he had been hearing that word all day.

"Gēge, I'll be going back with Mommy!" Xiao Xue suddenly said.

Jiang Ziya froze and looked at her. *Does this mean that she isn't going to use a substitute to go back with Jiang Yu?*

"You're not staying to keep me company?" Jiang Ziya intentionally asked in a joking manner, in order to avoid Jiang Yu's suspicion.

Once Jiang Yu heard that, she frowned, disapproving of the way Jiang Ziya had said it. If Xiao Xue were to throw a tantrum to stay, it would be troublesome.

Thankfully, Xiao Xue shook her head hard while answering, "No."

Jiang Ziya could only let the three of them leave. However, the uneasy feeling became stronger and stronger. *If only I could follow them back*, he thought.

He waited for them to give him a reply from home, anxious to the point that he couldn't even study. He also heard the sobs of the woman from the bed beside him.

The man in the patient bed next to him gently comforted, "Okay, I was in the wrong. 'Cause my feet hurt terribly and I was holding in my bladder, so I was a bit bad-tempered. You really can't find your little brother?"

The woman sobbed as she said, "It's been several days, but they haven't even found a single trace of him."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya was shocked. He felt as though he were listening to his sister's cries. If his brother-in-law really were to go missing...

"How could this be? Your little brother isn't a stupid guy. He wouldn't just go missing out of nowhere!"

"That's right. Such a big person, how could he go missing just like that..."

At this point, Jiang Ziya was contemplating sneaking home, but the phone rang. He quickly took the call.

"Ziya, your jiěfu isn't at home, and he still isn't picking up." Jiang Yu's voice sounded extremely panicky, though not to the point of tears.

Although Jiang Ziya also felt a little nervous, the situation didn't allow for him to panic along with her. He tried his best to say in a calm tone, "Sis, do you know the address of Jiěfu's company? Search for a business card or something."

"Oh, right. Okay, I'll go look for it."

Shuffling and flipping sounds came over the phone, but Jiang Ziya didn't hang up. Occasionally, he would remind his sister of possible locations to search. At the same time, he decided that once the matter was over, he would definitely ask his brother-in-law about his work properly, and memorize all the company details like address and phone number and whatnot.

"I found it!" Jiang Yu excitedly shouted. "There's a profile of the company, and the address and phone number are in it. I'll call them and check first."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya heaved a sigh of relief. However, as he waited, he was greeted with bad news.

"Ziya, no one in the company is picking up. Right now, I only hear the answering machine saying 'Work hours have ended for the day. Please call again tomorrow.' I'm going to go over and take a look."

Jiang Ziya quickly answered, "Sis, stay at home and take care of Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue. I'll go over and take a look."

"What? You can't, you're still injured!"

However, it was almost ten P.M. There was no way Jiang Ziya could watch on as his sister brought two little girls to run around at night. It was too dangerous.

"My injuries won't be a problem. I'm just going to take a taxi there to take a look."

"But—"

Jiang Ziya quickly cut in, "I'll get Lu Yang to come along with me. Don't worry."

"How can I not be worried? I mean, you even mysteriously got hit by a stray bullet." Jiang Yu spoke softly in a worried tone. However, she too

knew that it was inconvenient to bring around two children, so she could only agree. "All right, but be careful. Carry your cell phone on you, and be careful not to worsen your injuries. If there's any news, remember to call and tell me."

Jiang Ziya agreed to her requests point by point. Then, the moment he hung up, he changed into outdoor clothes and called Lu Yang. Thankfully, he picked up the call; otherwise, Ziya would really have to start wondering if disappearing acts were the current trend and everyone had to do it at least once.

"Your brother-in-law is missing?" Lu Yang exclaimed in shock. "Are you planning to go to his office to look for him? But I can't leave right now. Could you wait for me for an hour?"

"Forget it. I'll just go over and take a look by myself. I'm just going to the company."

Already, Jiang Ziya could hear weird sounds coming over the phone. It sounded just like the sound effects of weapons clashing in movies. From time to time, he could hear some strange sounds, like the sound of a fist connecting with flesh through a punch...

To ask someone to go "hand in hand" to find his brother-in-law while that someone was fighting for his life.... No matter how Ziya thought about it, he felt that it would be a jerk move.

"Then, give me the address. I'll finish up as soon I can, and then go and meet you later."

Jiang Ziya was on the verge of refusing his offer, but rethought his decision. After all, he didn't know the current situation on his brother-in-law's side, and he was currently an injured person with only one usable arm. It was simply unwise to reject Lu Yang's help.

After giving him the address, he reminded him, "Give me a call before you come over. Who knows, maybe my brother-in-law is just working overtime. Don't waste your time coming over if that's the case."

Lu Yang gave a "Mhn" sound in agreement, and then hung up even without saying bye.

Jiang Ziya was now regretting his decision to call him. Why did he feel like there was now one more person for him to worry about? He hoped that Lu Yang would not rush and become careless as a result. To think that he would go and vanquish demons while he still had two "donuts" around his arms... He really was a person who made others worry.

Jiang Ziya tiptoed his way out of the hospital. On his way out, he was afraid of encountering any passionate nurses who would stop him, but thankfully nothing of that sort happened.

Once he was out of the hospital, he immediately hopped in a taxi and headed straight to the office.

The taxi driver was a middle-aged man who was extremely talkative. Seeing how one of Jiang Ziya's arms was still wrapped in bandages, he asked a lot of questions in concern. The moment he heard that it was caused by a stray bullet, he immediately started cursing that the security in Taiwan was too bad.

"Seeing that you are that unlucky, you are heading to the right place."
The taxi driver nodded his head and commented, "I heard that they're really effective! I've brought many customers over before."

Effective? Jiang Ziya felt that the word choice sounded ominous and quickly asked, "What kind of company is the place I'm heading to?"

"Company?" The taxi uncle chuckled. "I guess you could call it a company. It's run by a great master!"

... Great master?

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya's expression darkened, and he asked, "What kind of master?"

"A feng shui¹ master!" The driver seemed to find it peculiar as he asked, "Ah, you didn't know? That great master specializes in looking at feng shui for people. I heard that he's pretty good. There's no fraud involved."

Feng shui, huh... Jiang Ziya heaved a sigh of relief. That sounded okay, as long as it wasn't the kind of master who vanquished demons. So, his brother-in-law worked an assistant to a feng shui master. No wonder his sister would say that he goes to look at houses.

After he got out of the car, Jiang Ziya raised his head to stare at the new, towering building. A strange feeling arose in his heart, not at all losing to how he had felt when he had discovered that Lu Yang's home was a temple. He had originally thought that a feng shui master would

be living in an area that looked more traditional, but it was very far from his expectations.

This kind of place looked like it would suit Lu Yang more. However, it just so happened that the reality was the opposite. The model-like Lu Yang lived in a temple, while the feng shui master worked in a modern, high-rise building. This was a true example of the phrase, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

As he rode the elevator up, Jiang Ziya began to feel a little nervous. *What if I can't find Jiěfu here, either? What if something happened to him?*

Although his brother-in-law hadn't been around back in high school, at that time, his father still occasionally returned home. In recent years though, he was outrageous to the point that he wasn't coming home at all. If even his brother-in-law were to go missing, who knew how terribly gloomy the atmosphere at home would become.

After following the copied address and reaching the floor indicated, he nervously stepped out of the elevator. This level was rather bright, until he saw that the signboard of his destination read "Feng Shui Master Wu Ming Liang," in which the name "Wu Ming Liang" sounded the same as "no brightness."²

Jiang Ziya was rendered speechless. Thankfully, the office did not truly have "no brightness"—the lights inside were still on—or it would be a disaster.

He pressed the doorbell and heard it ring inside. However, even after he rang the doorbell numerous times, there was no reply.

Could it be that they've all gotten off work? Jiang Ziya started to panic. He was just about to call home to ask Jiang Yu if his brother-in-law had returned, when he finally heard a voice from the intercom of the doorbell.

"Who is it?"

This voice is Jiěfu's! Jiang Ziya revived with vigor and quickly answered, "Jiěfu, it's Ziya."

"Ziya?" Jiang Qibing actually snorted at that. He answered, "Your lie is too absurd."

Jiang Ziya froze. He had never heard his brother-in-law speak in this kind of tone before. Moreover, to say that he was lying? Which part of it was a lie? The only thing he had said was "It's Ziya," and he couldn't possibly be lying about that, right?

"Ziya is still in the hospital. He can't possibly be here!"

"Jiěfu, that's because you didn't come home, but we couldn't contact you by phone either. Sis was very worried, so I came over to take a look."

Jiang Ziya started to sense that something was wrong. *He* could recognize his brother-in-law by his voice, so why would his brother-in-law suspect him? His voice wasn't that hard to tell, right?

“Save your breath. I won’t believe you. No matter what you try to do, I won’t make any moves and will stay here until you run out of strength to maintain this barrier dimension!”

Jiang Ziya stood rooted to the spot, stunned shocked as though he had been hit by lightning.

His brother-in-law actually knew about “barrier dimensions” too.

Then, does he know about the two girls at home?

“Jiěfu, Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue—”

“If you dare touch my family, I definitely won’t let it slide, and will make you die a horrible death!”

Jiang Ziya shivered. After being used to his brother-in-law’s gentle ways, hearing him show such ferocity was hard to accept. If he was this harsh just from his voice, then if he were to actually go in, would his brother-in-law really treat him as a demon and beat him up?

Thinking it over, Jiang Ziya felt that it might possibly happen. He had heard Lu Yang mention the events that had led up to him being hung on the rooftop. From what he had heard, the other had disguised itself as him, which was why Lu Yang had been tricked.

Lu Yang had even warned him, that as long as something felt off, he was never to agree to any “invitations.”

Jiang Ziya didn't dare to mention that he had already agreed to help Xiao Xue come "true."

Right now, his brother-in-law was obviously treating him as an imposter. Jiang Ziya pondered for a moment, and then decided it was in his best interest not to rashly head in. Getting beaten up was not the big issue here. If his brother-in-law also had a sword like "Slay" and chopped him with it directly, then it would be comically tragic.

"Jiěfu, are you in any danger right now?" He asked, still unable to stop worrying.

A cold snort was all he heard from the doorbell.

It seems like he isn't in any danger. Jiang Ziya relaxed, and then decided to wait until Lu Yang came over before he did anything. He was really thankful that he hadn't rejected Lu Yang's help earlier, or he really would have no idea what to do.

Jiang Ziya called his sister to report that all was well, spouting nonsense like how Jiěfu had been sent out on a business trip at the last moment, the place was very remote, and perhaps the phone signal there wasn't very good. It was to put his sister's heart at ease before anything else.

After he hung up, he waited for a long while, before he couldn't take it anymore and called Lu Yang.

"Sorry, I've been trapped again." Lu Yang sounded embarrassed. "It might be a while before I can get out."

Jiang Ziya froze and asked, "You're trapped by a barrier dimension again?"

"Yeah." Lu Yang affirmed, and then followed up quickly with, "Don't worry, this happens often. It's no big deal. Once the artifact demon who is trapping me in here is unable to maintain this 'barrier dimension' anymore, I can take care of him."

... It even happens often.

Jiang Ziya was rendered speechless. The exorcising abilities of his good friend... sounded very unreliable!

"Then, can you talk with me over the phone?"

"Yup." Lu Yang said, relaxed, "Since I've been trapped, there's not much for me to do. I tried looking around a little just now, but I didn't find the weak point of the barrier dimension. I'm tired of looking for it, so chatting with you to pass the time suits me just fine. Have you found your brother-in-law?"

"I'm outside my brother-in-law's company and discovered that he's also trapped in a barrier dimension like you. We talked over the intercom of the doorbell. He treated me as an imposter."

"..."

In an incredulous tone, Lu Yang exclaimed, "If it were your sister, I wouldn't feel as shocked, since special abilities are hereditary. But isn't your brother-in-law originally just a normal teacher?"

"Right now, it seems like he's an assistant to a feng shui master."
Jiang Ziya weakly answered, "Perhaps he got involved because of the feng shui master?"

"I'll help ask about the background of the feng shui master afterwards. Is he in danger?"

"I don't think so. He's just been trapped. Also, he intends to wait until the barrier dimension disappears, like you."

Jiang Ziya felt vexed as he complained, "It seems like my brother-in-law isn't simple either! What exactly is going on? Ever since I found out about Xiao—about you, it feels like this world has gone completely bonkers!"

Thankfully, he had made a good save. He had just nearly reminded Lu Yang about Xiao Xue again.

"These kinds of things are always like this. Originally, when you didn't know about them, even if you discovered something strange, you would convince yourself otherwise with all sorts of reasons, and then you would forget it completely after two days. Now that you know, there is no way you can ever deceive yourself again."

Lu Yang sighed, and then weakly said, "Ziya, there is no way that you will be able to return to the ordinary world anymore. Actually, given

that left eye of yours, you wouldn't have been able to continue playing dumb all your life anyways. The fact that you managed to hold on until age twenty before you stepped into this world is already quite strange. I've always suspected that someone has been protecting you from the shadows, the most likely suspect being the boss of Jiu Ge Bookstore."

"... Can't you just let me have someone normal around me?"

"Uh, I initially thought that your brother-in-law was a normal person." At this moment, Lu Yang suddenly laughed and said, "Looks like they can't continue anymore. Hold on, I'll take care of this artifact demon and head over."

Jiang Ziya could only continue to wait, but all of a sudden, he heard sounds coming from the office behind him. He immediately turned his head to look. The lights inside were flickering non-stop, and there was even the occasional rattling sound.

"Jiěfu? What's wrong?" Jiang Ziya leaned on the doorbell and pressed it desperately, but he heard nothing except for the sound of the bell.
I can't wait anymore!

Jiang Ziya banged on the door hard. The door was an automatic sliding glass door, but it was currently locked and would not slide open on its own. He was at a loss as to what to do. Though he wanted to smash the door open and had tried several times banging against it with his non-injured shoulder, he still wasn't able to knock it open. The glass was simply too sturdy.

He then looked around for things he could use to smash open the door. There was a flowerpot to the side, but it was too huge for him to pick up with one hand.

With no other options, he pressed his whole body to the door, trying to see what was happening inside on both ends. Instantly, he noticed that something was wrong with the left corridor. It was aglow with red flames from a sea of fire, as though it was the site of a fire. Inside the huge flames, he could vaguely see a human silhouette.

No, that can't possibly be real. Jiang Ziya forced himself to calm down. With such a large fire, he should be able to feel the heat from his side too, but he didn't feel anything different about the temperature.

That's not real!

The fire immediately extinguished, revealing a person who was continuously patting himself down with his hand. When the fire vanished, he froze, said "Eh," and then ceased his patting motions. "Jiěfu!" shouted Jiang Ziya.

Jiang Qibing was startled. He seemed dazed as he looked at Jiang Ziya outside the glass door, and then at his surroundings. He appeared to be lost as to what to do.

"Jiěfu!" Jiang Ziya anxiously called once more, as he banged against the glass door. "Hurry and come out!"

Once Jiang Qibing heard that, he hesitated for a few moments, before he then slowly opened the door and went out.

In this time period, Jiang Ziya was practically burning from anxiety, though he did not blame his brother-in-law for his slow movements. He understood that Jiang Qibing was still questioning whether he was real or fake, and perhaps was worrying even more that this was a trap and a fatal invitation.

No matter how slowly he went, Jiang Qibing still finally managed to open the glass door and walked out.

Jiang Ziya went up to him and sized him up. Seeing that he was completely unhurt, he finally relaxed.

"Ziya?" Jiang Qibing forced himself to put on a smile as he asked, "Why are you here?"

"I came to look for you. It's past ten PM. Sis is really worried about you!"

"... Were you really the one talking to me just now?"

"Yeah," replied Ziya as he nodded his head.

An awkward expression showed on Jiang Qibing's face, and he vaguely muttered, "This-That... My work is a bit complicated, so I was a little suspicious just now. But nothing major is going on, so don't worry about it."

He paused, and then, almost begging, he said, "It's best if you don't tell your sister. I don't want her to worry too much about my work."

Jiang Ziya agreed with a nod. He also did not want to make his sister worry.

“Jiěfu, drive me back to the hospital, and then go home. I told my sister that you went on a business trip, and that your phone didn’t have any signal, so you couldn’t call home to inform them. Remember not to get that wrong.”

Jiang Qibing had not thought that it would be this easy to convince Jiang Ziya, and furthermore, he had not asked any questions on the matter. He looked profoundly at his wife’s brother, and then agreed, “Okay.”

When the two of them went downstairs, they coincidentally ran into Lu Yang. All three of them momentarily stared at each other.

“Jiang-gē.” Lu Yang greeted with a smile as he took the lead, making Slay appear at his side. This attracted a glance from Jiang Ziya, but gathered no attention from Jiang Qibing.

... So he can’t see it? Lu Yang thought and didn’t bother to put away Slay, letting it float between the three of them.

Jiang Qibing acknowledged him with a “Mn,” not daring to ask him too much due to his guilty conscience. He merely asked him politely, “Did you come here looking for Ziya? How is your hand injury?”

Lu Yang chuckled as he said, “It’s a lot better. No big deal.”

No big deal? Jiang Ziya couldn't help but want to roll his eyes at him. *Those two donuts have already become strawberry-flavored, and you still dare to say you're fine. Do you think that we are all blind?*

"Come with me to the hospital to get it wrapped again! The nurses will surely give you the scolding of a lifetime."

Lu Yang scratched his head and reassured him, "It's really fine. I've got to go back and write my English essay. It's due tomorrow in class!"

"Come to the hospital. I'll write it for you!"

"Really?" Lu Yang's eyes sparkled as he immediately agreed, "Okay, I'll go to the hospital with you."

Jiang Ziya muttered in annoyance, "You... If you didn't want to write essays, why take a writing class? It's not even a required class!"

"Oh, I chose my classes based on your timetable; otherwise, who would help you with— Otherwise, no one would help me with the roll call!" Lu Yang quickly corrected himself.

To think that he had nearly said, "Who would help you with the roll call" in front of Ziya's brother-in-law... If he were to say that, Jiang Qibing would surely get angry, and then Jiang Ziya would never help him write his essays for the rest of his lifetime.

Jiang Ziya shot him a fierce glare. Thankfully, Lu Yang had corrected himself in time, or else Jiang Ziya would have been tempted to perform the act of killing one's friend on the spot.

Jiang Qibing looked at the bickering duo in amusement. Within his heart, he was very glad that he had insisted on Ziya going to university, instead of agreeing to Ziya's request of letting him work immediately after graduating high school.

Don't joke around. For such a clever child like Ziya, it would be too much of a pity for him not to further his studies.

Actually, Jiang Yu should have continued her studies, too.

Thinking of his young wife, Jiang Qibing hated himself for not having enough ability to make it happen. Perhaps, he could wait until Jiang Yu was a little older and was in kindergarten, then he could reconsider having Jiang Yu go back to school.

"Jiěfu?"

Jiang Qibing raised his head and saw the two boys currently staring at him. He quickly broke into a smile and said, "Let's go. It's very late already."

Footnotes

1 “Feng shui”: Feng shui is the practice of arranging and positioning buildings and objects within it to harmonize with spiritual forces for prosperity.

2 “Wu Ming Liang”: The name of the feng shui master 吳明亮 (wú míng liàng) sounds the same as “no brightness” 無明亮 (wú míng liàng).

Chapter 1: The Busy Patient Part 3 —The Conflicted Friend

The moment he walked into the ward, Lu Yang raised an eyebrow and pointed his right hand at the corner with two of his fingers held together. Slay, which was drifting beside him, abruptly shot out, piercing straight at the bloodstained shadow in the corner. A single strike was all it took to sever the shadow's head. A head wrapped in messy hair fell to the ground, immediately turning into drifting ashes together with the body that had been kneeling there. Just like that, the shadow disappeared without a trace.

Jiang Ziya was stumped and asked in confusion, "Why did you wipe him out so suddenly?"

Lu Yang shrugged as he said, "That was an illusory familiar of the lowest caliber. It doesn't have much awareness and is around the same as a cockroach. I normally don't do anything about them because there are just too many. But you're staying in this ward. I bet it's uncomfortable looking at that kind of thing, right?"

Cockroach... Jiang Ziya was a little speechless. If the average person saw that kind of thing, it would at least warrant an entire ghost story. Yet, to my friend, it's no different than a cockroach?

Lu Yang sat on the bed. His two hands had been rewrapped. Although he couldn't avoid being nagged by the nurses, smiling in response couldn't hurt.

"Remember to write my essay for me." Taking his shoes off, Lu Yang lazily lay down on the bed.

"Fine!" Jiang Ziya hurriedly drew the curtains shut to prevent bothering the other people. Although the elder in the opposite bed had poor hearing, there was still the married couple next to them.

He had to do something like that even though he had one arm in a cast, while Lu Yang was leisurely reclining in bed. *He even crossed one leg over the other. Just who is the patient here?!*

After pulling the curtains shut, Jiang Ziya sat down, took out his notebook, and began writing the essay. He didn't even bother to take out his dictionary. After all, if he wrote it too well, the teacher would figure it out, considering Lu Yang's abilities.

"What do you think is going on with my brother-in-law?" Jiang Ziya asked worriedly as he wrote.

"He's probably a practitioner, too."

Jiang Ziya glanced at Slay, which was floating to the side, and asked doubtfully, "But he didn't seem like he could see your sword."

"It's not strange if he can't. Not all practitioners have that kind of ability." Lu Yang gave Jiang Ziya a look and said, "It's stranger to be able to see so clearly, to the point of knowing that Slay is an ancient Chinese sword."

"You don't need to remind me how strange I am!"

Lu Yang began smiling. "You're only able to see, while the sword is *mine*! Just who is the stranger one?"

Jiang Ziya lifted his head and asked curiously, "Exactly what age were you when you started doing these things?"

"I can't really say. I'd been tagging along with my parents since I was young. Even I don't know what age I was when I started participating." Lu Yang thought it over for a bit and surmised, "Probably around ten or so. A few years before I had Slay, I began offhandedly whacking a few weak illusory familiars."

"Your parents also do this kind of thing?" Jiang Ziya was surprised. He had never heard Lu Yang talk about his family affairs before. His friend had never brought it up. However, Jiang Ziya had never thought that they would also be demon slayers. *Is this a family business, after all?*

"Come to think of it, where are your dad and mom? When I went over to your place last time, only your grandparents were there. No one mentioned your parents."

Lu Yang shrugged and said, "My dad and mom have been overseas for two years. Before then, they never came home much either. Either they would be running about in Taiwan, or they would be overseas."

Hearing such a detailed explanation, Jiang Ziya felt a bit nervous. In the past, Lu Yang had never spoken so much about his family. He hurriedly said, "If you don't want to talk about what's going on at home, you don't have to."

"There's no difference now. Before, I just didn't dare to say anything."
Lu Yang said helplessly, "If you had asked about my parents' professions, could I have told you that one of them is a Taoist priest, and the other is an exorcist?"

"...Your family sure is complicated."

"Yours doesn't seem simple, either." Lu Yang huffed, "If I knew it would be like this, I wouldn't have needed to keep it from you. There were many times when I was stuck in barrier dimensions I couldn't see through and didn't know how to crack. I was often detained. If you could have taken a look for me, it would have saved me who knows how much effort."

"I can help you?"

Jiang Ziya perked up. Lu Yang had helped him so many times, and he had even been captured because of what was going on with Xiao Xue, almost falling to his death from the building. Hearing now that he could help his friend, he felt relieved that he could finally repay this debt!

Lu Yang sat up and asked seriously, "Ziya, are you really willing to help me?"

Jiang Ziya nodded. Even though he wouldn't choose to slay demons if he didn't have to, he had incurred a debt, and he was really worried about Lu Yang getting caught so often. He had no choice but to bear with it and do it.

"Why are you doing this kind of thing?" Jiang Ziya asked in great concern. If he could, he would still prefer repaying the debt through a method like helping his friend take the night shift at a convenience store!

"It's like how you're an employee at a bookstore. It's a part-time job!"

"You get paid?" Jiang Ziya was shocked. He had thought that it was because Lu Yang's family ran a temple, so he had to do it for the better good or some similar reason.

"Mostly, but there's the occasional pro bono case."

Jiang Ziya asked curiously, "When do you do pro bono cases?"

Lu Yang painfully recounted, "Like when I accidentally discover an artifact demon that has shocking resentment, yet hasn't hurt anyone yet, or no one has discovered the "haunting," and so no one spends any money to commission me, but can I let him harm others? In those kinds of cases, I can only do free work."

After saying that, he added on worriedly, "When I do charity cases, you better not ask me for payment. I can only give you money on paid missions."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya rolled his eyes at him. When he had accepted earlier, Lu Yang hadn't mentioned anything at all about getting paid. Just as he was about to say that Lu Yang didn't need to pay him, he suddenly realized that he could take "another form of payment."

"Promise me you won't kill Xiao Xue, and I'll help you."

At first, Lu Yang couldn't figure out who Xiao Xue was, but immediately afterward, he understood that it was that artifact demon. He roared on the spot, "You promised you would trick the artifact demon out and let me get rid of her. Are you going back on your word?"

"It's not the same now!" Jiang Ziya said angrily, "She accepted coming along with me to save you, and she even blocked a bullet for me. How can I go along with the promise from earlier to kill her? That's too heartless!"

"Do you mean that I'm heartless?" Lu Yang glared at him in frustration. "I'm protecting your life!"

"Xiao Xiao *saved* my life and even yours!"

"What's with the arguing? I can't sleep like this!" The man next to them yelled.

They fell silent but glared at each other, neither willing to back down. Lu Yang lowered his voice and said, "Ziya, you haven't seen an artifact demon kill someone. There are cases where not a single person in the family was left alive. Think of your sister, your brother-in-law, and Jiang Jiang."

The moment his sister was mentioned, Jiang Ziya's determination wavered greatly. "Can't an artifact demon get along with people? Are you sure there are definitely no exceptions?"

Isn't Yu Shu, who lives across from us, raising a butler? Doesn't she worry... But House Keeper did say something about how Yu Shu has the ability to make him disappear.

"I can't say it's definitely!" Lu Yang snapped, "But can you be sure that the one in your family is an exception? Have you figured out how she appeared?"

Jiang Ziya of course hadn't. In addition to Xiao Xue, he was even more clueless about how Jiang Jiang had appeared.

Jiang Jiang's existence was a large part of the reason he didn't want to destroy Xiao Xue. Since he had already decided to accept Jiang Jiang, the addition of Xiao Xue wasn't so difficult to accept. *After all, Jiang Jiang's "caliber" is even higher than Xiao Xue's!*

Since he was already keeping the more advanced one, was there a need to be scared of the less evolved one? However, Jiang Ziya couldn't tell Lu Yang in so many words.

"I'll figure out how Xiao Xue appeared. Give me some time," was all he could say.

Hearing that, Lu Yang understood that it wouldn't be easy to convince Jiang Ziya anymore. He was so anxious that he furrowed his eyebrows, and he even considered that he might directly sneak into Jiang Ziya's apartment and deal with that artifact demon there. However, he recalled that the artifact demon was masquerading as a small child, so she definitely wouldn't leave Jiang Yu's side. It was unlikely that he

would succeed. He still had to have Jiang Ziya trick her out for it to work.

After thinking it through, Lu Yang looked at Jiang Ziya's shoulder injury and barged on to say, "When your shoulder gets a bit better in a few days, come with me. I'll let you see what 'demons' truly are!"

Jiang Ziya agreed on the spot. In the first place, he had wanted to hurry over and help when Lu Yang had gotten stuck in another barrier dimension today, but his shoulder injury wasn't fully recovered yet. Lu Yang probably wouldn't have let him tag along. Now that Lu Yang was inviting him of his own accord, of course he agreed immediately to prevent Lu Yang from backing out after thinking it over.

The guy who had promised to help relaxed, while the guy who had asked for help began worrying.

He had to find jobs that would pay so that Jiang Ziya could help out his family. They also had to be jobs related to barrier dimensions, or else Ziya wouldn't be useful and would definitely refuse the money. Additionally, this job couldn't be too difficult, since Jiang Ziya was still recovering, yet it couldn't be too simple, or else it wouldn't scare Ziya, and he would definitely be unwilling to hand that artifact demon over...

Thinking of all this, Lu Yang really had the urge to tell Jiang Ziya to wash up and sleep; he'll just go alone.

Jiang Ziya saw Lu Yang's conflicted face, but he didn't have even an ounce of sympathy. Recently, he had been worrying so much that his head almost hurt more than his injured shoulder. To be able to drag

his good friend into a shared headache was like sharing the pain and joy. Besides, this good friend was one of the reasons for his headache!

Seeing Jiang Ziya's relaxed expression over his worries, Lu Yang grew even more vexed. Just as he was about to describe to him all the various frightening artifact demons he had run into in the past, hollering came from the bed beside them.

"You're not returning again are you?" The man growled angrily, "You damn woman. Is your family so much more important than me—"

Jiang Ziya raised an eyebrow. This broken-legged guy really liked to yell at his wife. It was a good thing that in the afternoon, he had admitted he was in the wrong, and that he hadn't actually hit her. Otherwise, he was really considering secretly dialing the domestic abuse hotline.

The man kept yelling, but halfway through, he stopped, and then he blurted frantically, "He died? How?"

Hearing the word "die," Lu Yang glanced over at Jiang Ziya, wanting to know what was going on, but it wasn't like the latter knew anything more than he did, just that he had heard them arguing that afternoon. So, he could only shrug his shoulders. He was also very shocked over how he'd only just overheard that afternoon that he had gone missing, and now he was already hearing about his death that night.

But it was not that strange. If someone wasn't involved in all sorts of messes, they wouldn't disappear out of the blue. Once someone disappeared, it was most likely that they had gotten into trouble.

Even though he didn't know him, Jiang Ziya still felt a pang of regret hearing that someone had died.

"Was he found? What? You have to identify him?" The man said hesitantly, "All right, all right, stay there. I, I... Sigh, I'm fine. I'll just ask my brothers to come over to help."

The broken-legged man leaned on his crutches, hobbling to the bathroom. He kept mumbling, "What bad luck."

Jiang Ziya couldn't help rolling his eyes at his back. He was obviously capable of going to the bathroom on his own, yet he just had to have his wife come over to take care of him. He could get a pass if things were normal, but he had thrown a snit even when his wife's little brother had gone missing, and now he was calling it bad luck that the brother had passed away. It was despicable.

Seeing Jiang Ziya's sullen face, Lu Yang glanced at him curiously. Jiang Ziya quietly told him what he had heard that afternoon.

Lu Yang listened, yet he didn't care about the married couple's troubles. Instead, he worriedly said, "It's exactly the case that too many people have gone missing. That's why I've been too busy recently to even come to the hospital to visit."

Jiang Ziya was taken aback. He asked in confusion, "Your job description includes missing people?"

"Of course. It's not like people disappear for no reason." Lu Yang's words held a deeper meaning. The "reasons" naturally fell under his job description.

"I thought most of them would be caused by humans?" Jiang Ziya felt that murdering for money and the like were much more realistic causes than artifact demons, illusory familiars, barrier dimensions, and so on.

"In comparison, manmade troubles are still more common." Lu Yang confessed, "And by a whole lot. I often accidentally come across murder cases. I've reported them so much that I've gotten to know the police."

So that's how it is! No wonder he could deal with the police who had come to investigate. Jiang Ziya asked, a bit worried, "Since you make reports so often, aren't you afraid that the police will think you're a serial killer, that you've killed them yourself and are making the reports?"

Lu Yang smiled guiltily. Jiang Ziya understood immediately. He raised an eyebrow. "You've already been suspected before?"

"I keep reporting cases. There's no way they wouldn't notice! Thankfully, I've saved many policemen before. They help me settle it."

Saved many policemen before? Jiang Ziya stared at Lu Yang suspiciously. *Are policemen specifically there to be saved?*

"Fine, I researched which policemen had run into this kind of thing,

and I deliberately went to save them.” Lu Yang chuckled and said, “Some of them had also been saved by my mom before in the past. If I don’t know a few policemen in this line of business, I’d have my hands full just with going to the police station and the court house.”

That’s true. If it weren’t for Lu Yang, Jiang Ziya’s bullet wound wouldn’t have been so easily passed off.

“But knowing too many policemen also has a huge disadvantage.” Lu Yang bit out, “Those guys are the ones who keep tossing me jobs that don’t pay! Even when they promise me they would apply for funds, it’s always so little that it can only be used to pay my fare!”

Jiang Ziya laughed. He patted his good friend to console him and said, “Just treat it as doing a good deed for the public safety of Taiwan!”

Lu Yang growled, “Why don’t you sacrifice your own time working your part-time job to do a good deed for the public safety of Taiwan!”

Jiang Ziya said indifferently, “After this, aren’t I doing exactly that with you?”

Hearing that, Lu Yang remembered his worry from earlier over the contents of the job selection. He worried so much that his entire face contorted.

Jiang Ziya tossed the notebook over and said, “I finished writing it. Copy it over before you turn it in. Don’t turn it in just like that. Don’t you go thinking that the teacher is blind and can’t recognize the handwriting.”

Lu Yang looked at the clock on the wall, which indicated two A.M., and thought of his eight A.M. class that day, his face growing even more troubled.

Jiang Ziya poked his good friend. "I'm going to sleep. Go copy it over at the side table."

"Boo hoo hoo, you're so heartless!"

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya yawned widely, climbed onto his hospital bed, and forcefully squished Lu Yang off the bed.

Chapter 2: Confused; Confined by Part 1—The First Clash Between Lies and Truth

House Keeper knocked on the door and patiently waited for the other person to open it.

Soon after, Jiang Yu pulled open the door and smiled warmly. “Did you need to borrow something?”

As she spoke, she looked curiously at the person behind House Keeper. It was actually a foreigner. Even though House Keeper’s eyes were dark green, making him look like someone of mixed descent, the one behind him was blond-haired and blue-eyed. He was completely a foreigner.

“No.” House Keeper took a step back and introduced the person behind him. “This is my younger brother, Hold Keeper. He recently moved in with us, so I brought him over to greet you.”

They’re brothers? Jiang Yu was momentarily stunned. She had really never seen brothers who looked so unlike. Their only similarity was their handsomeness, but what little brother would come to stay at his older brother’s girlfriend’s home?

House Keeper took the initiative to explain, “We are brothers with the same father but different mothers, so we are not very alike. Many people find it difficult to believe that we are brothers.”

A laugh escaped from Jiang Yu, and she said, "Can't blame them. You two really are very different. Is your brother here to visit?"

"He came from overseas to study abroad in Taiwan. He plans to stay for two years." House Keeper explained with a gentle smile, "Hold Keeper's Chinese isn't up to par yet. Please forgive him for his blunders."

Hold Keeper took a step forward and bowed slightly. He spoke with a smile, "I am Hold Keeper. I am in your care."

Jiang Yu was a bit overwhelmed by the greeting. No one was that courteous nowadays. She hurriedly said, "We're all neighbors. There's no need to be so polite. Would you like to come in for a cup of tea?"

Hold Keeper turned his head to glance at House Keeper, like he was asking him for permission. House Keeper smiled slightly. "Let's head in for a bit. They have two adorable girls. You know of them, too."

Oh wow! What kind of well-behaved child is this? Jiang Yu was a bit shocked. *In this age, there actually still exists a younger brother who gives so much respect to his older brother? He even turned to ask his brother first. You only see something like that from young children!*

"Okay." Hold Keeper said with great humbleness, "Then, we'll be bothering Săosăo."¹

Jiang Yu couldn't help feeling a bit nervous. She quickly welcomed them inside and rushed off to make the tea and prepare the snacks.

The moment Jiang Yu went into the kitchen, Hold Keeper dropped all of his courteousness. He glanced at his "brother" out of the corner of his eye and said, "I told you I could pull it off. There's no need for you to fret."

"You pulled it off too well." House Keeper said flatly, "Didn't you see her shock? No one is that polite these days."

"Are you in any position to tell me about politeness?" Hold Keeper said in frustration, "Besides, you told me to be polite, and now you're saying it's wrong to be polite?"

"I am not saying it's wrong, just that you overdid it," House Keeper replied calmly.

"How did I overdo it?" Hold Keeper frowned and said, "Rather, I was too impolite. Not only did I not wear formal clothes, my words were too straightforward. I didn't use a bunch of deferential words, and furthermore, I didn't embellish my speech. I didn't even bring a gift, even though I don't want to give anything..."

House Keeper fell silent. He really didn't know how to explain it to the other person. Previously, he had already flipped through the other one's story. Compared to himself, the content of Hold Keeper's story was even more distant from present day life than his.

He looked at the clothes Hold Keeper was wearing. In actuality, those were his clothes, not Hold Keeper's. If he had worn those grandiose priest robes out, anyone would be able to tell there was something off about Hold Keeper. It was even worse than his dress shirt, dress pants, and vest combo. He really didn't know why Mistress had agreed to buy him those clothes.

Perhaps I should ask Mistress to order some everyday clothes? House Keeper began to realize that his own outfit could not really be considered "normal" enough.

"What are you staring off into space for?" Hold Keeper lowered his voice and said, "Where are those two little girls?"

House Keeper looked around the apartment. The layout was exactly the same as his mistress's apartment, just that the décor was completely different. This place had several small decorations, the walls were covered with pastel, flowery wallpaper, and the color of the curtains and tablecloth were both similarly rather soft. *Compared to Mistress's home, it looks... warmer? I think that is the word?*

Perhaps I should also decorate the apartment like this? But wallpaper with small flowers does not seem to fit the swords and weapons on the walls...

"Really, what are you staring off into space for? Don't forget our business."

Hold Keeper felt exasperated. He had only come over to see if he could help. The one who had to do the actual task wasn't him, yet that person who was supposed to do the deed kept staring off into space.

House Keeper returned to his senses and said nonchalantly, "They are probably asleep. Children sleep a lot. It is just past noon. They should be taking an afternoon nap."

Hold Keeper said in a low voice, "How about I detain the mother, and you head into the room to dispose of the kids?"

"Do you want to kill me?" House Keeper said flatly, "My disappearance would do you no favors. Mistress would make you do the housework. I am of the opinion that you would be unwilling to do such things."

Hold Keeper's face reddened, and he bit out angrily, "Who wants to kill you? Didn't that woman want us to come and get rid of those two girls?"

"Just one." House Keeper frowned. *Hold Keeper didn't even listen to Mistress's words clearly.* "We are only opposing the artifact demon. We must not ever provoke the other one."

Hold Keeper waved his hand impatiently, but he glimpsed Jiang Yu coming over with a platter through the corner of his eye. He immediately dropped his waving hand, sat up straight and tall, a faint smile on his face. His appearance and actions were impeccable.

Jiang Yu couldn't help straightening upon seeing him. House Keeper already made people feel he was very "polite." Fortunately, he seemed rather gentle and easy to approach, like he would be easy to get along with.

However, this Hold Keeper was already eye-catching enough with his blond hair, blue eyes, and beautiful appearance. Even his actions were so elegant that his entire person gave off a strange, powerful aura. No matter how you looked at him, he should be the type to be kept at a palace... Right, right! Once she thought of a palace, Jiang Yu felt that this Hold Keeper was practically like a prince!

Yet right now, the background behind the prince is wallpaper dotted with small flowers. It doesn't fit at all!

Jiang Yu felt the urge to move a pot of roses to place behind him as the background.

"We only have Tieguanyin oolong tea right now, and some jujube walnut cakes." Jiang Yu was a bit distressed. *Shouldn't this prince have something like black tea with biscuits and the like instead?*

"Thank you for the welcome." House Keeper quickly added on, "Sorry for making you go through this trouble."

Hold Keeper also expressed his thanks by inclining his head. He said rather elegantly and gently, "You have my gratitude for the tea and snacks."

Jiang Yu decided to keep her gaze on House Keeper more. This Hold Keeper really made her feel too much pressure.

"Yu Shu seems very busy lately?"

Truthfully, she didn't see Yu Shu often, mostly only interacting when they waited for the garbage truck. However, recently, House Keeper had been the one taking out the garbage, so she hadn't seen Yu Shu

for a long time already. But she didn't eliminate the possibility that she was too lazy to take out the trash, tossing the job at her boyfriend.

Even though they hadn't been acquainted for long, Jiang Yu already thoroughly understood Yu Shu's lazy personality.

House Keeper swallowed the tea that had been in his mouth and nodded. "Her manuscript is giving her some trouble."

In actuality, she was behind on her manuscript because she had previously been busy with readying a doll for Hold Keeper to use as a body. Now, she was being badgered by her editor, drinking coffee like water every day to rush out her manuscript.

"She's always shut away at home and won't even go out for a walk." Jiang Yu said worriedly, "That's not good for her health! House Keeper, you have to persuade her otherwise."

"I will do my best." House Keeper couldn't reveal that his mistress actually did go "out" for walks, just that this "out" was in the barrier dimensions he and Hold Keeper were from. She did not even need to leave through the door to go there.

"Gē, didn't you say there are two little girls?" Hold Keeper finally couldn't keep quiet. If they kept dallying like this, when would they ever accomplish their task?

Jiang Yu glanced at Hold Keeper, whose face held a trace of impatience, making him appear like an impatient young man. He didn't give off overwhelming pressure like before.

Seems like his courteous appearance from earlier was just the way he treats strangers. Once we're more familiar, I probably won't see that "prince" appearance much anymore.

Jiang Yu couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief. She glanced at him again, much more at ease with what she saw. This Hold Keeper was rather handsome. Sitting together with House Keeper, the two brothers were a feast for the eyes.

Scrutinizing House Keeper and Hold Keeper, these two youngsters, Jiang Yu suddenly felt something was odd. "Hold Keeper, how old are you?"

Hold Keeper was taken aback. He had asked about the little girls, yet he got asked about his age in return. He couldn't digest the question right away, yet he didn't think about it either before he replied, "Twenty-three."

Youngster? Jiang Yu laughed at herself. Hold Keeper was actually older than her, yet she called him a youngster. *Really, just because I'm married and have kids, I've forgotten that I'm only just past twenty.*

"Then, how about you, House Keeper?" Since she had already asked one of them, Jiang Yu grew curious and asked the other one too while she was at it.

"I am twenty-five," House Keeper answered with a tranquil smile. Even though Hold Keeper rolled his eyes at him, his expression didn't change at all.

In the books, he was over one hundred fifty, but of course he couldn't speak the truth. He also couldn't say that he wasn't even one year old—it hadn't been a year since Yu Shu had created him.

"Then, how old is Yu Shu?" Jiang Yu got addicted to asking and happily continued her inquiries.

"She is twenty-eight."

It's a case of the girl's older?!

Jiang Yu's love for gossip reared its head. In the first place, Yu Shu was always shut away at home, yet a handsome boyfriend of mixed descent had suddenly appeared. That was already a huge piece of gossip, and she had wanted to ask for the details from Yu Shu.

Unfortunately, House Keeper was always the one to take out the trash after that. She hadn't been very familiar with him then. It wasn't like she could latch onto him to ask about how they had started going out.

But, now that we've waited together for the garbage truck so many times, we should be familiar enough for me to ask, right?

"House Keeper, how did you get to know Yu Shu?"

Jiang Yu's eyes were nearly shining. The housewife circle was small, and she was too young to have an easy time joining the other housewives in their circle. *These days have been so boring!* Now that she had gossip to hear, she didn't want to miss out on the chance at all.

House Keeper paused. To his side, Hold Keeper actually didn't continue asking about the two little girls either. He tossed aside their business, instead watching on gleefully.

"I read her books and liked them a lot, so I wrote her an email. That's how we got to know each other."

House Keeper would have to tell his mistress when they returned later so that their stories would match, but Mistress was currently so busy with her manuscript that she couldn't see straight. He didn't know if

the words would get through to her even if he spoke right next to her ear.

Jiang Yu had a sudden realization. *So they're online friends. That does fit Yu Shu a lot.*

"Did you originally live in Taiwan?"

After meeting Hold Keeper today, Jiang Yu had the feeling that these brothers who made others feel so much pressure probably hadn't grown up in Taiwan.

"No, we did not originally reside in Taiwan."

Jiang Yu nodded. He had traveled thousands of miles to meet his girlfriend. No wonder both brothers stayed with Yu Shu. Yu Shu lived by herself anyway. Living together meant they could split the rent.

House Keeper was pondering whether to make up that he was from England or that he was from the United States of America when Jiang Yu stood up. Hold Keeper pulled on his sleeve to remind him to guard his expression.

Two little girls were rubbing their eyes as they walked out of their room. Their two identical little faces had the adorable appearance of having just woken up.

House Keeper retained his smile. He turned and told Hold Keeper, "These are the twins from their family. Aren't they adorable? I spoke no falsehoods."

"They really are cute," Hold Keeper spun the conversation further, saying, "the cutest pair of twins I've ever seen."

Hearing people praise her daughters made Jiang Yu happier than anything. She smiled and said, "The two of you are exaggerating too much."

"Māma, who are they?" Jiang Jiang looked at House Keeper and Hold Keeper with wide eyes while Xiao Xue clung bodily to her mom's thigh and refused to even lift her head.

"It's the boyfriend of the lady across from us, and his younger brother."

Jiang Yu led the two little girls over to the side of the table. She lifted Xiao Xue up, while Jiang Jiang sat obediently beside her.

"What's a boyfriend?" Jiang Jiang asked in confusion.

Jiang Yu froze. She hadn't thought that something she had randomly said would actually prompt her daughter to ask this question. She pondered over it and still didn't want to brush her daughter off. She said, "It's like how I am with your dad!"

When House Keeper heard that, he retained a smile on his face but felt a strange feeling in his heart. After all, Yu Shu should be considered his "mother," yet they were pretending to be boyfriend and girlfriend. When he had still been an illusion, he had absolutely no opinion over the matter, but now that he had become a lie, he certainly felt that something was off.

Hold Keeper's gaze even danced with mischievous mirth. This actually made House Keeper give him a sidelong glance. Hold Keeper was an illusory familiar just like how he had been before, yet why were his emotions so rich? *It is like he does not lose to me when I have already become a lie?*

He could not figure it out, but House Keeper was not that mindful of it, either. In fact, he didn't care at all whether Hold Keeper was an illusion or a lie. More accurately, he still did not understand why he should care about such matters.

"Māma, I'm thirsty," Jiang Jiang suddenly said.

"I'll go and pour some juice for you two."

Although there was tea on the table, Jiang Yu had never liked giving tea to kids. She stood up, thinking to place Xiao Xue down, but the little girl wasn't willing to let her go no matter what today. However, she didn't think much about it, as Xiao Xue was just a kid and probably wanted attention. Not too concerned, she carried Xiao Xue just like that with her to the kitchen.

Jiang Jiang, a lone girl, faced two grown men who were up to no good. However, what was strange was that the vigilant and nervous side was the grown men.

House Keeper looked at the girl and didn't react much. This one was not his target. If it weren't because the other might interfere, he wouldn't even give her a second glance.

The little girl warned, "Don't you dare bully Xiao Xue."

"What if I wish to bully her?"

House Keeper spoke with utmost seriousness, yet his expression and words didn't match at all. Hold Keeper couldn't help rolling his eyes at the sight. *Can you not say that you will bully a little girl so seriously?*

However, he didn't mention anything. This was a battle between a "truth" and a "lie." Hold Keeper had no power to interfere. No matter how unwilling, he could only listen quietly to the side.

Jiang Jiang narrowed her eyes dangerously.

"Will you step in and hinder us?" House Keeper began assessing whether he had the ability to contend against a truth. Mistress had mentioned that the other had already become a real little girl. As logic went, she shouldn't be very powerful, but Mistress also said she was not completely certain about it.

Mistress's words are never that dependable. In addition, he hadn't been able to catch Xiao Xue by herself for the longest time, so he could only take Hold Keeper with him here to scout around.

If this "truth" were to interfere, then matters would become very complicated.

House Keeper said calmly, "She is only an illusion, while you are already a truth. Do not continue to interfere in such matters. You should slowly 'forget.' Only then will you truly become a normal girl in the future."

"Māma likes Xiao Xue!" Jiang Jiang said with conviction, "Māma and Bàba like that we're twins, so I won't let Xiao Xue disappear. She will

always be with me. Don't even think about bullying her in secret. Even if you seek out Yaya-gēge, he won't help you!"

Hearing that, House Keeper stared at Jiang Jiang without breaking his gaze. A little girl's appearance really didn't have any threat to it, yet he felt that this girl wasn't just bluffing. She truly did have the power to protect Xiao Xue.

House Keeper recalled what Mistress said about meeting Jiang Jiang for the first time and how she had once thrown her out. Now he thought, *If they had not been in Mistress's home where she had the definite advantage, it is probable that even Mistress then could not have chased Jiang Jiang away?*

What am I to do now?

Jiang Jiang threatened, "Gēge, both of you have to promise me that you won't ever hurt Xiao Xue!"

House Keeper shook his head and said, "I am unable promise that."

Hearing that, Jiang Jiang narrowed her eyes. She still looked rather cute, but House Keeper felt very unsettled.

"Gēge, you are more troublesome, but if I want that gēge behind you to disappear, that would be simple!"

She looked toward Hold Keeper, who was so angry that he almost jumped up, but House Keeper held him back without letting go. All he could do was continue sitting quietly at his seat, though his expression toward the little girl had already turned hostile.

House Keeper serenely said, "If you make him disappear, Mistress would not let it go."

"Gēge, if you two make Xiao Xue disappear, I won't let it go either!"

House Keeper didn't respond, as Jiang Yu was already carrying a pitcher of juice into the living room. Xiao Xue was still clinging to her thigh without letting go. She wasn't even willing to lift her head.

"Jiang Jiang, your juice is here."

"I want it!" As Jiang Jiang drank, she gave Hold Keeper a few disdainful glances, making him so angry that he wanted to toss the walnut cakes in his hands at the little girl's face.

"We should take our leave now."

House Keeper stood up. Since he had determined that Jiang Jiang would indeed protect Xiao Xue, there was nothing else he could do. He should hurry home to tell Mistress—*Hopefully, she will be able to hear in the midst of rushing out her manuscript.*

Besides, the veins on Hold Keeper's forehead were nearly about to burst. They should leave quickly.

"You're leaving already?" Jiang Yu was reluctant for them to leave. She finally had such a great gossiping partner, yet she hadn't even found out much at all yet!

House Keeper smiled and said, "Thank you for your hospitality. Some other day, I will put on afternoon tea. May I ask you to come partake in it with us?"

Jiang Yu immediately nodded nonstop and said, "Yes, I'll definitely go." Even though going over so impatiently was kind of rude, she'd just make some desserts to bring over in the future as a return gift. She really wanted too much to get along with the neighbors across from her. That way, she would have people to talk with in the future.

"That's great. Yu Shu will also be very happy." House Keeper smiled. *Once we are in Mistress's territory, even a "truth" won't have the advantage, right?*

Jiang Jiang's ferocious glare seemed to prove that point.

Footnotes

- 1 “Sãosão”: This is a polite way to address younger, married women.

Chapter 2: Confused; Confined by Part 2—The Ancient Pathway

As he left the hospital, Jiang Ziya looked at his injured arm. The bandages keeping his arm in place had already been removed. Actually, it barely hurt anymore. It only hurt a bit when he moved it too much.

He got in a taxi, originally wanting to go straight home. However, he thought it over and was still a bit worried about what was going on with his brother-in-law's job. If he went on an unannounced inspection right now, would he be able to come across some of the truth?

He had already begun dithering over it in the hospital room, and when the taxi driver asked him for his destination, Jiang Ziya hadn't even made a decision, yet he blurted the name of the street where his brother-in-law's company was located.

"Got it."

The taxi driver responded and began driving. Jiang Ziya could only smile wryly to himself. He really did want to go take a look after all. Currently, he also had his left eye he could use. *I should at least be of some use, right?*

As the thought occurred, Jiang Ziya grew spirited. This left eye had been a thorn in his side since he was young. Now that it was finally useful, he couldn't help feeling victorious after all his troubles.

Through the corner of his eye, he suddenly spotted someone familiar. He blurted, "Stop the car!"

The taxi driver was no amateur. With the sudden shout to halt, he jerked the steering wheel, jamming the car right into a small space by the roadside. Behind them, a motorcycle nearly didn't react in time, almost crashing into them. The motorcyclist yelled at their window, only leaving belatedly when he saw the driver ignoring him.

At this time, the driver scolded, "Young man, next time, don't yell for the car to stop so abruptly. That's dangerous!"

Jiang Ziya had almost been scared to death, too. He had seen someone he knew, so he had abruptly called for the car to stop. However, he hadn't wanted the driver to pull over to the shoulder so abruptly. Parking a bit farther and having to walk a few steps more made no difference!

Frowning, he paid and got out of the car, glancing at that familiar back in the distance. Luckily, the other person seemed preoccupied and hadn't even noticed the car accident that had almost played out over here, instead walking with a lowered head.

Jiang Ziya hurriedly made his way over. He hesitated for a moment, taking in the furrowed brows of the other person, and the fact that there was "no reason for the other person to be here right now." Thus, for now, he decided it would be better to sneakily follow and observe him.

The other person walked back and forth along the path several times, ultimately sitting down on a bench by the roadside, discouraged, with a puzzled expression clearly displayed, as if there were something undecipherable no matter how it was approached.

Seeing that, Jiang Ziya knew that there was probably nothing more to see. At first, he had thought he could stealthily find out some of the other person's secrets.

Jiang Ziya bought a drink and walked in front of the other person, who actually didn't look up, still deep in thought, not at all aware of Jiang Ziya's presence. *So out of it.*

Jiang Ziya took the cold drink and plastered it against the other person's face, making him shudder and jump up.

"Ziya-gē, why are you here?" The moment Fu Jun noticed the person in front of him, he was utterly shocked.

"I saw you in the car as I passed by, so I got out." Jiang Ziya pretended to be puzzled as he asked, "You aren't in school at this kind of time? Don't tell me you're skipping school? You're just an elementary school kid, and you actually dared to cut class?"

"I'm not cutting class! I'm..." Fu Jun hesitated for a moment but still explained honestly, "I was called in sick."

Jiang Ziya's smile wasn't quite a smile as he looked at him. *Just how does he even look like he's sick? Just now, he even walked back and forth along this path so many times. Don't tell me sick people need more exercise?*

Fu Jun's face flushed and he muttered, "Taiyi called it in. I'm really not cutting class."

Jiang Ziya said unhappily, "The boss has always been haphazard. If you follow his steps, you won't even need to go to school three days a week. You'll just need to go help the boss, who'll be lazing in bed, and man the shop every morning."

"I know!" Speaking of Fu Taiyi, Fu Jun truly grew angry. "Ziya-gē, you don't know what happened. When I told Taiyi to call in my absence, he actually happily said, 'You finally learned to occasionally skip school. That's great. Don't be such an old fashioned student.' *I'm* so angry!"

What a terrible father, leading his kid astray! Jiang Ziya didn't know whether to laugh or cry. *Boss, luckily for you, your son is an obedient kid, or else he'd really become a bad student!*

Fu Jun had always been an obedient kid; that was why Jiang Ziya didn't believe he would skip school for no reason. Therefore, he had followed behind him without a word earlier, wanting to see if he could learn the secret behind the Fu father and son.

"Xiao Jun, why in the world did you have the boss call in sick for you?"

Fu Jun didn't seem to intend to hide it and straightforwardly said, "I just wanted to come find Peilun. He disappeared and still can't be

found even now. I thought I'd search along the path from school to his home several times. I might be able to find a clue."

Jiang Ziya asked meaningfully, "How about I search with you? I might be able to see something you haven't noticed."

Hearing that, Fu Jun hesitated momentarily. However, when he lifted his head and looked at Jiang Ziya's face, his eyes immediately lit up and he nodded. "Okay."

He didn't know whether he was mistaken, but Jiang Ziya felt that when Fu Jun had looked over, what he had zeroed in on at that moment was his left eye.

Both with ulterior motives, the two of them began the endeavor of walking a single path nine times. Unfortunately, they still didn't discover anything. In fact, Jiang Ziya had followed him and walked it several times already earlier. He hadn't discovered anything strange at all...

Although that wasn't quite right either. He should say that he just hadn't discovered anything stranger than what he usually saw.

Under the street lights, a completely blue entity kept jumping through a hole in the ground, and then falling out from a hole above it, then falling back through the hole in the ground.

In front of a display window, a bunch of sphere shaped entities resembling green algae floated in midair, occasionally thumping against the clear window.

These couldn't be called normal things, but Jiang Ziya normally saw them all the time, so they could be considered a sort of "normal."

After walking another round, Fu Jun sat back on the bench, discouraged.

"Ziya-gē, let's stop. I don't think we can find any clues."

Jiang Ziya sat down as well. "Could it be a kidnapping? Has there been a phone call for ransom from a kidnapper?" If it was something like that, then his eye wouldn't be of any use.

Fu Jun felt doubtful too and said, "I asked Xie-māma, but there hasn't been any news. Besides, Peilun's family isn't wealthy. He shouldn't have been kidnapped for ransom?"

Having said that, he grew even more worried. He shared a glance with Jiang Ziya. Both saw the unease in each other's eyes.

Xie Peilun was an obedient elementary school kid. It couldn't be that he had run away from home. If he hadn't been kidnapped for ransom, then it could only be for something worse...

Thinking of that, Fu Jun's face fell. His personality was mature, so he had never had much to talk about with his classmates in the first place. Xie Peilun was the only one he was close with. They'd been walking to school and going home together for over a year. When he considered how the other person might have already suffered misfortune, his heart felt heavy.

"Let's search again." Going by Fu Jun's expression, Jiang Ziya felt they should walk around few more times. They might be able to find a clue during one of those times.

However, Fu Jun answered, "It's no use. I walked around so many times already. I haven't discovered anything."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya recalled how today wasn't the first day Fu Jun and Fu Taiyi had started searching. It was likely that he really had walked this path countless times already, yet still had nothing to show for it. *Do we have to give up?*

But Fu Jun didn't have the intention to leave. Jiang Ziya thought that he probably didn't want to give up either, yet he understood that what he was doing was useless...

"Come to think of it, do you two only take this path to school? Have you ever taken a different route, like a shortcut?"

Fu Jun paused, brows furrowing as he considered it.

"There is a shortcut through an alley, but we've only taken it once a long time ago. I told him not to go that way, and later on, we never took it again."

"Let's go take a look," Jiang Ziya suggested. "It won't take too long anyway."

Fu Jun didn't think it over much before he nodded and led the way. Right now, he didn't want to give up, yet there was nothing much he could do. Being able to do *something* was good.

The alley wasn't too far away. They only had to turn at the ends of two roads to reach it.

Jiang Ziya had originally thought it would be a dark alley, which was why Fu Jun would advise Xie Peilun not to go this way. However, it actually wasn't like that at all. This alley was very bright, and you could hear people chattering around you. It wasn't remote or dreary at all.

Why isn't Fu Jun willing to take this shortcut?

Jiang Ziya looked toward Fu Jun, who lifted his head and seemed to understand his puzzlement. He suddenly extended his hand to gesture at the wall by the alley's entrance.

"There's an ancient pathway there. I'm unable to get rid of it. Even though it's unlikely to activate, it's still better to avoid it if possible."

Jiang Ziya was stunned, unable to respond at all.

"Ziya-gē, do you see it?" Fu Jun asked curiously, "You should be able to see it, right?"

Jiang Ziya stared as he answered, "You mean that red lotus flower drawn on the stone by the corner of the wall over there?"

He wasn't familiar with flowers, but lotuses were easy to distinguish. That lotus looked just like a blooming lotus seat that could be seen in temples.

"As expected of Ziya-gē." Fu Jun praised, "You could even distinguish the type of flower."

Only then was Jiang Ziya able to react, feeling extremely conflicted. It seemed like the Fu father and son no longer planned to keep him in the dark. Since that was the case, he should have directly asked his questions that day in the hospital.

"Xiao Jun..." Jiang Ziya took in a deep breath and asked, "Just who are you and the boss?"

"We are Jiu Ge," Fu Jun answered as if it were a matter of fact.

"...Isn't that the name of the bookstore?"

"Taiyi was the one who used it directly as the name of the bookstore."
Fu Jun complained, "I even told him it wasn't a good idea. What if someone earnest figured it out? But he just wouldn't listen."

So you mean I'm not an earnest person, huh? Jiang Ziya felt like he was choking and couldn't speak.

"Go back and look up 'Jiu Ge.'" Fu Jun hesitated and added on, "But don't believe too much of it. It's just antonomasia for us."

You want me to look it up myself, yet you tell me not to believe it. Then, is looking it up of any use? And what do you mean by antonomasia?

Seeing Jiang Ziya's "are you kidding me" expression, Fu Jun said, troubled, "I really don't know how to explain it!"

"... Just tell me one thing."

Fu Jun hesitated but nodded. "Okay."

"Are you and the boss human?" Jiang Ziya asked awkwardly.

These words were making it sound like he was calling them inhuman. He felt awkward the moment he spoke them, but he really couldn't leave it a mystery. The two girls at home were already giving him a huge headache. If even his work was dominated by non-humans, he really wouldn't know how to deal with it.

"Of course!" Fu Jun said with conviction, "Ziya-gē, you're thinking too much. Taiyi and I can run a bookstore and go to school. How's that not human?"

My family's Jiang Jiang might even go to kindergarten in the future! Jiang Ziya did his best to squash this retort.

"Anyway, Taiyi and I won't harm you!" Fu Jun looked at Jiang Ziya and solemnly said, "It's like what Taiyi said before. We know your father, so we're just helping him look after you and Jiang Yu-jiě. Don't be scared."

Jiang Ziya's expression was rather perplexed. *We?*

Unfortunately, Fu Jun didn't seem to realize he had let it slip. He continued, "We know that you have the truth-seeing eye and have been helping you keep it under wraps. Ziya-gē, don't tell anyone about it in the future either, or you might attract trouble!"

"Just what is the big deal with this eye? Why is it that revealing it would attract trouble?"

Jiang Ziya couldn't help asking. Even Yu Shu had said the same. *But isn't it just that this eye can see a lot of random stuff?*

What truth-seeing eye? Calling it the illusory-seeing eye would be fit current conditions more!

Fu Jun tilted his head and said, "I don't understand it too well either. Taiyi knows more. He said that your mom also had this kind of eye, but that it wasn't as strong as yours."

Jiang Ziya froze. Even his mother was involved. Although Yu Shu had said that these kinds of abilities were all hereditary, he hadn't given it much thought. *So it was my mother who passed this left eye to me?*

"Help me take a look at this alley for now, Ziya-gē." Fu Jun said worriedly, "Even if Peilun really had taken this road, he shouldn't have gotten into any trouble. That pathway is already so old. I don't think it can even be activated. How would it make Peilun disappear?"

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya returned to his senses. No matter what had happened in the past, the most important matter right now was finding the missing child before doing anything else.

They walked into the alley. At first, they approached with trepidation, but the alley wasn't long. Even though they had walked and stopped and walked and stopped, and they had even stopped to observe the

spider webs on the wall, it still only took ten minutes for them to reach the end of the alley.

Of course, nothing happened.

Fu Jun was devastated.

"Let's look again!" Jiang Ziya consoled him, "We might find a clue soon."

These were just words of comfort. Jiang Ziya himself knew that there wasn't a chance of finding anything anymore. The alley was so short, and there weren't a lot of obstructions. Just walking through once meant that they'd have discovered everything that could be discovered. They weren't a forensic team who could find fingerprints, traces of blood, or strands of hair.

"Ziya-gē." Fu Jun braced himself and said, "Can you go in with me?"

"Go in where?" Jiang Ziya asked in confusion.

Fu Jun stayed silent for a long while. He abruptly changed his mind and said, "Forget it. I'll go by myself—"

"Okay!" Jiang Ziya agreed in one breath.

He suddenly understood where Fu Jun wanted to go.

The lotus flower on the stone was a pathway.

Jiang Ziya's answer was to the point, yet Fu Jun, who had made the request, had changed his mind. He didn't know who had left that pathway, or why the pathway had been left. If they barged in rashly, who knew what would happen? For him to ask Ziya-gē to accompany him in to search for someone who had nothing to do with him would feel like he was tricking him.

"Just forget—"

The ringtone of a cell phone interrupted Fu Jun. He frowned as he pulled out his cell phone. He looked at the number on the screen. Xie Peilun's mother was calling.

He felt a bit uneasy. *Don't tell me it's bad news... No, no it won't be. It might be good news!*

Fu Jun braced himself and took the call. He said, while feeling apprehensive, "Xie-māma, this is Xiao Jun."

"Xiao Jun, I heard that you're sick. Are you okay?"

Hearing that, Fu Jun figured that he probably wasn't going to receive good or bad news. "Xie-māma, I'm okay. Has Peilun come home?"

"Not yet." A choked sound came from the other end of the line. There was a long silence before a soft voice said, "Sorry, it's just that I heard the teacher say that you're sick, so I called to see if you're okay. Peilun will come home soon. Then, you can go to school together again, okay?"

"Okay." Fu Jun's heart was heavy.

He'd gone over to Peilun's place several times. Sometimes, when Taiyi wasn't home and told him to take care of dinner on his own, and Peilun found out on their walk home, Peilun would often forcefully drag him over to his place to eat dinner.

Xie-māma was always super friendly. At dinner time, she would even heap food in his bowl all the time.

"What is it?" Jiang Ziya asked worriedly, "Has there been news?"

"No." Fu Jun's head drooped as he said, "Ziya-gē, can you go in with me? Taiyi isn't willing to interfere with the affairs of normal people. He won't go save Peilun with me."

Normal people... Jiang Ziya ignored the strange word choice and nodded. "No problem, let's go. The longer we take, the more dangerous it'll be for him, right?"

Fu Jun lifted his head and said seriously, "Ziya-gē, if you head in with me, I'll owe you one."

"Don't joke around." Jiang Ziya rubbed the head of this mature kid. He pretended to be unhappy and said, "You won't owe me anything. If you want to owe me one, then I won't head in with you."

Hearing that, Fu Jun said anxiously, "Ziya-gē, I'm not making things up. This is a serious oath. It has power behind it!"

"It's an invitation, right?"

Fu Jun froze. Then, he nodded in understanding and said, "Lu Yang-gē told you, right? I thought he wasn't going to explain these things to you! So he still did? He even told you about something as specific as invitations."

"Yeah," Jiang Ziya agreed vaguely.

To sum it up, Lu Yang hadn't told him the whole story. The two little girls at home, Yu Shu, House Keeper, and even the guy who had kidnapped Lu Yang last time had all played a part!

"Ziya-gē, you should accept my invitation."

Jiang Ziya frowned and said, "I said it's unnecessary. You and the boss have helped me a lot. If we're really talking about owing favors, I'd be the one owing you guys."

"No matter what, you should accept it." Fu Jun was adamant.

Jiang Ziya thought it weird. *Why do I have to accept? I won't ever ask Fu Jun to return the favor, so why even bother?*

Seeing that he was unwilling to accept, Fu Jun could only explain, "If I owe you, it'll mean that the entirety of Jiu Ge owes you. You can seek anyone out for the debt."

The entirety of Jiu Ge? Jiang Ziya thought it even weirder.

Are there people other than the boss and Xiao Jun?

"Ziya-gē, accept it." Fu Jun said it again, "If you head in with me, I'll owe you one."

As he spoke, he extended his pinky, intending to hook pinkies with Jiang Ziya to seal the promise. This action was just like a true child's.

However, Jiang Ziya saw that Fu Jun's pinky glowed with a faint shimmer. He hesitated before he also extended his pinky to hook the other person's finger. For a university student, this action was so childish that it'd make people blush.

"Okay, I accept."

The shimmer around the pinky suddenly burst into brightness, the pinpoints of light scattering across their large and small hands, sinking into their flesh, disappearing without a trace.

Only then did Jiang Ziya remember that Lu Yang had told him not to accept any invitations.

Yet in just a few short days, he had already accepted two.

Chapter 2: Confused; Confined by Part 3—The Lotus Dimension

Jiang Ziya kept his eyes wide, taking in Fu Jun's every movement. The latter knelt down in front of the stone, delicately touching the blooming lotus seat.

The lotus flower was drawn in great detail—deep pink petals, tender green leaves, and delicate golden lines tracing the edges—making it appear rather fancy, but unfortunately, it seemed quite aged, with mottled spots in many locations.

First, Fu Jun touched the picture of the blooming lotus seat, and then he knocked on the stone. Jiang Ziya almost didn't dare to blink his eyes. This was a rare chance to observe. He was afraid he would miss a single detail and still not understand how to enter a "barrier dimension" in the future—even though it was better not to have to enter those kinds of places.

After touching the lotus and the stone, there were still no changes. Fu Jun frowned. He pressed his index finger against his lips, forming a shushing gesture, and then slowly moved his finger away from his lips, pointing it at the stone. Jiang Ziya clearly saw the finger glow faintly again.

“In the name of the Lord of the East, Dong Jun, I command thee—open!”

Hearing such familiar words—the words that had come out of his phone to save Lu Yang and him last time had been about the same as these—made Jiang Ziya hold his breath. He almost didn’t dare to move, afraid to interrupt Fu Jun’s actions.

“The Lord of the East, Dong Jun, commands thee, open!”

After shouting it a few times and receiving absolutely no response, Fu Jun lowered his finger in frustration, face reddening a bit. He nearly didn’t dare to lift his head to face Jiang Ziya.

Seeing that, Jiang Ziya coughed lightly. “Maybe it can’t be used anymore. Then, it can’t be possible that your classmate disappeared here.”

Hearing that, Fu Jun actually felt even more despondent. If his friend hadn’t met something like this, then he couldn’t help at all and could only quietly wait for an update. However, two days had passed without any news. That in itself was already bad news.

Fu Jun said dejectedly, "Let's go then. Taiyi has something to do this afternoon and was going to close the store. But now that I'm heading back, I can help him look after the store."

Although Jiang Ziya thought it was too bad that he hadn't been able to see how to enter a barrier dimension today, he didn't plan to ask Fu Jun. Now wasn't the time. Compared to his matters, it was more worrisome that a child they knew might have run into trouble. So, he merely looked toward the lotus with regret yet discovered that the leaves below the flower had actually dried up and turned brown...

"Ziya-gē?" Fu Jun asked, confused, "Aren't you coming?"

"Why have the leaves withered?" Jiang Ziya mumbled in confusion yet discovered that even the petals were beginning to fall off one by one.

Fu Jun's eyes widened. He stared at the changes in their surroundings. A biting wind blew over, bringing with it a hint of a chill, as well as a single, withered leaf from who-knows-where. The original summer day had turned into an autumn one.

"Let's go!"

The entire lotus actually withered. Jiang Ziya couldn't figure it out, so he could only turn his head to say that. However, he saw Fu Jun staring at him with a very strange expression.

"What?" He asked in incomprehension.

You're still asking what... Fu Jun was speechless. Only now did he understand why both Fu Taiyi and Lu Yang had chosen to keep Jiang Ziya in the dark. He obviously could see, so it was pointless not to tell him about the world's other aspect!

However, Fu Jun understood now. While this fellow had only looked at an ancient pathway, he had activated it, falling into a barrier dimension unknowingly. Perhaps it would be better for him to know less.

"We can't leave anymore," Fu Jun said helplessly.

"Why not?" Jiang Ziya asked, confused.

"Ziya-gē, do you hear anything?"

Jiang Ziya immediately focused on listening. He did so for awhile but actually didn't hear a single sound. He was a bit let down. *Is it because only my left eye is problematic, so I can't hear it?*

"I don't hear a single sound."

Fu Jun nodded and said, "Cars, people, there are none of those sounds."

When Fu Jun said that, Jiang Ziya suddenly realized something was off. Earlier when they entered the alley, there were lots of sounds. Outside had been the noise of cars, and then they could also hear various sounds coming from the houses along the two sides of the alley. There was talking, music, and even children crying.

Yet, it was silent now.

Once he realized that, he abruptly began panicking. He resided in the city. *Since when is it ever this silent?* Even at midnight, there would be the occasional sound of a car passing by, yet there wasn't a single sound right now. It was like he was wearing ear plugs, and all the noise was blocked. However, he knew that that was definitely untrue.

He could still hear his own breathing and even the sound of his heartbeat...

When all sound is gone, a heartbeat's pulse can actually sound this conspicuous. He couldn't help counting it beat by beat, worrying whether the thumping would suddenly stop. But the more he thought that way, the more worried he got, and the faster his heart beat, heavier and heavier, making him start to hyperventilate...

"What exactly is going on?" Jiang Ziya couldn't help asking. If he didn't break the silence *now*, he felt he wouldn't be able to hold back a scream.

"We've already entered a barrier dimension. Even though many barrier dimensions resemble the real world, they often lack fine details. The easiest difference to spot is the sound."

Fu Jun explained in detail. That was also what Fu Taiyi wanted. Since Jiang Ziya had already taken a step into the inner world, then he could no longer remain oblivious. It was even more dangerous for someone like Jiang Ziya who possessed the truth-seeing eye to only have partial understanding.

Jiang Ziya nodded, suddenly recalling what had happened when his brother-in-law had been trapped in his office the previous night. He abruptly realized that when the fire had started, there had been no “heat,” and that was how he had determined that something was off.

“Why do these barrier dimensions exist?” Jiang Ziya really couldn’t understand it. It was so random that he had entered a barrier dimension just by looking at a lotus flower. *Seriously? Normally, don’t you have to be struck by lightning or hit by a car, so you’d die before going to a parallel world?*

“Most are created by people, but there are some super, super ancient barrier dimensions that we don’t know the origin of. It’s hard to believe that they might be created by humans.”

After saying so, Fu Jun glanced repeatedly at the alley and said, “Ziya-gē, I’ll explain it in more detail later. Can we go and find Peilun first right now?”

Jiang Ziya almost wanted to scold himself. *How could I have forgotten the most important thing?* He quickly said, “Of course, let’s go.”

The two of them walked into the alley again. This time, they were 120% alert.

“Is there anything I should pay particular attention to?” Jiang Ziya asked as he looked all around them.

Fu Jun had great expectations for Jiang Ziya’s left eye now. “Look at everything. Tell me if you feel there’s anything off at all, no matter if it’s actually anything!”

“Okay.”

They didn’t walk for long. Jiang Ziya didn’t need to speak for both of them to feel that something was wrong.

An old beggar sat at the corner of the wall, begging.

A bamboo mat was spread over the ground. The old man’s clothing was in tatters, and he had a large bowl in front of him, as well as a bamboo stick leaning against the wall behind him.

A single glance told both of them that something was iffy. Without even taking into consideration that this was a barrier dimension, so normal people wouldn't appear inside of it, even the clothes the old beggar wore was strange. It wasn't modern clothing. Rather, it looked like clothing a member of the beggar crew would wear in a period drama.

Jiang Ziya looked toward Fu Jun. Even though relying on an elementary school kid embarrassed him, it was the truth that this elementary school kid knew how to deal with the situation before them better than he did.

Fu Jun frowned a bit. "I don't know either." He honestly said, "Ziya-gē, don't think too highly of me. I'm just a kid. I couldn't even open the barrier dimension just now. I'm not even at your level!"

"But you saved me before." Jiang Ziya had even lamented over how the Fu father and son's single utterance had been more powerful than Lu Yang's struggling. Wanting him to believe that Fu Jun was just a normal elementary school kid now really had no credibility behind it.

"That was Taiyi." Fu Jun honestly admitted, "I only 'gave' you a hint so that you'd definitely take my call then."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya still found it hard to believe that the boss, who was always so silly, was his true savior. He would rather believe that an elementary school kid had saved him!

Jiang Ziya took a deep breath and said, "Then, you should get behind me. If there's anything you need me to do, tell me."

Since he now knew that Fu Jun was helpless too, then Jiang Ziya felt that he had the responsibility to protect the kid.

Fu Jun nodded, but he didn't hide behind him. He walked to Jiang Ziya's side and took his hand, just like an obedient kid.

Jiang Ziya gripped Fu Jun's hand tightly. The two of them walked toward the beggar in trepidation.

Once they stood before him, Jiang Ziya did his best to use his left eye to look at him, wishing to figure out once and for all if he was human or some other thing.

"Ziya-gē." Fu Jun lowered his voice to say, "This is his barrier dimension. You won't see through anything."

"Huh?" Jiang Ziya said strangely, "But I see that his skin is pallid. It doesn't look quite right."

Fu Jun was silent for a moment before he said, "Then, it might be a figment he left behind, while the actual person died a long time ago."

Hearing that he was dead made Jiang Ziya pale.

So this time, it really is a ghost?

Jiang Ziya heard himself swallowing. *I still have to face it, head on!*

"M-Mister, have you seen an elementary school student pass through here?"

The old beggar used clouded eyes to glance at them vacantly. Then, he bowed his head and returned to staring at the bowl. He was just like a delirious old person, unable to form an ordinary response.

"In the name of the Lord of the East, Dong Jun, I command thee to answer!" Fu Jun shouted.

The old beggar shuddered and raised his head to look at Fu Jun, his gaze still clouded. Then, he lowered his head to look at the bowl again.

"Taiyi lied to me!" Fu Jun vehemently bit out, "He *said* that my abilities are on par with his! Why are my words useless?"

Now that Fu Jun's attempt had failed, Jiang Ziya could only see if his left eye would be of any use.

He observed the old man even more carefully. The more he looked, the more pallid he thought the other's skin was. Even his pupils carried a thread of sickly gray, a color that wouldn't appear on a living being. Thankfully, this was an old guy with lots of age spots and wrinkles. He was also dirty, so even though his skin and eyes were grayish-white, it was not too alarming. If this were a young man or woman, he really might not have the courage to carefully observe this "ghost."

"Have you seen Xie Peilun or not?" Fu Jun asked again, specifically mentioning his name. Sometimes, names could put things in motion. This was a tidbit that Fu Taiyi had taught him.

The old man still looked at him vacantly. Fu Jun started growing vexed. He felt like he was being made fun of by this guy who had passed away who knew how long ago. This place might not even have anything to do with Peilun's disappearance.

Thinking that way actually made a lot more sense. *He* couldn't even open the barrier dimension, so how could Xie Peilun stumble inside for no reason? It wasn't like he was Ziya-gē!

"Let's go, Ziya-gē. I don't think we can find Peilun here."

Jiang Ziya could detect the heavy disappointment in Fu Jun's tone. He couldn't stop himself from waving away the other's intent to give up. He continued to observe the old man, yet the other didn't make any other movements. He just kept staring at his bowl... *Wait!*

Staring at his bowl?

Jiang Ziya quickly looked at the large bowl, suddenly discovering that the bowl actually had a lotus flower design on it. It was exactly the same as the lotus flower on the stone outside!

The bowl wasn't empty either. It had various things in it, but they weren't the coins or cash one might expect. It was a mound of copper coins, several gold bars and silver pieces, women's jewelry, and even some papers. Words like, "Wanbao Banking House," "One hundred taels exactly" and the like were written on them.

Jiang Ziya hesitated before he fished out his wallet. He placed a one thousand yuan bill in the bowl and asked softly, "Mister, have you seen a boy around the age of the one next to me? He wears a pair of glasses, and he looks like a very obedient child."

The old man lifted his head. A trace of vigor actually appeared in his clouded eyes. He mumbled, "A few days ago, a child was chased by illusory things and ran for a long time. After he exhausted himself, he was actually taken away by someone."

"He was taken away by someone?" Fu Jun hurriedly asked, "By what kind of person?"

The old man didn't say anything more. Jiang Ziya thought it over and put in another one thousand yuan. As expected, they received an answer again.

"A group of people bringing around demons has been capturing people all over the city. No idea what evil they're up to."

Fu Jun quickly asked, "Then, do you know where they've taken the people?"

"Toward the east."

During this time, Jiang Ziya was responsible for putting in more money. Fortunately, the boss had given him money, or else with his usual habit of only bringing around a thousand or two on him, he really wouldn't have enough money to pay to ask the questions.

"Where in the east?"

"Toward the east."

After spending several thousand, they still only received the answer "toward the east." When Jiang Ziya had paid so much that he was about vomit up blood, Fu Jun finally gave up.

"I think we won't get anything else." He was heavily disappointed as he said, "Toward the east is way too vague. We can't find Peilun like that."

"We might be able to find him. Aren't there often stories that say that gods teach people to walk that way to meet good luck?" Jiang Ziya consoled him.

He really hoped they could find him. Otherwise, he'd feel like they had been cheated.

"Let's go." Fu Jun frowned and said, "If someone's going around to capture people, Taiyi might be willing to intervene. Let's go find him."

Why isn't the boss willing to help search for him? Jiang Ziya felt a bit puzzled. But he'd be able to see Fu Taiyi soon, so he wasn't in a hurry to ask.

Before leaving, Jiang Ziya thought about it and returned to place another thousand in the bowl as a show of gratitude. Only then did he catch up with Fu Jun's strides.

"You two should be careful, too."

They had asked no questions, yet behind them came the old man's warning.

"You two are both people they want to capture."

Both Jiang Ziya and Fu Jun froze. They turned their heads to look, but where was there even an old beggar by the wall? Other than he and Fu Jun, there was no one else in the alley.

Suddenly, giggling reached his ears, followed by the swooshing sound of a passing car in the distance. Indistinct talking also came from the other side of the wall.

Fu Jun didn't have to tell him for Jiang Ziya to understand that they had left the "barrier dimension."

He didn't know how he had entered it. He didn't know how he had left it. No wonder Lu Yang often said that he got trapped. Again.

Jiang Ziya felt that he was trapped, too. Ever since he had returned home and seen Xiao Xue, he had become trapped by this familiar yet strange world.

Chapter 3: Hidden in the Dark Part 1—The Master

A tall, slender, middle-aged man with an otherworldly air sat on a chair of cypress. He wore a modified traditional Chinese jacket, rather old-fashioned, but not so strange to the point of looking like a person that had walked into the wrong time period. It could be said that this person's temperament commanded respect, and was suggestive that he was a reclusive man of great talent.

However, before him were several businessmen wearing suits and ties. Standing in front of all the others was a particularly fat man, who appeared to be the leader. He had quite a haughty demeanor, but at that moment, he was actually reverent and showed respect toward the middle-aged man, not at all daring to be lacking in manners.

"Master Wu, I am planning on purchasing a piece of land for a new construction plan. I would like to ask if you could go over and take a look. Is this land a favorable one?"

Master Wu was silent for a long while. Then, he said, "Before one can take a look at the land, one must first take a look at the person. This one does not believe to have seen you before."

Fatty hurriedly said, "I'm Cai Zunbao. Owner Li recommended me here. You can call me Xiao Cai if you'd like."

Master Wu looked at his assistant, who was standing to the side. It was actually Jiang Qibing. The latter immediately handed over several sheets of data and quietly said, "Mr. Li has indeed given his greetings already."

Master Wu nodded and said in satisfaction, "Since Old Li recommended you, then it seems that you and I do have some connection. Agree on a time with my assistant. Then, I will go and see if that piece of land has any affinity with you."

"Thank you, Master Wu!"

Cai Zunbao was overjoyed and lowered his head, bowing nonstop.

It was said that this master before him wasn't easy to get to look at feng shui for people. It was difficult to acquire his services. Luckily, he had researched in advance. He had heard that if someone who had acquired the master's services before introduced you, then it would be easier to succeed in acquiring his services. Therefore, he had begged all the way to Owner Li's side.

Master Wu politely said, "This one still has spiritual practice yet to be completed and will take his leave first. If you have anything else to discuss, do so with my disciple."

"Great Master, by all means! Please go ahead!" Cai Zunbao didn't dare to disrupt the great master's spiritual training. The more practiced he was, the better. His piece of land still awaited the master!

After he saw to the master's departure from the reception hall with a great bow, Cai Zunbao's bent back immediately straightened. He haughtily glanced at that "disciple." In his eyes, that guy wasn't some disciple. He was just a lackey who took care of the little things. Putting it nicely, he'd be called an assistant. He himself had several assistants and secretaries behind him.

When it came to someone like him, Cai Zunbao had no intent to lower his head for his favor. He waved behind him at his several "assistants." Naturally, someone walked forward to take care of the matter. All he had to do was sit down, drink tea, and wait for the business to be settled.

Jiang Qibing began to discuss various things with Cai Zunbao's assistant. Even though these people had come to seek the "master," other than wishing to hear the master's words when he was giving his

assessment, at all other times, they preferred to discuss things with regular people.

In particular, all the small details such as the price, time, and location... Those were matters that a "master" should definitely not worry about. It was easier for people to accept bargaining over the price with an "assistant" like him.

Jiang Qibing was patiently explaining, "Master Wu has been busy with his spiritual practice lately. He will not have time to look at the land until next month."

"Next month won't do!" Cai Zunbao immediately cut in and said with dissatisfaction, "Buying land is something that has to be done the earlier the better. What if someone comes and steals it from me? I can't wait until next month!"

Jiang Qibing frowned and said, "The master will not have time to deal with secular matters such as these until next month. If you're in a hurry, you can ask someone else."

When he heard that, Cai Zunbao grew frantic. He had thought that it was just the other person's way of bargaining, but he hadn't

considered that the immediate response would be for him to ask someone else. That didn't seem like bargaining anymore.

"No, no! I don't intend to ask anyone else. But is it really impossible to make it earlier?"

Jiang Qibing frowned. The person before him was a somewhat well-known owner of a construction company. Jiang Qibing had already asked around about the land in question as well, and it shouldn't be too troublesome a matter. It was just that yesterday night...

When he thought of last night, he immediately thought of Jiang Ziya, as well as how Jiang Yu had said that she was going to buy nutritional supplements for Ziya to strengthen his body. On top of that, it was almost their birthday...

He needed money. Jiang Qibing's attitude softened.

"All right. I will discuss it with Master Wu to see if we can move a case that is less urgent to a later date. Master Wu will go over next week."

When Cai Zunbao heard that, he was still not very satisfied, but since the other party already said that it was in exchange with another case's time slot, he *was* being prioritized. He thought it over. His fellow businessmen wouldn't disrespect him so much that they'd forcefully snatch that piece of land from him. Thus, he nodded in agreement.

"Then, when can I come next week to hear the master's thoughts on that piece of land?"

"I will give you a call."

Only then did Cai Zunbao nod in satisfaction and lead his assistants out.

After seeing the customers off, Jiang Qibing frowned as he collected the tea cups on the table.

"Jiang-gē."

Hearing himself being called, he raised his head. Before him was the otherworldly Master Wu.

“Jiang-gē, it doesn’t seem like you want the case? Is there a problem with it? You know, Jiang-gē, if there’s a problem with it, then why not just decline it? Otherwise, if we have to ‘handle’ it later, then that’ll cost money.”

Master Wu shook his head and kept spouting “Jiang-gē.” There was no trace of his otherworldly air. He was pretty much an old ruffian to the letter. Paired with the traditional Chinese jacket he wore, his entire person was seriously out of place.

Jiang Qibing didn’t know whether to laugh or cry as he said, “I told you not to call me Jiang-gē. You’re much older than I am, yet you’re calling me Gē. That just won’t do.”

Wu Mingliang smiled as he said, “This has nothing to do with age. It’s all about experience! I’m just putting on a pretense. Jiang-gē, you’re much more powerful than I am.”

When Jiang Qibing heard that, he sighed. He knew that he wasn’t at all “powerful.”

Although the job of assessing feng shui appeared to be very profitable, the reality was much less than imagined... Though, putting it that way was not accurate. Truthfully, there were many feng shui masters who had fat wallets.

It was more accurate to say that if Jiang Qibing had been a heartless person, one who would directly cancel a job or ignore someone's request if the place was truly problematic, merely telling the other person that the house was unfit for inhabitation, doing and caring about nothing else, then he really would have been able to earn a lot of money.

However, he couldn't do that at all. If he took on a job, he had to do it properly. So if he really encountered a strange house or piece of land, he could only spend money to buy some "tools" to deal with it. That still wasn't too bad, but if he encountered a case he wasn't capable of resolving himself, he had to ask true "professionals" for help. Often, the fee for hiring them a single time was enough to cost him several cases' worth of payment.

Therefore, Wu Mingliang had suggested for him to decline if there was a problem. Even he was scared from having paid so much for the settling of the land.

Jiang Qibing was aware of his own bad habit, so he always researched in advance. Like this time, when Mr. Li came over in advance to give his greetings, he had then done a preliminary check into the land to see if there were any strange rumors about it. Only then would he accept the case. Otherwise, he would rather drag things out with the other party for a period of time, finish his research, and open the discussion again only if the other party still wished for his services.

If he had to pay several more times, he wouldn't even have enough money to take care of his wife, brother, and child anymore.

"It's not that this case is problematic." Jiang Qibing shook his head and said, "I haven't had time to tell you yet. Yesterday, I ran into something strange. So, I'm debating if I should take a break for a bit."

Hearing that, Wu Mingliang was shocked and hurriedly said, "Jiang-gē, don't tell me that you saw some strange place again, and you ran off to deal with it by yourself? It's not that I want to say this, but you should stop being so soft-hearted. Don't forget that you have a family to take care of, and this kind of business is dangerous. If you can avoid doing it, avoid doing it."

Accepting cases that are problem free and ignoring all places that are problematic, isn't that the sign of a true fraud? Jiang Qibing couldn't convince himself to do that.

He was originally a teacher, yet now, he had become a feng shui master. Even though he was supposedly just an assistant, the truth was, the so-called "Master Wu" was just there for appearances. It was because Jiang Qibing really couldn't pretend to be a great master, but if there was no pretense at all, the customers wanting their feng shui looked at wouldn't be willing to believe him.

Even if he really did know how to deal with "those kinds of things" as opposed to those famous feng shui masters, it was no use. The customers didn't believe in a feng shui master like him who wore a suit and tie and who was only thirty years of age.

The strange thing was, they liked coming to tall buildings to discuss matters, instead of old dwellings.

After thinking about all of that, Jiang Qibing couldn't help glancing at Wu Mingliang. If it wasn't for meeting this fellow by chance, who had single-handedly whipped up this "pretense," he would probably have long gone to a construction site to carry bricks to take care of his wife.

"I didn't run across the strange occurrence outside. It was right at our own office."

Last night, Wu Mingliang, with nothing to do, had gone home like usual at around four. Jiang Qibing, on the other hand, had stayed behind in the office to research Cai Zunbao's matter from today. When he had just about finished his research, he had felt abnormally tired. Yet when he'd raised his head to look at the clock, it was clearly only six. He'd still have enough time to make it home for dinner.

At that time, he felt that something was off and got up to go home. Unexpectedly, the moment he left the office doors, he saw Jiang Yu with their daughter Jiang Jiang's hand in hers. The two of them stood at the door, looking like they were waiting for him.

Jiang Qibing was a little surprised. He hurriedly headed over. "Why did you come over?"

"For dinner!" Jiang Yu smiled and said, "I placed a reservation at a restaurant today. I'm looking forward to a good meal with you."

Hearing that, Jiang Qibing's footsteps faltered. The strange feeling he felt grew even stronger.

Jiang Ziya was still in the hospital. In the past few days, Jiang Yu had been so worried that even the meals she cooked were foul tasting. If it wasn't forgetting to add salt, it would be salty to the point that a single bite of vegetables would need half a bowl of rice to go with it. *How could she be in any mood to make a reservation for a restaurant?*

"Hubby, come on. Let's go and have dinner."

Jiang Yu's eyes were as bright as stars, her small, pink lips were perked up in a smile, her youthful face was as pretty as a luminous moon that had just risen, so much that no man could refuse her—

Jiang Qibing gazed at her for a few seconds and coldly said, "My wife isn't that pretty!"

After he said that, it suddenly grew dark before him. Jiang Qibing found that he had returned to the inside of the office. He took a deep breath, recalling how he had felt that something was off when he had looked at the clock earlier. Therefore, he immediately turned his head to look at the clock. Unexpectedly, it was already almost ten.

Although he didn't know what had happened, it was already very late, and he hadn't even called home. Jiang Yu must be worried.

He hurried to call home to assure her of his safety, but neither his cell phone nor the landline worked. Only then did Jiang Qibing realize that he was still in a barrier dimension.

And the corridor to the office's exit was so endless that he couldn't reach the end no matter how much he walked.

Until Jiang Ziya rang the doorbell.

"What?" Wu Mingliang jumped in shock. "Jiang-gē, are you sure? How could there be any problems with our office?"

After returning from his recollection of the prior night's strange occurrence, Jiang Qibing nodded in agreement. "We've been renting this place for so many years already. A problem wouldn't suddenly occur. I wonder if it might be a practitioner causing trouble..."

If it really were that, then it would be problematic.

Jiang Qibing knew that he was only half-baked and couldn't be considered a true practitioner. It was just that his grandfather had once been a true practitioner. Through his influence, he had somewhat learned how to deal with things like these. Therefore, when he had lost his teaching job, and was under financial pressure, he had become a feng shui master with difficulty. He helped people with feng shui while also selling small tools on online auction sites.

However, that did not make him a true practitioner.

"Why would a practitioner want to cause us trouble?"

Wu Mingliang was immediately worried!

Several times, he had seen the "practitioners" that Jiang Qibing would hire. That really wouldn't be a joke. If they clashed with them, they wouldn't even know how they died!

Jiang Qibing also felt doubtful. Even if they felt he was a fake feng shui master and wanted to teach him a lesson, among those in the same business, he was considered to be actually doing his job.

Most feng shui masters completely relied on feng shui books and would say things about how the bed should not face the mirror, or how to arrange the furniture by the door. Not even a handful would be like him and actually deal with things. Even if the other party wanted to teach fake feng shui masters a lesson, his turn shouldn't have come so quickly even if they were going about this in order, right?

"Jiang-gē, say, do you think this person causing us trouble might want money from us?"

Wu Mingliang had seen many cases where those who had earned money would be extorted for protection fees. But they hadn't even earned much money, and they were already being targeted?

Jiang Qibing shook his head and said, "If the other party is someone who can freely use this kind of power, then they don't need money from us. He would be able to do a lot of other things. Threatening a business as small as ours, how much money would they even make?"

That's true...

Wu Mingliang nodded in agreement. Leaving everything else aside, with the power to make people die without even knowing how they died, being an assassin would make money much more easily than extorting protection fees.

"We'll have to wait and see." Jiang Qibing frowned. "Let's accept fewer jobs for now and observe things first."

"Then, why did you accept the job just now?" Wu Mingliang didn't understand it. Jiang Qibing said he wouldn't take on any cases, yet he had just accepted a new one. He had never seen Jiang Qibing do anything this contradictory before!

"I need money," Jiang Qibing said simply.

"Didn't we just take on two jobs that earned a good sum of money?"

Jiang Qibing said helplessly, "Recently, my wife's brother accidentally got involved in a criminal shooting. He was hit by a stray bullet and is in the hospital right now. And, I don't know why we have been spending a lot more than usual lately. Even though it's still manageable right now, if we don't come up with a new source of income, things will become very hard in the future."

Wu Mingliang nodded, even though he still didn't understand why Jiang Qibing was always so poor, as their income wasn't too bad, and there weren't that many people in Jiang Qibing's family. His daughter wasn't even in school yet, so how much money could they need?

But he always seemed like he was very much in need of money. If it weren't because Wu Mingliang knew that Jiang Qibing was a thrifty person, he would have believed that the other person was spending money recklessly.

"Your wife's brother is sure unlucky. How did he get involved in a shooting? Public safety nowadays is far too lacking!"

Jiang Qibing was also very suspicious about that. Jiang Ziya didn't frequent all that many places. They should all be public places with many people coming and going. If a shooting had happened, it should have become sensational news, so why hadn't he seen any related news about it on TV or online?

At first, he had only wondered about it for a bit and tossed it to the back of his mind. There were too many situations to consider. It could be that the police were still investigating so were unwilling to make it

public. It could be that the shooting hadn't resulted in any casualties, so the reporters were too lazy to report it, and so forth...

However, after what had happened yesterday, Jiang Qibing began to feel that something was off.

Even though Jiang Ziya hadn't reacted too much last night, not reacting much was the strangest reaction... No matter what, if his brother-in-law suddenly didn't recognize him, and even thought that he was an imposter, his reaction really shouldn't have been an unperturbed one, and why hadn't he asked him a single question?

Jiang Qibing felt that Jiang Ziya seemed to know something and was waiting for him to take the initiative to explain.

He was very troubled over it.

Truthfully, he didn't want to involve Jiang Ziya in these matters at all. Even he himself walked on the outskirts. He had not truly entered the so-called "inner " world.

He didn't want to, and he didn't have the ability to involve himself in that world. He was even more unwilling to let his family have any possibility of getting dragged into that world!

But Jiang Ziya's reaction from the previous night...

Jiang Qibing decided to go home earlier today and have a proper talk with his wife's brother.

Chapter 3: Hidden in the Dark Part 2— The Neighbors Across

When Jiang Qibing returned home, he even held in his hands a small, pretty cardboard box with two exquisite cakes inside.

Neither he nor Jiang Ziya liked sweets, so he had only bought two small cakes for his wife and his daughter. Merely thinking about the sweet smiles they would show while eating them lifted his mood.

The moment he walked in, he couldn't wait to shout, "I'm home."

The entire place was filled with the aroma of food and the familiar sound of stir-frying vegetables from the kitchen. Jiang Qibing's heart was immediately filled to the brim with warmth.

As she was in the middle of stir-frying the vegetables, Jiang Yu obviously couldn't step aside, but she didn't forget to shout, "Jiang Jiang, Xiao Xue, go welcome your bàbi!"

...Xiao Xue?

Jiang Qibing froze.

“Bàba!”

“Bàbi!”

Two little girls rushed out from their room, practically pouncing on Jiang Qibing at the same time. One grabbed his left hand and the other grabbed his right. The two little faces on both sides were exactly the same and couldn't be told apart at all.

Jiang Qibing looked at his pair of daughters, a bit stunned.

“Bàba, what's this?” One of the girls lowered her head to look at the little box in Jiang Qibing's hands.

“Smells so good!” The other girl cried out, “Is it candy?”

“It's a small cake.” Jiang Qibing smiled as he said, “I bought cakes for you, one per person. But you can't eat it right now. You have to wait until after dinner, or your mother will scold you.”

Both little girls' eyes shone, making the girls appear super cute.

"They'll be full after dinner. How will they eat cake then?" Jiang Yu brought out the fish, an exasperated but fond smile on her face.

Jiang Qibing was a bit embarrassed as he said, "How about letting them share a slice? You should eat a slice, too."

Right. That should have been his original plan, or else why would he have only bought two cakes? Jiang Yu also liked sweets. How could he have skipped buying his wife's share?

Jiang Yu deliberately shook her head and sighed, saying, "Sooner or later, you'll turn us into three fatties from feeding us so much. It's not good to eat sweets at night. Let's save it for later. Tomorrow, we can have it for afternoon tea."

Then, I won't be able to witness the cute sight of my wife and daughters eating dessert! Jiang Qibing was full of reluctance.

Maybe I should skip work tomorrow. In any case, he had already been planning on not accepting jobs for awhile. He could conveniently stay

home to watch his wife play with their daughters. He might as well stay home and manage the tools auctioned online. The sales seemed to be doing well lately and could be considered a rather good source of side income.

With that in consideration, Jiang Qibing said, "Tomorrow, the boss will go overseas for a period of time. I can work from home for now."

Hearing that, Jiang Yu said rather happily, "Really? That's great. You can help me watch Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue. In the meantime, I can focus on stewing soup for Ziya to recover his strength."

Jiang Qibing agreed with a smile, but then he asked doubtfully, "Where's Ziya? Hasn't he returned from the hospital?"

"He just called and said he needs to head over to Jiu Ge."

With his plan to return home and talk with Ziya dashed, he couldn't help muttering, "Why is he running about while injured?"

Jiang Yu also complained along with him, "I also told him that. He's only just gotten injured by a stray bullet. It's such a frightening thing

to happen. Why isn't he scared? Shouldn't he at least hide away at home for awhile?"

"Boys shouldn't be that scared of things." Hearing Jiang Yu say that, Jiang Qibing couldn't help dissuading her, "If he hid at home like that, afraid to go out, it'd be my turn to nag at him."

Hearing that, Jiang Yu rolled her eyes at her husband. "I'm going to finish stir-frying the remaining dishes. Go put the cakes in the fridge and help me carry out the soup while you're at it."

"Yes, dear wife." Jiang Qibing smiled as he followed his wife into the kitchen. He didn't forget to turn and tell the two girls, "Wait in the living room for dinner. Don't play around!"

"Yes, Bàbi!"

"Okay, Bàba."

The two little girls obediently nodded in agreement, yet when Jiang Qibing lowered his head and saw the twins, a sliver of doubt flashed across his mind. He felt like something wasn't quite right...

“Hubby?” Jiang Yu poked her head out of the kitchen in puzzlement.

Jiang Qibing abruptly returned to himself. He smiled and rubbed the heads of the two girls and simultaneously called out, “Coming” to his wife. Then, he quickly walked into the kitchen.

The two girls stood silently in the living room. One of them lowered her voice and asked worriedly, “Jiang Jiang, Bàba looked weird just now. Has he figured out that something’s strange?”

Jiang Jiang nodded. “But at least Bàbi is a lot easier to trick than Gēge. We can’t trick Gēge at all.”

Xiao Xue pouted and said, “In the beginning, you clearly said that everyone would be tricked, yet in the end, we could only trick Māma.”

Could only trick... Jiang Yu, huh?

Jiang Jiang hesitated but decided not to think too deeply about that question, or else it’d get worse the more she thought about it.

"It's your fault since you're not a lie yet. Even the illusion of the neighbor across from us has already turned into a lie!" Jiang Jiang complained, "Why are you so slow at it? If you're only an illusion, it's really easy to get discovered. I don't know how long we can keep it from Bàbi."

"Go ask Ziya-gēge!" Xiao Xue said in discontentment, "He already turned the butler across from us into a lie, yet he can't turn me into a lie as well."

Jiang Jiang frowned, but she didn't have a good solution either. She could only say, "From now on, you're going to use a substitute body at home. At all other times, go stay by Gēge's side. Gēge is really powerful. He'll definitely be able to turn you into a lie! Besides, if you don't hurry and become a lie, you might not be able to keep it from Bàbi for much longer."

Hearing that, Xiao Xue could only nod.

Worried, Jiang Jiang said, "Also, I'm afraid I won't be able to help you anymore in the future."

"Why not?" Xiao Xue was stunned, deeply afraid that Jiang Jiang didn't want to help her anymore. If so, what could a mere illusion like her do?

"I feel like I've been forgetting more and more things lately..."

At this time, the husband and wife in the kitchen were chattering as they walked into the living room. Jiang Jiang could only shut her mouth and stop discussing their problem.

Forgetting was the best. Jiang Jiang knew that, yet she also felt that she couldn't forget everything just yet to focus on being a little girl. There still seemed to be something that wouldn't allow her to do so; however, she had already forgotten the reason.

What's more was how she had Xiao Xue to consider now, too.

Eh? Can it be that that "reason" isn't Xiao Xue then? Jiang Jiang frowned, trying to remember, but she gained nothing from it.

"Looks like Ziya really isn't returning home for dinner." Jiang Yu worried, "I wonder if running about like this will affect his injuries. When he returns home tonight, I'm going to nag at him."

"He still needs to go to class. It's not like he can stay home."

Actually, Jiang Qibing was a bit worried, too. He had returned earlier exactly because he wanted to talk with Jiang Ziya. He was somewhat disappointed he hadn't accomplished what he wanted, but hearing that Jiang Yu wanted to "nag" at Ziya, as the brother-in-law, he felt he shouldn't add insult to injury.

That's true... Jiang Yu began feeling that maybe she was worrying too much. It was just that she and her brother had only had each other for so long. She really couldn't help worrying about him. She believed that if she had been the one hurt, Jiang Ziya would definitely be an even bigger worrywart than her.

Jiang Yu lifted Xiao Xue onto a chair and watched Jiang Qibing lift Jiang Jiang onto the other chair. The two of them looked at their pair of twin daughters with a smile, and then they smiled at each other before they sat down to eat.

"Hubby, after we eat, why don't we head over to the neighbors a bit?"

Jiang Yu had never followed the rule of "not conversing while eating." Jiang Qibing was usually busy with his work and had very little time to chat. If they couldn't even talk during meals, then their family would grow apart.

"Over where? You mean the neighbors across from us?" Jiang Qibing looked curiously at his young wife. It was rare to hear about her interacting with others. This was also what made his heart ache the most for his wife.

Jiang Yu nodded. *Speaking of today.* "An author and her boyfriend live across from us. Oh, and her boyfriend's little brother was also here today. Both brothers are foreigners! Both of them have good manners. They even went out of their way to come over today to give their regards! We should go over and return the goodwill."

...Foreigners? Jiang Qibing nodded, a bit surprised that two foreigners were actually living across from them. He recalled that there seemed to be a woman living there, but when he tried to think about it more, he actually couldn't recall the appearance of the neighbor at all.

"Māma, I don't want to go!" Xiao Xue immediately pouted and complained.

Jiang Yu was taken aback and asked in confusion, "Why not? It's those two big brothers who came over to visit us. Don't you want to play with them?"

"Those two big brothers are so tall. They're so scary!" Xiao Xue made up. In any case, she was just a kid. There didn't need to be much of a reason for her to like or dislike something.

Jiang Jiang immediately followed up with, "Yeah! Both Bàbi and Ziya-gēge aren't that tall!"

Jiang Qibing mourned silently. He was allegedly one hundred seventy five centimeters. *That can't be considered short, okay?* But since Jiang Yu said the two neighbors were foreigners, it wasn't strange for his height to lose to theirs.

Their words confused Jiang Yu. The two foreigners were indeed quite tall, and her husband was indeed not that tall, but Jiang Ziya was quite the tall one. In terms of height, he probably didn't lose to them. How

was it that Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue would be afraid of people who were too tall?

Jiang Qibing understandingly said, "In a bit, I'll help them wash up. In the meantime, you can go over to the neighbors to chat with them. Since they're right across from us, it's not a bad idea to interact with them more. A close neighbor is much more valuable than a faraway relative."

"But aren't you tired from working all day?" Jiang Yu really couldn't bear that her husband, who had worked so hard all day, still had to take care of their daughters after returning home.

"I'm tired." Jiang Qibing smiled and said, "So I want to bathe with my cute daughters and relax. Otherwise, after they grow up, I'll be an old father by then. I wouldn't have such a great health benefit then."

Jiang Yu smiled and didn't protest further.

After eating her fill, washing up the dishes, and accompanying her husband and children to watch TV, she couldn't wait to grab the return gift she had baked—cookies—and visit the neighbors.

“Looks like your mommy really likes the neighbors across from us.”

Jiang Qibing felt it was rather amusing, but he was very happy that Jiang Yu had finally found someone she could chat with.

He touched the two little girls’ heads and said, “You need to get along with them. Don’t dislike them just because they’re tall!”

Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue could only nod and agree. It was just that when Jiang Qibing turned around to head to the bathroom to fill the tub, both of them glanced at each other, finding a distressed expression on each other’s face.

They could never go to the neighbors across from them!

Yu Shu’s home was exactly the place where Jiang Jiang was least confident of being able to protect Xiao Xue. Last time when Jiang Ziya had taken her there, she had been chased out by Yu Shu’s shout, demonstrating that that home was basically a strong barrier dimension. Yu Shu was the king of that place! If they stepped foot inside, their lives would be in Yu Shu’s grasp.

It was too dangerous. They definitely could not go inside that barrier dimension!

“What are you thinking about?”

Both girls jumped in shock and turned to look. Jiang Qibing was smiling gently at them. Seeing how his words had given them a big scare, he immediately burst into laughter.

“Really, what’s up? I’ve been calling you for a long while, yet you haven’t come over to bathe.”

Of course, Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue didn’t dare to explain. They obediently went to the bathroom to bathe. They were on tenterhooks while bathing, afraid that the absence of Xiao Xue’s clothes to conceal her would allow Jiang Qibing to see her ball shaped joints.

Luckily, Jiang Qibing didn’t discover anything. They survived their bath time with no mishaps.

“Jiang Jiang, can you dry your own hair for a bit? I’m going to blow dry Xiao Xue’s hair first. I’ll do yours after.”

With two daughters, Jiang Qibing suddenly felt that two hands weren't enough. He had already felt overwhelmed while bathing. He didn't know how Jiang Yu was able to take care of two little girls normally. However, this kind of panic actually made his lips twitch upward involuntarily.

Jiang Jiang nodded, rubbing her hair while thinking. She thought it was strange. Jiang Qibing clearly wasn't a normal person who didn't know anything, so why was it that he couldn't see through Xiao Xue, who was still an illusion?

She had the feeling that she was missing a huge chunk of her memories.

She hoped that there wasn't anything too important among what she had forgotten.

How long would she be able to remember the cause of Xiao Xue's birth?

"Jiěfū, you're back. No overtime today?"



Jiang Qibing raised his head and glanced at the door. Who else was standing there but Jiang Ziya?

"Yeah, there's something I want to talk about with you, so I came home earlier. I didn't think you'd come home later than me."

Jiang Ziya smiled in embarrassment and apologized, "I was held up."

"Are you free now? I have something to ask you."

Jiang Qibing couldn't decide if he should take the opportunity to talk about the matter from yesterday with Jiang Ziya while Jiang Yu wasn't around, or if he should wait for Jiang Yu to return and take care of the girls. They could then talk to the side.

However, when he lowered his head to look, he saw that both his girls were still so small. Whatever he spoke about with Jiang Ziya, they wouldn't understand. Besides, their home wasn't large. He couldn't guarantee that Jiang Yu wouldn't come over to listen to their conversation. Therefore, quickly finishing the discussion while she wasn't around would be easier.

“Okay.” Jiang Ziya nodded and said, “Let them play here. We can go to the living room to talk.”

Jiang Qibing hesitated for a moment. He turned his head to look at the two girls and said, “Play here for a bit. Bàba and Gēge are going to talk in the living room. If you get bored, you can come over to find us, okay?”

Sigh! It should be Jiùjiu! Why was he following along and saying “Gēge” too? Jiang Qibing was rather vexed. The family hierarchy was truly a mess.

Xiao Xue nodded obediently, yet Jiang Jiang gave a cry of, “No!” and grabbed her dad’s hand tightly. Her actions surprised Xiao Xue. She sensed something was wrong and hurriedly copied Jiang Jiang, grabbing tightly onto Jiang Qibing’s hand, too.

Jiang Qibing could only helplessly say, “Oh well, let’s have them come to the living room, too.”

However, Jiang Ziya showed a troubled expression and said, “Jiěfū, I do not believe that is a sound idea. What we need to say is not

suitable for children this young to hear. They should stay in their room.”

Jiang Qibing began to feel that something was off. *Since when does Ziya talk in such a... genteel way?*

With his suspicions raised, Jiang Qibing began to recall even more suspicious areas. *Did I hear the door open just now? I don't think I heard anything. Jiang Ziya was suddenly standing there at the door without a sound.*

Jiang Qibing gripped the two little girls' hands back. He tried his best to relax his posture and said, “Okay, wait in the living room for me. I'll console them first before I head over.”

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya remained standing at the door. He was silent for a long while before he nodded in agreement. “Understood. Then, I shall head there and wait for you.”

Understood? Shall? Jiang Qibing tried hard not to let his expression twist too much. He didn't know his wife's brother spoke in such a, such a... How was he to describe this? Should he call it polite or outdated?

Seeing Jiang Ziya's posture as he turned to leave, Jiang Qibing was even more speechless. He still found it very wrong.

He lowered his head to look at his cute daughters. He forced a smile and said, "Bàba is going to the living room to take a look. Stay inside this room obediently, all right?"

"No!" Jiang Jiang refused to let go of his hand. She stubbornly said, "Let's go to the living room together. Me and Xiao Xue don't want to stay here by ourselves. It's so scary!"

Hearing that, Jiang Qibing wavered. It was true that leaving the two kids here by themselves wasn't necessarily safer. It was better to keep them by his side. Besides, he had to head over quickly. There was no time to think further. He didn't know if Jiang Yu had returned yet, either.

He hoped that it was all just his imagination.

He took a deep breath and entered the living room with his two daughters in tow. However, where was there even a trace of Jiang Ziya?

He stayed silent and walked over to look at the shoe cabinet. As he expected, the sneakers that Jiang Ziya normally wore weren't there.

Jiang Qibing broke into a cold sweat.

"Where did Gēge go?" Jiang Jiang deliberately said, "Should we call him?"

Only then did Jiang Qibing remember there was such a method to solve his problem. He hurriedly picked up the phone and dialed, sincerely hoping that the ringing would come from the room, that everything was just his imagination, that Jiang Ziya was just particularly polite today, that he had merely gone inside his room to get something, so he just wasn't in the living room.

The dial tone sounded in the receiver, but no ringtone sounded in his surroundings.

The number that you have dialed cannot be reached. Please leave a message after the "beep"...

No one picked up? Jiang Qibing frowned. Even though he wanted to tell himself that it wasn't something strange—after all, Jiang Ziya often missed picking up the phone, and nine out of ten times would have to return the call after he realized it—but he just couldn't *not* worry.

"Ziya, why haven't you returned home even though it's so late already?"

Actually, it wasn't very late yet, but something so strange had happened just now, and the call wouldn't connect either, so Jiang Qibing felt it was too late!

"When you hear my message, call me back right away!"

He was at his wit's end.

Don't tell me something happened on Ziya's end, too?

Chapter 3: Hidden in the Dark Part 3— The Enemy

Do we head east or toward Jiu Ge?

The moment Jiang Ziya and Fu Jun escaped from the barrier dimension, they ran into a dilemma. The old beggar from the barrier dimension had told them to head east, but the bookstore wasn't in the east. Fu Jun wanted to tell Fu Taiyi about what they had found out first and ask him to help with the search.

"If we go to Jiu Ge first and then head east, the positioning would be different, wouldn't it?"

Jiang Ziya made a guess. What the old man meant just now was for them to head east the moment they left the alley.

Fu Jun hesitated and said, "Yeah. Even if we go to Jiu Ge first and then return here to head east, it might be different by then too because the time would be different."

"Then, what should we do... Oh, how about we call the boss?"

Fu Jun shook his head and said, "No, Taiyi didn't want to deal with all these things in the first place, so a phone call would definitely let him fib his way out. I want to go directly to him and drag him out to help with the search."

Jiang Ziya agreed when he heard Fu Jun's explanation.

The boss was exactly someone who didn't take his work seriously. He didn't even look after his own bookstore correctly. Wanting him to rescue someone that had nothing to do with him might really require him to be forcefully dragged out.

"You go find the boss. I'll try heading east."

Fu Jun immediately shot that down. "No, Ziya-gē, you don't know enough yet. If you run into trouble, you won't be able to solve it and might even be endangered... I know! You can ask Lu Yang-gē to help!"

Jiang Ziya was about to say that Lu Yang was still in class, but when he thought about how this involved a person's life and death, there wasn't a better reason than that to skip class, so he immediately nodded in agreement.

"You go and find the boss. I'll head east and contact Lu Yang to have him meet up with me."

The more he spoke, the more Jiang Ziya felt that this was a good idea. *However...*

"Just how long have you and Lu Yang known about each other? Did you even conspire together to trick me? You bastards! You obviously knew that I have such a strange eye. Why didn't you tell me anything?!"

He even had the urge to bite someone's head off.

Fu Jun hurriedly shook his head and said, "We haven't conspired together! Lu Yang-gē knows that Taiyi is a practitioner, but he doesn't know that I can be considered one, too. So if there's any conspiring going on, it'd be between those two. I have nothing to do with it!"

"So, they really did conspire together!"

"I don't think they have, only that they have an understanding between them. I think it's just that... Um, I'm really not sure. Ziya-gē,

don't bully an elementary school kid! I-I have to go find Taiyi now.
Ziya-gē, you should go find Lu Yang-gē, too!"

Fu Jun fled in a hurry.

Jiang Ziya dropped his threatening expression, watching Fu Jun's fleeing back. He began to regret his act of bullying an elementary school kid. But when he gave it a second thought, he grew rather angry again. He wanted these people to know not to ever hide anything from him again!

Jiang Ziya called Lu Yang, but no one answered. He wasn't surprised. It was still class time right now, and no matter how little Lu Yang cared about his studies, he still couldn't take his cell phone out during class to answer a call.

The foreign language department held classes by sections. Each section only had around ten students. The professor didn't even need to take roll. A single glance revealed who was in class and who wasn't. If anyone dared to answer a call under the professor's sharp eyes, then they were pretty much doomed to fail the course.

There was only half an hour left until the class ended. He might as well walk while he waited.

He walked toward the east. It sounded like an easy feat, but Jiang Ziya didn't have a habit of carrying a compass on him. Figuring out which direction was east was a big problem. He could only walk into a hardware store and buy a simple compass. Finally, he knew which direction he should take. After that, he called Jiang Yu, making up an excuse about going to Jiu Ge, so he wasn't going home just yet. Only then did he follow the old man's information and head east.

As he walked, he observed the children around him. Unfortunately, all of the children he saw on the way had parents holding their hands. They were too young too and couldn't possibly be Fu Jun's classmate.

With present day roads, walking directly east was actually a huge hurdle. Often, he would run into buildings that blocked the way and would need to take a detour around them before continuing east.

Walking in such a way can't really be considered heading east, can it?

After walking for half an hour, Jiang Ziya still hadn't discovered any suspicious people or happenings. He felt that it definitely had to be

because he had curved back and forth too much and had overlooked it way back.

At this time, his cell phone began ringing.

"Ziya, what's up? You want me to pick you up from the hospital?"

The moment the call connected, he heard Lu Yang's voice.

"I already got out." Jiang Ziya hesitated over whether or not he should continue walking. *Is it necessary to get Lu Yang to come over?* But when he thought about how it involved a child, if he could walk farther, he should walk farther...

He told Lu Yang a simple version of events and earned a deep sigh from Lu Yang, who said, "Come on, you haven't even gotten rid of that artifact demon at home, yet you want to go save someone?"

Jiang Ziya felt guilty. He didn't at all want to get rid of that "artifact demon!" It wouldn't be wrong to call running over to save someone a diversion tactic. With something else to keep him busy, Lu Yang

wouldn't be thinking all day long of wanting to get rid of Xiao Xue, right?

"I'm heading over right now. Continue east. See if you can find any clues. Keep me updated on your location and don't hang up. No matter what suspicious things you see, you have to tell me everything."

"Are you trying to make my cell phone bill explode?"

Even though thinking of the resulting cell phone bill pained him, Jiang Ziya immediately began walking. He even frequently glanced at the compass in his hand and didn't hang up.

"Just get it reimbursed."

"Reimbursed from who?" Jiang Ziya snapped, "It's not like I can ask Xie Peilun's mom to pay the cell phone bill, right?"

"Ask Fu Taiyi. Since it's his son who's searching for his classmate, and the son who asked you to find me, then of course you should be getting reimbursed by Fu Taiyi. Don't let him escape!"

Jiang Ziya grew curious. He pretended to be unhappy as he said, "So you're on familiar terms with my boss and even conspired with him to keep me in the dark about all of this."

"Who conspired with him?! I only know that Fu Taiyi is also a practitioner. I've asked him some stuff before. He said that your dad requested for him to look after you, and that's why he hired you as a part-timer." Lu Yang hesitated. "Actually, later, I thought about it and suspect that he's... Forget it, I'll tell you when I see you."

"Are you saying it or not?" Jiang Ziya heard the sound of a motorcycle being started. He hurriedly said, "Are you driving? I'll hang up. Don't drive with one hand to use the phone. That's too dangerous!"

"Who's driving with only one hand? Am I putting on a stunt show? I'm using earbuds, and it's a wireless Bluetooth! Jiang Ziya, can't you keep up with the current trends?"

"Me using a cell phone is already trendy enough—"

Suddenly, someone covered his mouth. Before Jiang Ziya could even react, his entire person was pulled into a van to the side. His cell

phone flew out of his hand, smashing against the road. A car's wheel crushed it into smithereens. Then, the van's door was pulled closed, and the van quickly drove off.

The pedestrians by the road stared with dropped jaws at the scene. It was only when the van had driven faraway that they were able to react and shriek, "A kidnapping! Someone got kidnapped!"



Head east, great!

Jiang Ziya had indeed found Xie Peilun. It was just that he had been trussed up and had found him while he himself was a hostage.

The old man had even warned him that the other party wanted to capture Fu Jun and him. However, the hint to "head east" had made him walk right into the trap. Even though he had found the person he was searching for, his goal was to rescue him, not to endanger himself as well!

His two hands were tied up in front of him, and his mouth was taped. Jiang Ziya wasn't alone. Even though it was dark with only a single light bulb flickering high up on the ceiling, he could still see several

people in the surroundings. Their hands were tied in front of them just like him, and their mouths were sealed shut with tape.

Everyone was leaning their backs against the wall. Even with only their eyes showing, their fear and helplessness were easy to see.

It hadn't taken long for Jiang Ziya to discover that among them was a child around the same age as Fu Jun. After carefully observing the other person's brows, he was certain that the child was Xie Peilun. However, the other person didn't seem to recognize him.

The current situation is way too strange. Jiang Ziya didn't know what to do at all. Has Taiwan's public security fallen so ridiculously? Not only are people kidnapping others right from the streets, they've even kidnapped a lot. They don't look like they're in it for ransom, more like they're going to sell us off to the mines. Could this be what they call a human smuggling syndicate?

Jiang Ziya inwardly groaned. If that was the case, then his left eye, and even Lu Yang and the others, would be of no use, right?

These days were all so surreal. Can you not suddenly turn so realistic?

In the dim light, a tall man suddenly appeared below the light bulb, giving Jiang Ziya a huge fright.

Could this place be a "barrier dimension?" Jiang Ziya tried using his left eye to look at his surroundings, but the lighting was truly too poor. He couldn't even tell what color the walls were, so how would he be able to tell anything else? He could only direct his attention to the man in front of him.

The tall man walked up to him. He had absolutely nothing concealing his face, which dismayed Jiang Ziya. Watching the news a lot made him understand. If a kidnapper didn't conceal his face at all, that was bad news. The other party was either planning to kill the hostage, or was absolutely certain that you had no way to tell his identity to anyone else, such as selling you to a mine that never saw the light of day.

Jiang Ziya was taking measure of the tall man. At the same time, the tall man was also taking measure of him. After a few minutes, the man walked over and removed the tape over Jiang Ziya's mouth.

The moment he could speak, Jiang Ziya tried to "right the situation."

"Did you get the wrong guy? It's not like I'm the son of a wealthy family. You won't get much ransom for kidnapping me. You'll lose more than you gain. Why not let me go? I'll definitely pretend that this never happened!"

"You're uninvolved?" The man sneered and said, "Then, you tell me, how did Zhang Dongping die?"

"Who's that?" Jiang Ziya was truly suspicious. He had never heard that name before. *Could he truly have kidnapped the wrong guy? Just how unlucky can I get?*

"He had a scarecrow, a female corpse, and a crawling corpse. How's that? Do you remember now?"

It's the guy who kidnapped Lu Yang to threaten me to hand Xiao Xue over!

Jiang Ziya's face paled. As expected, the case had not been resolved.

Seeing his expression, the tall man knew that he had understood. "I'm Zhang Dongqi."

Shoot, he even told me his name... Wait, he's also a Zhang? Don't tell me...

"That worthless Zhang Dongping was my older cousin."

Jiang Ziya's face grew dark. Even though *he* hadn't killed the guy, he had been present. And he really couldn't be considered completely uninvolved. After all, Fu Jun had made the phone call for the sake of rescuing him, resulting in the man getting killed by his own three artifact demons. His death had been gruesome, too. This grudge was truly a deep one.

He couldn't help glancing at Zhang Dongqi's expression, hoping that he and his cousin hadn't gotten along well.

Zhang Dongqi merely said indifferently, "My cousin had always been a scaredy-cat. After he got the news that there might be an artifact demon, he was envious and wanted to snatch it, yet even with three artifact demons in tow, he didn't dare to go personally. He even sought a helper out to construct a 'barrier dimension' together."

After saying that, he glanced at Jiang Ziya. "Someone able to see through the barrier dimension Zhang Dongping had set up with another's help, and to incite the three artifact demons to defect and kill him, could definitely not be a mere artifact demon on the verge of becoming a lie!"

It indeed wasn't Xiao Xue. In actuality, the only thing Xiao Xue had done was to block a bullet for Jiang Ziya, and she hadn't even completely blocked it!

Jiang Ziya looked toward Xie Peilun. He and the other people had all fallen to the floor, unconscious. Yet they had obviously been awake just now. He didn't know what Zhang Dongqi had done.

Xie Peilun clearly had nothing to do with this incident. *Could he have been mistaken for Fu Jun, and was captured as a result?*

"Even if you've snatched me because of that incident, this has nothing to do with Xie Peilun. Why have you kidnapped him?"

Jiang Ziya purposefully dropped Xie Peilun's name, wanting the other person to realize that he had the wrong kid. Perhaps, he would let the child go. Besides, the other guy seemed to have realized that it wasn't

just Xiao Xue at home. That was just too dangerous. He had to quickly change the topic!

However, Zhang Dongqi was shocked. He said with interest, "What, you know each other? He has nothing to do with this incident, but I didn't think you'd actually know each other. Don't tell me you're also relatives? That's great! Hereditary abilities are all particularly strong!"

Again with the hereditary abilities... Jiang Ziya didn't know how many times he had heard those words. He hoped that the abilities didn't come from his dad's side; otherwise, the next time he saw him, Jiang Ziya would definitely give his father a beating before anything else!

"It's just that I know his classmate. His surname is Xie, I'm a Jiang. There's nothing hereditary."

Jiang Ziya didn't dare to let the other person know what had been passed down through his "family." If this got Jiang Yu, Jiang Jiang, and Xiao Xue involved, he would die with regrets—*Bleh, bleh, bleeeh! What am I talking about?! I'm not going to die!*

Zhang Dongqi merely smiled but didn't retort, causing Jiang Ziya to feel great unease. He didn't know if the other person had believed

him. *Don't you go searching for my sis... But no, if he really wants Xiao Xue, then he'll definitely go to our home!*

Jiang Ziya could only hope that his brother-in-law was actually a strong "practitioner"—having heard this term so many times, even he knew how to use it now. However, he didn't really understand what made someone a "practitioner," and just how strong were those people?

The current situation made him feel that guns were still a lot stronger. In the previous incident, he had gotten hurt because of getting shot. It had nothing to do with the three artifact demons.

Zhang Dongqi looked Jiang Ziya up and down. "Looks like you didn't bring the artifact demon with you. Make a call. Command that artifact demon to come over."

Jiang Ziya hesitated. He had to make the call, as he wanted to live on! *But the important thing is, who should I make this SOS call to?*

"Don't try to play any tricks. I've thoroughly investigated your family situation." Zhang Dongqi sneered. "Don't pin your hopes on your brother-in-law. He can't be considered a practitioner. He'd be no use

even if he came here. I'm not like that useless Zhang Dongping! If you're a man, deal with it yourself. Leave your brother-in-law out of this, so he can take care of your sis."

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya grew excited. That guy had only mentioned his brother-in-law. He hadn't mentioned Lu Yang, nor had he mentioned the boss. Even Yu Shu had been left out—then again, it wasn't like his neighbor would come and save him, right?

Zhang Dongqi tossed a cell phone at Jiang Ziya and took out a gun at the same time. He warned, "Put it on speaker and watch your mouth. I don't mind not acquiring a mere artifact demon. I'm not that concerned about your life!"

*S***—this is why guns are scarier than anything else!*

Eyes glued to the dark barrel of the gun, Jiang Ziya could only obediently make the phone call.

"Hello, how do you do? This is—"

“Jiěfū.” Jiang Ziya hurriedly called out to stop the other person from speaking more and said, “This is Ziya. Are you and Sis both home?”

“Ziya?! Are you...”

Jiang Ziya quickly cut in again, “Can you put Jiang Jiang and Xiao Xue on? I want to buy a cake for them and need to ask them what flavor they want.”

Silence came over the other end for a long while. Jiang Ziya’s entire body was tightly drawn. He began to regret that maybe he had chosen the wrong person to call when a voice said, “I just took a look. They should both be in their room. I’ll go find them. Hold on.”

“Okay.” Jiang Ziya felt his nerves loosen a great deal.

Soon after, a little girl’s voice came over the phone, calling out, “Gēge.”

“Xiao Xue?”

Jiang Ziya was a little surprised. Even though he guessed that the other person could possibly come up with a little girl's voice, he was still very surprised when his guess came true. So called practitioners truly had something extraordinary about them.

"Yeah!"

Jiang Ziya deliberately used a commanding tone to say, "Xiao Xue, come out right away, to—" He looked toward Zhang Dongqi. The latter rather smoothly rattled off the address.

"Did you get the address? Don't be late. Come here right away!"

"Yes, Master. Xiao Xue will head over immediately."

Hearing the word "Master" made Jiang Ziya's skin crawl. The feeling of getting called Master was just too strange. But, he was greatly relieved at her response that she would immediately come over. *Luckily...*

The neighbor across wasn't actually going to not come and rescue him.

Just now, Jiang Ziya had understood that he couldn't call home. Zhang Dongqi had already told him that his brother-in-law couldn't be considered a practitioner. That meant he couldn't get his brother-in-law involved. If something happened to both his brother-in-law and him, then what was his sister to do?

If he called Lu Yang, that fellow wouldn't be able to come up with a girl's voice on the spot to respond. They'd definitely get seen through. At that time, his life would be forfeit. The boss was the same. He couldn't expect that Fu Jun would be able to mimic the voice of a three year old little girl.

In a hurry, Jiang Ziya could only call the neighbor across from him. Since Yu Shu was able to make the characters in her books come alive, then it shouldn't be too hard for her to come up with a girl's voice, right?

Good thing he hadn't chosen the wrong person.

Zhang Dongqi came over to take the phone. Then, he actually pushed the barrel of the gun against Jiang Ziya's forehead. A sinister smile spread across his face.

Why? Jiang Ziya was shocked. Doesn't he need my permission to take an artifact demon? Xiao Xue told me that before. How can he kill me? Then—

Bang!

Jiang Ziya's entire body shuddered. His eyes were wide, face dripping with water.

Zhang Dongqi guffawed. He tossed the water gun in his hand at Jiang Ziya and mockingly said, "I'm not worthless like that Zhang Dongping. What practitioner would carry around something like a gun? It's not like we're mafia!"

He looked at Jiang Ziya and sneered, "But carrying around a water gun isn't a bad idea. At least, you normal people are the most scared of stuff like this. All I have to do is wave it around, and you're quivering like a quail, willing to do anything. Last time, I used a gun and pointed just like this, and the guy was even able to kill his wife and son. This is much easier than setting up some barrier dimension. Hahaha—"

"..."

Even though what he carried was a water gun, Jiang Ziya felt that this guy was much scarier than his cousin, who had carried a real gun.

Chapter 4: The Bookstore's Part 1— The Boss

Then Fu Taiyi picked up the new books the deliveryman had just delivered, a hefty thirty something in number, he was greatly shocked. Either these authors all published nothing, or they would all release books at the same time! They gave no consideration to how the reader would have to buy so many books all at once. *It's very hard for them, okay!*

As he offhandedly flipped through them, looking to see if there were any novels he was currently following, Fu Taiyi came across a familiar title. He immediately made a sound.

"What a rare occurrence. I thought Yu Shu would drag it out for a few more months before releasing more in this series. I've been pestered to death by the readers. She's finally willing to release the next volume."

Spirited, Fu Taiyi directly tore off the plastic around the book, too lazy to even take inventory of the rest, and immediately began reading.

The book's genre was futuristic sci-fi, depicting a story about heroes. He was truthfully not all that interested in this kind of material, but he liked the main character in the story a lot—actually, it couldn't really be considered "like." It was just that every time he read about the

main character dithering over an insignificant problem, in addition to having a strange persistence in several matters, Fu Taiyi would have the urge to reprimand the guy severely. Usually, he would finish reading the book while berating the main character the entire time.

It was a rare reading experience to yell while reading yet still not dislike the book. Therefore, Fu Taiyi did quite like the book.

After he made tea to ready his throat, he opened the novel. Just as Fu Taiyi was about to scold the main character, he saw someone rush into the bookstore.

He frowned as he lifted his head, thinking it to be some kind of demon. He was thinking of hollering to chase it out, but he saw that the one who had run inside was actually his son, who had skipped class for once.

"Xiao Dong, you're back?" Fu Taiyi was elated. He said, "Perfect. Watch the store for me. I'm going to read—"

"Like hell you're reading!" Fu Jun was furious. He scolded, "Isn't that book on sale in the store? Why did you unwrap it?"

"I collect this series. I always order an extra one to keep for myself. It's not like you don't know that." Fu Taiyi felt wronged and said, "Why did you suddenly scold me? You know, I'm still your father when it all comes down to it."

Fu Jun glared at his so-called "father." He never had the air of a father, so how would he be able to treat him as one?

"If you're my father, then close the shop. Come with me to find Peilun."

Fu Taiyi lifted a brow.

"We shouldn't get involved in matters of the surface world. We can't use our powers against normal people. Haven't I told you that? It's fine if you want to search for Peilun, but you must use your own eyes and feet in the search. The addition of my eyes and feet wouldn't make a difference."

Fu Jun shook his head. "But Xie Peilun could have gotten involved with the innerworld. When Jiang Ziya and I went to search for him—"

When he said that, he saw Fu Taiyi stand up abruptly. *His face is frightening!*

Although Taiyi was usually always fooling around, once he grew serious, even Fu Jun would pull back, no longer daring to put on the airs of a little adult toward his father.

“Who did you say you were with?” Fu Taiyi actually used a serious tone to ask.

“Ziya-gē...”

It was evident that Jiang Ziya had not come with Fu Jun. When he heard Fu Jun’s words, Fu Taiyi felt uneasy. *This is definitely not a good sign.*

His complexion was terrifying as he asked, “Where is he?”

Fu Jun didn’t dare keep it hidden. He immediately recounted everything in detail.

“The one inside the alley is Fortune Misfortune Hand in Hand—Old Man Huofu.” Fu Taiyi felt his head hurting a lot as he said, “The alley was sealed off a long time ago. Why did you head inside for no reason?”

“To find Peilun...” Fu Jun answered quietly.

Fu Taiyi felt his head hurt even more.

If he knew this would happen, he wouldn't have let Fu Jun take a day off to search. At first, he had thought that it was great that Fu Jun cared about his classmate. This could be a good life experience, no matter if he could or couldn't find the kid in the end. If he could find him, that was of course a happy ending. If he couldn't find him, Fu Jun might feel dejected, but that was a normal thing to feel in this world. Fu Taiyi was very content to let Fu Jun experience that.

He didn't think that Fu Jun would run into Jiang Ziya. If he hadn't, with Xiao Dong's powers, there was no way he could have opened that pathway.

Fu Taiyi had prepared for every contingency, but he just had to have overlooked the variable known as Jiang Ziya.

...Sigh, Old friend Jiang Shang, this responsibility you've left behind really is too heavy.

Seeing Fu Jun's puzzled and dissatisfied expression, yet he didn't dare to retort, Fu Taiyi couldn't help curbing his cold demeanor. *No matter how mature Fu Jun usually acts, isn't he still just a kid?*

Even though he had told Xiao Dong that Jiang Ziya was very special before, and he had also instructed him not to tell that fellow anything, not to involve him in the innerworld, recently, Jiang Ziya had walked inside on his own. Therefore, he had also told Fu Jun that he could slowly start telling Jiang Ziya some things, but not to tell him too much just yet...

Even Fu Taiyi felt that he was being contradictory, let alone Fu Jun, who was a kid.

"Ziya must have found your classmate already. That's good fortune. But he has definitely run into trouble. That's misfortune. Once you have heard Old Man Huofu's words, fortune and misfortune come hand in hand. That's why that pathway was sealed. Even though both fortune and misfortune happen, it's always misfortune more than fortune."

Hearing that Jiang Ziya had run into trouble, Fu Jun's face immediately paled. Then, when he heard that misfortune happened more than fortune, he really couldn't keep calm anymore. He hurriedly said, "I-I told him to find Lu Yang-gē to go with him. Taiyi, didn't you say that Lu Yang-gē is very strong?"

Fu Taiyi said unhappily, "Aren't you forgetting something? I said 'for his age.' He is rather strong, with rare, innate talent. It's not common to come across that anymore in this age. However, if this were long ago, he would have just been considered one of the stronger ones and not a rare talent."

Fu Jun cared little about "long ago." He only cared about right now!

"Then, can Lu Yang-gē protect Ziya-gē or not?"

"I can't be certain." Fu Taiyi was serious as he said, "From what you told me, your classmate seems to have been taken away by someone after getting chased by a demon. However, that alley doesn't have any demons residing there. There's also no way he could have entered Old Man Huofu's barrier dimension. Also, logically, a child that's only in elementary school couldn't have disturbed too powerful a demon. With all these points considered, I believe that a practitioner is involved."

Hearing that, Fu Jun's eyes immediately lit up. He said, "Since a practitioner is involved, that means you have to step in, right, Taiyi?"

Fu Taiyi rolled his eyes at his son. "What are you being so happy about? If a practitioner is involved, your Ziya-gē would be in even bigger trouble!"

"If Taiyi is lending a hand, then there's no problem anymore." Fu Jun felt that it was better if a practitioner was involved. Then, he would be able to force Fu Taiyi to step in.

"It better be something that will be resolved when I step in. Just who do you think your dad is?"

Fu Jun raised his head and softly said, "God of the Eastern Sky, Dong Huang, of course."

At these kinds of times, he had utmost confidence in his father.

Fu Taiyi smiled and said, "Not yet, my little Lord of the East, Dong Jun."¹

He extended his hand to rub Fu Jun's head, causing the other to roll his eyes at him unhappily. However, Fu Jun didn't dare to scold him like usual, allowing Fu Taiyi to greatly benefit. He couldn't help rubbing and rubbing that little head. In the end, he successfully angered his son, who grabbed his hand and roughly shoved it away.

Fu Taiyi laughed loudly and said, "All right, call Lu Yang and Ziya. Ask them where they are. I'll go and meet up with them. It's time to let them know a bit about some things. After all, guiding the young has always been one of our duties."

Fu Jun smiled and nodded. Just as he was about to dial them, his cell phone began ringing on its own. The contact person displayed on his screen was even Lu Yang.

He answered the call, his tone happy as he said, "Lu Yang-gē, Taiyi and I are just about—"

"Ziya was kidnapped." Lu Yang's tone was frigid.

Fu Jun froze, his head full of the phrase "misfortune more than fortune."



Yu Shu watched House Keeper place the phone down, feeling rather annoyed and angry. The previous wave hadn't even settled yet, and another was already coming. That brat Jiang Ziya made things even more dramatic than what happened in novels!

She was just a person responsible for writing novels. She had no plans to live the life of a novel!

"What? Has that brat run into more trouble?"

House Keeper made a conjecture, "I think he has been kidnapped. The target seems to be that artifact demon again, Xiao Xue."

Hearing that, Yu Shu instead relaxed and casually said, "As long as his truth-seeing eye and the 'truth' at home aren't discovered, that's fine. If his eye is discovered, and that his family has a 'truth' as well, it wouldn't be strange if his entire family were kidnapped!"

When House Keeper heard that, he frowned. Seeing that Yu Shu didn't seem to have much of a reaction, he couldn't help but ask, "Do you plan to rescue him?"

When she heard him, Yu Shu looked back at her own illusory familiar with not quite a smile. She asked, mockingly, "How about you? Do you want to rescue him?"

House Keeper's eyes flickered. He said respectfully, "I only consider what Mistress considers."

"What are you considering?"

Not waiting for Yu Shu's response, Hold Keeper walked out with a yawn. He even held in his hand a red apple that he had been eating.

Wrong! There really is something wrong! Yu Shu's face twitched.

In the books, Hold Keeper clearly didn't like apples. So what's going on with him eating apples day and night ever since he's been out? Even if he veers off path, it doesn't have to be in the complete opposite direction, right?

"I am considering whether or not to rescue Jiang Ziya," House Keeper said in order to remind Yu Shu again.

"Why rescue him?" Hold Keeper took a bite out of the bright red apple. As he chewed, he said, "Didn't you just head over wanting to lure away that Jiang Qibing guy, so that Mistress could go with Jiang Yu to bring the artifact demon back, but you failed to trick him?"

House Keeper didn't know why he was bringing that up now. *Does he want to mock me for my failure again?*

"Now, all we have to do is to tell them that Jiang Ziya is in trouble and suggest for them to have the girl stay at our place. Then, we can urge the husband and wife to quickly go and rescue Jiang Ziya. Wouldn't we be able to easily get rid of that artifact demon this way? If we really wanted to, we could even get rid of that 'truth' or whatever it is, snipping all future trouble in the bud."

Yu Shu stilled. She looked toward Hold Keeper. As expected of "that fellow," he was amazing at taking advantage of the situation, and his schemes were truly great!

But so ruthless.

Wouldn't this mean not caring about Jiang Ziya's life?

Yu Shu felt a bit conflicted. Even though she knew that Hold Keeper was just an illusion, and he was even an illusory familiar of the lowest power level, so he wouldn't have many emotions, after interacting with him for all these days, just how did Hold Keeper even resemble an "illusion" with no feelings? His emotions were practically even more abundant than House Keeper's, who had become a "lie!"

Seeing him so ruthless, Yu Shu couldn't help lamenting that her "younger son" had grown astray, and she couldn't even blame it on classmates leading him astray. She really had to quickly put him back on the straight and narrow, since if Hold Keeper really became a bad person, then wouldn't she be the one in deep trouble?

"I can't watch that Jiang Ziya guy disappear or breathe his last breath just like this."

Yu Shu's feelings were conflicted as she admitted, "If I really didn't care about the lives of the family across from us, I wouldn't give a damn over their possession of an artifact demon. All I would have to

do is stay in this home. Don't even mention artifact demons. Even against that 'truth' of theirs, I wouldn't be scared."

Of course, she would much rather prefer that the neighbors only consisted of humans.

Hold Keeper gave an "oh" and didn't say anything else.

House Keeper relaxed a bit. *It sounds like Mistress will rescue Jiang Ziya.*

Yu Shu sighed deeply. The saying "A close neighbor is much more valuable than a faraway relative" really was true. A close neighbor was much better at bringing trouble than a faraway relative!

She lazily stood up and raised her head to glance up at the katana on her wall with regret. That was her handiest weapon, yet it was too flashy in the real world. She could only change her weapon.

"House Keeper, are you able to temporarily disguise as Xiao Xue?"

House Keeper honestly answered, "I am unable to. Our builds are too different, and I do not have the ability to shift. If it were a body around my size or slightly larger, I am able to disguise as that for a while. However, I am unable to shrink to the size of a three year old little girl."

Yu Shu tsked and grabbed her head before she turned.

"I'm heading over to the neighbors for a bit."

As she said that, she was already at the door.

Hold Keeper's face paled as he called out to her. He asked worriedly, "Wait, are you heading over by yourself? There are two demons there! Shouldn't you at least bring House Keeper with you?"

Yu Shu shot him a glance and gleefully said, "Son, you already know how to worry for your mom? I'm so touched!"

"...Go die already!"

"You cannot tell the mistress things like go die!"

House Keeper grew angry. It was one thing for Hold Keeper to run his mouth like usual, but mentioning the word "die" at this kind of time made him feel deeply uneasy.

Hold Keeper fell silent. For once, he didn't mouth back.

"All right, this isn't a big deal. Don't you two brothers argue."

After Yu Shu finished consoling them, she saw that they were still glaring at each other, so she could only change the topic, "House Keeper, Hold Keeper, get ready. You'll be coming with me later."

"As you command." House Keeper nodded.

Hold Keeper didn't think he would also be able to go. He immediately agreed happily, already forgetting about exchanging glares with House Keeper.

Yu Shu immediately went to knock on the neighbors' door.



The person who opened the door was Jiang Yu. She put in no effort to hide her surprise, saying, "Yu Shu? This is so rare! You're actually willing to leave your apartment. Come in, come in."

Yu Shu walked into an apartment that was not her own with no reservations. After all, Jiang Yu had been over at her place just now, chattering away half the night, giving Yu Shu plenty of time to send her son over to scare Yu Shu's husband half to death. Therefore, there was no need for niceties between them.

"Yu Shu, are you here to continue chatting?"

Jiang Yu was a little curious. Even though she loved to have Yu Shu over, they had only just chatted until they had almost run out of things to talk about. The scene had become a bit awkward, so Jiang Yu had taken her leave. *So why has Yu Shu come over?*

"Can you let me borrow your kids to have a chat?"

Jiang Yu blinked, not quite understanding what she meant.

Yu Shu splayed her hands out and said, "I have to write about a kid in my manuscript, but I'm a bit stuck and couldn't write anything. I just happened to remember that you have actual kids here, so I thought I'd come over to chat with them to see if I could find some inspiration."

She really had to admit that sometimes being an author was a really convenient profession. No matter the scope of what she did, including kidnapping kids even, she could use the phrase "gathering material" to explain it away every single time.

"I see." Jiang Yu smiled and said, "But don't scare them! They're both in their room. I'll take you there."

On the way, Yu Shu also saw Jiang Qibing. However, the moment he saw her, he froze. He immediately said he was going to the kitchen to make milk tea for them. Then, he fled with an embarrassed expression.

"Does your hubby not want me here?"

Jiang Yu coughed once, eyes darting at Yu Shu's chest area.

Yu Shu lowered her head. *Oh, I'm wearing a tank top, short shorts, and flip flops. I forgot to change before I left, but there are plenty of girls on the streets who wear a lot more revealing stuff than I do! It's just that I'm a bit lacking in youth and a bit more plentiful in chubby fat. Cut me some slack here, come on!*

"Your hubby sure is pure hearted. This kind of man is hard to find. He's a keeper."

Jiang Yu rolled her eyes at her and said, "Have you forgotten we're already married? I've kept him well in my grasp!"

"That's true. Once you saw a good man, you didn't let go of him even though he was your teacher. You sure are a tough gal. Color me impressed, super impressed."

Jiang Yu rolled her eyes at her even harder.

When they entered the room, it was obvious that one girl's gaze was alarmed and the other's gaze was wary, but Yu Shu ignored all of that. She sat in front of the two little girls with no reservation. One of the girls immediately hid behind the other.

Yu Shu waved her hand at Jiang Yu and said, "You can leave. If their mom is here, kids aren't able to speak very naturally. I want them to be more natural. Don't be a hindrance here."

"Yes, yes, this hindrance will leave now."

Jiang Yu felt that she really must be too lonely. With Yu Shu's way of talking that could frustrate a person to death, Jiang Yu still wanted to converse with her, and she was even having such a good time. *Goodness!*

"Remember to come out for milk tea later."

"I don't drink that kind of stuff. Do you have coffee?"

"No more coffee! You're going to have milk tea!" Jiang Yu said resolutely, "I'll tell Qibing to use an insulated pot. When you come out later, it'll still be warm."

"On such a hot day, adding ice cubes is the real way to go!"

"Girls shouldn't drink cold drinks!"

Against Jiang Yu, Yu Shu couldn't figure out why she always came out disadvantageous. She could only rub her nose and let it go. It was just a pot of warm milk tea. It wasn't like she hated it. In any case, the main point right now wasn't drinking tea.

When she saw Jiang Yu leave, Yu Shu turned to face the two little girls. They were just like two cats with their hackles raised and tails stepped on.

"Don't worry, I can't destroy you here." Yu Shu indifferently said, "I'm a dragon in my own place, and I'm even on the level of a divine dragon, but I'm just a worm outside of it, only slightly better than an earthworm. Or else, why do you think I hate going out so much?"

When they heard that, the two girls finally stopped glaring as much, but Xiao Xue still hid behind Jiang Jiang's back, unwilling to show herself.

"I have something to discuss with you." Yu Shu pointed at Xiao Xue. "Yes, you, stop hiding. Don't think that just because I'm currently an earthworm, I can't tell you and Jiang Jiang apart."

Xiao Xue widened her eyes. *What does this neighbor have to discuss with me? Is it discussing what method to use to burn me?*

Yu Shu bluntly said, "Jiang Ziya was captured. The other party wants you to head over there. I'm giving you three minutes to decide. If this is dragged out any longer, I don't think there'd be a need to go over there anymore."

"Yaya-gēge was captured?" Xiao Xue cried out, immediately turning her head to look at Jiang Jiang. Last time, it was Ziya-gē's classmate who was captured. Jiang Jiang wasn't willing to rescue him, but now that Jiang Ziya himself was captured, Jiang Jiang wouldn't treat it as something that had nothing to do with her, right?

"You can't get involved." Yu Shu glanced at Jiang Jiang and said, "If someone discovers that a 'truth' has appeared in this family, your entire family will get kidnapped! That's why this matter can't ever be discovered. Don't stick your nose in this. Obediently stay by Jiang Yu's side as a three year old girl, got it?"

Jiang Jiang looked warily at her and said, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Very good. Yu Shu nodded and looked toward Xiao Xue, stating the main goal she had come here for today.

"If you come with me to rescue Jiang Ziya, then I won't burn you."

When she heard that, Xiao Xue's eyes lit up.

"But there's a condition."

Hearing the "but," Xiao Xue's face fell. *It's never that easy.*

"From now on, you must live in my home."

Xiao Xue's eyes widened. She immediately loudly protested, "I don't want to!"

"It's not up to you." Yu Shu said impatiently, "Your existence as an artifact demon keeps reminding Jiang Jiang that she's not human. As

long as you leave, she will truly become a 'truth.' She will become a true, little girl, no longer bound by what's true or false."

Xiao Xue froze. *I'm to blame for Jiang Jiang being unable to become a real little girl?*

"Originally, burning you would have been the easiest method to solve this, but it wouldn't be easy to get Jiang Ziya onboard. Besides, killing you might cast a shadow over Jiang Yu. With the current situation in their family, this shadow might develop into a very scary result... So, seeing that you likely haven't harmed anyone, I'll force myself to take you in."

In actuality, Yu Shu was all sorts of unwilling. Things like artifact demons were much more troublesome than illusory familiars. If it weren't for her absolute authority in her own home, so the other party would never be able to cause even a tiny ripple, she would never take in an artifact demon.

It was just that House Keeper and Hold Keeper could still leave the apartment. As for Xiao Xue, Yu Shu would never let her take even a step outside of her home ever again.

"...No is no!" Xiao Xue's tears were brimming.

She looked toward Jiang Jiang, wanting the other to speak up for her.

Yu Shu immediately looked toward Jiang Jiang as well. Truthfully, Xiao Xue's wishes weren't important. She really wasn't powerful enough. Jiang Jiang was the important one. She was what prevented Yu Shu from taking this opportunity to destroy Xiao Xue—*Cough*. Yeah, she had lied. Even though she was an earthworm, she was still able to get rid of Xiao Xue.

"If she's just across from you, you can visit her at any time. That would be the best for everyone."

Yu Shu tried to persuade Jiang Jiang. Since the latter had already become a "truth," then she must greatly desire becoming a real girl. She wouldn't want to keep being called "true" or "false." She would just want to be a little girl.

However, Yu Shu didn't explain that as time passed and Jiang Jiang became a real girl, she probably wouldn't remember Xiao Xue any longer.

Jiang Jiang lowered her head in thought. Even though Xiao Xue's tear-filled eyes made her waver, she also knew that if things continued like this, how much longer could they keep it from Bàba?

In the future, they would attend kindergarten. Even if Xiao Xue could become a "lie," becoming a "truth" was highly improbable. If she attended kindergarten, letting the teacher and students interact with her for extended periods of time, they would definitely figure out that something was wrong. Xiao Xue's real identity would get harder and harder to conceal as she grew older...

"Xiao Xue, go live in Yu Shu's home. I'll take Māma there to visit you often." Jiang Jiang's eyes drifted to the side. She was unwilling to look at Xiao Xue, yet she couldn't help explaining, "At least, that's better than getting burned."

Xiao Xue bit on her lips, unwilling to say anything.

"So? Want to agree to my invitation?" Yu Shu asked, unperturbed, "You still have thirty seconds left to consider it. After that, I'm leaving. Your 'Yaya-gēge' will get killed with the ransom unfulfilled, and some other day, House Keeper will definitely be able to find the opportunity to burn you—"

"Okay, I agree to your invitation," Xiao Xue finally said, but her head was lowered, her expression completely hidden.

"Very good." Yu Shu stood up and stretched. "I'm going to return home to change. Meet you downstairs in three minutes. We're going to save that idiot brother of yours."

She left without looking back. There was no time to waste—and she didn't want to drink warm milk tea either. Therefore, she rushed straight out of the Jiang's home, not stopping even when Jiang Yu called after her.

"Inspiration suddenly hit me! I'm afraid I'll forget, so I'm going to write now. See you next time!"

Jiang Yu stared with her jaw dropped as Yu Shu rushed out like the wind. Her door was slammed shut, while she still had a pot of milk tea in her hand.

Jiang Qibing stood beside her, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. "This friend of yours sure has quite the personality..."

...I know, right? Jiang Yu placed a hand against her forehead, once again feeling that she must have been too lonely.

Footnotes

¹ **Lord of the East, Dong Jun:** Dong Jun (東君, Lord of the East) and Dong Huang (東皇, God of the Eastern Sky) are featured in two poems from Jiu Ge (九歌, Nine Songs), an ancient set of Chinese poems addressed to the spirits of fallen warriors who fought far from home. The Jiu Ge poems seem to be the inspiration behind Fu Taiyi's and Fu Jun's characters. Si Ming (司命, Master of Fate), who was mentioned in volume 1, is also from Jiu Ge and has corresponding poems. For more information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jiu_Ge.

Chapter 4: The Bookstore's Part 2— Talent of the Innerworld

Jiang Ziya bit and pulled and even rubbed his hand against the wall, but although the nylon rope around his hands appeared thin, the rope wasn't loosening or breaking despite his relentless struggling. *I won't be able to break it.*

The other person was truly a professional. There were no openings he could take advantage of.

Jiang Ziya could only give up on the idea of struggling free of the ropes. He turned to look toward the others. After Zhang Dongqi left, they began waking up one by one, baffling Jiang Ziya as to how the other person was making that happen.

Jiang Ziya's target was Xie Peilun. He hadn't forgotten that his goal was to find Fu Jun's classmate. He just hadn't thought that he would find several more people. From Zhang Dongqi's tone, Jiang Ziya figured that these people's capture had nothing to do with himself. *So, why have they been captured?*

He began taking measure of the other people. However, the dim lighting only allowed him to make out basic details. Xie Peilun was an elementary school student. The person huddled in the corner seemed

to be female, and she wasn't all that old. At least, she didn't appear to be older than Jiang Ziya.

Other than her, there were also two males. One of them appeared not much older than Xie Peilun, while the other might be around Jiang Ziya's age.

These people seemed like they didn't know each other. If he had to connect them somehow, he could only say that they were all fairly young.

Not captured for mining, but maybe the sex industry. Jiang Ziya felt even worse about it.

He tried his best to nudge his body forward toward Xie Peilun. The latter was so scared that he kept shrinking into himself.

"Peilun, it's me, the gēge from Jiu Ge Bookstore."

Jiang Ziya spoke in a quiet voice. Thankfully, Zhang Dongqi hadn't taped his mouth back up. From Xie Peilun's expression, it was obvious that he was scared out of his wits. Don't even mention the gēge from

the bookstore, even if his actual gēge were here, he might not recognize him either.

Xie Peilun stilled. Finally, he calmed down and glanced at Jiang Ziya's face. He recognized him. He was so emotional that he seemed to want to rush over, but his hands and feet were both tied, so he could only thrash around frantically.

Jiang Ziya immediately leaned forward, resting against Xie Peilun's shoulder to comfort him gently. Only then did he stop struggling. The child's soft wrists had turned bloody from his previous actions.

Xie Peilun's tears dripped down his face like they weren't worth anything. Even though this gēge was also tied up, as long as an adult he knew was present, he would feel that there was at least someone there for him.

Under the dim lighting, Jiang Ziya lowered his head and saw that Xie Peilun's wrists were already an expanse of purple and black from the tight, nylon rope. Who knew how many times he had struggled? Right then, a surge of anger seized Jiang Ziya. *How despicable, to treat an elementary school kid like this!*

Jiang Ziya really wanted to ask Xie Peilun how he had arrived here, but the other's mouth was still taped up, so he couldn't speak at all.

"I'm going to use my mouth to pull off the tape over your mouth."

Taking such an action toward a little boy would definitely look a bit perverted, so Jiang Ziya felt a need to clarify beforehand to avoid scaring Xie Peilun so much that he would frantically squirm backwards.

Xie Peilun immediately nodded his head hard. Only then did Jiang Ziya dare to approach and bite at his face. However, using only his mouth to rip off tape was, as expected, difficult. He felt like he had nearly slobbered a face full of saliva on Xie Peilun's face before he finally managed to pull the tape off.

The moment the tape left his mouth, Xie Peilun let out a sigh of relief. He immediately asked, "Gēge, how did you get caught too?"

"Ah, actually, I was caught when I came out to search for you with Fu Jun."

Xie Peilun's eyes filled with tears again. Touched, he said, "Xiao Jun was searching for me?"

"Your mom is also frantically searching for you everywhere."

Xie Peilun cried even harder.

Jiang Ziya could only use his tied up hands and his advantageous height to pat the other's shoulder. He waited until Xie Peilun calmed down a bit and immediately asked, "Do you know why you were captured?"

"It's all that alley's fault! Xiao Jun said that that alley was bad news. I should have listened to him and avoided it, but I was a big idiot and didn't listen to him. Sob, sob..."

Xie Peilun cried as he recounted what had happened back then. He resolved to obediently listen to Fu Jun from now on, even more than he listened to his mom!

At this time, the other people around them started taking notice of them and began closely listening in.

What had happened to Xie Peilun didn't take long to recount. He finished talking about it in no time at all. Jiang Ziya couldn't figure out much from it either. He only knew that Xie Peilun's run in with danger should have nothing to do with that alley. What Fu Jun meant by "bad news" was that old beggar. However, Xie Peilun had never stepped foot into that barrier dimension, and he hadn't met any old beggars.

He couldn't get an answer from Xie Peilun, so Jiang Ziya could only turn to look at the others. The moment he saw the tape on their mouths, he felt a huge headache coming on. He could only pick out that guy who was around his age first. He looked to be calmer than the kid, and he was a guy. It was much better than slobbering over the girl's face.

"I'm going to pull off the tape."

The other person immediately nodded.

After the tape was removed, he blurted, "I saw the same thing as the kid, but I saw it in the parking lot of a building. I was also chased until I couldn't run anymore. Then, I was captured."

When Jiang Ziya heard that, he figured that the other two had experienced something similar. Just as he thought that there was no need to remove more tape, he lifted his head and saw the girl and the kid stare at him with imploring, tear-filled expressions.

"...Peilun, go pull off the tape over the big sister's mouth."

As for Jiang Ziya, he rolled over to the kid, and face against face, began slobbering... Ah no, it should be ripping off tape. At first, he had thought that it wasn't a good idea to plaster his face against a girl's, so he had told Xie Peilun to do it, but now, he abruptly discovered that it was simply even more perverted to plaster his face against a little boy's!

After the tape was removed, both of them spoke of happenings that were almost the same. Only the location was different. The time frame was about the same. It had all occurred within the past few days.

It seems that these people really have nothing to do with me. Jiang Ziya was a bit confused over why Zhang Dongqi had kidnapped these people.

Jiang Ziya looked at the guy and asked, "How about we inch over to the other end of the room to take a look?"

"I've tried several times already. I couldn't find the end of the other side at all. I only know that there's a portable restroom to this side over here."

Even though this man was calmer than the rest, his face was still full of fright. Besides having to face getting kidnapped, he also had to face all sorts of weird occurrences. It was already rather strong of him not to collapse on the spot.

Now that they had his left eye, the situation was of course different. Jiang Ziya held back his urge to say that. No matter if it were Yu Shu, Lu Yang, or the boss, all of them had uniformly told him that he was never to tell others about his truth-seeing eye. Therefore, he had to keep his mouth sealed tightly.

"I'm going to take a look anyway."

After he said that, Jiang Ziya heard the guy give an unhappy snort. He didn't pay him any mind. He used a fairly ridiculous pose to inch over, appearing just like a huge crab.

Having left the vicinity of the light bulb, it was truly very dark in front of him. Jiang Ziya nearly couldn't see anything. In addition, the guy had said that he couldn't find the end, so Jiang Ziya moved fairly quickly, until there was a "bang"—his head had knocked into a wall.

Jiang Ziya felt so much pain that he was nearly about to swear. *Didn't he say he couldn't find the end? I didn't even have to crawl for very long to find it.*

He turned his head to look. He could even see their figures under the light bulb still!

"Dà-gēge, are you okay?" Xie Peilun shouted in a panicked voice.

"I'm okay." Jiang Ziya hurriedly said, "My head just hit the wall. I'm going to look around. Be good and wait under the light bulb. I can see you from here."

Xie Peilun obediently agreed and shrank into the big sister's arms with the other kid. The three of them hugged each other, forming a lump. Their tears were plentiful enough to be drunk as water.

Jiang Ziya shuffled left and right, trying to figure the place out. *Why isn't there even a window?*

This place seemed to be rectangular, and the area was rather large. He couldn't figure out what material the surrounding walls were made of. They didn't seem to be concrete walls. However, he couldn't write off that they might just be veneer over permanent walls.

He slowly touched the three walls, wanting to figure out how that Zhang Dongqi had been able to appear soundlessly and disappear after that. Even if this place were a barrier dimension, there had to be a door for that guy to be able to enter, right?

If that guy could walk through walls, then Jiang Ziya would surrender, rub his nose, and accept getting kidnapped.

After touching around, he couldn't find anything that resembled a door. He didn't even find anything that jutted out. The walls around him were all flat.

There was nothing more he could do. Jiang Ziya could only begin inching back, but halfway there, his butt suddenly sat on a place that was odd. That part of the floor seemed to be a bit different from the rest of the floor.

He immediately stopped. At first, he couldn't see anything different. Then, he lowered his head and closed his right eye, looking only with his left. He immediately saw a shadow. It was much darker than the

rest of the floor. He carefully touched around the black shadow and actually found a small dip. The size was just right for a hand to reach in.

The exit is actually below our feet!

Jiang Ziya excitedly reached his hand in, trying his best to lift the door. Then, he discovered that he couldn't lift it...

All right, I was too stupid. If I had thought about it, I'd have figured out that it had to be locked. It was just that that guy had been dismissive of guns just now, so Jiang Ziya had been a bit hopeful that he would also be dismissive of using locks and would only use barrier dimensions and the like to keep them contained.

It was evident that the other party hadn't entirely cast away the real world.

Jiang Ziya could only return below the light bulb. Xie Peilun nearly threw himself at him, bringing with him the girl and the kid, who had also shuffled closer.

"Did you find anything?" The guy asked with a tone that was enjoying Jiang Ziya's failure.

Jiang Ziya shook his head. He had found something, but it wasn't useful in any case. Besides, that guy was actually enjoying his failure, so he wasn't someone who wanted to help. Therefore, there was no need for Jiang Ziya to elaborate, or the secret of his left eye might come out.

They could only obediently wait for the neighbor to come save them.

Jiang Ziya felt a bit depressed. It was great that his left eye could see through things, but the problem was, after he figured things out, he couldn't do anything about it. *That's even more depressing than not being able to see anything in the first place!*

Next time, if anything that seemed even the least bit unnatural were to happen, he was definitely going to chain Lu Yang to his waistband before leaving.



Zhang Dongqi sat in front of the surveillance monitor, staring at the screen without breaking his gaze. When he saw the person on the screen hit the wall, he laughed.

"Looks like out of these captured people, only that guy is the least bit useful."

There were actually two people sitting on the sofa behind him. One of them was Zhang Nanzhu. She was Zhang Dongqi's younger cousin, from the same side of the family as him. The other person was her older cousin, Liu Jing.

Faced with Zhang Dongqi's mocking, Zhang Nanzhu kept silent and didn't react much.

As for Liu Jing, he snorted coldly. He was very unhappy about what Zhang Dongqi had said because they had captured all of the others. Only that guy had been captured by Zhang Dongqi's own hands. Yet he just had to have captured a useful one!

That guy hadn't even been captured as new blood. It was just that the Zhang family had learned of Zhang Dongping's death, so they had sent Zhang Dongqi over. As a side benefit, he could watch over Zhang

Nanzhu, who was still learning her way around, while he avenged Zhang Dongping.

Even though Zhang Dongqi was powerful, leaving no doubt as to this mission's success, Liu Jing really didn't like the guy. He disliked the entire Zhang family even more. Even Zhang Nanzhu irked him.

Normally, if Liu Jing were to see a hot babe on the level of Zhang Nanzhu, and she even wanted him to handle some business with her, he would have long since sidled up to her, since the pavilion closest to the water enjoys the moonlight first. He wouldn't let go of such a good chance.

However, this Zhang Dongqi just had to follow along and interfere. He was so full of it, it was like he'd gotten the winning tiles at mahjong. He always had a gaze that looked down on everyone. The sight of it made Liu Jing seethe!

The only comfort Liu Jing had was that even Zhang Nanzhu didn't get any better treatment from Zhang Dongqi.

"He's the target of your vengeance, isn't he?" Liu Jing mocked, "What freaking use is there for a guy you're gonna kill?"

Zhang Dongqi couldn't answer that.

Even though his thoughts toward Zhang Dongping, his useless older cousin, was that it was no big deal that he was gone—he wasn't even sad about it—his cousin *had* been killed. Therefore, the Zhang family had to avenge him. He agreed with that point. If they didn't avenge someone in the family who got killed, then who would think anything of them in the future? A bunch of people might start looking for trouble with them.

"He discovered the exit," Zhang Nanzhu suddenly said.

At first, Zhang Dongqi didn't understand what she was talking about. Then, he looked at the screen. Jiang Ziya was flat against the floor, hand touching here and there. Then, he made a pulling motion. It was obvious that he had found the trap door on the floor.

"He could actually discover the location of the exit?" Zhang Dongqi exclaimed in shock, "He's not a practitioner, is he?"

Zhang Nanzhu said quietly, "No, I looked into it. His brother-in-law started a feng shui business, but he can't be considered a practitioner. He only uses some tools to take care of small problems."

"He might have stumbled upon it."

Liu Jing didn't at all believe that the brat would have the ability to find the exit. Besides, he wasn't the one who had captured him, so anything gained from this wouldn't be credited to him.

Zhang Dongqi sneered, disinclined to pay attention to Liu Jing. If breaking through a barrier dimension could be done through stumbling upon it, then that brat had to have unbelievable luck. In the innerworld, luck like that could be considered part of one's strength.

Could this brat be the cause of Zhang Dongping's death?

Zhang Dongqi abruptly felt some things clear up. Without his barrier dimension, his useless cousin's underlings, those artifact demons and illusory familiars, wouldn't be able to scare someone to death but would rather make them laugh to death.

If this were truly the case, then it would be such a waste to kill the brat!

The Zhang family had plenty of talented individuals who could subdue demons or engage in fights, but they had few experts at creating barrier dimensions, and even fewer talented at breaking barrier dimensions. This kind of talent was pretty much a rarity in every family. Everyone fought tooth and nail for it.

Killing such a talent was pretty much a waste of natural resources!

Zhang Dongqi grabbed his head, unable to decide. Even though he knew the Zhang family lacked a talent like Jiang Ziya, and Zhang Dongping hadn't been some expert in the family that they would miss because he had died, Zhang Dongping came out on top because he had had connections. If Zhang Dongqi didn't kill this enemy of theirs, his family would definitely be unwilling to let this matter go.

...Forget it. I'll wait and see. That brat might not even be the culprit behind this. From what he said in his phone call, he was definitely calling for backup.

Zhang Dongqi had been waiting for Jiang Ziya's backup from the start. He had never thought that the brat would have had the ability to kill Zhang Dongping, so he had only captured him as bait. He hadn't thought that this bait was actually a huge, delicious fish, almost making him unwilling to use him to catch other fish.

Zhang Dongqi was undecided until an idea struck him.

The backup that the brat called might also be big fish. He could capture them together and take them straight to the Zhang family. He could let those old guys stress over whether to kill or keep them. Then, he'd have nothing to do with it. After all, it didn't matter if they killed or kept them. He would have made a great contribution either way!

After thinking it through, he turned and asked, "Nanzhu, are you done with the barrier dimension?"

Zhang Nanzhu nodded and said, "I'm done. Like you asked, I made it doubly secure."

"Good! Double it again."

Zhang Dongqi had a feeling that the big fish he was luring in this time was definitely going to be crazily big!

As someone of the innerworld, in regards to something like premonitions, he didn't hold the opinion that he would rather believe in them than not. Rather, he definitely believed in them!

Chapter 4: The Bookstore's Part 3— Author

Yu Shu walked along the street, a toy longsword in her hand.

Along the way, plenty of children stared at her plastic sword, and many wanted to rush over and snatch it to play with it. The adults next to them could only keep a tight hold on them. Their gazes seem to mock this “auntie” who was still playing with toys at her age.

But all that didn't matter. It was better than carrying a katana and having Mr. Policeman take her in for tea. Besides, the favor she was doing was going right on Jiang Ziya's tab.

However, Yu Shu was still a bit irked. *Why do I feel that I have the worse end of the deal? I only had Jiang Ziya go to the supermarket to buy stuff once, and a bunch of things resulted.* She had only started keeping a tab not long ago, and she already felt that Jiang Ziya would probably need to do grocery shopping for her for his entire lifetime before he could pay off the debt.

Only children paid Yu Shu attention, but all sorts of people paid attention to the man following behind her.

House Keeper wore a dress shirt, vest, and dress pants. Wearing this outfit outside was not as strange of a sight as wearing it at home, but he was carrying a large, red backpack on his back. There were even decorative devil wings on both sides of the bag. Paired with his classical, refined demeanor and walking under the colorful neon city lights, the incongruity of his image shot through the roof.

What House Keeper had brought up to her earlier was correct—he and Hold Keeper should buy some t-shirts and jeans to wear.

She just hoped that these two people from olden times wouldn't look too weird wearing ordinary youngsters' clothing... *Wait, House Keeper is clearly from a futuristic, technological age!*

For the first time, Yu Shu regretted her bad habit of always liking to design ironic characters.

"I am sorry, I am here with her." For the fifth time already, House Keeper turned down a female who was making a pass at him. Each and every time, he used Yu Shu, who was walking ahead of him, as the excuse.

Seeing those women swing incredulous stares at her, and some even had gazes tinged with merciless disdain, Yu Shu glared back at them viciously.

Disdain? That's my son, not my man. If you want to be my daughter-in-law, you should be crawling over and calling me Mom—Bleh! Who wants them to call me Mom?!

"Mamma mia!"

Someone is actually calling me Mama? And this voice even sounds like a guy's!

Yu Shu stilled, looking over with a scowl.

A man had his mouth hanging open so wide that it had become an O. He pointed a shaking finger at House Keeper, his face full of disbelief. He blurted, "Ch-Charles!"

Yu Shu started, reflexively glancing toward House Keeper, who was startled but elated. The expression on his face seemed to appear even more human than before by a few smidgeons. Yu Shu was so annoyed

that she narrowed her eyes, her expression rather threatening. Toward this guy who had randomly called and revealed her butler's true name, her hatred directly shot up by fifty percent.

"This is the first time I've seen such a spot on cosplay!"

Fu Taiyi walked over happily. The two people behind him both frowned. One of them was a child who was holding onto the other person, who looked like a university student, telling him not to worry. The child's face was stiff while he rather seriously consoled that university student. This sight was beyond strange.

Yu Shu blocked House Keeper, preventing Fu Taiyi from observing him from too close of a distance. Although House Keeper was already a "lie," and it was dark, so normal people shouldn't spot any discrepancies, and even if they did see anything, they would write it off as their eyes playing tricks on them, it was still better to invite as little trouble as possible.

Fu Taiyi was already crowding Yu Shu, yet he approached even closer. Taking such an action toward a woman was truly rather brash. House Keeper moved forward, wanting to step in front of Yu Shu, but Yu Shu actually used her plastic sword to block him, not permitting him to step forward.

Yu Shu was certain that this fellow before her wasn't trying to cop a feel off of her.

Fu Taiyi said, "This one is the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi. Dare I ask who you are? You actually dared to bring a demon onto the streets so impetuously!"

God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi? Yu Shu snorted and said, "And *I'm* the Heavenly Goddess, Xuannü!¹ You're just a person and you dare to claim you're a god?"

Fu Taiyi smiled slightly and didn't get mad. He said, "I don't dare to. It's just a name."

"Jiu Ge, right?"

Yu Shu had heard of them before. Jiu Ge was one of the local powers behind Zhongxiang City. She had completely no interest in provoking them. Even though she was invincible at home, and she didn't go outside much, there would always be times when she had to go out. Avoiding making sworn enemies outside was the true way of life.

"I'm just an author. Not a famous name, no number, no money. Move!"

"...Don't tell me you're Yu Shu?"

She had Charles with her on the streets and even said she was an author. If Fu Taiyi still couldn't guess who she was, then he had truly read so many of her books for nothing.

Yu Shu narrowed her eyes but suddenly remembered that the other person had just recognized Charles and even called out his name. After learning that she was an author, he immediately knew her penname...

"You've read my books?" She asked, pleased, her tune completely changing.

Fu Taiyi nodded.

"So you're actually a reader of mine?" A smile blossomed. *See, even Jiu Ge has readers of mine! I can be considered a pretty famous author!*

She was so happy that even her eyebrows were arching.

But right now, she couldn't be bothered with readers. If she didn't hurry, her grocery shopping lackey was going to kick the bucket.

"I'm a bit busy. I'll give you an autograph next time. See ya."

After saying that, she tugged on House Keeper, intent on leaving.

Fu Taiyi was shocked. *This brash woman is the author behind that indecisive, old-fashioned, polite main character who worries about too much?*

There has to be some mistake here!

"You're the neighbors across from Ziya?"

Yu Shu stopped walking and looked toward the university student, who had just spoken. *Huh, quite a handsome one. He's actually half. What good material!*

House Keeper said softly, "Mistress, we met him when we went to visit Jiang Ziya at the hospital."

Outside the apartment, House Keeper should directly address her as Yu Shu, but that God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi already seemed to know that he was a familiar. Obfuscation seemed rather unnecessary.

Yu Shu recalled the name that Jiang Ziya would often mutter and asked in return, "You're Lu Yang?"

Lu Yang nodded. Yu Shu hadn't left much of an impression on him, but the man behind her sure had. It was hard to come by that kind of elegance in this current era.

Seeing the two adults and one kid before her, their expressions somber, Yu Shu had a light bulb go off. She blurted, "Hey, don't tell me you guys are looking for Jiang Ziya?"

They nodded, stunned.

“Oh, awesome, I’m on my way to rescue him.”

When they heard that, Fu Taiyi, Fu Jun, and Lu Yang all sincerely did not know whether they should beat Jiang Ziya up or this woman in front of them. They had been searching frantically here, relying on Fu Taiyi’s miniscule sensing to keep on searching back and forth, panicking to the point that smoke was about to fume from their heads. Yet, this woman had shown up out of nowhere and said she was going to save him, and she even looked like she knew where he was. How could they not be angry?

“How do you know where he is?” Lu Yang asked, deeply suspicious. Although he had heard Jiang Ziya mention the neighbor across from him, he recalled that they had only begun interacting recently. It was impossible that this neighbor would run off to rescue him just because Ziya had been kidnapped.

Yu Shu said in frustration, “It’s all because he called me asking for help. I had no choice!”

"Why did Ziya-gē call you for help?" Fu Jun asked in confusion. Jiang Ziya had clearly been helping him search for his classmate when he had disappeared. *Shouldn't he call me or Lu Yang for help?*

The other two had the same doubts, and they also felt a bit hurt. One was his boss who had known him for several years, and the other was his friend who had known him for several years. Yet, Jiang Ziya chose the neighbor for help?

"Um..." Yu Shu rubbed her chin and said, "I think it's because he felt that only I would be able to come up with a little girl's voice to respond to him? When he called, he addressed my butler as Jiěfu right off the bat, and then he adamantly demanded to speak with his family's artifact demon. I bet the culprit was next to him, demanding him to hand the artifact demon over."

Lu Yang abruptly came to a realization and snapped, "It was you, wasn't it? You told Jiang Ziya all those things and got him involved in the innerworld!"

"My ass!" Yu Shu furiously said, "He was the one who barged into my place and caused a bunch of things to happen, putting me behind on my manuscript!"

Were you not behind on your manuscript because of bringing Hold Keeper and me into existence? Jiang Ziya does not seem to be involved. Moreover, before Jiang Ziya had barged inside their home, he had been helping the mistress take out the trash. He had been the one to appear before Jiang Ziya.

To the side, House Keeper chose to remain silent, a perfectly obedient demon.

"You're one to speak!" Fu Taiyi also chose to enter the blame game, but his target was Lu Yang. "Who was it who kept waving that sword around in front of Jiang Ziya? Aren't you doing it on purpose? You're trying to take advantage of Ziya's left eye to make your sword become more and more real!"

"I'm not!" Lu Yang flushed red and explained, "It's because a death god appeared then. He seemed like he was going to attack us, so I had to chase him away. I had no other choice but to call Slay out."

...Come to think of it, I have something to do with that death god. So, I am to blame, too?

Fu Taiyi didn't dare to say anything more.

Yu Shu wasn't about to be outdone. She scolded Lu Yang, "It was obviously your fault! A death god is no big deal. Did you have to swing your sword around for that? And you dared to scold me. Pot, meet kettle! I've told Jiang Ziya before. You're up to no good!"

"What did you say?!"

"Enough—"

Fu Jun gave a loud, long shout. His young voice was so high that it could disperse the clouds, shocking the passersby around them, who darted their eyes at the kid, one after another. Then, they used disdainful gazes to stare at the adults by the child.

Fu Jun snapped, "You three all had a part in getting Ziya-gē involved! But right now, who got him involved isn't important. We need to hurry and rescue Ziya-gē. Stop fighting."

Hearing that, the three adults began reflecting over how their actions just now had been more immature than a kid's.

"Jiang Ziya gave me an address." Yu Shu told the other two. "I've already wasted too much time here. If I don't hurry over, I'm worried I'd have to collect his dead body. You're coming with me, right?"

"Of course!" Lu Yang immediately answered.

Still, when Lu Yang heard her say "collect his dead body," he was so angry that he kind of wanted to start another fight with this woman. *She doesn't even look all that young. How could she be so thoughtless with her words? Talking about collecting his dead body in this kind of situation, it can't get any unluckier than that!*

But, this really isn't a good time to be arguing. He could only quash his anger.

Fu Taiyi frowned. "There are so many of us. We might alert them to our presence. Also, doesn't the kidnapper want Xiao Xue? Did you bring her?"

"Xiao Xue, huh?" Yu Shu looked at Fu Taiyi and gave a cold snort. *Looks like this guy is heavily involved with Jiang Ziya's family. He even knows what the artifact demon in his family is called.*

Lu Yang also shot a glance at Fu Taiyi, his face full of deep suspicion.

Fu Taiyi felt a cold draft behind him. *All right, I really am one of the culprits who pushed Jiang Ziya into the innerworld, and with quite some strength, too.*

"You..." Lu Yang spoke but stopped. He thought he shouldn't bring up his suspicions at this kind of time. What was important was saving Jiang Ziya first.

Fu Taiyi and Jiang Ziya had known each other for several years already. If he really wanted to harm Jiang Ziya, he would have succeeded already. He wouldn't need to wait until now, so it was unlikely that he would take action during a rescue mission. *That neighbor is still more suspicious!*

Yu Shu gestured at the large backpack on House Keeper's back. They all clearly understood her.

"How about this..." Yu Shu said straightforwardly, "You have your abilities, and I have mine. I don't think you'll trust me, and I don't want to trust you either. So how about we simply let Xiao Xue answer

the invitation. We will each use our own abilities to hide. After that, we will each do our own thing.”

If it weren't because of her agreement with Xiao Xue, after seeing these two people about to head off to save Jiang Ziya, Yu Shu would definitely have gone home after she told them the address. She didn't want to have to clean up this mess. It was a pity that she had given the invitation. She had to see it to the end. Only then could she once and for all bring Xiao Xue home as her third doll.

“Just the way I want it,” Lu Yang replied indifferently.

Fu Taiyi inclined his head. Even though he preferred working together, and he didn't like this kind of antagonistic atmosphere, he wasn't close with Yu Shu. Also, he had blurted out Xiao Xue's name just now, clearly making Yu Shu suspicious.

Lu Yang was also walking the path of hunting demons. This was not very compatible with his path in life.

Fu Taiyi had always coexisted peacefully with demons.

Looking toward that large backpack, he sympathized with Xiao Xue, who was stuffed inside. This child had already been pitiable since before, and there seemed to be no change now. *Did she come voluntarily to rescue Jiang Ziya...*

He glanced at Yu Shu. *Probably not, huh?*



Each with their own intentions, they arrived nearby the location indicated by the kidnapper. They looked over from a distance. It was actually a plot of empty land overgrown with weeds. For some reason, there were several cargo containers haphazardly dumped there. It was fairly late by now, with few people about in the area.

Seeing that this was the location, they all began frowning. This place was practically set up as the perfect place to kill someone.

They looked toward Yu Shu in unison. She waved at House Keeper, who walked over and handed Yu Shu the doll that had been in the backpack. Then, he put the backpack back on.

That doll had white hair, blue eyes, and snowy white skin. She did not look like a typical doll but had a snow kingdom kind of feel. She was a

rather unique doll, just that there was some dust on her body. She wasn't dirty, but it was easy to tell that she was aged.

At this time, the doll suddenly began struggling. At first, you could pass the movement off as someone shaking her, but then her limbs began to move as well. Her neck extended, shaking the head portion as if wanting to shake free of something.

The doll's cotton surface also began to change, turning smoother, like a person's skin. It was beyond odd, the state between cotton and skin, like a block of human skin and cloth had been sewn together.

After that, the nails on the fingers also began growing one by one...

Not long after, a cute girl appeared in Yu Shu's arms, but she was a white haired, blue eyed child with snowy white skin. Her appearance couldn't possibly be that of a Taiwanese child's. She was very scared and timid, but she had no intentions to escape, instead obediently staying in Yu Shu's arms.

As for why she had returned to her initial appearance, Yu Shu had also arranged that. No matter what, she could not use Jiang Jiang's face. That would end up involving Jiang Jiang.

Lu Yang summoned Slay. Even though this would reveal his abilities ahead of time, while the other two hadn't revealed their abilities at all, which definitely put him at a huge disadvantage, Slay could help him keep watch. Therefore, Lu Yang had to call Slay out ahead of time.

He had Slay float by his side on watch. Lu Yang purposely raised an eyebrow at the other two. *I've already shown my power. Now it's your turn.*

Yu Shu raised the plastic sword in her hand, but even if you beat Lu Yang to death, he wouldn't believe that that could really be used as a sword. It wasn't like it was some hard resin. It was just a plastic sword that children played with. All an adult had to do was use some force to bend it, and it would snap in two.

Fu Taiyi was even more ridiculous. He answered with a straightforward, stupid grin, as if he didn't understand Lu Yang's silent prodding at all.

Meeting a woman who was all sorts of unreliable, plus a practically unscrupulous bookstore owner, Lu Yang felt completely helpless. *Just what kind of company does Jiang Ziya keep?*

Yu Shu placed Xiao Xue on the ground and gave her a command.
“Walk over slowly. We naturally have our ways to follow you secretly.”

Xiao Xue nodded timidly. She couldn't help but sneak a glance at Fu Taiyi. It was too bad that a doll that hadn't been alive for long could not win against a wily human. Everyone had seen her action. Fu Taiyi could only smile even more idiotically.

“Okay.” Xiao Xue answered and said uneasily, “If that person speaks with me, what should I say?”

Everyone suddenly felt the uncomfortable feeling of bullying a little girl. Only Yu Shu mercilessly said, “Just pretend to be emotionless and walk over. If he speaks with you, you don't have to say anything. We're going to murder him directly!”

As she ranted, she pulled House Keeper into the dark to hide.

“Making me leave the apartment when it's already this late. What if I fall behind on my manuscript again? It's not like I can tell the readers that the neighbor across from me got kidnapped, and I went off to rescue him, so there will be no release this time—F***! That kind of

excuse is even worse than the excuse of my hair hurting. No one's gonna believe that!

"Dammit, this old lady is definitely going to chop that kidnapper up into seven times seven—forty-nine pieces to boil in my soup!"

Xiao Xue's tears were almost about to overflow. *Must I stay in this Yu Shu's place from now on?*

Do I have to? Can I return to my box to sleep instead?!

Footnotes

¹ **Heavenly Goddess, Xiannü**”: Also known as Jiutian Xiannü, she is the goddess of war, sexuality, and longevity. See [here](#) for more information.

Chapter 5: Contract Between Human and Doll Part 1—Under the Starry Sky

Xiao Xue tried her best to keep her face expressionless as she walked toward the abandoned plot filled with cargo containers.

Whether or not they could rescue him, she would face the same result—she had to leave that home for Jiang Jiang to successfully grow up into a real person, but the person who had been kidnapped was Jiang Ziya. He was her Yaya-gēge who had always treated her with kindness. Xiao Xue was still willing to rescue him.

Actually, there was some selfishness on her part as well. Perhaps Jiang Ziya would speak up for her. *Maybe, I can stay...*

Even if in the end, there really is no other way, and I have to go to Yu Shu's home, then at least Yaya-gēge would come and visit me every day, right?

With this kind of idea in mind, Xiao Xue walked toward the abandoned plot step by step. The vacant plot only had a lopsided wooden fence surrounding it. Even a little girl could easily find a gap in it to squeeze through. She zeroed in on a hole that didn't have as many wires tangled around it. Xiao Xue squeezed right through it.

When she lifted her head, she was faced with brightness.

The dirty and messy plot of land, the randomly placed cargo containers—all of it had disappeared without a trace. All that was left was the starry sky and the swaying grass below it, a beautiful sight.

Xiao Xue stared dazedly at the sky full of stars, but not because she was mesmerized by the beautiful, starry sky. Rather, she felt like she had seen this sight before. *But how is that possible?*

Ever since XX took her out of the box, she had always been in the city. She had never before seen a night sky filled with stars like this. The lights in the city were too strong. At best, she could barely make out a few stars...

Wait, XX?

Xiao Xue abruptly realized she couldn't remember the name. *It should be Jiang Jiang, right?*

But that's not important right now! Xiao Xue shook her head hard. She had to save Yaya-gēge.

"Is anyone there? Master, didn't you call me over?" She shouted. She didn't care who heard her. The kidnapper, Yaya-gēge, or Yu Shu; of course, if it were Fu Taiyi, that would be even better.

"You've gotten caught in a barrier dimension."

Xiao Xue jumped in shock. Then, she remembered and looked down at her chest. There was a necklace there. The pendant was a small, foreign soldier—on the outside. On the inside, it was something that was the same as her.

The illusory familiar was called Hold Keeper. Before they left, Yu Shu had him occupy the necklace, and then had her wear the necklace on her neck.

"I know." Xiao Xue pouted. "But I can't do anything about it."

"You can't? Then, what can you do?" Hold Keeper asked.

"I can shapeshift! I can shift into lots of different appearances!"

"Then, can you break the barrier dimension?"

"I can't!" Xiao Xue complained, "It's not like I have the kind of eyes Yaya-gēge has. How could I break a barrier dimension? I'm just an artifact demon that hasn't even become a lie yet. How could I be that strong?"

"What kind of eyes are those?"

"Duh, truth—"

Xiao Xue abruptly stopped. She stared at the necklace in front of her chest, feeling that something was wrong. It was true that she didn't know whether or not Hold Keeper knew that Jiang Ziya's left eye was odd, but the other person was clearly fishing for information. *Is this really Hold Keeper's voice?*

"Why did you suddenly stop in the middle?"

Xiao Xue said without batting an eye, "You know how Yaya-gēge likes to play detective games. His eyes are really good. He often notices a lot of details. Hold Keeper, you're so strange. How did you forget that?"

"Oh, I thought you were talking about something else."

"Hold Keeper, how do I get out? Why aren't you telling me yet?" Xiao Xue purposely asked, "Aren't you more familiar with this? Master said so and told me to listen to you. Where do we go now?"

"I was still figuring it out just now. I've got it now. Look toward the left. Do you see a star that's very bright? It's not all that high up from the horizon. That's the North Star."

"I see it."

"Just walk in the direction of the North Star."

Hearing that, Xiao Xue obediently headed that way. However, she knew in her heart that this had to be a trap, as Hold Keeper couldn't possibly know how to get out. His power level didn't even reach hers!

But Xiao Xue didn't plan to expose him. Rather, she was going to follow what he said because her goal was to meet the person who had kidnapped Ziya-gēge. That was what Yu Shu had told her, that all she had to do was meet the person. She could leave the rest to Yu Shu.

That was why she just had to follow along. She would definitely be captured, and then she would be able to see the person who had caught Ziya-gēge.

Walking toward the North Star, Xiao Xue's sight was continuously filled with a sky full of stars. It made her feel uncomfortable, but she didn't know why. There seemed to be some strange, distant sounds drifting to her ears, but she was certain that she wasn't hearing anything.

Just like that, she gazed at the stars as she walked, her eyes full of stars. Even if she closed her eyes, she would still see those dots of starry light. She didn't know how long she walked, but she didn't feel tired...

"Xiao Xue, Xiao Xue!"

Xiao Xue slowly opened her eyes. A familiar face appeared before her gaze. She jumped in shock and shouted, "Yaya-gēge!"

Jiang Ziya forced a smile. From a distance, he had seen Xiao Xue walk over in a daze and felt that something was wrong. He had purposely used his feet to thump the ground, but Xiao Xue hadn't responded at all. She walked all the way up to him and kept walking. If he hadn't caught her, he really didn't know if she would have hit the wall and fallen, or if her body would have kept on walking against the wall.

For some reason, Jiang Ziya felt that it would be the latter. Xiao Xue would keep on walking like this. If she were human, she might even walk until she died.

I found Yaya-gēge! Xiao Xue looked around but only saw several people who were tied up just like Jiang Ziya. She didn't find anyone that looked like the kidnapper.

This troubled Xiao Xue. *I didn't meet the kidnapper. I directly found Yaya-gēge. Is this okay?*

Yu Shu had said that all she had to do was meet the kidnapper. But she didn't tell her, what should she do when she found Jiang Ziya?

Xiao Xue hugged Jiang Ziya tightly, not wanting to let him out of her sight again. She just had to wait for Yu Shu and the others to save them.

After thinking it over, Xiao Xue removed the necklace Hold Keeper was in and placed it around Jiang Ziya's neck. Only then did she pounce back into his arms, hugging onto him tightly without letting go.

"Xiao Xue, who is coming to save me?"

"Everyone is coming to save you. There's Lu Yang-gē, Yu Shu, and even the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi! They will definitely be able to save you—Ah!"

An abrupt squeeze, and Xiao Xue cried out in pain. She raised her head in confusion at Jiang Ziya. The other person was staring right at her, eyes wide, as if he didn't understand what she had just said.

Xiao Xue froze, overcome with shock. *Could this Yaya-gēge be fake, too?*

Frantic, she grabbed onto the necklace that Hold Keeper was in. This was her only hope. If this Jiang Ziya before her wasn't real, then she had to hurry and retrieve the necklace. However, what felt like electricity suddenly ran through the necklace, and pain prickled across her body. She reflexively shut her eyes and cried out in pain.

The necklace stopped responding after that shock. Xiao Xue was confused, but she didn't dare put the necklace down. When she opened her eyes again, it was like a layer of fog had been dispelled before her. Only then did she understand that what she had seen just now wasn't real. It had all been hidden from her view!

Now that she could see clearly, Xiao Xue actually discovered that the Jiang Ziya before her had tape over his mouth. It wasn't like he could speak.

Xiao Xue was shocked. She had thought that Jiang Ziya had been the one asking the questions. *Was the kidnapper the one who asked everything?*

"The God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi? You damn brat. You're actually in cahoots with Jiu Ge? Hahaha. Like I thought, you're a super big catch. Too bad you're too big a fish. I might choke if I try to swallow this down."

Xiao Xue was so frightened by this voice that she shrank into Jiang Ziya's arms. The kidnapper didn't seem to be present. There were probably speakers or the like around them that were projecting his voice.

Why is everything different from what Yu Shu said? I can't see the kidnapper like this!

Jiang Ziya kept on going "mmph mmph." Seeing no response from Xiao Xue, he glanced around, looking for something, but in the end could only use his face to nudge her.

Only then did Xiao Xue respond. She rushed to rip the tape off of Jiang Ziya's mouth. The latter took in a deep breath, finally understanding why that woman and kid had used such beseeching eyes to look at him. Even knowing that they would get a face full of saliva, they had still wanted him to use his mouth to rip the tape off of their mouths.

It really was a terrible feeling having your mouth sealed with tape.

Jiang Ziya used a raspy voice to say, "Xiao Xue, go and rip off the tape from the other people's mouths."

Xiao Xue nodded quickly and went to work. However, when she finished, she immediately ran back to Jiang Ziya's side and held onto him without letting go. This was all she could do now.

"Looks like your artifact demon is not too far from becoming a lie," Zhang Dongqi said in high spirits.

At first, he had thought that it was just an artifact demon and wasn't worth the effort. But earlier, he had heard her say that she had the ability to shapeshift and was almost a lie. An artifact demon with the ability to shapeshift becoming a lie—that would so useful!

Jiang Ziya frowned and advised, "You best let us go. The people coming to rescue me are no joke. You won't be able to win against them."

Probably.

Truthfully, he didn't know the abilities on his own side himself. All he knew was that Lu Yang had a sword. *As for the other two, it's Yu Shu and the boss... right? I think Xiao Xue said "The God of the Eastern Sky,*

Taiyi" just now, but there's Taiyi in that name, so she should be talking about the boss, right?

Jiang Ziya found that he wasn't even sure if it was his boss, yet he was trying to threaten the other party with their strength. This really made him feel unconfident.

Zhang Dongqi snorted and proudly said, "We, the Zhang family, aren't scared of Jiu Ge."

He even said the Zhang family! Jiang Ziya wondered just how he had gotten involved in what seemed like a fight between entire families. As someone from a family that only had five members and two of those members weren't even human, he completely didn't have what it took to fight family to family with Zhang Dongqi.

"Since you killed Zhang Dongping, you won't be left off the hook! Even if you have Jiu Ge to back you up!"

I really wasn't the one who killed him...

Jiang Ziya wanted to cry but had no tears. However, he had no intentions to shove the blame onto the boss either. After all, the boss had called to save him. All in all, even though Jiang Ziya hadn't dealt the killing blow, it was because of him that the guy had died.

But really, didn't that guy get killed by his own familiars...

Truthfully, Jiang Ziya wasn't sure how that guy could have gotten killed by his own familiars. Even though he wanted to explain it away as the boss having the ability to command those familiars to kill the guy, he had been present and had clearly heard the boss. The boss hadn't instigated those familiars to kill him. He had only said:

In the name of the God of the Eastern Sky, pledged by the word of the God of the Eastern Sky, thou spirits and familiars art free, thou shalt not serve under any master, from this moment henceforth!

Even if this went to court, no one could accuse the boss of murder, right? He had only given the familiars their freedom. That they had immediately turned and murdered their master after gaining their freedom wasn't his problem, right?

Zhang Dongping had to have abused his familiars for no reason. That was why those familiars would take revenge on their previous owner the moment they gained their freedom!

If his family's Xiao Xue became free, she wouldn't kill him. Jiang Ziya was confident in that.

"But if you're able to compensate, then there is still room for negotiation."

"..." Jiang Ziya was a bit speechless. This person must have had a rotten, super duper, terrible relationship with his cousin. "How much do you want?"

Jiang Ziya felt defeated. He didn't have the means to fight family to family, so he could only see if he was able to foot the compensation. But it was for a human life. He felt that the money involved would cost him his entire lifetime to pay.

"That artifact demon, the familiar in your necklace, and you must promise me three things."

Zhang Dongqi's final condition was quite despicable. Right now, he still didn't know the guy's background. Earlier, from the result of their digging, they learned that he was just a normal university student. *But look at him now—just how is he normal, huh?*

Since he still wasn't sure of the guy's true background, he had just gone with "three things," this kind of unclear request. Later, he would observe the guy's condition and make his actual requests, like letting him borrow his power or handing over more familiars.

Hearing this kind of demand, Jiang Ziya's face darkened. He wasn't willing to hand Xiao Xue over as a bargaining piece again, and the other guy had said that there was a familiar in the necklace too. He didn't even know what the necklace was, but it was probably Yu Shu's, Lu Yang's, or the boss's. He couldn't make the decision to hand it over.

And those "three things," no matter how much of an idiot Jiang Ziya was, he would never agree to such a compensation. That would practically be giving up his future!

"How's that?" Zhang Dongqi coldly said, "Why hesitate? Agree, and you'll escape with your life. If you don't agree, you're dead meat!"

Jiang Ziya blanched.

“Who’s gonna be dead meat, we don’t know that yet—Attack, strike!”

A familiar, angry voice shouted, and noise erupted. The light bulb no more than three meters from Jiang Ziya exploded, but that was only the start. The room began splitting apart from the top, the crack spreading downward and downward, from the wall to the floor, forming an entire circle. Then, a “bang” resounded booming again, and the room before his eyes actually split in two, falling apart to the left and right.

Jiang Ziya stared at the night sky outside.

Only then did he realize that they had been confined in a cargo container. It was just that the inside walls had been lined with sound-absorbing foam. The metal walls hadn’t been directly exposed to them, so he hadn’t been able to discover that they were actually in a cargo container.

Even though knowing that didn’t help much either.

In the sky, House Keeper had a gigantic pair of bat wings on his back. He carried Yu Shu, elegantly landing not too far from Jiang Ziya, making Jiang Ziya feel like Yu Shu was just like a queen making her entrance. Furthermore, this queen had even used a single strike to cleave apart a room—no, this wasn't a queen. This was practically a monster!

Yu Shu stood there, seemingly with a sword in her hand. Because the sword glowed brightly, Jiang Ziya couldn't see it clearly. But as the glow slowly dissipated, the true form of the sword was revealed... to be plastic, toy sword.

Crack!

And it even broke.

Yu Shu lowered her head to look. She offhandedly tossed the toy sword that had broken in half, shrugged, and said, "Uh huh, I've used up my powers. This has nothing to do with me anymore. I'm heading home to work on my manuscript. Bye bye!"

...Hey!

"Ah, I can't leave yet."

So you know you can't leave yet!

Yu Shu walked over and snagged the necklace that lay against Jiang Ziya's chest. She gave a "bye" and turned to leave just like that.

Jiang Ziya stared as Yu Shu swaggered over and fell back against House Keeper, who gave Jiang Ziya an apologetic smile. After that, he extended his wings and flew away with his mistress.

However, halfway through their flight, a streak of black suddenly shot toward House Keeper and Yu Shu, who were in midair.

Jiang Ziya didn't have time to see what it was. He immediately yelled, "Yu Shu, watch out—"

The large bat wings in the air elegantly served, easily dodging the streak of black. Then, Yu Shu even guffawed arrogantly.

“Missed me! Hahaha—”

From below came Zhang Dongqi’s angry scream, “Just you wait, the Zhang family isn’t going to overlook this!”

“Fine, I’ll be waiting at home for you!” Yu Shu retorted with quite a despicable exclamation. *Come to my place if you dare. No matter how many people come, you won’t survive!*

Of course, asking her to leave the apartment was impossible.

Where Jiang Ziya was currently located was neither high in the air nor close to the ground. He seemed to be on the “second floor,” likely because two cargo containers were stacked on top of each other, and he was in the top cargo container.

Curious, he looked down. That streak of black that had shot toward Yu Shu had landed on the ground. It was actually something like a beast, but it wasn’t truly a beast. It was a mess of deep black, the shape like a leopard or tiger. He couldn’t really say what kind of beast it was, but whatever it was, it appeared undeniably ferocious. If he got any closer, he felt that he would get torn to shreds by those claws!

Zhang Dongqi was actually riding on top of that beast.

Jiang Ziya abruptly had some understanding of how terrifying these “practitioners” were. No wonder Zhang Dongqi had little care for guns. There were powers like Yu Shu’s and powers like that shadowy beast. A mere gun really didn’t cut it...

Can we really safely retreat after catching the attention of someone like this? That Zhang Dongqi even said that the entire Zhang family wouldn’t overlook this. If the Zhang family has a lot of people with this kind of power, then I’m dead meat.

Jiang Ziya freaked out. It was fine if it was just him, but he might even endanger his sister and brother-in-law—

“Sigh, who would have thought that Zhongxiang City had a woman like this around? Looks like I still don’t know my own place of residence well enough.”

Hearing this voice that sounded like it was echoing in a valley, Zhang Dongqi knew that the most famous person he had heard about today had arrived.

“God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi!”

Jiang Ziya stared, his jaw dropping. The person who had appeared before his eyes was extremely familiar.

That person was dressed in a very elaborate Chinese robe. It was black-based with a golden trim. His hair was even tied into a bun, and he was wearing a similarly styled, black-based coronet lined with gold. He even wore a mask on his face, a golden mask. It had designs on it as though it was mottled, and the nose was especially sharp, like a crow’s beak.

It’s actually the mottled mask guy from the supermarket!

Wait, didn’t Zhang Dongqi just call him...

God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi?!

Could the mottled mask guy be—Fu Taiyi?!

Seeing that the God of the Eastern Sky had shown up, Zhang Dongqi was actually at a loss. There were plenty of rumors about Jiu Ge's boss. However, most of them were about how he had good relations with demons and familiars, and how his personality and actions were odd. Some even claimed he wasn't human at all, that he was one of the strongest spirits!

As for his abilities, there wasn't a single rumor around. It was said that he had little interest in matters related to practitioners, so he rarely interfered. However, it went without question that he had to be very strong. After all, Jiu Ge had several others that were said to be extremely powerful. Therefore, their leader couldn't possibly be a weakling!

Even though he was up against a powerful opponent, Zhang Dongqi thought of Zhang Nanzhu. She was well hidden, responsible for maintaining this barrier dimension. No one should be able to find her. As long as the barrier dimension was still up, he couldn't possibly lose!

As for Liu Jing, he had no hopes of depending on him. The moment that woman sliced the cargo container apart, that guy had been scared shitless. He had lost all his nerves, unable to fight, and who knew if he had fled already.

However, that woman couldn't be that strong. She probably had a special ability. Zhang Dongqi bet that she had left in such a hurry because she actually didn't have any combative power!

Zhang Dongqi abruptly felt more confident again. If he could defeat the boss of Jiu Ge here, even if it was because of the barrier dimension, he would become famous... He was kind of eager to try.

"Even if Jiu Ge's boss is here, inside my barrier dimension, you're nothing!"

"That is true," Fu Taiyi sincerely agreed. The eyes under the mask glanced toward Fu Jun, who was hiding in the dark. If his Dong Jun were a bit bigger, and the "inheritance" was a bit more complete, wouldn't destroying this barrier dimension be as simple as a snap of the fingers?

It was a pity that Dong Jun was too small, and the inheritance wasn't complete enough. He couldn't even activate a tiny bit of the power of "spiritual words."

"Sigh!" Fu Taiyi despondently let out a breath. *What can I do about my son being too small still? It's not like I can give him growth hormone injections, right?*

"So Jiu Ge is intent on clashing with the Zhang family today?" Zhang Dongqi pretended to scowl, using that to cover up his own guilty conscience. Even though he was pretty high up in the Zhang family, provoking Jiu Ge right off the bat was enough for him to catch a lot of flak once he returned.

"Nothing of the sort." Fu Taiyi said lightly, "It's just that you've captured a little friend of mine. Of course I would come over to take a look."

"He killed my cousin! What's wrong with taking revenge—"

"Oh, sorry, I was the one who killed him."

"..."

Jiang Ziya listened to the contents of their conversation, his heart thumping faster and faster the more he heard. *Just who exactly is the boss? Why does the bad guy look like he fears the boss a lot?*

"Ziya, don't look back."

Jiang Ziya stilled but figured out right away that the voice definitely belonged to Lu Yang!

He was hidden in the darkness behind Jiang Ziya. He gave pointers in the dark, "Use your left eye to look at that beast. It's not real. It's just a lie."

"It's not real?" Jiang Ziya felt that it looked real enough.

"Yeah, it's not real. That person set up a barrier dimension here. Only in his own barrier dimension would that kind of thing be that powerful. It's like the guy who captured me last time. His female corpse, scarecrow, and crawling corpse, once the barrier dimension was destroyed, was just a plastic model, scarecrow, and broken burlap sack.

“Even though this lie is much, much stronger than those three illusions, it’s definitely nothing all that dangerous. He’s only powerful because of the barrier dimension.”

When Jiang Ziya heard that, he slowly began to feel that that should be the case. Otherwise, if that kind of shadowy beast were to run outside, wouldn’t that throw the entire world into disarray?

“Ziya, observe the surroundings. There has to be someone maintaining this barrier dimension. Try to figure out who it is and tell me where he is. Then, I can destroy this barrier dimension!”

Hearing that, Jiang Ziya calmed down. Just as he was about to say “okay,” he heard the soft sound of the nylon rope around his hands being sliced apart.

After that, Lu Yang jumped out. In front of him was that shadowy beast.

Chapter 5: Contract Between Human and Doll Part 2—For Your Sake

Jiang Ziya froze. He was about to tell Lu Yang not to be reckless when Xiao Xue gave a tug in his arms.

“Gēge, no. When you look for the barrier dimension’s weak point, you’ll need someone to hold that thing back. If you want to help Lu Yang-gē, you should hurry and find that weak point instead!”

That was true, but seeing Lu Yang face off against such a huge creature, a dark beast practically twice Lu Yang’s height even when it was grounded, how could Jiang Ziya calmly search for the weak point?

Lu Yang stood in front of the black beast. He looked like a boat in the ocean, about to be overturned by the waves at any moment. However, there was no trace of fear on his face. He was already prepared for battle, filled with fighting spirit.

Slay pierced about around him, flying with great force and speed, even emitting the “vrmm vrmm” cries of a sword, appearing plentifully imposing. Even though the slim sword didn’t seem as powerful as the black beast opposing it, the sword definitely couldn’t be overlooked!

Zhang Dongqi had originally looked down on these youngsters. The one whom he truly minded was the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, who stood afar in the distance.

But now that he had seen that sword of his opponent's, he stopped looking down on him. He cried out in alarm, "You possess an innate familiar spirit?"

No wonder people caution not to wreak havoc in Zhongxiang City!

That bastard Zhang Dongping should have just died, instead of provoking an opponent with such strong people backing him up while he was at it! That strange woman, the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, and even this youngster who possessed an innate familiar spirit...

Zhang Dongqi began to question just who the hell he had kidnapped. How could a single person have so many people backing him up? And these people weren't even from the same crowd!

The woman had an unknown special ability; the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, was the head of Jiu Ge; that youngster gave the impression of the way of the Tao. As for Taoism in Zhongxiang City... *Don't tell me he's from Master Ah Lu's Qing Wei Gong?*

If Zhang Dongping had left behind even a single piece of his corpse, Zhang Dongqi would definitely dig it out and whip his corpse. *Too bad that bastard hadn't even left behind dust.*

"I'll say, let's not make the situation as serious as one involving the Zhang family and Jiu Ge." The God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi said exuberantly, "Why not have a fight with him? If he wins, you will treat it as if nothing at all happened today. You will return and tell the Zhang family that you have already killed the foe. You won't ever return for vengeance."

"What if I win?"

Hearing such a condition, Zhang Dongqi felt that it would be fine even if he lost. After all, the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi was famous to the point of being scary. With this Taoist brat in the mix as well, he really wasn't confident that he could escape. He might even lose his life here. But if he agreed to this condition, even if he lost, he could leave with his life intact. This way, he could guarantee his survival.

Fu Taiyi said indifferently, "If you win, I will accept all the conditions you asked of Jiang Ziya earlier."

Zhang Dongqi's eyes shone. The two demons to be given in the terms were no longer important. What excited him more was that the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi would promise him three things. Nothing could compare to such an amazing deal!

"No problem! But I won't take down the barrier dimension."

Fu Taiyi was generous and straightforwardly said, "That's fine! But I also have a condition. We have the right to look for the weak point of the barrier dimension, and we are allowed to destroy it."

Zhang Dongqi frowned and said, "If you take part, won't this barrier dimension get destroyed right away?"

"Then, I won't interfere." Fu Taiyi lazily said, "I'll let those two brats play with you. How's that? Are you going to agree to my invitation?"

Zhang Dongqi's heart leaped in excitement. He immediately agreed. Even though his opponent was a Taoist who had an innate familiar spirit, he was too young. Zhang Dongqi didn't at all believe that his opponent would be able to defeat him. Besides, they were in his barrier dimension. His advantage wasn't slight.

As for whether or not his barrier dimension would get destroyed, Zhang Dongqi wasn't confident about that. But he believed that the barrier dimension would at least hold for ten minutes to half an hour with no problems. That amount of time would be enough for him to knock all the teeth out of this pretentious Taoist brat!

"Hah!"

The moment he heard Zhang Dongqi agree to the invitation, Lu Yang had Slay commence the attack. He had battled with demons for many years, and his mind was not the least bit pedantic. If there was a way to sneak an attack, then he would definitely not use brute force. If he could take the first strike, then he would strike first. Exterminating demons was a job that required him to put his life on the line. If he were overly concerned with miniscule details, then he'd be a goner!

Both of them were practitioners. They knew that with their lives on the line for this job, they had to be despicable. Therefore, Zhang Dongqi didn't unreasonably scold Lu Yang about sneak attacks being despicable. They just began fighting right away.

That black beast was humongous in size, yet its actions were very nimble. Lu Yang wasn't able to dodge it more than once. If not for Slay returning to defend him in time, Lu Yang would have been sent flying several times already.

To the side, Jiang Ziya was very distracted. He really couldn't calmly search for the weak point while his good friend was battling a beast. On top of that, he was a bit angry that Fu Taiyi wasn't lending a hand. But then he immediately recalled the conditions Fu Taiyi had mentioned. They were obviously for the sake of protecting him.

There was no way he could stay on guard forever. If he were to catch the Zhang family's attention, Jiang Ziya would definitely not be able to live peacefully any longer. It could even be said that he would be killed sooner rather than later. Only Fu Taiyi's proposed conditions could help free him.

But seeing how cautious Zhang Dongqi was toward Fu Taiyi, if Fu Taiyi were to lend a hand, then Zhang Dongqi would definitely refuse the battle invitation. Therefore, they could only have Lu Yang fight instead.

Jiang Ziya bit his tongue, using the pain to force himself to calm down so he could scrutinize his surroundings for the weak point. Still, he could not help occasionally glancing at Lu Yang, and then his face would pale from how frightening the battle appeared.

"Little Lu Yang, you really are strong!" Fu Taiyi praised nonchalantly to the side, "To be able to survive for so long in the opponent's barrier

dimension... That's no small feat... Oh no, I've only just praised you, and you've been clawed. Pay more attention! You've already been a practitioner for so long, with such abundant battle experience, and you let yourself get bullied by an animal. How embarrassing."

...Can a human win against a beast in battle?

Hearing Fu Taiyi speak, Lu Yang's teeth were nearly about to crack from how tightly he had them clenched. Even the tiger Wu Song fought against wasn't this gigantic!¹

Not only was the beast fast, its furry skin was incomparably tough. Even when Slay found an opening to strike, Slay would get stopped by the layers of needle-like fur, causing very little damage to the foe.

Lu Yang could only do his utmost to dodge using his exceptional physical abilities. However, mistakes were unavoidable. Injuries littered his body more and more, causing Jiang Ziya to feel distraught as he watched from the side, unable to do anything about it.

"Where in the world is the weak point?" He was so frantic that he was about to pull his hair out.

Xiao Xue also spoke anxiously, “Gēge, try looking more closely at other places!”

But I’ve looked everywhere already! He had looked several times at every corner and hadn’t discovered anything. *Just where is the weak point of this barrier dimension—*

Jiang Ziya suddenly realized where he hadn’t looked.

Behind me!

Behind him, there were only a few people who had been kidnapped just like him, so he hadn’t turned to look in that direction this entire time. However, that was also the only place he hadn’t looked.

Jiang Ziya immediately turned and scrutinized those people, even Xie Peilun. It was only until he looked at that woman that he abruptly discovered that there seemed to be a layer of mist over her face.

He slightly tilted his head to the right and used his left eye to observe the woman. Then, he immediately shouted as he pointed at her, “It’s you! You’re the one maintaining this barrier dimension!”

The woman frantically said, "No! No, it's not me! I was captured and confined here together with you. Have you forgotten?"

Of course he remembered, but his left eye could discern that this woman's appearance wasn't the same as before. They must have swapped her out when they sealed everyone's mouths back up with tape.

"So you've finally found her?" Fu Taiyi lazily said, "Humans and their blind spots. All you have to do is turn around and you would discover a new world, yet you just won't look behind you... Oh no, Lu Yang got kicked again. If you don't hurry and dismantle the barrier dimension, I bet that even if the barrier dimension is gone later, little Lu Yang will already have kicked the bucket."

Jiang Ziya clenched his teeth and rushed toward that woman... who was Zhang Nanzhu, but he couldn't bring himself to punch a girl just like that. At first, he thought to grab her hand, but he hadn't thought that Zhang Nanzhu would be more vicious than he was, turning and giving him a spin kick right in the stomach, almost making him throw up his dinner from the previous night.

Seeing that, Fu Taiyi finally dropped his lazy expression. He had forgotten that Jiang Ziya was just a normal person who had no fighting ability whatsoever, but a practitioner, even a woman who didn't specialize in fighting, would at least know a few tricks.

Even though he had discovered the weak point of the barrier dimension, Jiang Ziya might not be able to do anything about it. Meanwhile, Lu Yang was losing bit by bit and had no way he could divert his attention to deal with the woman.

Zhang Nanzhu also realized that this brat had no fighting ability at all. She immediately rushed forward and wildly kicked at his stomach and trampled on him.

"Don't you dare hit Gēge!" Xiao Xue abruptly pounced on her, transforming her teeth into fangs, biting Zhang Nanzhu in the neck.

All that could be heard was Zhang Nanzhu's wailing shriek. A huge chunk of flesh between her neck and shoulder went missing. Scarlet blood dripped ceaselessly. Instantly, the barrier dimension collapsed. She was finally unable to maintain it any longer.

At this moment, Lu Yang just happened to be sent flying by the black beast with a kick. His entire body slammed against a cargo container before he collapsed on the ground. There was no part of him that didn't hurt. Even Slay, which had been flying around him, fell to the ground. Although it wanted to fly back up, it couldn't stop falling back onto the ground.

Zhang Dongqi walked over to Lu Yang and sneered, "To think you guys were able to break the barrier dimension, but can you even stand up anymore?"

Lu Yang had his head lowered. He saw that there was a black hound, one that appeared incomparably vicious, not far from him. A single glance, and any normal person would be so scared that they would give it a wide berth.

But compared to the black beast just now, this hound was practically a Chihuahua.

Even though they were one and the same, barrier dimension or no barrier dimension, and even a gigantic black beast could shrink into a black dog.

Lu Yang, with his head bowed, smirked. He got up suddenly and rushed toward Zhang Dongqi. Even the fallen Slay “vrmm’d” and pierced toward that hound, its speed even faster than before. And this time, the hound didn’t have needle-like fur to hinder Slay. After several exchanges, Slay pierced through the hound’s waist, putting an end to it all.

On the other end, Lu Yang couldn’t defeat Zhang Dongqi as quickly. They exchanged strikes back and forth, every punch landing on flesh. Even the people to the side winced, feeling like their skin was smarting.

Originally, Zhang Dongqi had thought that he could defeat this Taoist brat using his own martial arts abilities, but unfortunately for him, Lu Yang had always been proud of his physical abilities. He had put in great effort training until now. Even though he had just received a harsh beating, he had actually used most of his strength to protect himself so he wouldn’t suffer heavy injuries, waiting for the moment Jiang Ziya destroyed the barrier dimension.

“I’ll be damned, your martial arts skills are top notch!” Zhang Dongqi swung his fists and shouted excitedly, “Let’s have a good fight!”

Unfortunately for him, Slay had already returned to its master’s side and was currently humming, waiting to be commanded!

Lu Yang gazed at Zhang Dongqi serenely. As mentioned earlier, he was never ever pedantic.

Zhang Dongqi's face twitched. He hadn't thought that this brat really wouldn't have the least bit of a youngster's brashness. He had originally wanted to force Lu Yang to fight him with his fists. Perhaps, he could defeat the brat using his own fists, considering that the brat had already suffered injuries that weren't light. Unfortunately, the brat didn't have the least intention to fight him with his fists!

Even though he was young, his personality and way of handling things was exactly like a seasoned practitioner.

Could it be... that this brat is that rumored grandson of Master Ah Lu's, a boy who started capturing demons ever since he was ten years old?

Don't tell me that all of the famous people of Zhongxiang City have shown up to fight me? Zhang Dongqi was so furious that he laughed. He could only say that his defeat wasn't unwarranted, but his defeat was infuriating!

"Cough, cough..." Jiang Ziya was hugging his stomach as he walked to Lu Yang's side. He couldn't help reminding Zhang Dongqi, "If you don't hurry and take that woman to the hospital, she's going to die."

Zhang Dongqi looked at Jiang Ziya with confliction. *Just who is this guy? He was able to make so many people show up to protect him?*

As for what had happened today, truthfully speaking, if these people had taken the initiative to approach the Zhang family to negotiate, the matter of Zhang Dongping might have been resolved just like that. Zhang Dongqi wouldn't have had to been overwhelmed by so many people, and he had even lost a demon beast who was already a lie!

The God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, hadn't even interfered!

"I will abide by my promise. Can I leave now?" Zhang Dongqi mostly said this to the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi.

"In a moment. Let me say something first."

Even though the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, spoke with a smile, Zhang Dongqi felt his heart shake.

He slowly said, "I do not know when Zhongxiang City turned into the Zhang family's territory. First, it was your cousin. Then, it was you. Each and every time, you came to disturb someone under my protection."

Hearing "someone under my protection," Jiang Ziya's heart skipped a beat, filled with pain. Ever since he was young and his mother died while his father left the house for years on end, there were few who protected him and his sister.

"It's true that Qing Wei Gong's Master Ah Lu doesn't look after his grandson much, but if the Zhang family wishes to use their 'family' to threaten his grandson, then I believe that Qing Wei Gong won't let their only successor clash against your entire family all by himself."

...I guessed right. The corner of Zhang Dongqi's mouth gave a spasm. He hated that his cousin hadn't left behind even a single piece of his corpse.

"Try it again," the God of the Eastern Sky, Taiyi, smiled as he said, "and I will seek all of you out the next time."

Footnotes

¹ **“Even the tiger Wu Song fought against wasn’t this gigantic”**: Wu Song is a character from the classical Chinese novel, *Water Margin*. He is known for fighting a tiger with his bare hands. For more information, see [here](#).

Epilogue: Character Introductions

Afterword

I was a bit squiddish... No, I mean, I was a bit skittish over whether or not I should open a drinks bar at the end—filled with shots through the heart.

Actually, the original plan was for it to be a super tragic ending, but in the end, it was only slightly sad, not even to the point of a tiny bit tragic. As expected, I was still too soft-hearted.

I actually consider this ending one that is on the happy side, but after my editor finished reading, she told me, "This ending is not bad. A bit of a BE (Bad Ending). It suits the tone of Human Doll Contract."

Wait! I was always under the impression that this is an HE (Happy Ending)! So it's actually a BE?

I was greatly shocked. I quickly explained to my editor that this is an HE! Why would you say it's a BE?

"Because the last line says there won't be a happily ever after..." Even though the last line is that there won't be a "happily ever after," leave future events to the future. Right now, it's still an HE!

It's just like how people have to eventually die. Would you say that everyone has a BE? At least, right now they're living happily and messily!

“So, will the big conclusion in the future be an HE as well?”

...No idea. My thoughts twist nine times and take seventy eight turns. Even I don't understand it myself. A single topic can have three types of main characters, eight backgrounds, and ninety-nine important side characters waiting to be chosen. I'll decide everything when it's time to write the book.

Even though I do have an ending in mind already, who knows if I might accidentally twist my foot, and there goes the bullet off its mark. It's hard to say if it'll land on the calves or the heart. So tell me, how would I know if the ending will turn into a drinks bar or some other kind of bar?

See, the most relevant example is how Human Doll Contract was originally a horror novel!

A ~~ horror ~~ novel ~~

But after I wrote the first volume, I don't know what I did with the genre of this child. I can only toss this child into the “nonsensical novel” genre.

I hope everyone will like this child that has transformed from the horror genre into the nonsensical genre.

Following this, the next story in the Illusion, Lies, Truth series is “In the Name of God.” I love the preview of the next volume. Everyone, don't forget to turn the page to read the preview!

By the way, my editor's favorite character is Lu Yang. (Yu Wo gleefully reveals the editor's secrets)

I can't tell you who my favorite character is. If I tell you it's one of them, the other one will get jealous. They're really two very bothersome fellows.

By Yu Wo



Preview

Illusions, Lies, Truth

In the Name of God

"I saw an angel, but he was killing someone."

Jiang Ziya has never been religious.

After all, the things he sees with his eye always and constantly destroy his understanding of religion.

If angels don't necessarily equate to kindness, then what about gods?

In the name of god, they speak like humans yet do the work of devils.

In the end, what is the division between humans, gods, and demons?

As for me—what am I?



Character Introductions

amip



傅君

Fu Jun

[Biography]

He is the son of the boss of Jiu Ge Bookstore. He is currently still in elementary school. Jiang Ziya has always felt that he is the true owner behind Jiu Ge. His personality is more mature than most elementary school kids. According to Jiang Ziya, he is also more mature than his father, Fu Taiyi.

Most loved: Fu Taiyi

Most hated: devils

Love and hate: Leng Yun

Specialized weapon: spiritual words

[Overview of Stats]

Battle Stat: 80

Physique Stat: 30

Support Stat: 60

御



御書

Yu Shu

[Biography]

She lives across from Jiang Ziya. She is an author who likes to hermit away at home. Perhaps she has lost herself in her writing, or perhaps she is just too lazy to do chores, and thus she called out an illusory familiar based on a butler from her books. She likes to say that the butler and the golden-haired man she called out are her children.

Most loved: staying at home

Most hated: going out

Love and hate: the world

Specialized weapon: katana

[Overview of Stats]

Battle Stat: 60

Physique Stat: 50

Support Stat: 80

暗



House Keeper

[Biography]

He is an illusory familiar that has been called to life based on a character from a certain book of Yu Shu's. He is of the vampire race, but his profession is unexpectedly that of a butler. His personality is very gentle—at least on the surface.

Most loved: his name

Most hated: never able to clearly see the novel he's from

Love and hate: Yu Shu

Specialized weapon: himself

[Overview of Stats]

Battle Stat: 90

Physique Stat: 80

Support Stat: 10

九月紫繪

御我著

幻·虛·真

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幻·世·界

人娃契

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