

Guardian Chapter: 19

Chapter: 19

This question leaves the whole room in silence. After a while, the Ghost Slayer speaks.

“You were determined to resurrect her, whatever the cost... sometimes when your will is strong enough, anything is possible; but that does not mean you were right.”

Li's eyes turn red; she looks the other way, not willing to let anyone see her weakness.

She says with a deep and monotonous voice, “yes, I'm just a human, no matter what life throws at me... my only family suddenly passes away, my parents despise me, I struggle to pay tuition, and I can't even find a job here; I'm pathetic, aren't I? I have to... endure all of that; I really shouldn't have brought grandma back, I should've just died with her.”

Zhao calmly looks at her.

Li coldly laughs, “I'm like a tortoise, crawling on the ground slowly and strenuously, just for a passer-by to kick me, and I fall facing up; when I painfully get back on all fours, I get kicked again, isn't it hilarious?”

This girl is laden with grudge and anger, although she tries her best to conceal it. Guo's face heat up: he is stupid and lazy, but he got this job because of his uncle; he stands up and says, “I... I'll bring you a cup of water.”

Zhao asks, “the sundial responded to you, and your grandma survived, but she was still unwell afterwards, did you take care of her?”

“Who else could have done it,” Li says without an expression, “my parents only agreed to take her in when they heard she was gonna die.”

Zhao nods, “You had to study, make your own living, and pay for your tuition, and you also had to take care of her, must have been tough?”

Lin is a bit surprised: he thought Zhao wanted to get her to talk about the incident with the hungry ghost since she lied, but now he isn't sure what the boss is trying to get out of her.

What's the point in asking these questions?

But the Ghost Slayer doesn't seem impatient at all, so Lin doesn't say anything, and keeps his doubts to himself.

Guo hands Li a cup of warm water; the girl takes it and doesn't say anything. She stares at the cup, which is shaking in her hands.

"She wakes up at half past four in the morning, everyday, and she always wants to make me breakfast. But her condition was deteriorating. One time she was cooking milk, and it spilled on the stove, almost causing a gas leak. So I had to wake up at half past four everyday too, and make breakfast before she messes things up. When it's noon, whether or not I'm having lessons or working on a project I still have to take a one-hour bus back home everyday to make her lunch, make sure she takes her medicine, and then rush back to school. I don't even have time to eat lunch myself. She is always babbling at home, I can only work once she is asleep, around ten every night. I work til midnight, sometimes even later, and I still have to get up before sunrise."

Li takes a deep breath, her face is incredibly exhausted, "is it tough?" She takes a sip of water, and says coldly, "don't waste time, there is no use talking about this, what else do you want to ask about the case, just ask."

Zhao taps on a file in his hands, "sorry for being rude, but it must have been easier for you once your grandma passed away?"

Li stares at him, "what do you mean?"

Zhao stares back, "I meant what I said, literally."

Li jumps up and spills the cup of water, "is this how the police treat normal citizens? How can you detain me for no reason, and make false accusations?"

"Sit, calm down." Zhao wipes the water with tissue, "I'm not accusing you of anything, I'm just asking about how you felt; feelings cannot be crimes, even if you wanted to blow up a building, as long as you didn't do it, nothing will happen."

"I want to go home, you can't detain me."

Zhao looks at her, and nods, "alright, I will leave out the irrelevant parts; let's talk about today, you told me you saw the victim and the shadow behind her, do you remember what the shadow looked like?"

Li frowns, "I didn't take a close look, can't remember."

Zhao smiles, his dimples deepen, but his eyes are not smiling; he looks down and says slowly, "maybe you wouldn't remember a passer-by, that's normal... but how can you forget something so frightening? If you don't remember, why are you shaking?"

Zhao says with a more serious tone, "didn't you tell me it was black, a little short, and a little fat?"

“Revoking your testimony is a bad habit. Tell me, did the shadow look like what you said?”

Lin slams on the desk and shouts, “say it!”

“Yes... so what!?” Li erupts.

“Oh, a little short, a little fat.” Zhao sluggishly repeats, and crosses his arms on the desk, “then was it male or female, young or old?”

Everyone here except Li knows what the hungry ghost looked like... there is no telling whether it was male, female, young or old; it was a bony monster with a giant stomach, scythe hands, and as tall as two humans.

Everyone is staring at Li with suspicion.

Zhao lowers his voice, and almost whispers, “I lied, human memory is unreliable, and you could very possibly forget about something if it frightened you; your brain might want to protect you from fear and shut down the memory as a defense mechanism. So what you said... could be just your imagination.”

Guo slow-wittedly realises that this really isn't just filing a case report, it's a trial, and he has a bad feeling about it.

Li's face turns grey, with defeat.

Zhao is no longer faking a smile, “now can you tell me, why did you jump off the building this morning?”

Li's chest vigorously rises and falls.

“Did you think that if you kill yourself, then you will be freed from this curse, and you will be forgiven?” Zhao laughs coldly, “I'm not much older than you... many young kids like you are not afraid of death, because they are too young to comprehend it fully. Especially you, you're so... determined and impulsive.”

Li's voice weakens, “what.. what makes you say that? How do you know I don't understand death? I know how it feels, I have seen it! The heart stops, breathing stops, her body... turns cold, becomes inhuman... and I can't find her, can't see her anymore, can't...”

“Li Qian,” Zhao interrupts, “you don't understand nor do you fear death, but you fear separation, you couldn't accept your grandma leaving you suddenly.”

The interrogation room is incredibly quiet; Li's body shivers like a fallen leaf caught in the wind.

Zhao continues, “the shadow you saw tailing the victim, was it... old, wearing a thick cotton jacket, and a hairpin on her head?”

Lin and Guo are astonished.

Li lets out a shrieking and abrupt screech; her face distorts into a frightening expression.

Is she going crazy? Guo thinks; he doesn't understand the situation. He glances at the boss, who is fumbling with his fingers, looking like he really wants to smoke.

Zhao takes out a photo; it's a photo of Li's grandma, who wears a gentle smile on her face. Guo recognises her as the old lady who pounced forward to protect Li from the hungry ghost.

Zhao sets the photo in front of Li, “this is Wang Yufen, born in 1940; she died last month, cause of death was an overdose of drugs.”

Li glares at the photo, her eyes almost popping out.

Zhao continues, “your grandma is your only family, so the two of you must have been incredibly close... can you tell me why are you so afraid of her after she died? What makes you think she would hurt you?”

Li freezes into a statue.

Zhao's voice softens, “if you don't tell the truth, you won't get the chance in the future, you will never be free for the rest of your life; lies will always be lies, and they will haunt you forever like a curse.”

Someone else... said something similar to her today.

Li sluggishly raises her head.

Zhao leans forward, and looks her in the eyes, “the Sundial of Reincarnation connected the souls of you and your grandma, normally you would've died together, but you're still alive... so your grandma must have died earlier than destined. I kept thinking, what went wrong? Did the Hell Guards make a mistake, or did someone trap her living soul?”

“But then I realise, I'm so stupid, there is another possibility: the sundial could have disconnected from her. And what that means is, the person who brought her back, murdered her.”

The interrogation room is so quiet that a pin dropping on the floor would be heard.

“She was suffering from dementia, so she must like to eat candy like a child. Tell me, who put the blood-sugar-lowering drugs in the candy box?”

He hears Li's coarse voice; she softly says, "it was me."

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Part 1

"...after that, tap here. Then all you have to do next is set up the payment passcode and you're done." Zhao Yunlan handed the mobile phone to Shen Wei. Before Shen Wei could take it, Zhao Yunlan gave it some thought and decided to do it himself. "Nevermind. I'll set it up for you since you don't have any fresh ideas anyway."

Professor Shen was as obstinate as a mule. All his passwords were his house number and he had no awareness about his safety at all.

Zhao Yunlan continued, "Fortunately you aren't loaded."

From a miniscule point of view, Comrade Shen Wei was quite capable of surviving thus far. By focusing the mind he used in managing the three realms into handling his basic needs, he was surely able to skillfully and efficiently complete the necessary tasks.

From a holistic point of view, Shen Wei never lived his days normally. In chaotic times, he would temporarily find recess in mountains, while during times of peace, making do with renting a random house to reside in. He had been wandering about in the mortal realm for decades, living a clean life without saving even a single penny, let alone buying a house to stay in. Until now, apart from the salary given by the university, one could say that he had nothing to his name.

As for the famous mountains and great rivers in the world, the development of the tourism industry required fees due to the country's integrated program. He did not receive a single cent.

"Come here, I'll teach you how to send red packets." Zhao Yunlan reached out and wrapped an arm around Shen Wei's shoulder, putting a stop to his elegant sitting posture. In the name of education, he used the man's phone to send himself a red packet, which he received jovially. "The last old antique of this century has finally stepped into the e-payment era. It's truly worthy of celebration... Tsk, here we go again."

Before he could finish, his phone started ringing incessantly. Zhao Yunlan glanced at it. Having no intention of answering it, he flipped the phone over. Unexpectedly, the other party persistently kept calling three more times. Upon noticing that he was playing deaf-mute, the person's phone call eventually reached Zhao Yunlan's office desk. Zhao

Yunlan stretched out his leg over the small sofa and poked Da Qing with his foot, who was concentrating on licking his fur clean. "Damn fatty, pick up the phone."

Due to Shen Wei's presence, Da Qing was forced to choke with silent fury. He angrily flicked his tail and jumped onto the office desk next to him. Picturing it as if it were Zhao Yunlan's face, he slapped the phone receiver with his paw. "Hello, SI...huh? Ahaha... Hello, old chief... Are you looking for our Director Zhao? Oh, he said he's not here."

Zhao Yunlan was rendered speechless.

Only after flipping his phone over did he realize that the three phone calls were not made by the same person. The caller ID for the last two calls belonged to his father so he could only get up with a splitting headache and stagger towards the office desk, one step at a time. "Those blasted spirits and demons, don't they have anything better to do?! They even went to old man for help."

The Special Investigation Department in the mortal world, also known as the Guardian Order, used to be a combination of a 'nursery' and a 'penitentiary for labor reform'.

Among the team members, apart from the earthling Little Guo and the respective comrades Wang Zheng and Sang Zan under the Guardian's care, the remainder could, in general, be divided into two different types of individuals. One type was like Zhu Hong and Lin Jing, who were sent over by their elders or their clans to gain experience, while the other type referred to prisoners serving their sentences like Chu Shuzhi. Since the Guardian Order was originally used to harmonize the three realms and preserve the peace in the mortal world, they had to clean up the messes of the fugitives who committed crimes in the mortal realm on a daily basis. On top of that, they had to obey the laws and regulations of the society. It was a arduous job which bore no fruit. And their chief? He was but a mere mortal. The chances of anyone following their chief's footsteps encountering any bright future prospects were nil. Therefore, there weren't any experts who were willing to come.

However, times have long since changed. Ever since the great seal was vigorously broken, the four hallows reset, the great reincarnation cycle was completed, and the Ghost King became a saint, with Kunlun finally returning to his rightful place. Although these incidents were not widely known, it wasn't considered a secret to the well-informed sources of the three realms. As a result, the Special Investigation Department drudgery became a sensation overnight. Everyone wanted to get a taste of some celestial prowess. Annoyed beyond measure, Zhao Yunlan used being unable to put down so many names on the Guardian Order as an excuse to dismiss them.

However, even if he wasn't able to put down so many names on the Guardian Order, the Special Investigation Department, being an administrative organization, was easily able to do so.

Thus, those clever individuals began to act out on their own everywhere just to do something with the Guardian Order, stubbornly pushing the Special Investigation Department to undergo reforms. Soon, the Dragon City's Special Investigation Department was turned into the Special Investigation Central Office, having multiple branches in various regions, making the whole thing look as though it really was something important.

So, just like that, the Chief Zhao who spent his days lying around in the building at 9 University Avenue evolved into Director Zhao with no rhyme nor reason.

After the reconstruction, this was the first year that the SICO would officially open their doors to the public for recruitment. Life was now peaceful and tranquil. Zhao Yunlan who had wholeheartedly wanted to start farming, reluctantly acknowledged his superior's orders, and was dragged out from his loft to lead the job. Although the people who were recruited would not be able to enter the Guardian Order, they would still be bestowed the title of a branch organization. And neither did Zhao Yunlan want to recruit a group of hideous people to make up the numbers, seeing how he wasn't lacking in retarded subordinates. Now that the manpower in the central office was limited, it was unrealistic to start a large scale public recruitment process. Thus, they only released a limited number of application forms this year, spreading across tribes and races and leaving it to themselves to select the cream of the crop.

Experts from each realm were like the eight immortals soaring over the ocean, using any means to prove their own worth in order to get their hands on more application forms.

"Hello?" Zhao Yunlan lazily answered the phone. "Oh dear, aren't you already retired? Why aren't you focusing your attention on organizing open-air fitness dancing for the elderly women and instead are worrying so much for nothing? Who went to you for connection purposes? Ugh..."

Da Qing straightened his ears and heard a long, air-filled lecture coming from the phone receiver. At the beginning, Zhao Yunlan tried to interrupt and defend himself, saying, "I'm not. I didn't." But it was all to no avail, so he gave up. He leaned against the desk, standing with legs crossed, utterly bored to death. His gaze shifted from inspecting the ceiling to Professor Shen's spotless cuffs, as he seriously began to miss the Shen Nong's medicinal bowl. At least that Mr Crap Bowl didn't possess such strong desire to lecture.

This retired old officer had recently received solicitous visits from many unknown individuals. By the time he had realized what was happening, he was instantly consumed with anger. It was already 2018; never had he expected that there would still be people taking the roundabout route of going through the back door, all for the sake of that stupid application form. What the hell was this?

So he called his son and reprimanded him.

Zhao Yunlan replied as though he was chanting a scripture. "Yes, I know... You're right... No, I'm not taking the opportunity to do rent seeking. It's really because we have limited resources. There are too many people applying so we can't attend to all... I'm not corrupted, there's no acid rain in Dragon City.... No, I don't wag my tongue everyday. I have been facing the wall reflecting my shortcomings on a daily basis. It's true! I need to be precautious beforehand... If you don't believe me, ask Shen Wei!"

Someone knocked on the office door three times. Lin Jing poked his head in as he held up a calendar in his hands. He first greeted Shen Wei with clasped hands. "Thank you Professor Shen. Chief, tomorrow is the Dragon Boat Festival; I came forth as a representative of my fellow colleagues to ask, what benefits will we get in the celebration of the festival?"

Zhao Yunlan tilted his head to support the phone on his shoulder. Not in a good mood, he pointed a finger at the door. "Send out a notice to celebrate the festival with honesty. Scram!"

Having gotten the short end of the stick, representative Lin ran out of the room in shame.

He had just left when Zhu Hong came knocking on the door. "Thank you, Professor Shen. Director Zhao, my Uncle Four wanted to have a meal with you, and the other elders of the demon race wanted to come pay their respects. Sigh, I'm just helping him to pass on the message. They are seriously quite annoying. Don't go for the sake of me if you're too lazy to."

Zhu Hong was one of his own, so there really wasn't any need to talk about pretenses with her. However, the demon race was considered to have the closest relationship ties with Lord Kunlun, similar to an iron rod, so he was obliged to take the elders' feelings into consideration. Zhao Yunlan could only helplessly wave his hand at her.

The moment Zhu Hong turned around, she almost collided into Chu Shuzi. Chu Shuzi appeared to be in a hurry so he could only spare enough time to nod at her. "Wait... Old Zhao, something happened. Somebody has been messing around with the application forms."

Shen Wei, who was entirely focused on playing with his phone lifted his head upon hearing him. "What's wrong?"

Shen Wei usually didn't interrupt the daily affairs of the SICO unless he was asked to do so. This time around, he spoke out on his own accord was because the 'anti-counterfeit symbol' on the application forms was made by him. The Spirit Executioner guarded the great seal and did not live in vain for the past five thousand years. He had watched races from respective realms rise and decline on their own under his very nose. His entire being was practically a living 'library of lost arts'.... However, considering the fact

that nobody dared to come running to him to monopolize him, the so-called 'library' was still very poor.

Shu Chuzi said, "There are still ten days left until the application deadline, but the number of applications we received back has already surpassed the numbers sent out. Oh right. Thank you Professor Shen."

Shen Wei frowned.

"Gather them all together and let me have a look." Zhao Yunlan put down his phone and walked over. He sighed. "Come to think of it, what sort of secret signal is 'thank you, Professor Shen'? Why is everyone saying the same thing when they come in?"

Shen Wei said, "Um..."

Chu Shuzi replied, "Just now, Professor Shen sent out red packets as funds for the Dragon Boat Festival, right?"

Zhao Yunlan grabbed the phone from Shen Wei's hands and took a look. He had merely received a phone call and his comrade Shen Wei had already mastered the skill of e-payment. He even seriously practiced after the lesson. He went according to the list of contacts and sent everyone in the SICO a red packet.

It wasn't the kind where he sent out one to multiple recipients and make them fight for it, since Teacher Zhao had yet to teach him that. He had literally sent out to them individually, one by one.

He had sent out red packets to only half of his contacts, but had run out of money halfway, with there still being half of the list left to go.

His Professor Shen treated money as though they were game credits, the kind that didn't need to be recharged with cash and could be sent after logging in.

Zhao Yunlan was speechless.

Shen Wei returned a confused look.

"It's...nothing." Zhao Yunlan stretched the word 'it's' for two miles and shot back a pained smile. "I'll transfer you some cash since you ran out. Don't leave the rest. Just keep sending. Send the packets to all of them. Ah...haha, you're a fast learner."

Just like that, during the Dragon Boat Festival this year, everyone received the festival funds sponsored by an anonymous person with the surname Zhao. What a touching gesture it was indeed!

Part 2

All the problematic application forms were stashed away in the basement. Although the lights weren't on, it wasn't dark; the application forms were stacked together, their soft silvery glow sufficient to form a row of incandescent lamps.

Wang Zheng and Sang Zan worked overtime late into the day. By the time Zhao Yunlan and the others reached downstairs, they had just divided and sorted the application forms according to different races and regions.

The finely made application forms were sent out in a white envelope which had a small seal on it, all courtesy of Shen Wei. The application form inside would belong to whoever managed to break the seal; even if others snatched it away, they wouldn't be able to write down their information. It was considered to be a preliminary screening method used to replace the need for a written exam, as organizing one wasn't a realistic approach. On one hand, as the saying went, 'everyone has their own 'specialty'', therefore since everyone had their own fields they were skilled at, it was unfair to test them altogether; on the other hand, those who cultivated deep within forests and mountains were only literate enough to understand just one word of Chinese.

Sang Zan said, "Director Zhao, we sent out 729 application forms in total and received back more than 1560 replies as of current."

"That much of a difference?" replied Zhao Yunlan.

Sang Zan sighed. "Yeah. It's an impressive sight to behold."

Zhao Yunlan was at a loss for words.

Within the few years that comrade Sang Zan had worked at SICO, he had been very determined to improve himself. He now could hold normal conversations properly, successfully ridding himself of the 'stutterer' stigma. As a result, he demanded from himself and began to learn proverbs on his own, occasionally trying to quote classics. This, however, gave rise to a brand new set of challenges towards his colleagues' fortitude.

Zhao Yunlan, nearly used to it, proficiently overlooked every four character idiom Sang Zan used in his words. Waving his hand, he replied, "Thanks for the hard work."

"That's absurd! You're welcome." Sang Zan beamed in response. "I have nothing to my name so all the help I can give is like a hair off a bull's back."

Oh lord. How could Wang Zheng let him be? She only knew how to stand at the sidelines and watch with a foolish smile on her face !

"Okay. Whatever makes you happy," Zhao Yunlan said helplessly. "Both of you can hurry up and get off work now."

Shen Wei's anti-counterfeit symbol couldn't be forged by just anyone, especially when creating an exact copy of it. Shen Wei had already looked through the application forms while Zhao Yunlan was talking with Sang Zan and Wang Zheng.

Chu Shuzi asked, "What do you think, Professor Shen? Honestly, I really can't tell the difference."

Shen Wei did not reply. After muttering irresolutely to himself for a while, he suddenly flicked his hand, messing up the entire arrangement done by Wang Zheng. The glowing application forms flew up like butterflies. With a loud rustle, they overlapped with one another and fell into two separate stacks. Between the two, one of the stacks was obviously thicker than the other.

Zhao Yunlan lifted his pants and bent to a half crouch. He pulled out a couple of forms from the two piles and pointed at the thicker one. "These are all the same?"

Shen Wei nodded.

Shu Chuzi was confused beyond measure. "Why wouldn't they be? Aren't we unable to tell the real apart from the fake because they are all the same?"

"No," replied Shen Wei. "He's referring to the seal on each form."

As it turned out, although the seal on every application form looked the same, each seal had to be broken differently. With that, they would be able to select talented individuals with different aptitudes, and they could also prevent them from discussing the solution in private.

When they had released the forms, the seals with different attributes were sent out according to the respective tribes. For example, the snake tribe belonged to the element of water so to break the seal, they had to burn it using the True Fire of Samadhi, which was already considered as a terrible imposition to them.

Naturally, the seals on the application forms they received back had already been broken. However, the aura that remained on them was more than enough for the 'examiner' to spot the problems. The seals on the application forms in the thicker stack were wholly similar. Obviously, someone had copied one of them.

Shen Wei said, "When the forms were sent out, I made a record of their whereabouts. We can first find out which tribe or faction this was sent to."

Shu Chuzi was astounded. "No...please wait! There's more than seven hundred copies and each of them is different? And you've tracked and recorded them all?"

"Uh." Shen Wei pushed up his glasses. "What's wrong?"

Shu Chuzi was rendered speechless.

No wonder nobody in the office brought up the need to pay any wages to this super foreign aid. When this amount of workload was accounted for in the form of a market price, they feared that they could only afford to hire him by auctioning off Lord Kunlun!

With a clue in hand, the remaining process got easier. By checking the records, they found out that the problematic application form was sent to the demon race – more specifically, the Southern Sea aquatic tribe.

Zhao Yunlan stood up. “Get Zhu Hong to make a phone call to her uncle.”

The demon race was roughly made up of birds, beasts, aquatic tribes, and ghouls- which referred to those who flew in the skies, ran on land, swam in the waters, as well as those who cultivated into demons from stones and trees. And each of them, based on their tribes, had their own habitats which they lived in.

Since SICO’s Zhu Hong was from the snake tribe, the clan elder, Uncle Four, who was good in dealing with affairs, and would play fair when handling them. The snake tribe could be said to ‘follow in the footsteps of their superior’, so they were exceptionally glorious. In a few short years, they had already become the head of all demonic tribes. If something happened with the demon race, just look for Uncle Four.

After receiving a call from his niece, he braved the scorching sun and rushed over to 9 University Avenue in less than five minutes. Once he understood the situation, he apologized to Lord Kunlun and didn’t have the face to ask for the application forms anymore. Turning around, he rolled up his sleeves and personally advanced forth to the Southern Sea to nab the bastard who did it.

Part 3

”This incident is rather strange, now that I think about it.” After they had returned home that night, Shen Wei said while he sliced some ham, “There’s always someone better than me out there so naturally I wouldn’t have the audacity to say that nobody can ever replicate the things I made. But that envelope was very simple. Any true expert who touched it could instantly tell that the seal on every application form was different. So why would they do something dumb like making more than a hundred copies of it?”

Zhao Yunlan leaned against the cabinet leisurely, refusing to work yet busily making a mess of things. While Shen Wei sliced the ham, he took the slices and ate from the chopping board. “What about transcendent artifacts? The environmental pollution is getting worse for the past few years. Although there’s nothing great about the snake tribe’s cultivation, each tribe has their own piece of history. Anyone of them could have a small mystical instrument passed down from their ancestors.”

Shen Wei mulled over the situation for a while after he was done slicing the hams. Turning around to get a porcelain plate, he said, "But I really can't think of anything for now..."

Whatever it was, it was powerful enough to replicate the Spirit Executioner's innate Ghost King's seal, and was used to do something as boring and senseless as this—just what sort of transcendent artifact was it?

A God Pangu brand photocopier?

By the time he returned back with the plate to serve the ham, he realized that the moment he turned around, the slices on the chopping board were all eaten up by a certain someone.

Shen Wei was at a loss for words.

Realizing what he'd done, Zhao Yunlan trailed after his gaze and snuck a glance, before quickly chewing and swallowing the 'evidence' that remained in his mouth. Afterwards, he nonchalantly stretched as though he wasn't the culprit.

Shen Wei asked, "...isn't it salty?"

Before Zhao Yunlan could abscond out of the kitchen to avoid punishment, his heart suddenly palpitated. At the same time, Shen Wei turned his head, and the two of them shifted their gaze towards the southern sky.

Shen Wei asked, "What's that?"

"No idea, but..." Zhao Yunlan narrowed his eyes. "Somehow, I could sense the presence of the Three Sovereigns... Hello, Zhu Hong?"

"Old Zhao, Uncle Four is in danger!"

"Calm down, and speak slowly."

"Didn't he go to the Southern Sea? Just now my tribe sent news that the clan leader's Prime Lamp has suddenly went out! My uncle, he..."

"Don't panic yet," replied Zhao Yunlan. "A phenomena will usually take place after the fall of a great demon. It won't happen without anyone knowing. Maybe he got into some sort of accident which caused him to break off from his Prime Lamp. How about this? Get your tribe to bring Uncle Four's Prime Lamp over. I'll take a trip down with Shen Wei."

Now that they couldn't have their dinner in peace, Shen Wei hurriedly packed the rest of the ingredients and shoved them into the fridge, as it seemed like the both of them could only order take-out once they returned home for the night.

Soon, an elder from the snake tribe arrived, delivering Uncle Four's Prime Lamp to them. Both Zhao Yunlan and Shen Wei took a step forth, and in a blink of an eye, translocated to the Southern Sea.

Ever since the tourism industry developed in the Southern Sea, the aquatic tribes' useless troops were getting worse by the day. All the little demons were allured by the teeming world of sunshine, beaches, and coconut trees, and would dress in flowery trunks as they wandered sillily, fooling about amongst the vacationing humans. However, once their vacation ended, the humans would return back home to work or attend school, doing whatever they need to do in life. Yet, this group of small, dim-witted demons would continue to fool around with the next wave of tourists. As they messed around day by day, their innate quality failed to improve, putting a damper on their cultivation. The sun had turned their scales into a bronze-tan color.

By right, when the clan leader of the snake tribe arrived, this band of useless shits should welcome him with a large banner in hand. Which bloody sea urchin gave them the audacity to rebel?

Could it be that gulping down freshwater on the shore everyday has changed their osmotic pressure, causing their ego to expand?

In any case, Zhao Yunlan couldn't figure it out.

By the time they'd arrived and caught sight of what happened in the Southern Sea, the aquatic tribe was already in a state of chaos. Scared shitless, the leaders of each clan wet their pants when they heard about the arrival of the esteemed Lord Kunlun and the Ghost King. Still sporting flowery trunks, they knelt down on the beach together, their torsos bare, heads facing the white sands while their backs faced the sky. Large characters forming the lines "We're deserving of death! Great gods, please have mercy on us!" were etched on their backs.

The site held such magnificence to an extent that even the hermit crabs were too afraid to crop their heads up.

"Get up, all of you. What're you all doing? If you have something to say, just say it! Stop embarrassing yourselves!" Seated on the cloud, Zhao Yunlan was disgusted to the point his temples pulsed. They didn't go down since there wasn't any space for them to land on. "I just don't get it. All the bad social habits from feudalism were buried deep underground for over a hundred years. How can you still maintain them in your tribe? Pay some heed, will you?!"

The Southern Sea was rich in resources such as seafood...No, scratch that, a variety of aquatic tribes here contained a mixture of many species. Each of the clan leaders worked together to form an alliance. The head of the alliance was a large, three-thousand year old sea turtle, while the deputy head was a two-thousand five-hundred year old sea cucumber.

Both heads were known as the golden partners, neither having the right to accuse the other as a slacker. Zhao Yunlan listened to them keening on and on below him as they reported the entire matter to him. Halfway through, he felt as though his soul had travelled through thirty-six mountains and rivers, back and forth for a total of eight times. His eyes were already losing focus, and for the first time ever, he thought that his Guo Changcheng really was a smart boy.

Listening until the end must have been tough on Shen Wei. "So, you're saying that your tribe's elder who watches over the Southern Sea's forbidden land harbored resentment for not getting an application form, so he stole one without permission? And used the forbidden land to mass duplicate it?"

The head turtle sighed in despair. "Alas, yes. This man's true form is a barracuda. He profited from selling the fake application forms and used the money to buy areca nuts in bulk. Now he's already on the run to escape punishment!"

"...Forget about wholesale for now. It's not important," Shen Wei said, "Can you tell us what is it that your tribe's forbidden land is guarding? How were the application forms duplicated?"

The sea cucumber deputy head miserably replied, "My lord, besides the barracuda clan who watched over the forbidden land, little demons like us would never dare to approach it. Legend has it that an ancient holy artifact was sealed there. Oh right, the great clan leader from the snake tribe dropped by just now too. He disliked that we couldn't clearly explain and insisted on checking out the forbidden land on his own. We didn't dare stop him! As a result, the Southern Sea quaked violently all of the sudden, not long after he entered. And the great clan leader never returned. Until now, we've no idea what happened to him!"

Shen Wei turned around and exchanged a glance with Zhao Yunlan. Shaking off his drowsiness, Zhao Yunlan straightened his back. "Hey, cut to the chase! Lead the way."

It was already late into the night. The dragon boat festival was still on going with no moon in sight. The surface of the sea appeared heavy and dense, but it was as though something of colossus size had just abruptly woken up from the within its depths. Restless and agitated, it billowed the waves back and forth, unexpectedly in sync with Zhao Yunlan's palpitating heart. By the time they arrived two-hundred li away from the forbidden land, the two heads of the Southern Sea aquatic tribe had already turned to a deathly pale. No matter what, the pair didn't dare to advance any further.

The deputy head said, "During the past festivities, we could still muster up our courage to go and inspect the forbidden land. But ever since that loathsome sharp-toothed fish touched something he wasn't supposed to, the forbidden land became more and more terrifying as the days went by. At the start, it only had an effect on those who were ten li away. Now, it has expanded to at least a hundred li radius. We can hardly breathe anymore..."

As he explained up to that point, the deputy head rolled his eyes upwards and passed out, and feebly sunk into the deep waters. Out of thin air, the spirit execution blade fell into Shen Wei's grip, abruptly extending itself by multiple metres. With the blade sheathed, Shen Wei speedily used it to fish the sinking sea cucumber out of the vast sea.

The head turtle no longer bothered with excessive formalities. He greeted Shen Wei at a distance with clasped hands before revealing his true form. Throwing his partner onto his back, he swam away like a torpedo.

The two figures swiftly swept passed the undercurrent, and moved in the direction of the Southern Sea's forbidden land.

The closer they got, the calmer the waters were. About fifty li away, the waters began turning unnaturally calm, as though they had been forcefully pulled flat by a pair of invisible hands. The water seemed dead, without the trace of even a tiniest ripple.

Zhao Yunlan and Shen Wei soon arrived at the centre core of the forbidden land. They found a strange whirlpool no more than two metres in diameter revolving at an alarming speed. Like a needle, it pierced through to the bottom of the sea. It's said that water can never be cut by a knife, but the whirlpool itself and the surrounding waters appeared as though they had been severed apart. The whirlpool was still revolving at a rapid rate while the waters surrounding it were deathly still.

At the top of the whirlpool, an indistinct wisp of dark energy was faintly discernible, resonating with Shen Wei's spirit execution blade—both, without a doubt, originating from the same source!

"It's a holy artifact left behind by some saint from the primordial times. There's a high possibility that it's counteracting my powers," Shen Wei explained. "Nevermind everything else, just my mark on that application form stimulated the thing that's trapped here, loosening the seal as a result. On top of that, Uncle Four's intrusion added oil to fire. From what I see, this seal is going to break anytime soon—do you have an idea on what's inside?"

Zhao Yunlan frowned. Mulling for a moment longer, he shook his head. "I've never seen it before, but..."

Just then, something flashed inside the briefcase he carried. Uncle Four's Prime Lamp had lit up—The Prime Lamp was essentially just a small chunk of a candle, encompassed by a dragon pearl. It looked like a crystal lamp, the flame flickering at times, as though it was about to die soon. The dying flame shone at the surface of the sea, congealing rapidly into a line that shot straight into the whirlpool.

Shortly after, the dragon pearl surrounding the Prime Lamp ruptured without warning, instantly shattering into dust. For a moment, the waning flame danced ferociously, prompting Zhao Yunlan to instinctively reached out his hand to shield it. All of a sudden, the whirlpool on the surface of the sea 'burst' in all directions. At that split second, the stars spattered across the sky resembled dust blown off by a strong gale. Almost parallelly, Shen Wei seized Zhao Yunlan into his arms as he positioned his long blade before them both.

Yet, almost immediately, Shen Wei felt something amiss—his hand couldn't feel Zhao Yunlan's presence at all.

Shen Wei turned around in shock. Both of them were nearly within reach but there seemed to be a transparent film isolating them apart. Zhao Yunlan said something but his voice failed to reach through, so Shen Wei could only read his lips saying, "These bubbles are..."

Bubbles?

Glancing around his surroundings, Shen Wei saw that Uncle Four's Prime Lamp was reflecting and refracting in all directions. Numerous rays of lights interlocked with one another, projecting countless transparent films to their surroundings, resembling a cluster of soap bubbles. Mirage-like shadows loomed across the bubbles indistinctly, projecting countless Zhao Yunlans and Shen Weis, alarming the hearts of anyone who saw it. In just a short moment, the two trapped within different 'bubbles' began to move further and further apart. Shen Wei's eyes reddened and he quickly took out his spirit execution blade to hack away at them with breakneck speed.

A loud 'Bang!' resounded. The spirit execution blade that was capable of cutting through anything appeared to be trapped in a slough. As countless strange 'bubbles' were shattered by his blade, more 'bubbles' would continue to rise from the bottom of the sea. Tumultuous waves that could topple mountains and overturn seas howled loudly as they billowed forth on the sea surface. The howls resembled the loud thunderous noise that sounded when the Pangu Axe had cut open the chaotic world in primordial times, thereby shaking mountains, and stirring up the vast, blue sea. And then, Shen Wei's vision turned dark—

Part 4

When Zhao Yunlan recovered from his shock, his hand was still holding on to the Prime Lamp's small chunk of candle. On it, a flame the size of a bean shone brightly. He tried

to move a little before he suddenly stopped in his tracks, a look of astonishment flashing past his face.

Zhao Yunlan slowly lowered his gaze to his right foot...only to find that he sprained his ankle.

As Lord Kunlun's incarnation, he was impervious to guns and spears, and immune to any form of illness. Ever since Zhao Yunlan's divine soul awakened six years ago, he had almost forgotten what a mosquito bite felt like. Never did he expect that he would actually sprain his ankle in the Southern Sea today!

He grimaced in pain as he touched his ankle, finding the whole incident slightly intriguing. Surmising that he hadn't injured his nerves, he carefully began to make small movements, propping his hand against the wall to get up on his feet. As he stood, he quickly realized something was amiss. Both his arms and legs felt so heavy as though they weren't his own. Lord Kunlun's astounding power of soaring the heavens and crushing the three realms into nothing had vanished into thin air.

Apart from that, his perceiving watch has stopped working and the half a dozen talismans left in his wallet had all turned into ordinary papers. They didn't react to his commands anymore so he wasn't able to summon his long whip. Even the Guardian Order, connected to him by blood, laid soundlessly on the palm of his hand, turning into an ordinary piece of wood.

Zhao Yunlan raised Uncle Four's Prime Lamp to light up his surroundings—this entire place was extremely barren. Glancing over, he saw that none of the street lamps were switched on. Abandoned houses occupied on either side of the street, embedded in layers of dust.

As though they were ruins.

He limped two steps forward before being forced to come to a stop to pour out the fine sand that filled his shoes. As he breathed, his torso felt as though it was being stabbed with needles, his heart tightening considerably as time went by to the point where he could barely breathe. Zhao Yunlan recalled the times when he was merely a mortal. Although his body couldn't be regarded as being perfectly healthy, it didn't feel like he had this many problems either.Could it be that he's having a hard time adapting?

Zhao Yunlan dragged his heavy body and went around the street. His phone didn't have any signal so he took a quick glance at the time.

8:45PM.

The small plate of ham he stole prior to dinner was just enough to satisfy his mouth. After spraining his ankle and suffering continuously from chest pains, his mortal body once more made him live through the memories of having stomach aches.

Precisely that very moment, a 'meow' sounded out. Zhao Yunlan looked up, only to catch sight of a black cat leaping onto the roof from the branch of wilted tree at the side. Sticking out its tail, its paw nimbly stepped onto the ruined walls in an unhurried manner. No matter from what angle he's eyeing from, he looked so much like when Da Qing was still a kitten—he had a neck and a waist, and was at a youthful age when he hadn't put on weight!

Habitually, Zhao Yunlan enjoyed teasing animals so he made a catcall at the cat. At the exact moment when the cat turned to look towards him with his dark green eyes, Zhao Yunlan noticed the talisman he carried in his mouth. Before he could get a better look, his vision suddenly went topsy-turvy. The cat had disappeared without a trace and the streets deformed and distorted at a rapid rate. Zhao Yunlan took a misstep and fell ruthlessly to the ground. His ankle that had recovered from its pain with much difficulty was sprained again.

Taking a sharp breath, Zhao Yunlan cursed angrily. Shocked, he realized that he had returned back to the place he first woke up.

Propping himself against the same wall he used before, he began to stand up on his feet once more. He only took a step forward before sensing that his feet felt weird—the sand he had poured out earlier had found its way back into his shoes again.

Zhao Yunlan's eyes contracted as realization suddenly dawned on him. Taking out his phone, he once again glanced at the time.

8:35PM

This was...ten minutes ago?

Zhao Yunlan walked across the street in a fast pace while taking out his phone to count the time. Ten minutes later, the black cat emerged again as expected. With the same posture, he jumped out from the same place. This time around, Zhao Yunlan did not rashly call out to the devilish cat. Instead, he leaned against the cornering to observe him for a while.

The cat holding the talisman in his mouth lifted its paws and walked five steps...before the world before his eyes spun yet again!

Once more, Zhao Yunlan had returned back to ten minutes ago.

The same thing happened for two or three times. Eventually, Zhao Yunlan decided he might as well remain seated on the ground—his shoes were difficult to remove after all.

This world was basically an entire loop, which lasted for about ten minutes. The space didn't seem vast either and he was trapped within the ten minutes, the cycle repeating itself again and again.

Stroking the walls beside him, Zhao Yunlan recalled the strange “bubbles” he’d seen when he got separated with Shen Wei.

“Bubbles”...time loops...

Zhao Yunlan stood up all of a sudden, once again pouring out all the sands caught in his shoes before running across the desolate street. At the exact moment when the black cat appeared, with the Prime Lap in his mouth, he ran up and grasped the edges of the roof. By stepping onto the shorter wall, he then leapt onto the rooftop, immediately picking up the surprised black cat and yanked the talisman out from his mouth. Doing a quick turn, he then leapt down from the roof. It was almost time for the period to reset itself before he could even land on the ground. In one swift movement, Zhao Yunlan placed the talisman over the Prime Lamp’s flame, lighting it up within seconds. At the same time, a light ‘Crack!’ sounded, as though something had shattered into pieces. The black cat in his grip then abruptly turned into a wisp of black smoke.

Zhao Yunlan stumbled a few steps to get a hold of his footing. When he lifted his head to look, he realized that he wasn’t sent back to the starting point—the street before him had also went through a subtle change. The road lamps were lit up and the dust drifting about in the air had reduced significantly. The large tree was also no longer bare. Although there were only a few leaves left, it still looked alive.

Zhao Yunlan shook off the dust from his top. “I see, so that’s how it is. And here I was wondering what kind of treasure lies in the Southern Sea, but turns out to be trouble.”

Everyone knew that time couldn’t flow in reverse. It was impossible for a person to leap back and forth in their own timeline within the same dimension. The law of karma can never be broken.

Before Lord Kunlun’s soul returned to his rightful body, Zhao Yunlan had once ‘transmigrated’ to the nineteenth year eleven years ago, but that wasn’t really considered to be an actual time-travel. During then, Shen Nong had placed an eleven years reincarnation cycle into the scale of Nu Wa. The “small reincarnation cycle” was a microverse molded by Shen Nong that was a similar, yet different illusory world to reality—He had the misfortune of going through one earlier.

When Uncle Four handed him Nu Wa’s scale, Zhao Yunlan had gone into the microverse without realizing it. When the time in the microverse had reset, Zhao Yunlan who was trapped amongst it also followed suit and leapt back to the time eleven years ago...until Shen Wei used his spirit execution blade to split open the world in order to pull him back to reality.

The “bubbles” that separated Shen Wei and him just now turned out to be the same as the small reincarnation cycle eleven years ago. Each “bubble” was a universe that looped infinitely with a set length of time.

Since it was a simple universe that resets every ten minutes, then there was a possibility that there would be a life-like and complicated boundless universe which resets every thousands of years.

So this really wasn't some sort of a "holy artifact." It was a "failed and trashed experiment," an astrayed path left behind by the old Gods when they were attempting to create the real reincarnation. It had always been sealed in the Southern Sea. As it turns out, the seal was accidentally disturbed by the Ghost King's aura and was broken through again by a great demon's accidental intrusion, thereby releasing it back to the world of the living.

Zhao Yunlan lifted his head to gaze at the street lamp while thinking to himself, "I knew it! You lot would never leave any kind of legacy for me! Instead, all you leave behind is just some shambles that needs to be cleaned up!"

It was unrealistic for him to count on Shen Wei's blade to rescue him since he didn't even know what year or month was Shen Wei sent to. Each of these microverses' with infinite time-loops would have to be broken from the inside.

That wasn't so difficult—each of the micro universe had a point of connection with reality. Through that point of connection, Zhao Yunlan and Shen Wei could be released to the outside world from inside. By finding and destroying it, the microverse would have nothing to rely on and would then vanished into a puff of smoke.

For example, eleven years ago, the "point of connection" during then was the mysterious "Ancient Mystery Records".

At that time, the Zhao Yunlan in the reality world had one in hand while the other him in the reincarnation cycle had one too. When he brought this book into the reincarnation cycle and the two identical books coincided with one another, and as a result, it caused the microverse to be connected with the reality world, thereby blending both the illusory world and reality together.

At that time, Zhao Yunlan was in a hurry to find out what Shen Wei had hid from him, so he kept following the trail of the book and didn't think of destroying it. If he had burnt the records after he had gotten his hands on it in the cycle of reincarnation, the karma in the reincarnation cycle would have severely deviated from the one in reality. Then, the microverse would disappeared without a trace, without even needing Shen Wei to cut it open from the outside world.

If he had burnt it in the reincarnation cycle, the book would have been in his hand the moment he got back to reality instead of being eternally trapped in the endless cycle.

As for the copy of "Ancient Mystery Records" in reality, there was a high chance that Shen Nong's medicinal bowl, the old bastard, had sneakily planted the book into SID earlier on.

Currently, these layers and layers of micro universes were like “bubbles.” When Zhao Yunlan’s figure was reflected on to them, each layer would copy one thing from him to be regarded as the “point of connection” for the microverse and reality. It could be the dead perceiving watch, the useless talisman, the Guardian Order that was turned into a regular piece of wood, as well as the long whip which he couldn’t summon...even the divine powers he had as Lord Kunlun.

Zhao Yunlan wasn’t sure of what methods to use to deal with each microverse, so he could only fumble about one by one. Every time he destroyed something in the world, he could destroy a layer of the microverse. Then that thing would follow him back to the real world.

“It’s so troublesome.” Zhao Yunlan sighed. “If I knew it would turn out like this, I might as well go back and conduct a written examination.”

Those bunch of imprudent Southern Sea aquatic tribes were all to blame. He would definitely feast on seafood once he got out of this mess.

Part 5

Zhao Yunlan had already lost count of how long he had lingered in these countless microverses.

In the beginning, the microverses shared the same simple sceneries such as a ruined street, dark cities, outskirts, under the waters...with no one around in sight. The time loop could be as short as ten minutes or as long as three days. The things that were replicated were all junk that weren’t important to him.

But soon, the microverses began becoming bigger and more and more complicated. People started to emerge within them, even the ones he knew in real life—for example, in the world of the perceiving watch, the time loop lasted for an entire three years and the setting was Zhao Yunlan’s previous incarnation during the early years of Republic of China.

The perceiving watch belonged to the Zhao Yunlan’s previous inheritor of the Guardian Order, the one left behind by his previous incarnation. At that time, while he was pursuing a demon that had nabbed a hostage, he accidentally destroyed the watch face in the midst of it. The hostage was a child orphan. A man who introduced himself as the head of the orphanage had rushed over to pick up the child, saw that his watch was broken and told him of a craftsman he knew which he brought the watch to to get it repaired. By the time he returned it, the watch had already turned into a perceiving artifact that could bridge between yin and yang.

Watching from the sidelines, Zhao Yunlan saw his identical previous incarnation figure things out and rushed over to the orphanage to look for the head. He then discovered that the head was a pudgy nun and wasn’t in fact the man who helped him fix his watch.

“Shen Wei.” Connected with his past self, Zhao Yunlan shook his head with an involuntary laugh as he recalled the origin of this watch. “You sneaky bastard.”

After that, the time loops only became longer. When the time loop exceeded a period of fifty years, Zhao Yunlan was no longer a spectator in the microverse. He realized that he would blend into it with another identity and go according to the microverse’s script.

Things that happened within the microverse may not necessarily be part of his memories. Some of it resembled the memories he had in some previous incarnations with just a slight difference, while others were from a bizarre and variegated world with a few familiar scenes flashing by—Zhao Yunlan preferred the latter more.

It was because Shen Wei rarely appeared within his five thousand years reincarnations worth of true memories. Occasionally, he would catch a glimpse of him, but that was only for a brief moment before he immediately disappeared.

But within an unreal world, Shen Wei would always appear beside him using a different identity, and accompanied him for a lifetime until the both of them grabbed hold of the key item to break through the cycle....As expected, the real Shen Wei—Shen Wei’s spirit execution blade was already trapped inside. Even if he had the blade, he was afraid to use it. If the microverse was broken from the outside, then the replicated item would end up the same as the “Ancient Mystery Records”, trapped within the cycle eternally.

Zhao Yunlan had broken through eighty microverses and everytime he left one, the time would revert back to 8:35PM.

It was as though he had already experienced all living beings in a split second.

It was fortunate that Lord Kunlun was a divine soul forged from thousands of years of reincarnations so he was clear and calm from the beginning till end. Finally, he arrived at the eighty-first microverse.

Eighty-one is the by product of nine and nine.

Zhao Yunlan had a feeling that this should be the last world. Shen Wei was also there but never did he expect that the universe’s time loop would be over ten thousand years long. The endless period made this universe feel almost real as the binding force of this world was too great. As he fumbled, rose, and fell, and was about to get to the end of the cycle, Zhao Yunlan still couldn’t find the point of connection in the world.

The variety of items he brought in with him—Even the blood of his heart, his backbones were already shattered in the reincarnation. What else could it be?

What else was left?

Part 6

Oh, yes, there was himself.

Humans are enslaved for the sake of material gains.

And their hearts, driven by life, fame and fortune, are also bound by chains.

Part 7

Zhao Yunlan freed himself from the last microverse. Hundreds of thousands of mountains shook and capered as monstrous waves billowed down. It was as though it came from the Nine Heavens, magically opening a passage before him on their own accord, allowing the great mountain god to rise forth.

Meanwhile, a shrill cry travelled to his ears as the spirit execution blade appeared out of nowhere, falling onto the surface of the water. The entire Southern Sea was soon to be split in half. Zhao Yunlan swiftly fluttered his eyes open, as he reached out into the raging tides, and grabbed the hand holding a blade. “Shen Wei!”

The tumultuous waves receded, revealing Shen Wei’s figure, looking all more pitiful than he did. Stunned, the moment his eyes laid on him, Shen Wei did not utter a single word, as though he hadn’t yet recovered from the boundless cycles he’d experienced.

“It’s alright,” Zhao Yunlan muttered softly. “We’re home.”

Shen Wei’s entire body swayed before he stumbled forth, throwing himself onto Zhao Yunlan. The grip he had on the spirit execution blade suddenly loosened and it fell as light as a feather—onto the back of a large floating snake.

Relieved, Zhao Yunlan felt it was great that Uncle Four’s Prime Lamp was still lit and that this old snake was still alive and healthy. Now, Zhu Hong could still remain in SICO, earning her keep and live until she died, so there was no need for her to go home and take over his place anymore.

Part 8

“Ah? Ah... Ah! O..kay.”

At the office of 9 University Avenue, Guo Changcheng had been on the phone since first thing in the morning, his tone already having changed several times, ranging from astonishment and complete loss... to absolute embarrassment—Guo Changcheng awkwardly replied back into the receiver. “I don’t have anything I want. Thank you, Chief. Re-really! There’s no need...Nothing from the duty-free shops as well. Don’t you worry about it. It’s more important that you’re happy...Hey, have fun and happy holidays...”

Before he could finish his sublime blessings, Chu Shuzi and Lin Jing stood up while slamming the desk as Da Qing exploded into a ball of fury.

Chu Shuzi cried out, "Is it Old Zhao? What do you mean by that? What do you mean by happy holidays?! Is he skipping work or not?!"

Lin Jing followed suit. "He ran off? He dumped this whole mess and ran off? How is that even fair?!"

Da Qing instantly leapt off the sofa. "That shameless bastard! Hand me the phone."

Guo Changcheng shyly put down the phone. "He hu-hung up."

"Call him back! If you can't reach him, call Professor Shen!" thundered Da Qing in a fit of rage.

As expected, Zhao Yunlan had immediately switched off his phone after hanging up, his smooth actions hinting the experience behind them.

However, one thing that came as utterly unexpected to them all was—

Shen Wei stood barefoot on the beach, one hand gripping his collar and the other on his waistband, his face turning red from struggling. He'd rather die than follow what Romans did in Rome, and change into a pair of flowery trunks.

Just what is that thing?! It was a disgrace! An absolute disgrace!!

Zhao Yunlan chased after him and coaxed, "Just try it on. How would you know it's not good on you if you haven't even tried it on? I'm sure you'll love it. Shen Wei~ Little Wei~ My darling... Don't you feel annoyed that you're always dressed in black? Who knows, you'll discover a brand new world in the process... Hey! If you don't want to wear it, then don't! Don't jump into the ocean!"

Shen Wei was forced to the seaside with a foot sticking into the sea waters. His phone fell from his pocket, just in time for it to ring once before the screen turned dark, heroically sacrificing itself.

At 9 University Avenue, Guo Changcheng innocently announced, "Professor Shen refused the call."

Da Qing crumbled into pieces with a loud, shrilling cry.

"How can a person with thick eyebrows and big eyes like Professor Shen betray us too?!"

